Chapter 4
Origins of Ageism at the Individual Level

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4.1 Introduction

The term ageism was first coined by Butler in 1969. According to his early definition, ageism is an age discrimination which is reflected in the prejudice of one age group toward other age groups (Butler 1969). Although ageism can be aimed at younger age groups (Snape and Redman 2003), most of the theoretical and empirical research on ageism has focused on the old age group (Iversen et al. 2009). Butler himself refined his definition of ageism in 1975 as "a process of systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people because they are old" (Butler 1975). Following Butler's later definition, the current chapter focuses on ageism toward the old age group.

Although Butler focused on negative stereotypes, current perceptions of ageism include both positive and negative stereotypes towards older adults (Iversen et al. 2009; Palmore 1999). According to the stereotype content model, older adults are perceived as incompetent but warm. These perceptions lead to emotions of pity and sympathy and less so to emotions of envy (Cuddy and Fiske 2002; Fiske et al. 2002). Consistent with this claim, a large body of research has indicated that ageism is manifested in both negative and positive age stereotypes

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and affective attitudes (e.g., Kite et al. 2005; Meisner 2012). In addition to cognitive and emotional aspects of ageism, studies have also identified behavioural implications of ageism, reflected in avoidance (Bodner et al. 2012) and patronizing language towards older adults (Nelson 2005).

Negative stereotypes as well as discriminatory behaviours toward older adults are spread over diverse areas of society, such as in the labour market (e.g., Posthuma and Campion 2009) and the healthcare system (e.g., Bowling 2007) (for further details see section introduction of this book: "On the Manifestation and Consequences of Ageism;" Ayalon & Tesch-Römer 2018). Diverse social and psychological theories, operating at a variety of levels (individual, interpersonal, evolutionary, and socio-cultural), shed light on the roots and dynamics of ageism, and by doing so, provide a robust understanding of the topic (North and Fiske 2012).

In this chapter, we present three theories to provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychological and sociological processes that constitute the basis of ageism at the individual level: terror management theory (Greenberg et al. 1986); stereotype embodiment theory (Levy 2009); and social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979). These three theories were chosen because they provide a wide and comprehensive theoretical understanding concerning the causes as well as the expressions of ageism. Additionally, these theories have served as the basis for numerous studies that examine various aspects of ageism and provide evidence for the relevance of these theories to explain ageism at the individual level.

It is important to note that other theories, such as social affordances theory (Montepare and Zebrowitz 2002), which provides an explanation of the roots and dynamics of ageism at the interpersonal level, or social role perspective theory (Kite et al. 2002), which provides an explanation at the socio-cultural level, could also have served as potential explanatory models for the development of ageism (North and Fiske 2012).

Each of the theories sheds light on different roots of and reasons for ageism, and on different reflections of ageism among various age groups. Capitalizing on these three theories, we present a model that suggests possible interactions and relationships between ageism as it is manifested in various age groups across the life span.

We suggest that terror management theory provides an explanation for the roots and motives of ageism towards old age groups among young and middle aged groups as well as among the young-old age group, and that stereotype embodiment theory provides an explanation for ageism among the young-old and old-old age group. Social identity theory, in contrast, provides an overview of the manifestation of ageism among different age groups (see Fig. 4.1).

The definition of ageism is fraught with an assumption that society tends to view the old age group as a distinct and separate group with unique features. Although in the definition lies a criticism of this separation and of the attribution of specific features to the old age group, this separation forms the basis for the theoretical understanding of the dynamic nature of ageism, as well as a methodological basis for the empirical examination of ageism. Hence, the three theories that are presented are based on the assumption that age groups can be captured and defined as social groups with unique features that separate and distinguish them from other age groups.

The following section first provides an overview of the theoretical and empirical basis of the division of individuals into age groups. The subsequent three sections

