While racism has been recognized for a long time, the problem of ageism is quickly becoming more noticeable in modern day society. Ageism is the prejudice or bias against people of other age groups than oneself. The most common form of ageism is prejudice against elders from the younger generation. The practice is commonly depicted throughout various forms of pop culture and has been personally observed or experienced by most Americans, myself included. The provocative question must be answered: "Is ageism the new racism, and if so, what causes this bias and why does the human race continue to label those different from themselves?" Some sociological theories may help explain why ageism exists and what effects it has on the victims. This is a pressing issue that must be addressed.

The concept of ageism was first brought to my attention during a gerontology class last semester. On the first day of class, we watched a YouTube video where younger people were asked to predict the success of older people performing certain activities such as yoga, martial arts, and running. The participants' answers were unanimous. Always, the younger person assumed that the older person would be incapable of successfully performing the activity. The participants were asked to demonstrate a depiction of the older person performing the chosen activity. They would act it out in slow motion and hobble as if they had a physical disability, impeding their ability to successfully perform the various activities. Much to the surprise of the younger participants, when the older people were asked to perform the actions, they did so exceedingly well. The older adults were asked when they had started to learn the skills and many answered after their retirement. Rather than having a lifetime of practice, they learned the skills at an older age. Why had the younger generation expected a very different scenario?

portrayal of old age in pop culture. Many television shows and movies depict elder adults as incapable, grumpy, inactive, and mentally unaware of the things going on around them. This has created a general fear of aging as well as a stereotype of the typical older adult. Many businesses feed on this fear of aging by advertising products to combat wrinkles, grey hair, and memory loss, which are all seen as a negative in American culture. These advertisements create a sense of embarrassment in elder adults because they feel like they do not look like everyone is expected to look. Personally, I have heard my grandmother talk about needing to get rid of wrinkles and dye her hair to look younger. She is not alone in this feeling as many other seniors feel the same way when they see how their age group is depicted in pop culture. A long-lived life should be celebrated but older adults today are battling with mental health problems and low self-esteem due to ageism on television, movies, and advertisements.

The sociological theories that could explain why ageism exists and the effects it has on the older generation are the collective consciousness, othering, and the looking glass self. The collective consciousness was introduced by Emile Durkheim in the reading "The Cultural Logic of Collective Representations." Durkheim explains that all societies are created with cultural meaning making through collective representations of everything. The collective consciousness is a set of shared beliefs, concepts, and ideas that help to understand how everything in the world works and why it works that way. For example, the collective consciousness about weddings is the image of a white dress, wedding cake, reception, and a father walking his daughter down the aisle. Through shared ideas like this example, it is easier to communicate with others because there is a collective understanding of what is expected. The process of othering was introduced by Simone de Beauvoir and is the idea that humans define people who are different from them as

example, people in America often look at immigrants as others and see themselves as superior to immigrants. They also view these immigrants with different cultures as potentially threatening and feel the need to separate their identities. Othering often occurs when people are defined by their physical appearance, religion, or language. The looking glass self was defined by James Cooley, and it is the idea that your self-esteem and views about yourself come from how others perceive you. This explains why people see themselves based on how they think they look to others. For example, someone may feel unconfident if they feel as though they do not look like the cultural definition of attractive. The looking glass concept comes from how people interpret themselves being seen by others as if they were seeing themselves inside a looking glass. Due to this interpretation, if someone feels as though they are seen in a negative way by others, they will begin to lose confidence and see themselves in a negative way as well. Together, all three of these sociological concepts can help to answer why ageism exists and how it affects its victims.

First, the collective consciousness explains why all the younger people in the YouTube video underestimated the elder adults and why elder people are negatively portrayed in pop culture. Overtime, a cultural wide understanding of old age has developed as stereotypes are reinforced. Things such as wrinkles, grey hair, memory loss, and decreased activity are natural as people age, but a negative connotation has been created out of a fear for growing old. Throughout history, these bodily changes were not seen as negative but social media and pop culture has given the younger generation a stronger influence over the older generation. They have essentially changed what it means to be an elder adult and destroyed the respect that used to be reserved for the elders. With young people holding more power in society than ever, no one wants to grow old. The desire to separate oneself from the aging stereotype was created. The

othering begins when people start to separate themselves from the image of older people.

Othering is the way people combat their fear of growing old because when the elder population is looked at as an other, people begin to forget that they will one day be old as well. Othering allows for one group to feel superior to another group and creates a divide between the two groups. For example, racism is the result of people of one race othering those who have a different skin color and believing themselves to be superior. Ageism works the same way because the younger generation looks at the seniors as incapable, slow, and not physically attractive. Throughout human history, elders were always well respected and regarded as authority figures. Now, ageism is completely changing this dynamic. As older adults are othered by young people, the generations become progressively more separated than ever before. This process was clearly demonstrated to me while watching the YouTube video and seeing the younger generation assume they could participate in activities better than the elder adults. It also explains why older people are depicted in pop culture as less competent than the younger generation. The younger generation is the target audience for most of the movies, television shows, music, and social media posts being created today. When seniors become aware of this divide between generations, a negative view of themselves becomes unavoidable through the concept of the looking glass self.

The looking glass self-concept explains the effects that ageism has on seniors' self-esteem and why advertisements for looking younger are so effective. When elder adults listen to and see how they are portrayed in the collective consciousness of society, they begin to view themselves in that way as well. As their hair begins to change color, wrinkles start to appear, and their memory is not as sharp as it once was, older people commonly experience a sense of

reminders that they are aging. This explains why in my personal experience with my grandma, she has talked about dying her hair. She feels as though she no longer looks like she "should" because of the obvious othering against her age group. The beauty companies choose to create these advertisements to appeal to the longing to be a part of the dominant group rather than the "othered" group. This not only continues to cause a decrease in seniors' self-esteem but also reinforces the idea that younger people are more attractive and possess the physical qualities that everyone should desire and attempt to maintain.

All three of these concepts work together interchangeably in a continuous cycle to create ageism. The collective consciousness creates the need for othering and the process of othering worsens the picture of aging in the collective consciousness. Meanwhile, the affected population begins to believe the collective consciousness and sees themselves as inferior. In comparison to ageism, the modern world is working hard to eliminate racism. While it still exists, racism is much less prevalent than it was in the past. We need to ask ourselves if ageism is the new racism, and can it be stopped before the elder population begins to experience intense, and possibly violent, discrimination. Sociological concepts are important to understanding how ageism has developed and they may hold the answer as to how to counter its effects. Studying how the world is combatting racism could bring insight as to how ageism can be eliminated as well. In conclusion, it seems as if it is human nature to create a collective consciousness and practice othering for those who are different than us. We need to recognize how these practices effect the people they target through concepts such as the looking glass self. Then, perhaps, there can be a solution to ageism and any other type of prejudice.