RESEARCH ARTICLE 

Old Age, the Medicalization of Aging, and Transhumanism: A Critical Sociological Assessment

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Abstract

As global demographic aging accelerates, old age has increasingly become a contested socio-cultural and biopolitical domain shaped by consumer capitalism, biomedical authority, and technological imaginaries. This study critically examines the medicalization of aging through an interdisciplinary framework integrating medicalization theory, the sociology of the body, Foucauldian biopolitics, and transhumanist philosophy. The article argues that aging is no longer approached merely as a natural life course phenomenon but is increasingly reconstructed as a biomedical deficiency requiring continuous intervention, optimization, and technological management. In contemporary societies, anti-aging discourses, consumer-oriented body politics, and transhumanist narratives collectively contribute to the normalization of youth-centered ideals while simultaneously marginalizing the aging body. Drawing upon critical sociological theory, the study explores how modern power structures regulate aging through processes of bodily surveillance, self-discipline, commodification, and social exclusion. Particular attention is devoted to the transformation of the body into a perpetual “project” within neoliberal consumer culture, where successful aging becomes associated with productivity, flexibility, and aesthetic performance. The article further evaluates transhumanism’s promise of overcoming biological aging and extending human life, contrasting this vision with Wilhelm Schmid’s “Art of Aging,” which conceptualizes aging as a meaningful existential and social experience rather than a pathological condition. Methodologically, the study adopts a theoretical and interpretive qualitative approach based on critical conceptual synthesis and interdisciplinary literature analysis. In addition, the paper discusses active aging policies, Third Age Universities, geotechnology, and intergenerational solidarity as alternative frameworks capable of promoting socially inclusive and humane approaches to aging. The study concludes that the dominant techno-capitalist treatment of aging risks deepening social inequalities, ageism, and psychological alienation by redefining old age primarily through biomedical and economic logics. Accordingly, aging should be reconsidered not as a condition to be eliminated, but as a socially valuable and existentially meaningful stage of human life. Technological and medical advancements, therefore, should serve to enhance the dignity, participation, and well-being of older individuals rather than support an endless pursuit of biological immortality.

Citation

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1. INTRODUCTION

"I am aging, therefore I am living; I have aged, therefore I exist."

Marc Augé

As the global elderly population grows at an accelerating pace, the question of how the experience of old age is socially constructed has become an increasingly urgent research concern. Individuals aged 60 and above, projected to constitute one fifth of the world's population by 2050 (WHO, 2025), represent not merely a demographic reality but a social terrain on which relations of power, consumer culture, and technological discourse are continuously reproduced.

Although old age is a natural phase of human life, it tends to be approached through the lens of a health-illness duality. It is, however, a subject that demands interdisciplinary engagement across the social sciences: sociology, social policy, social work, philosophy, psychology, and economics alike. For this reason, aging cannot be reduced to physical and cognitive biological changes such as greying hair or loss of skin elasticity. It must be understood as a multilayered and singular process, one that unfolds differently within each person's own life trajectory.

Within sociology, aging is treated not only as a biologically inevitable process but also in ways that encompass its social and cultural dimensions. Age is, in part, a cultural category; sociologists have long emphasized that perceptions of old age vary considerably across societies. Modernization and the cultural shifts that followed have led to aging being approached through particular, and often rigid, frameworks (Marshall, 2014, p. 816).

Today humanity is moving through rapid and intensive processes of technological development, industrialization, and urbanization. The transhumanist worldview, sometimes described as a second Enlightenment, holds that through mental, biological, and physiological interventions, humanity can transition from its natural biological constitution to a bionic one, thereby achieving what it calls "evolution." Against this backdrop, the present study aims to critically interrogate the concepts of old age, the body and bodily perception, the medicalization of aging, active aging, and anti-aging practices in relation to transhumanist discourse.

A review of the existing literature reveals that discussions of the sociology of aging, the sociology of the body, and transhumanism have largely proceeded in isolation from one another. Studies addressing the medicalization of aging within a medicalization theory framework (Conrad, 2007; Zola, 1972) have tended to explain this process primarily through the institutions of medicine and the pharmaceutical industry, while much of the transhumanism literature has not sufficiently examined the aging experience in its sociological dimensions. Moreover, studies that bring both bodies of literature into dialogue with Foucauldian power analysis and Bauman's theory of liquid modernity remain quite limited.