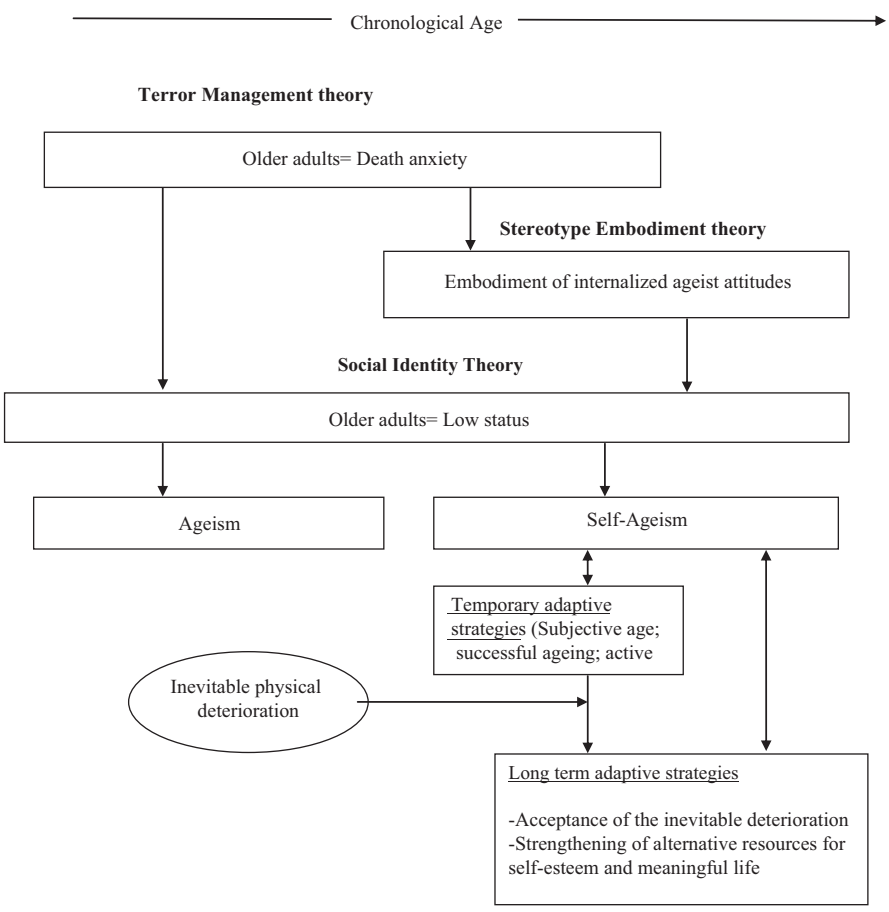

Fig. 4.1 An integrated model of ageism in younger and older adult

present the three theories and their possible contribution to the understanding of the roots and maintenance of ageism at the individual level. Finally, we present a comprehensive model, based on the three theories, to better conceptualize the roots and maintenance of ageism across the life span. The model we present expands on Bodner's (2009) etiological model for ageism among younger and older adults.

4.1.1 A Rationale for Examining the Etiology of Ageism in Different Age Groups

Various studies have shown that chronological age is an important marker of objective and subjective transformations that unfold during one's lifespan. According to these studies, older age is associated with deterioration of physical abilities such as sensory and motor performance and gait speed (Chodzko-Zajko and Ringel 1987;

Reinders et al. 2015) or cognitive ability (e.g., Craik and McDowd 1987; Old and Naveh-Benjamin 2008; Rönnlund et al. 2015). Recent studies that have examined psychological and sociological features, such as wellbeing, emotional experience, and social power, have indicated that these features tend to increase during the first period of life. However, from midlife on, these features tend to decline (Blanchflower and Oswald 2004; Carstensen et al. 2000; Eaton et al. 2008).

The attribution of unique features to different age groups is also reflected in fundamental theories concerning the life course, when different periods are characterized by certain types of psychological crises (Erikson 1950) or by various psychological tasks (Havighurst 1956). Others, however, have noted that there is a wide heterogeneity within age groups. This heterogeneity tends to be particularly pronounced in old age, as older adults are highly affected by their diverse life experiences (Baltes and Baltes 1990).

Although changes during the lifespan are gradual and continuous, in the theoretical and empirical literature it is common to divide the adult population into three main age groups: young adults (from 18 to 34–39 years), middle-aged adults (from 35–40 to 59–65 years), and older adults (aged 60–68+) (e.g., Bodner et al. 2012; Cherry and Palmore 2008; Laditka et al. 2004).

In recent years, due to longevity and improvements in the quality of life, there is a tendency to divide the old age group into two distinct groups: the young-old, which is called the third age (65 to 80–85) and the old-old, which is called the fourth age (80 or 85+) (e.g., Alterovitz and Mendelsohn 2013; Baltes and Smith 2003). Due to increasing longevity, some authors have suggested an even more detailed division into three distinct groups in the fourth age: old (75–84), old-old (85–95), and oldest-old (95+) (Cohen-Mansfield et al. 2013).

Unlike other social characteristics, such as gender or nationality, where membership tends to be permanent during the lifespan, the boundaries between different age groups are permeable and temporary. Thus, although middle-aged adults may perceive themselves as an in-group, and older adults as an out-group, these distinctions are temporary. The instability of the boundaries between age groups is reflected by the fact that the old age group used to be part of the younger groups, and the younger age groups are expected to become part of the old age group, if they survive (Greenberg et al. 2002).

This somewhat arbitrary division into different age groups, and especially the primary division that perceives old age as a distinct category, forms the basis of the theories presented in this chapter. Despite its limitations, this division has been used in studies that examine ageism, and can be a useful tool in understanding of the roots and dynamics of ageism during the life span among different age groups.

