

## Age Activation Between Self-Empowerment and Social Pressure-Key Results From a Qualitative Interview Study About Older Women Being Active in Fitness Gyms (a Comparison Between Germany and the USA)



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In the course of demographic change, the idea of age(ing) as something unavoidable has changed into something more adaptable. Through a healthy lifestyle, which aims at the self-responsible management of physical risks through fitness and discipline, individuals may expand their independence in later life. However, physical ageing and age-related health risks, including life expectancy, depend significantly on a person's social position. In addition, the shift in health ideology towards the individual and the trend towards active ageing may lead to social pressure for some individuals.

This presentation aims to shed more light on the field of tension described above. The results try to demonstrate how older women who are active in fitness gyms benefit from their active lifestyle and how they perceive differences in the underlying health care systems.

In order to highlight the subjective perspective of older adults, several 60 to 80-year-old women who had been active in fitness gyms for at least two years were interviewed: 26 interviews were conducted in Germany (Freiburg) and 14 in the USA (east-coast: Amherst). The evaluation of the interviews was based on qualitative content analysis and was carried out with technical support (MAXQDA).

The interviews reveal that for the respondents of both samples creating a fit body primarily results in self-empowerment gains. At the same time, submissions to Western body and fitness norms are also evident. Furthermore, it is indicated that inequalities in health opportunities exist in both countries and that a lack of resources in form of cultural and economic capital prevents successful age(ing).

### Biography:

Dr. phil. Gabriele Sobiech is professor of sport science and sport sociology at the University of Education Freiburg in Germany. Research and teaching focus: Sociology of the body and sports; constructions of gender in sport and society; sociology of space.