This study seeks to fill that gap by bringing medicalization, the sociology of the body, and transhumanist philosophy together within a single analytical framework. The central argument is this: the medicalization of aging is not an incidental medical development but a structural process produced through the articulation of capitalist consumer culture, the power strategies through which bodies are normalized, and transhumanist discourse. Against this process, Schmid's "Art of Aging" offers a sociologically meaningful alternative framework. The article proceeds through the following themes: the definition and multidimensional nature of old age; the medicalization process and anti-aging practices; the sociology of the body; social exclusion; active aging models; and transhumanism. The concluding section connects the theoretical findings to policy recommendations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The sociological understanding of aging has expanded significantly in recent decades, moving beyond purely biological explanations toward multidimensional analyses incorporating culture, power, identity, technology, and political economy. Existing scholarship demonstrates that aging is not only a physiological process but also a socially constructed phenomenon shaped by institutional practices, consumer culture, and ideological frameworks.

One of the central conceptual approaches within this literature is the theory of medicalization. Zola (1972) and Conrad (2007) argue that many ordinary aspects of human life have increasingly been redefined within biomedical frameworks and subjected to medical authority. Within this perspective, aging is no longer interpreted merely as a natural stage of the life course but is progressively reconstructed as a condition requiring continuous monitoring, intervention, and management. Contemporary anti-aging industries, pharmaceutical developments, and preventive health discourses have further intensified this transformation. Recent studies additionally emphasize the emergence of "healthism," in which individuals are morally expected to maintain youthful, healthy, and productive bodies throughout the aging process (Jønsson, 2024).

Parallel to medicalization theory, the sociology of the body has provided important analytical tools for understanding how modern societies regulate bodily appearance and social identity. Foucault's concepts of anatomo-politics and biopolitics explain how modern power disciplines individual bodies while simultaneously regulating populations through institutional surveillance mechanisms (Foucault, 1992; 2003; 2014). Within this framework, aging bodies increasingly become objects of normalization, productivity measurement, and biomedical supervision. Baudrillard (2017) and Bourdieu further demonstrate that the body functions not merely as a biological entity but as a symbolic and cultural project shaped by consumption patterns, class structures, and aesthetic norms. In contemporary consumer societies, youthfulness has become associated with success, flexibility, and social desirability, whereas aging is often framed negatively through narratives of decline and dependency.

The literature on aging and social exclusion similarly highlights the structural marginalization of older individuals in late modern societies. Scholars such as Giddens (2013), Beauvoir (1970), and Kalınkara (2016) emphasize that industrialization, technological acceleration, and neoliberal economic structures have weakened the traditional social status of older generations. Ageism, technological exclusion, and the decline of intergenerational interaction contribute to the invisibilization of older individuals within contemporary public life. In response, alternative frameworks such as active aging policies and Third Age Universities have emerged to promote social participation, lifelong learning, and intergenerational solidarity.

Another increasingly influential body of scholarship concerns transhumanism and technological enhancement. Authors such as More (2013), Bostrom (2003), and Harari (2016) conceptualize technological advancement as a means of overcoming biological limitations, extending human lifespan, and potentially transcending mortality itself. Within transhumanist discourse, aging is frequently positioned as a technical deficiency that can be delayed, optimized, or ultimately eliminated through scientific intervention. Critics, however, argue that such perspectives risk commodifying the human body while deepening social inequalities and reinforcing unrealistic ideals of perpetual youth (Dağ, 2021).

Despite the growing literature on aging, the sociology of the body, and transhumanism, these fields have often developed independently from one another. Existing studies rarely integrate medicalization theory with Foucauldian power analysis, consumer culture critique, and transhumanist philosophy within a unified sociological framework. Furthermore, limited attention has been devoted to the ways in which neoliberal body politics and technological enhancement discourses collectively reshape the social meaning of aging.

Accordingly, this study seeks to bridge these theoretical domains through an interdisciplinary critical framework. By synthesizing theories of medicalization, biopolitics, body sociology, and transhumanism, the article argues that the medicalization of aging represents not merely a biomedical development but a broader socio-cultural process embedded within capitalist consumer culture, technological rationality, and modern regimes of power.

3. METHOD

This study adopts a theoretical analysis approach, consistent with the qualitative research tradition. The theoretical literature on aging, medicalization, the sociology of the body, and transhumanism was systematically reviewed; core concepts and theories across these fields were assessed from a critical perspective and synthesized into an integrated analytical framework. The study draws on primary theoretical sources, secondary academic literature, and recent empirical research (Neuman, 2014). No experimental process or fieldwork was involved; analysis was carried out through conceptual synthesis and theoretical inference. This methodological choice is consistent with the interdisciplinary character of the study and with the interpretive tradition of social theory (Creswell, 2013).

What Is Old Age?

Old age is an ordinary stage of life. Aging brings with it a range of physiological and psychological changes. Yet in recent years, reaching a consensus on the chronological age at which old age begins has grown increasingly difficult. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines individuals aged 65 and above as "elderly"; that said, explaining this age group through chronological criteria alone is no longer sufficient.