4.2 Terror Management Theory

Terror management theory claims that humans possess cognitive abilities that allow them to be self-conscious, and that this self-consciousness is reflected in humans' awareness of their vulnerability and mortality, which creates the potential for a paralysing terror. According to terror management theory, in order to manage the anxiety brought about by the awareness of mortality, humans unconsciously sustain faith in cultural worldviews, which enable them to portray human life as meaningful, important, and enduring. The adoption of social and cultural rules allows humans to believe that they are valuable and deserving within their culture. Perceived social approval leads humans to feel self-esteem, which is reflected in the belief that they are significant human beings in a meaningful world. These perceptions allow humans to buffer anxiety and to maintain relative equanimity despite their awareness of their vulnerability and mortality (Greenberg et al. 1997; Greenberg et al. 1986). Unlike proximal and conscious defences, such as active suppression and cognitive distortion of death-related thoughts, self-esteem and worldview are not based on a logical or rational approach to death, but provide symbolic and ongoing defences which allow humans to construe themselves as valuable participants in a meaningful universe (Greenberg et al. 1994, 1997; Pyszczynski et al. 1999).

There is a large body of research on terror management theory. These studies follow the assumption that self-esteem and faith in one's cultural worldview are two important psychological structures that provide protection against death anxiety. Based on this main assumption, studies have generated two hypotheses. The anxiety buffer hypothesis states that strengthening either self-esteem or faith in one's cultural view reduces anxiety. The mortality salience hypothesis states that reminding people of their mortality activates the need for validating their self-esteem and their faith in their cultural view (Greenberg et al. 1997). Studies that have tested these hypotheses for over 30 years, relying on more than 500 experiments in over 30 different countries, have yielded support for the theory and its core propositions (Darrell and Pyszczynski 2016).

4.2.1 Social Groups and Stereotypes in Light of Terror Management Theory

Social relations and group identification constitute significant elements in terror management theory. According to the theory, being part of a social group and having significant social relations with others allows people to feel as though they are integral parts of the cultural world and forms the basis for attaining self-esteem. Yet the wish to be part of a group varies; people may wish to belong to certain groups or to avoid others, according to their pertinent worldviews and their perceived

self-worth (Solomon et al. 2004). Thus, out-group members who subscribe to different worldviews might threaten explicitly or implicitly the validation of the in-group's worldview. This psychological threat is one of the main causes of prejudice and discrimination (Greenberg et al. 2002).

To conclude, according to terror management theory, identification with the in-group is derived from the need to approve one's worldview, to attain self-esteem, and thus to buffer death anxiety. Conversely, discrimination towards out-groups is derived from the anxiety that is evoked as a result of different worldviews that can seem to threaten the worldview of in-group members (Greenberg et al. 2002; Solomon et al. 2004).

These assumptions have formed the basis of various experimental studies that have examined in-group bias as a reaction to mortality salience. Studies have indicated that mortality salience leads to a more positive evaluation of in-group members and a more negative evaluation of out-group members (e.g., Greenberg et al. 1990; Harmon-Jones et al. 1996). Studies have also shed light on the mechanisms that lead from mortality salience to in-group bias, indicating the mediating role of in-group identification and perceived collective continuity (Castano et al. 2002; Herrera and Sani 2013) as well as control motivation (Agroskin and Jonas 2013). In addition, studies have found that mortality salience increased the use of stereotypes based on nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation, and age (e.g., Castano 2004; Martens et al. 2004; Schimel et al. 1999). The use of negative stereotypes further increased when a competitive or threatening out-group member was present (Renkema et al. 2008).

4.2.2 Ageism Among Young and Middle-Aged Adults in Light of Terror Management Theory

Following Greenberg et al. (2002), Martens et al. (2005) have suggested that terror management theory could be used as a theoretical and empirical framework for understanding the psychological and sociological processes that underlie ageism. They have identified three psychological threats, derived from terror management theory, to explain negative reactions toward older adults. These three threats include: the threat of death, the threat of animality, and the threat of insignificance (Martens et al. 2005). In the following sections, we discuss these threats and review some studies that have examined ageism in relation to these threats.

4.2.2.1 The Threat of Death

Older adults serve as a direct reminder of our inevitable mortality. A sense of threat is embedded in the human awareness that ageing leads to death. The encounter with ageing, especially in its final stages, reminds us that even if we are able to avoid accidents, diseases, and disasters, we will eventually die (Greenberg et al. 2002;

Martens et al. 2005). In an experimental study that examined this hypothesis, Martens et al. (2004) found that mortal salience caused participants from the young age group to rate the attributes of older adults as considerably different from their own, thus increasing their distance from older adults. Furthermore, participants who were exposed to mortality salience viewed older adults less positively than in the control group. Another study demonstrated that distancing from and derogating older adults in response to mortal salience occurs primarily among participants who rated their personalities as similar to those of older adults. However, mortal salience did not affect the level of distance from teenagers (Martens et al. 2004). This implies that when participants perceive similarities between themselves and older adults, they might feel more threatened by the prospect of their ageing and inevitable death (Martens et al. 2004).

