

## 11.4.7: Section Summary

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### 11.4.2 Who Are the Elderly? Aging in Society

The social study of aging uses population data and cohorts to predict social concerns related to aging populations. In the United States, the population is increasingly older (called “the graying of the United States”), especially due to the baby Boomer segment. Global studies on aging reveal a difference in life expectancy between core and peripheral nations as well as a discrepancy in nations’ preparedness for the challenges of increasing elderly populations.

### 11.4.3 The Process of Aging

Old age affects every aspect of human life: biological, social, and psychological. Although medical technology has lengthened life expectancies, it cannot eradicate aging and death. Cultural attitudes shape the way our society views old age and dying, but these attitudes shift and evolve over time.

### 11.4.4 Challenges Facing the Elderly

As people enter old age, they face challenges. Ageism, which involves stereotyping and discrimination against the elderly, leads to misconceptions about their abilities. Although elderly poverty has been improving for decades, many older people may be detrimentally affected by the 2008 recession. Some elderly people grow physically frail and, therefore, dependent on caregivers, which increases their risk of elder abuse.

### 11.4.5 Theoretical Perspectives on Aging

The three major sociological perspectives inform the theories of aging. Theories in the functionalist perspective focus on the role of elders in terms of the functioning of society as a whole. Theories in the conflict perspective concentrate on how elders, as a group, are at odds with other groups in society. And theories in the symbolic interactionist perspective focus on how elders’ identities are created through their interactions.

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