Each person may experience the aging process differently depending on their life circumstances and accumulated experiences. It bears emphasizing that aging is a layered and multidimensional phenomenon, shaped by numerous variables that may accelerate or slow its course. Leading a physically and cognitively active life supports healthy aging, while sedentary and passive living can hasten the process. Positive thinking, rich social relationships, and a sense of security also directly influence how aging unfolds (Zastrow, 2016, p. 288). According to a widely used classification in the research literature, individuals aged 65 to 74 are defined as "late adults," those aged 75 to 84 as "older adults," and those aged 85 and above as "the oldest old" (Garfein and Herzog, 1995).

3.1. Chronological Aging

Chronological age is a concept that determines at which stages of life individuals are expected to take on particular roles and responsibilities. Social milestones such as starting school, obtaining a driver's license, or acquiring the right to vote and stand for election are all tied to chronological age. Gerontologists, however, have consistently stressed that chronological age alone is insufficient for defining old age (Baars, 2013). In this context, Quadagno (2005, p. 50) proposes the "life course perspective." In short, gerontologists argue that a one-dimensional age-based assessment oversimplifies the experience of aging and overlooks the fact that each individual's needs and circumstances are unique.

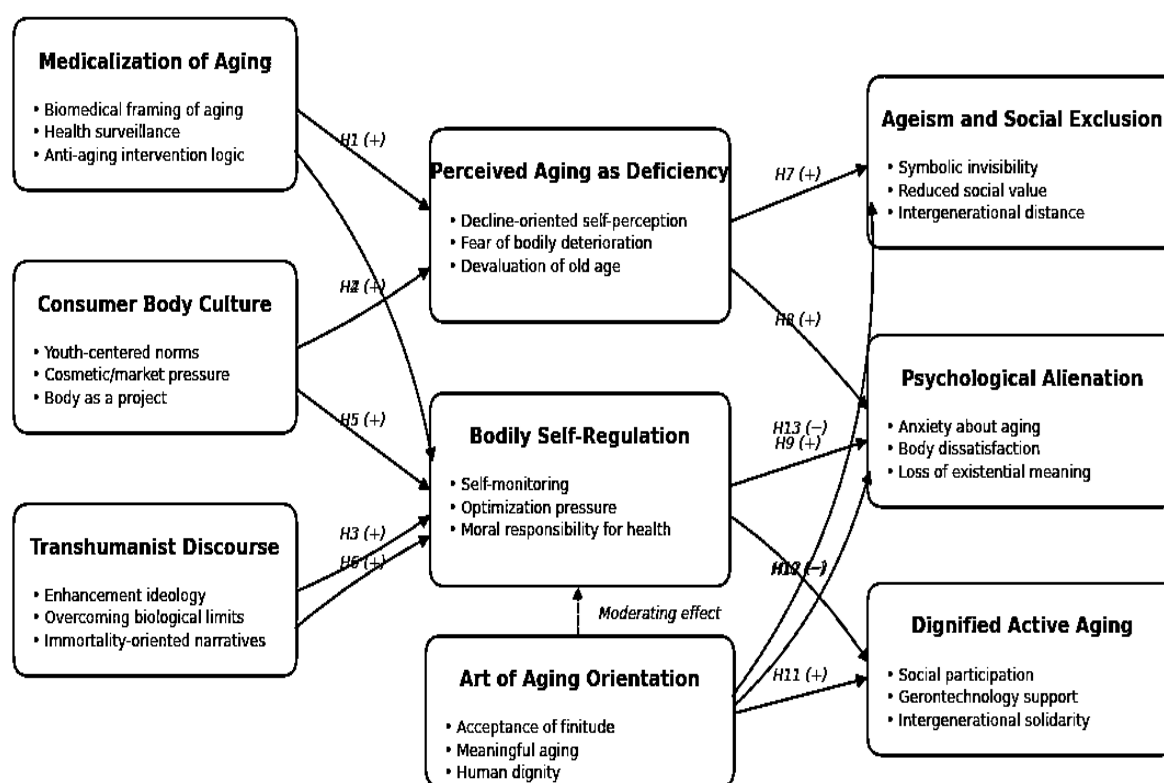
3.2. Biological Aging

Biological aging is shaped by a wide range of factors beyond the passing of chronological years, including diet, physical activity, stress, and health habits. A person's biological age and the way their body responds to that age cannot be explained by elapsed time alone. The beneficial effects of living healthy years on biological aging have been documented across various studies (Doding, Cepelak & Pavic, 2019, pp. 483-497).

Figure 1. Proposed Structural Equation Model (SEM) of the Medicalization of Aging, Transhumanist Discourse, and Social Outcomes

Proposed SEM Model: Medicalization of Aging, Transhumanist Discourse, and Social Outcomes

Conceptual structural model for a critical sociological assessment of aging



Note. H = hypothesized path. (+) indicates a positive association; (-) indicates a negative association. The model is conceptual and suitable for adaptation into empirical SEM/PLS-SEM testing.