Additional support for this hypothesis is provided by a study that found a positive correlation between ageism and fear of death among young age groups (Bodner and Cohen-Fridel 2014). A similar pattern has also been found among middle- and old age groups, where death anxiety was correlated with ageism (Bodner et al. 2015) as well as with negative stereotypes of old age (Depaola et al. 2003).

These findings stress the uniqueness of the relationship between social versus age groups and discrimination in different age groups. Whereas among social groups discrimination towards out-groups emerges from holding a different worldview, which can be perceived as a threat to the worldview of in-group members (Greenberg et al. 2002; Solomon et al. 2004), among age groups the threat emerges from the possible similarity between members of the groups. This distinction emphasizes the unique nature of ageism, which is different from other forms of prejudice and discrimination and points to the necessity for generating unique hypotheses concerning its roots (Martens et al. 2004).

4.2.2.2 The Threat of Animality

A less direct association of older adults and death is embedded in the deterioration of the physical body that is reflected in older adults' physical appearance (e.g., wrinkles), as well as in the physical and cognitive decline that is often seen in older age, and in the diminishing control over bodily functions that older adults often experience. These characteristics of old age remind us that, like all animals, we are flesh and blood creatures who are vulnerable to death (Martens et al. 2005). According to Isaksen (2002) the fear of encountering the deteriorating bodies of older adults might be particularly high in Western society. This fear might be explained by the prevailing perception in Western society, influenced by Judeo-Christian beliefs, that view human beings as composed of body, mind, and soul. According to this belief, as regards bodies, all humans are alike. In contrast, soul and mind are perceived as unique features that define us on a social and cultural level and make us different and separate from one another. Thus, physical decline and diminishment of physical control among older adults creates an emphasis on the physical self over the spiritual self and can symbolize the inability to impose mind over matter (Isaksen 2002).

This hypothesis can be included as part of a wider hypothesis that suggests that physical aspects of the body remind us of our mortal nature. According to this hypothesis, the efforts of human beings to buffer their death anxiety by adopting cultural beliefs and standards are threatened by their awareness of the physical aspects of the human body. Humans might feel uneasiness and even disgust toward physical aspects of their body, because they remind them of their animal nature, their vulnerability, and their inevitable death (Goldenberg 2005).

This hypothesis is supported by studies that found that when mortality was salient, participants expressed negative reactions and disgust towards different aspects of the physical body, such as body products (Goldenberg et al. 2001) and breast feeding (Cox et al. 2007a, b). In addition, the presence of stressing stimuli related to physical aspects of the body were found to lead to higher death-thought accessibility compared with neutral pictures (Cox et al. 2007a, b). However, other studies found that the effect of mortality salience on physical aspects of the body, such as exercise and sexual activity, was limited for participants high in neuroticism (Goldenberg et al. 1999, 2008).

4.2.2.3 The Threat of Insignificance

Finally, ageism might evoke perceptions concerning the difficulty of preserving positive self-esteem in old age (Martens et al. 2005). According to terror management theory, self-esteem is a vital resource in human life, because it buffers the potential for death-related anxiety (Greenberg et al. 1986). Social perceptions and stereotypes often associate old age with ongoing loss of abilities and resources (Bowd 2003; Cuddy and Fiske 2002; Ellis and Morrison 2005). It is these abilities and resources that are perceived as crucial to acquiring and preserving self-esteem in youth and middle-aged individuals. As a result, these age groups might perceive the older adults as a threat, since they serve as potent reminders of the transitory nature of these attributes. Thus, the threat of loss of these attributes might trigger death anxiety (Martens et al. 2005).

One study that examined this hypothesis found that participants viewed teenagers more favourably than older adults when they were primed with the importance of engaging in physical activity, an attribute that usually declines with age. However, when participants were primed with the importance of wisdom, an attribute that is predicted to increase with age, there was no significant preference of teenagers (Martens et al. 2005).

4.2.3 Ageism Among Older Adults in Light of Terror Management Theory

Terror management theory is based on the assumption that death anxiety is a main motive in human life, and that cultural worldview and self-esteem serve as unconscious mechanisms to buffer the threat of death (Greenberg et al. 1997). According to Martens et al. (2005), the encounter with older adults might evoke anxiety

because they represent inevitable mortality, physical deterioration, and loss of resources perceived as essential to our self-esteem. This anxiety might be manifest in ageism (Martens et al. 2005). However, this theory is focused on the perceptions of young and middle-aged groups towards the old age group and does not describe the way older adults perceive their own ageing process.