Caption: The figure presents a conceptual Structural Equation Model (SEM) illustrating the sociological relationships between the medicalization of aging, consumer-oriented body culture, and transhumanist discourse within contemporary society. The model demonstrates how these interconnected structural forces contribute to the perception of aging as a biomedical deficiency and intensify processes of bodily self-regulation, social exclusion, ageism, and psychological alienation. Simultaneously, the framework incorporates the moderating role of the "Art of Aging" orientation, emphasizing meaningful aging, dignity, and existential acceptance as alternative pathways supporting active and socially inclusive aging. The model is theoretically grounded in medicalization theory, Foucauldian biopolitics, sociology of the body, and critical perspectives on neoliberal consumer culture and transhumanism.

Source: Developed by the authors based on Conrad (2007), Foucault (1992; 2003; 2014), Baudrillard (2017), Bauman (2023), More (2013), Harari (2016), and Schmid (2015).

3.3. Social Aging

Social aging is shaped not only by chronological and biological age but also by social values and roles. In Eastern societies, older individuals have traditionally been regarded as sources of wisdom, whereas in Western societies they are often positioned as people who have fallen behind the times and lost their productive value (Giddens, 2013, pp. 223-224). As industrialization and specialization accelerated, older adults lost their influence in the labor market and in advisory roles, which eroded their social standing (Zastrow, 2016, pp. 644-647). According to Simone de Beauvoir (1970, p. 68), old age within the system has come to represent a kind of "otherness."

Foucault's analysis of power and the body offers a critical theoretical framework for making sense of this process of social exclusion. Foucault argues that modern power governs the body through two distinct strategies (Foucault, 1992; 2003). The first is anatomo-politics, which encompasses the mechanisms that discipline the individual body, shape it according to particular norms, and integrate it into the economic system. The second is bio-politics, which involves the management of populations as a whole through birth and death rates, disease statistics, and life expectancy data. The aging body falls into a problematic position on both counts: from an anatomo-political standpoint, it can no longer be disciplined and rendered productive; from a bio-political standpoint, it is classified as a segment of society that generates costs. The continuous surveillance of the aging body through medical monitoring, care institutions, and health policies constitutes the concrete institutional expression of this power strategy (Foucault, 2014). The inclusion of old age within the category of disease is therefore not an incidental medical development but a structural product of power's strategy for normalizing and managing the body.

Wilhelm Schmid (2015, pp. 10-11) notes that one of the central reasons old age is perceived negatively in modern society is precisely that it is treated as an illness. In his view, this understanding is the product of "propaganda for a self that will remain forever young." Old age in the modern period has consequently come to be experienced by individuals as a condition to be avoided, and the way this perception becomes entangled with the broader social system is plainly visible.

4. Anti-Aging

The growing tendency to define old age as a health problem in modern society is explained in the sociology of medicine through the concept of "medicalization." Medicalization refers to the process by which conditions previously not regarded as medical problems are redefined within a framework of disease or disorder and transformed into phenomena requiring medical intervention (Conrad, 2007). In this process, it is not only the institution of medicine that plays an active role; the pharmaceutical and cosmetics industries, the media, and consumer culture all operate as significant actors. In the context of aging, medicalization means that growing old is framed not as a biological norm but as a "condition" to be treated and delayed. The astronomical scale reached by the anti-aging industry is concrete evidence of how deeply this medicalization process has become intertwined with market economics. As Zola (1972) anticipated, medicine in modern society exercises over the aging body the same function of social control it inherited from morality and religion: being old has been transformed into a "risk condition" requiring medical surveillance and intervention. Today this process extends well beyond the treatment of disease; older individuals face social pressure to age actively, productively, and healthily. According to Jønsson (2024), old age in modern society is increasingly evaluated within the framework of "healthism," whereby individuals are held morally responsible for maintaining their health. Aging thus ceases to be a natural life stage and becomes a biomedical risk domain requiring continuous management.

4.1. Eternal Youth and the Art of Aging

The anti-aging movement began in the 1960s and 1970s with the establishment of institutions such as Gerovital (Bozkurt, 2023, p. 72). In the modern world, old age is presented as a condition to be prevented and delayed. Contemporary anti-aging discourses target not only aesthetic youthfulness but also the postponement of biological aging. Developments in geroscience, including stem cell therapies, senolytic drugs, and longevity medicine applications, treat aging as a biologically manageable process (Tenchov et al., 2024). Old age is thus redefined not as an inevitable life stage but as a technically manageable "problem." The "wise elder" of traditional society has, in the postmodern period, been transformed into a figure perceived as powerless, unproductive, and burdensome. In Bourdieu's terms, "the body is the objectified form of class taste." According to Shilling, the personal construction of a healthy body encourages individual responsibility for bodily management to a greater degree than ever before (Bozkurt, 2023: 18).

Procedures such as laser treatments, botox, and cosmetic surgery transform the individual's body into a project object. This is connected to the ideology of "successful aging," which has become increasingly widespread. According to Gibson et al. (2024), the successful aging discourse evaluates an individual's aging process through the lens of performance, self-regulation, and lifestyle choices. While this approach makes staying young and healthy a matter of individual responsibility, it also carries the risk of leading

people to perceive aging as a personal failure. The purpose of anti-aging practices is therefore not simply to "look young" but to demonstrate socially that one is not yet old. Investment in bodily appearance turns the aging body into an object of consumer culture while potentially estranging individuals from their own bodies.

Schmid (2015, pp. 11-12) proposes the "Art of Aging" as an alternative to the "Forever Young" ideal: rather than building a life in opposition to the aging process, one learns to live alongside it. This means giving meaning to life, engaging in contemplation, and filling a finite allotted time with things that matter.

4.2. The Objectification of the Body and the Project Body

The modern individual regards the body as a performance space to be presented to society. Cooley's concept of the "Looking-Glass Self" illuminates this relationship: we position ourselves through the mirror that society holds up to us. According to Mead, the individual self emerges through experience as part of the social self (Bozkurt, 2023, p. 45). As the gap between the ideal body and the actual body widens, individuals grow increasingly dissatisfied and turn toward bodily modification.

Baudrillard (2017, p. 163) argues that consumer culture positions the body as the most singular and precious of all objects. Obsessions with health, diet, youth, and beauty render the body both functional and ideological. Anti-aging advertisements and digital media discourses represent aging as an aesthetic "flaw" in need of correction. Recent studies show that the cosmetics and aesthetics sector in particular has turned the aging body into an object of consumer culture by establishing youthfulness as a social norm. The body thus becomes not merely a biological entity but a performance space requiring constant improvement, optimization, and display (Yasin & Sabir, 2026). "The negative perception of aging is so powerful that individuals may be willing to endure every cost and pain that aesthetic procedures entail" (Alptekin & Delibaş, 2021, p. 169). As the body is elevated to such heights, the inner self is left behind, and the deep relationship between the body and the self is damaged.

According to Holz et al. (2025), presenting aging as a deficiency that must be perpetually deferred does not only heighten individual anxiety; it can also weaken the social value attributed to older individuals. This contributes to the reproduction of discriminatory attitudes toward old age and to the equation of youth with social success.

5. The Meaning of The Body as A Sociological Phenomenon

5.1. The Sociology of the Body: Power Structures and Social Positioning

The human body is a shared site of inquiry across many disciplines, and sociology is one of them. From birth onward, our bodies are continuously constructed through social interaction. It was the work of Michel Foucault that pioneered the emergence of the sociology of the body as an independent field. According to Foucault, power operates through two fundamental processes in its effort to define and control the body: the anatomo-political and the bio-political (Bozkurt, 2023, p. 14).

Goffman argues that it is through the "performance" the body stages in everyday life that the individual makes a difference; Bourdieu, for his part, maintains that an individual's socio-cultural structure shapes their ways of thinking, their tastes, and their perceptions. The social class a person occupies directly determines how they experience old age. Individuals from working-class backgrounds tend to approach aging with greater acceptance, while those from upper-class backgrounds are more inclined to allocate resources toward deferring the visible signs of aging.

5.2. The Ideal Self, the Ideal Body, and Modern Alienation

The self takes shape through the communication an individual maintains with others and with society at large. According to the concept of the "Looking-Glass Self," we construct our sense of self by seeing the social world through the eyes of others. As one draws closer to the ideal self, self-confidence grows; as one moves further away, it diminishes. The external appearance of the body directly affects one's self-perception. "The ideal self sets the ideal body in motion and puts it on display; the body, in other words, is presented as the storefront of the self" (Bozkurt, 2023, p. 57).

Over time, the individual comes to make changes to their body not for themselves but for others, and these changes find no natural end. The person grows progressively estranged from themselves. "With modernity, old age is perceived as an undesirable condition by the individual and simultaneously imposed on the aging person by society. Modern life delivers a single message: stay young, always" (Bektaş, 2017, p. 14).

6. Old Age and Social Exclusion

The concept of social exclusion gained widespread currency in the context of neoliberal policies that took hold after 1980, accelerated by globalization. "The global developments of the 1990s brought changes to family structures; the loss of roles and status experienced by older individuals became intertwined with difficulties in adapting to a technologically driven way of life.

Social exclusion is defined as the process by which an older individual is deprived of some or all of the social, psychological, economic, and cultural structures necessary for integration into society" (Kalınkara, 2016, p. 108).