McCoy et al. (2000) claim that the protection of one's cultural worldview and self-esteem against the threat of mortality becomes less effective in old age. The ongoing loss of abilities and resources might threaten older adults' self-esteem. In addition, the constantly changing values and rapid technological advancements that characterize the Western world might threaten both the self-esteem and the worldview of older adults. As a result of feeling "left behind" by these advancements, older adults might perceive their abilities and roles as less relevant even before they experience a loss of physical abilities. Moreover, they might perceive their worldview as being threatened by newly emerging worldviews in society. Not only are the mechanisms of self-esteem and the worldview less effective among older adults, but the salience of death is also heightened in this age group through their physical deterioration and the loss of their loved ones (McCoy et al. 2000).

According to McCoy et al. (2000), the increase in mortality salience and the decrease in the effectiveness of protective mechanisms might provide an impetus for psychological reorganization that ultimately functions to help older adults cope with their nearness to death, which is an inherent and inevitable part of late-life. This psychological reorganization, which can be derived from the accumulated wisdom of older adults, may assist older adults in shielding themselves from the terror of death (McCoy et al. 2000).

Support for this hypothesis can be found in studies that have shown that fear of death is diminished in old age (e.g.,(Gesser et al. 1988; Fortner and Neimeyer 1999). Furthermore, experimental studies have found that under a mortality salience condition, old-old adults and young-old adults low in neuroticism perceived their subjective age as significantly lower than young-old adults high in neuroticism (McCoy et al. 2000). Furthermore, unlike other age groups, mortality reminders did not significantly affect the life expectancy of old-old adults (Maxfield et al. 2010). These studies indicate that older adults, especially in the last stage of life, tend to achieve greater acceptance of the inevitability of their own death. The different reactions of older and younger adults to mortality salience is also reflected in studies that have found that young adults respond to mortality salience induction as predicted according to terror management theory, that is, by holding a harsher judgment of moral transgressions and by engaging in health-promoting behaviours, whereas older adults do not (Bozo et al. 2009; Maxfield et al. 2007).

Thus, empirical evidence suggests that death anxiety diminishes in old age, and that older adults respond unlike other age groups to mortality salience. These findings notwithstanding, two studies that examined the relationship between ageist attitudes and death anxiety among older adults showed a positive correlation between them (Bodner et al. 2015; Depaola et al. 2003). However, a careful examination of the age of the participants in these two studies might imply that most of them belonged to the young-old age group, as the mean age ranged between 58.15 and 69.4 (Bodner et al. 2015; Depaola et al. 2003).

To summarize, the hypothesis of McCoy et al. (2000) that death anxiety diminishes in old age and that, therefore, terror management theory might be less relevant to this age group, is partially supported by empirical studies. According to these studies, terror management theory might be relevant to some extent in the young-old age group and might explain self-ageism in this age group. However, in the last stages of life, the decrease in death anxiety makes terror management theory less relevant as a source of self-ageism.

4.3 Stereotype Embodiment Theory

The internalization of negative attitudes towards the self among older adults could be explained by the unique features of different age groups. Unlike other social groups, which tend to be a part of the individual identity for a prolonged period, individuals pass through different age groups during their life course. Thus, negative attitudes and stereotypes of older adults, which the individual has internalized during the lifespan, are often unconsciously embodied in old age (Kite et al. 2002; Levy 2009).

Studies examining explicit attitudes of older adults toward their age group found a positive self-identity (Cherry and Palmore 2008; Laditka et al. 2004). Studies exploring implicit attitudes, however, found a tendency towards internalization and embodiment of negative attitudes among older adults (e.g., Levy and Schlesinger 2005; Meisner 2012).

The embodiment of negative attitudes among older adults towards their own age group is reflected in a study that found that older participants were more likely than younger participants to oppose increased funding to programs that benefitted their age group. This opposition was predicted by age stereotypes (Levy and Schlesinger 2005).

The embodiment of negative stereotypes among older adults has also been shown in experimental studies. These studies found that underperformance in cognitive and physical tasks among older adults was influenced by age group identification (Haslam et al. 2012; Kang and Chasteen 2009) as well as by priming with age stereotypes (Lamont et al. 2015). Additionally, negative age stereotyping had a stronger effect on important behavioural outcomes compared with positive age stereotyping (Meisner 2012). Similarly, longitudinal studies have shown that negative age stereotypes and self-perceptions of ageing among older adults have an adverse influence on health, longevity, and cognitive performance (e.g., Levy et al. 2002a, b, 2012; ; Wurm and Benyamini 2014; Wurm et al. 2007).

4.4 Social Identity Theory

According to social identity theory, social behaviour is characterized by two typical behaviours: interpersonal and intergroup behaviours. Interpersonal behaviour is determined by individual characteristics and interpersonal relationships whereas

intergroup behaviour is determined by respective membership in various social groups or categories. The social behaviour of individuals combines these two aspects. Accordingly, individuals do not act just on the basis of their personal characteristics or their interpersonal relationships, but as members of their reference groups. These memberships reflect on the identities of the individuals as well as on their relationships with members of other groups (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

According to social identity theory, the identification of an individual with a certain group is relational and comparative and can be based on minimal criteria. This determination was based on several studies that indicated that the mere perception of belonging to two distinct groups is sufficient to provoke intergroup competitive or discriminatory responses on the part of the in-group (e.g., Billig and Tajfel 1973; Turner 1975).