The four primary dimensions of social exclusion are consumption, production, political participation, and social relations. Older individuals may encounter negative treatment simply for moving slowly in a supermarket, and they are often unable to benefit adequately from cultural opportunities or transportation facilities. The framing of retirement as a period of passivity and withdrawal deepens social exclusion further. State policies designed to prevent exclusion, the strengthening of family ties, the assumption of responsibility by civil society, and the promotion of intergenerational solidarity are all of fundamental importance in addressing this problem.

7. Overcoming Stereotypes: Building an Active and Fulfilling Life In Old Age

7.1. Redefining Aging: Health, Security, and Social Participation

The concept of "active aging" was first developed by the WHO in the late 1990s and was endorsed as a core policy objective at the World Population Summit held in Madrid in 2002 (Kalınkara, 2016, p. 265). Active aging is a broad concept aimed at enabling individuals to reach optimal levels of social, mental, physical, and health-related functioning while improving their quality of life. According to the WHO (2002), the determinants of active aging are classified under six headings: health and social services, behavioral factors, personal characteristics, physical environment, and economic conditions (Karahana Şen, 2025, p. 26).

7.1.1. Health

Health in old age encompasses early diagnosis, preventive services, the strengthening of geriatric care, and the support of home-based care. The training and support of family caregivers is critically important for improving the quality of life of older individuals.

7.1.2. Security

Older individuals must feel safe within their communities. Age-friendly home arrangements, environmental and urban planning, awareness-raising efforts against elder fraud, and the coordinated assumption of responsibility by local governments and civil society organizations are among the priority steps in this area.

7.1.3. Participation

The participation of older individuals in social life has a positive effect on the process of active and peaceful aging. Cultural events, outings, hobbies, and intergenerational interaction settings strengthen older adults' sense of belonging to society. Municipal courses and companionship programs are among the important tools that support this process.

7.2. The Role and Importance of Third Age Universities

The concept of lifelong learning was first introduced by UNESCO in 1960 (Güleç, Çelik and Demirhan, 2012, p. 35). Third Age Universities, which put this concept into practice, aim to enable older individuals to make use of their accumulated knowledge, strengthen intercultural communication, and maintain their social skills. In Turkey, the first example was established in 2015 under the name "Tazelenme Üniversitesi" (University of Renewal) by Prof. Dr. İsmail Tufan at Akdeniz University, and the model subsequently spread to cities such as Muğla and İzmir. These institutions support older individuals socio-culturally and contribute to active aging through activities such as spending time with peers, developing new skills, and taking up hobbies (Oğlak and Canatan, 2020, p. 132).

8. Meaningful Life, Death, And the Perception of Old Age in The Modern World

8.1. Meaningful Life and the Inevitability of Death

However far we extend the chronological span of life, what ultimately matters is not a long life but a "meaningful" one, and that life ends in death. What makes life valuable is precisely its finitude. Schmid (2025, p. 35) articulates this question as follows: "Was that all there was? Throughout one's lifetime, death presses upon the living: are you truly living? How are you spending your time?" Bauman's theory of liquid modernity completes this inquiry on a sociological plane. According to Bauman, in liquid modern society individuals are compelled to continuously reconstruct themselves in an environment where traditional identities, norms, and institutions have dissolved (Bauman, 2023). This perpetual project of transformation presupposes a young and flexible body, a rapidly adapting identity, and a subject ready for consumption. Old age, however, stands in direct contradiction to this foundational assumption of liquid modernity: the aging body slows, the aging identity loses its flexibility, and the older individual steps outside the cycle of consumption. In this framework, old age emerges as the one identity condition that liquid modern society structurally excludes, for the older individual proves unable to meet the "flexible identity project" that Bauman envisages (Şahin, 2024: 4). Modern human beings live as though playing a game of musical chairs; speed and consumption have colonized every domain of life, and there is no place in this game for those who slow down.

Table 1. Sociological Dimensions of the Medicalization of Aging in Contemporary Society

Dimension	Core Characteristics	Dominant Institutional Actors	Sociological Consequences
Biomedicalization of Aging	Aging is reframed as a treatable biomedical condition requiring continuous intervention and monitoring	Medical institutions, pharmaceutical industry, anti-aging clinics	Expansion of medical dependency and normalization of surveillance over aging bodies
Consumerization of the Body	Youthfulness and bodily perfection become market-oriented ideals promoted through consumer culture	Cosmetic industry, digital media, wellness sector	Intensification of body dissatisfaction, commodification of aging, and identity insecurity
Neoliberal Self-Regulation	Individuals are held personally responsible for maintaining “successful” and “productive” aging	Health industries, self-help culture, social media platforms	Internalization of performance pressure and moralization of health behaviors
Technological Optimization	Aging is positioned as a technical limitation potentially overcome through enhancement technologies	Transhumanist movements, biotechnology companies, AI-driven health systems	Reconfiguration of human identity and emergence of new ethical inequalities
Social Exclusion and Ageism	Older individuals are increasingly marginalized within productivity-centered societies	Labor markets, urban systems, media representations	Isolation, symbolic invisibility, and weakening of intergenerational solidarity
Digital and Gerontechnological Adaptation	Technological systems reshape elderly participation and access to social life	Gerontechnology developers, public institutions, digital infrastructures	Both inclusion opportunities and risks of technological exclusion