Social identity theory posits that people want to have a positive self-identity. They achieve this goal by demonstrating biases which create a positive distinction between their group (in-group) and other groups (out-groups), and by elevating their in-group status above that of other groups (Kite et al. 2002; Tajfel and Turner 1979). However, Tajfel and Turner (1979) claimed that, contrary to the tendency to prefer the in-group over the out-group, subordinate groups often internalize a negative evaluation of themselves and are positively oriented towards out-groups (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

4.4.1 Ageism Among Young and Middle-Aged Adults in Light of Social Identity Theory

By examining different age groups in relation to social identity theory, we can infer that young and middle-aged adults might create a positive unique identity, which consists of their age group, by differentiating themselves from and elevating themselves above the old age group. This tendency might increase due to society's negative view of older adults (Kite et al. 2002). An empirical support for this phenomenon can be found in various studies documenting negative attitudes of young adults toward older adults (e.g., Bergman and Bodner 2015; Rupp et al. 2005).

Among middle-aged adults, the need for a positive distinctiveness of their age group might increase due to the recognition that they are closer to becoming members of a devalued group (Kite et al. 2002). This assumption is supported by studies that found that participants in middle-aged groups were more ageist than younger and older groups (Bodner et al. 2012; Laditka et al. 2004). However, other studies did not find significant differences between young and middle-aged groups (Cherry and Palmore 2008) or found conversely that the young group was more ageist than the middle-aged group (Rupp et al. 2005).

According to social identity theory, positive self-identity of the young group could be achieved not only by derogating the old age group, but also by relative positive distinctiveness of both age groups based on personally relevant traits

(Harwood et al. 1995). The positive distinctiveness of the young age group from the old age group is supported by studies that stressed the mixed nature of older adults' stereotypes, with young adults attributing positive stereotypes to older adults (e.g., warmth and experience) alongside negative ones (e.g., inflexibility and incompetence) (e.g., Chasteen et al. 2002; Cuddy et al. 2005).

4.4.2 Ageism Among Older Adults in Light of Social Identity Theory

According to social identity theory, subordinate and minority groups in society often internalize a social evaluation of themselves as "inferior" or "second class" (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Thus, the low status of older adults in society could affect their self-perceptions as members of this age group by internalizing the negative representations of old age that are prevalent in society (Kite et al. 2002). This can be reflected in self-ageism (Bodner et al. 2015).

Along with the assumption of social identity theory that subordinate groups tend to internalize the socially prevalent view of themselves as inferior, an additional and contrary assumption of this theory claims that social groups have a motivation to have a positive self-identity (Tajfel and Turner 1979). This complexity, in the case of older adults, is reflected in studies that examined perceptions and attitudes of older adults towards their own age group (e.g., Levy and Schlesinger 2005; Meisner 2012).

A few studies have explored explicitly ageist attitudes and behaviours of older adults toward their own age group. Research has indicated that older adults have more positive views about older adults than young and middle-aged groups do (Laditka et al. 2004). A different study that examined positive and negative ageist behaviours did not find significant differences between the older and the younger age groups (Cherry and Palmore 2008). However, studies that examined these attitudes as they are implicitly manifested, found a tendency towards internalization and embodiment of ageist attitudes among older adults (e.g., Levy and Schlesinger 2005; Meisner 2012).

4.4.3 Strategies to Maintain Positive Self-Identity According to Social Identity Theory

In order to maintain a positive self-identity among minority and subordinate groups (e.g., older adults), Tajfel and Turner (1979) indicated three strategies that members of these groups could adopt. First, older adults can use social mobility by avoiding identification with the old age group. They can achieve this goal by maintaining a youthful appearance and by avoiding behaviours associated with the old age group.

Second, older adults can use social creativity by focusing on the positive attributes of ageing or by comparing themselves with other less well-off older adults (e.g., a social downward comparison). Finally, older adults can act towards social change by stimulating social action in favour of changing the status of older people in society (Harwood et al. 1995; Kite et al. 2002; Tajfel and Turner 1979).

Evidence for the use of social mobility strategy among older adults can be found in experimental studies that have shown that older adults who were exposed to negative age stereotypes displayed a lower group identification and a stronger subjective age bias, while they tended to feel younger than their actual age (Weiss and Freund 2012; Weiss and Lang 2012). Similarly, the impact of negative age-related information on older adults' explicit and implicit self-esteem was moderated by self-differentiation from their age group (Weiss et al. 2013). Furthermore, the tendency of individuals in middle and later adulthood to report younger age identities (Montepare and Lachman 1989) can be interpreted as a desire of these individuals to relate themselves to the young age group and to differentiate themselves from the old age group.

Other studies have found, however, that perceived age discrimination among older adults was positively associated with age group identification (Garstka et al. 2004) and older subjective age (Stephan et al. 2015). Finally, an experimental study found a complex view concerning the activation of negative age stereotypes on three measures of subjective age: felt age ("How old do you feel?"), desired age ("If you could choose your age, how old would you want to be?"), and perceived age ("How old would you say you look?"). Whereas, older adults in good health felt older than their chronological age, older adults in bad health reported older perceived age and younger desired age (Kotter-Grühn and Hess 2012).

Support for the use of social creativity strategies can be found in theories on "successful ageing" (Rowe and Kahn 1997) and "active ageing" (WHO 2002), which stress the positive attributes of ageing. Additional support for these strategies can be found in arguments that call for the separation of the "third age" from the "fourth age." This separation allows young older adults to preserve their status by comparing themselves to the "fourth age," which represents "real old age" and is characterized by frailty, abjection and the "othering" of the self. This results in the defining of older adults by their alienation and vulnerability as well as their exclusion from society (Gilleard and Higgs 2011; Higgs and Gilleard 2014).

4.5 Synthesis of the Three Theories from a Life Span Perspective

Although these theories can be seen to provide three different explanations for the origins of ageism at the individual level, a careful examination indicates that they provide a complementary and coherent overview of the origins and processes of ageism over the life course. A sociological and psychological explanation of the

roots of ageism can be found in terror management theory. According to this theory, the unconscious threats that are embodied in old age undermine our confidence in our cultural worldview and self-esteem (Martens et al. 2005). Ageism is seen as an unconscious defense against death anxiety, which might arise as a result of the encounter with the old age group (Martens et al. 2005). However, studies indicate that this mechanism is relevant mostly among young and middle-aged groups (Bodner and Cohen-Fridel 2014; Martens et al. 2004) and to some extent among old-young adults (Maxfield et al. 2010; McCoy et al. 2000). It becomes less relevant among the old-old age group (Maxfield et al. 2010; McCoy et al. 2000), suggesting a gradual reduction of death anxiety in this age group (e.g., Fortner and Neimeyer 1999) and a greater acceptance of the inevitability of death.

Whereas terror management theory provides an explanation for the roots of ageism among the young, middle- and young-old age groups, stereotype embodiment theory provides a complementary explanation for self-ageism among the young-old and old-old age groups. According to this theory, processes of assimilation of the negative representation of old age from the surrounding culture and the internalization of these representations over one's life span might lead to an embodiment of stereotypes in old age (Levy 2009). Thus, older adults might perceive their status as low, not as a direct response to death anxiety, but due to the internalization of these negative attitudes.

Finally, social identity theory focuses on the diverse expressions of ageism among different age groups. According to this theory, ageism is derived from the desire of the young and middle-aged groups to distinguish themselves from and elevate themselves above the old age group in order to create a positive unique identity based on their own age group. The low status of the old age group, which is reflected in negative attitudes and stereotypes toward older adults in society (and can be explained by the two previous theories) might increase this tendency among different age groups, including older adults themselves (Kite et al. 2002) (see Fig. 4.1).

4.5.1 Short-Term and Long-Term Strategies for Coping with Self-Ageism

A unique feature of ageism that emerges from the three presented theories is the inherent threat embedded in it. Unlike other kinds of prejudice and discrimination, which are directed toward distinct out-groups and pose an external threat, ageism is directed toward our future selves by symbolizing our fear of death and the accompanying deterioration of the self (Martens et al. 2005).

Although studies have shown that stereotypes toward older adults in society consist of both negative and positive aspects (e.g., Fiske et al. 2002), the thoughts of inevitable deterioration and death that are associated with old age pose a significant threat to the wellbeing and confidence of the older adults, as they overshadow the positive representations of old age. Moreover, even when old age representations

are positive, they tend to be devalued in society, relative to the stereotypes of youth. Thus, although people might have a nuanced view of old age as having both positive and negative attributes, they act consciously and unconsciously to differentiate themselves from this age group due to the threats embedded in it.

The conscious and unconscious desire of different age groups to differentiate themselves from the old age group is reflected in their relating themselves to younger age groups or by reporting younger age identities (Montepare and Lachman 1989; Weiss and Freund 2012; Weiss and Lang 2012). Although it may be claimed that this tendency can emerge from the internalization of negative age stereotypes, a growing body of research indicates that a younger subjective age is positively associated with diverse subjective and objective outcomes such as improved physical and cognitive functioning, health, psychological wellbeing, and longevity (e.g., Gana et al. 2004; Kotter-Grühn et al. 2009; Stephan et al. 2014; Stephan et al. 2013). Hence, this strategy has positive outcomes and is highly desirable.