Accepting the finitude of the body is necessary for a meaningful life. Religious beliefs and spiritual values reduce anxiety about death and support psychological balance in old age. "The key factor that enables religion to minimize the negative psychological effects of the fear of death on the individual is the belief in an afterlife" (Kalıncara, 2016, p. 159). Belief in the afterlife, in this context, offers the most meaningful responses to the existential anxieties of human beings.

8.2. The Perception of Death, Spirituality, and the Invisibilization of Old Age

In modern society, older individuals are relocated to care homes and cemeteries are pushed to the outskirts of cities, rendering death invisible. The wave of information that spreads through social media tends to reinforce negative perceptions of old age. In an age of speed and gratification, the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) deepens, and older individuals find themselves at risk of losing their connection to society as they are unable to sustain that pace. Yet old age is a natural period through which cultural transmission and social memory are carried. The social value of this wisdom and experience needs to be rediscovered.

9. Ageism And New Models of Aging

Age-based discrimination encompasses behaviors such as the social rejection of older individuals, intolerance toward them, and their treatment with contempt. "If advanced age evokes associations with mortality, worthlessness, unproductivity, and meaninglessness, it can be said that prejudice against older people has taken hold" (Bozkurt, 2023, p. 70). Stereotypes define older individuals as unproductive, dependent, isolated, and resistant to change (Yurttaş, 2017, p. 2), which in turn negatively affects their sense of self-worth.

Table 2. Comparative Conceptual Framework: Transhumanist Anti-Aging Paradigm versus the “Art of Aging” Approach

Analytical Dimension	Transhumanist Anti-Aging Paradigm	“Art of Aging” Perspective (Schmid)
Understanding of Aging	Aging is viewed as a biological deficiency or technical problem	Aging is regarded as a natural, meaningful, and existential life stage
Human Body	The body is a modifiable and optimizable project	The body is an integral part of lived human experience
Role of Technology	Technology should overcome biological limitations and extend life indefinitely	Technology should support dignity, autonomy, and quality of life
Concept of Success	Success is associated with youthfulness, productivity, and enhancement	Success is associated with acceptance, wisdom, and meaningful living
Relationship with Mortality	Death is perceived as a problem to delay or eliminate	Mortality is accepted as an essential dimension of human existence
Social Implications	Risk of intensified inequality, exclusion, and body commodification	Encourages intergenerational solidarity and social integration
Psychological Orientation	Continuous optimization and fear of decline	Inner balance, self-reflection, and existential maturity
Ethical Perspective	Human enhancement and post-biological transformation	Human dignity, authenticity, and social meaning

At the same time, perceptions of old age are themselves being transformed through the process of modernization. Individuals reaching the age of 65 to 70 no longer define themselves as “old”; through their colorful dress, curiosity, and active engagement, they embody what might be called a “young-old” profile. According to Tufan, the most distinctive characteristics of this generation are high levels of education, an active social life, and intensive participation in cultural activities (Yurttaş, 2017, pp. 56-57). The more older individuals are visible and integrated into society, the stronger social bonds become and the less exclusion occurs.

10. Old Age, Technology, And Transhumanism in The Digital Age

10.1. The Position of the Older Individual Against the Speed of the Digital Age

In this artificial intelligence-driven and technology-oriented digital age, humanity is advancing toward the Society 5.0 vision. Despite new technological developments taking center stage in daily life, older individuals are not prepared, at the cognitive or physical level, to keep pace with this acceleration. An older person with diminished vision and hearing may be unable to carry out banking transactions or book medical appointments independently. This situation creates fertile ground for loss of self-confidence, technology-induced exclusion, and social isolation (Üresin, 2022, p. 32).

Gerontechnology is a multidisciplinary research field that draws on social, cultural, and physical knowledge to develop technology in ways that ease the lives of older individuals and improve their quality of life (Üresin, 2022, p. 32). Designs tailored to older users, including large buttons, loud call notifications, and simplified interfaces, are among the practical outputs of this field.