The desire of the middle-age and the young-old age groups to differentiate themselves from the old age group is also reflected in theories such as successful ageing (Rowe and Kahn 1997) and active ageing (WHO 2002), that focus on positive aspects of ageing. These theories undermine the prevailing assumptions that ageing is necessarily characterized by physical and cognitive deterioration, disease, and social isolation and emphasize the potential for maintaining physical, social, and mental wellbeing throughout the life course. According to these theories, successful or active ageing can be achieved by reducing risks for disease and disabilities, maximizing cognitive and physical function, maintaining interpersonal relations, continuing one's engagement in productive activities, and participating in social, economic, cultural, spiritual, and civic affairs (Rowe and Kahn 1997; WHO 2002).

Despite the dominance of these theories, there have been calls over the years that have questioned their legitimacy. These calls have argued that the distinction between successful and unsuccessful agers follows an ageist worldview, as "successful" old age is seen as a continuation of middle age and avoidance of all illness and deterioration (Calasanti 2015; Dillaway and Byrnes 2009; Liang and Luo 2012). Furthermore, the paradigm in these theories reflects Western values of independence and productivity and fails to address values of intergenerational solidarity or harmonization that may be of greater relevance for defining desirable old age for some groups of older adults (Lamb 2014; Liang and Luo 2012). A similar criticism is directed toward the distinction between the third (e.g., successful ageing) and the fourth age (e.g., failed old age), as the fourth age is perceived as the "real old age" and includes all negative attitudes of society toward this age group (Higgs and Gilleard 2014). We suggest that due to the significant threats of death and deterioration that are embedded in old age, the perception of a subjective young age identity ingrained in theories such as successful ageing and active ageing, which emphasize the importance of maintaining physical, social, and mental wellbeing in old age, are essential and have positive outcomes (Montepare and Lachman 1989; Rowe and Kahn 1997; WHO 2002).

However, these strategies are temporary. Even if an older adult uses all of his or her efforts to maintain good health and good physical and cognitive functioning, he or she would not be able to ignore the deterioration which is almost inevitable in the later stages of life. Therefore, we suggest that a young subjective age identity and theories like successful ageing and active ageing can serve as short-term strategies that are mostly relevant to the middle-age and young-old age groups, but that they gradually become less relevant in the later stages of life, especially in the old-old age group. The encounter with the gradual reduction of physical, cognitive, and social resources in the later stages of life requires the adoption of long-term strategies that do not ignore and repress the inevitable deterioration and death that are embedded in the life course.

These strategies include first a recognition of meaningful decline as a valid dimension of ageing and personhood (Lamb 2014). Second, they pose an alternative to values that emphasize functionality by emphasizing such resources as tradition, wisdom, memory, narrative, change, generation, and leadership (Katz and Marshall 2003). These long-term strategies are reflected in several theories which pose alternatives to the successful ageing and active ageing theories. According to the "conscious ageing" theory, old age is characterized by processes of decrement and compensation. These processes promote a creative response to disability whereby losses are balanced by gains and the decline is compensated for by spiritual insight. According to this theory, old age can be an opportunity for spiritual growth (Moody 2005). Similarly, the "harmonious ageing" theory, which is inspired by Eastern philosophy, possesses a dialectic and holistic ageing approach that allows for cross-cultural, liberal, inclusive, and open discourses that emphasize the complementary coexistence of body and mind. The theory defines "harmonious ageing" as a balanced outlook towards the ageing process, which follows the natural laws of the human body and promotes cultivating a sense of harmony with oneself and one's surroundings. This balanced and harmonious outlook promotes handling challenges and thus making adaptations accordingly (Liang and Luo 2012).

4.6 Conclusions

To summarize, ageism among young, middle-, and young-old age groups derives from the unconscious threats of death and deterioration that are embedded in old age (Greenberg et al. 1986). Self-ageism among older adults can also derive from the internalization of ageist stereotypes during the life span (Levy 2009). Even when the threat of death declines, especially in the last stages of life (McCoy et al. 2000), self-ageism is often preserved due to these internalization processes (Levy 2009).

In order to protect themselves from the negative consequences of the threat of death and deterioration that are embedded in old age, members of the young-old group might use various strategies. They might perceive their subjective age as

younger (Montepare and Lachman 1989), identify old age with the "fourth age" (Higgs and Gilleard 2014), or adopt theories such as successful or active ageing, which focus on the positive aspects of old age (Rowe and Kahn 1997; WHO 2002).

However, the positive effects of these strategies are limited, especially among the old-old group, when deterioration and death can no longer be ignored. In order to preserve self-esteem, the old-old might better adopt worldviews that emphasize alternative resources for self-esteem and meaning in old age, alongside the acceptance of the inevitable deterioration in old age (Cosco et al. 2013; Kahana et al. 2012) (see Fig. 4.1).

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