10.2. The Naturalness of Aging and the Art of Aging Approach

In the postmodern age, old age is presented as something to be delayed as long as possible. Within the transhumanist perspective, aging is regarded as a deficiency and is thought to be something that can be overcome through the possibilities of technology. This approach drives individuals into an endless struggle against aging, ultimately exhausting them (Schmid, 2015, pp. 11-12).

Schmid draws attention to the importance of accepting old age and viewing this period as a valuable process. In his view, the “Art of Aging” represents a way of life that is at peace with growing old. The “Forever Young” principle obstructs the natural flow of life and restricts the emergence of new experiences. Schmid emphasizes that accepting temporal finitude and discovering inner tranquility is among the gains that come with maturation (Schmid, 2015, pp. 13-14).

10.3. Transhumanism: Technology, Human, and the Search for Immortality

The word “transhumanism” is formed from the combination of “trans” (transition/transformation) and “humanism” (Can, 2022, p. 608). Aldous Huxley (1957/2020), the first to use the concept, foresaw that humanity would stand on the threshold of a new

mode of existence. According to Max More, transhumanism is a cultural movement that aims to develop widely applicable technologies specifically for eliminating aging and enhancing the intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities of human beings (More, 2013, p. 17).

Among the primary objectives of transhumanism are the extension of lifespan, the uploading of the mind to digital environments, and the augmentation of bodily capacities. Grey (2012) estimates that with advances in anti-aging technologies, humanity could live for 1,000 years. Ahmet Dağ (2021, p. 17-18) notes that the theoretical foundation of transhumanism rests on Darwin's theory of evolution, while its practical basis lies in industrialization and technological applications; he nevertheless regards the claim of "remaining human" as a paradox. This debate becomes still more meaningful in the context of liquid modernity: while Bauman's liquid modernity sees individuals breaking from traditional identities and continuously reconstructing themselves, transhumanism carries this desire for transformation beyond biological limits (Şahin, 2024, p. 8-9).

Some transhumanists argue that religions are mistaken on the question of death and contend that technological immortality can be achieved (Harari, 2016, p. 33). Transhumanism in this context can also be understood as a philosophical movement that aims, through scientific and technological progress, to postpone and ultimately eliminate death (Abbagnano, 1992, pp. 763-770; Bostrom, 2003, p. 4). Şahin (2024, pp. 10-11) characterizes transhumanism directly as "a revolt against death," emphasizing that the movement aims to fundamentally transform how death is perceived; and while it remains uncertain whether this goal can ever be realized, it is clear that it brings with it profound ethical and social problems. Does this goal enrich humanity's experience of life, or does it render life meaningless? This question continues to occupy the center of sociological and philosophical debate.

11. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study takes a humanistic and sociological stance, positioning aging as a life stage requiring meaning rather than a disease requiring prevention, in contrast to the techno-capitalist approach that treats it as an illness to be cured. In doing so, it demonstrates that old age is not merely a biological process but a multidimensional experience shaped by social, cultural, economic, and technological transformations. Modernization, capitalism, youth-centered beauty norms, and transhumanist philosophy are rendering old age increasingly invisible while framing the aging process as a problem. Transhumanism's positioning of aging as "a deficiency to be overcome" stands in contradiction to Schmid's "Art of Aging" philosophy, which invites us to understand old age anew as a natural and valuable period of life.

The study has shown that anti-aging practices and the ideology of the ideal body place older individuals under both economic and psychological pressure. Presenting the body as a project and youth as a form of capital to be preserved casts the experience of aging in a negative light. Social exclusion, loneliness, technological incompatibility, and loss of status are among the most prominent difficulties older individuals face in modern society.

The findings point to several interconnected areas of policy and social transformation. Above all, a transformation in social perception is necessary; adopting a language and cultural policy that foregrounds the experience and wisdom of older individuals is the foundation of this change. To support active aging, access to health services must be strengthened, safe environmental arrangements must be made, and opportunities for social participation must be expanded. Within this framework, the wider dissemination of Third Age Universities and lifelong learning programs, along with the development of digital literacy training and age-friendly technologies, are among the priority steps to be taken. In addition, support for social and cultural projects that encourage intergenerational solidarity, the strengthening of legal regulations and oversight mechanisms to combat ageism, and making spiritual and psychosocial support services accessible all constitute indispensable components of a comprehensive aging policy.

In conclusion, old age is a period to be given meaning, not prevented. The potentials of transhumanism should be employed not to eliminate aging but to humanely support the physical and cognitive capacities of older individuals. Making old age natural, valued, and visible is indispensable both from a human rights perspective and for the continuity of society. All stakeholders in society must together build a new understanding, one that recognizes aging as a worthwhile process.

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Ethical Considerations

This study complies with internationally accepted research ethics standards.

Author Contributions

Both authors contributed equally to all stages of the study, including conceptualization, literature review, theoretical analysis, writing, and revision.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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