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Elder Mediation Summit

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Berner Fachhochschule

Research Fokus „Autonomy of Late Life“

**The Partner-Hypothesis of „Old Age“ in Mediation –
The Unconscious Influence of Social Identities**



Overview

- Background: Importance of communication in mediation
- Social communication means partner orientation
- Effects of social categorization
- Communicative prejudice in communication with older people

Background



- Speech and communication as main instruments
 - Mediation aims at the intervention in conflict situations based on mutual confidence
 - Mediation has to work objectively
 - In conflict situations there is emotional involvement \leftrightarrow objectivity
 - Even on the part of the mediator there are (mainly unconscious) barriers for communication
- Communication is always SOCIAL communication



Social Communication= Partner Orientation

Model of communicative assimilation:

- Partner-orientation as a factor for successful communication
 - Patterns of communication are assimilated with those of the partner and modified accordingly:
 - Aim:
 - High efficiency
 - Best possible understanding and being understood
- Meet others on their „level“ also with communication

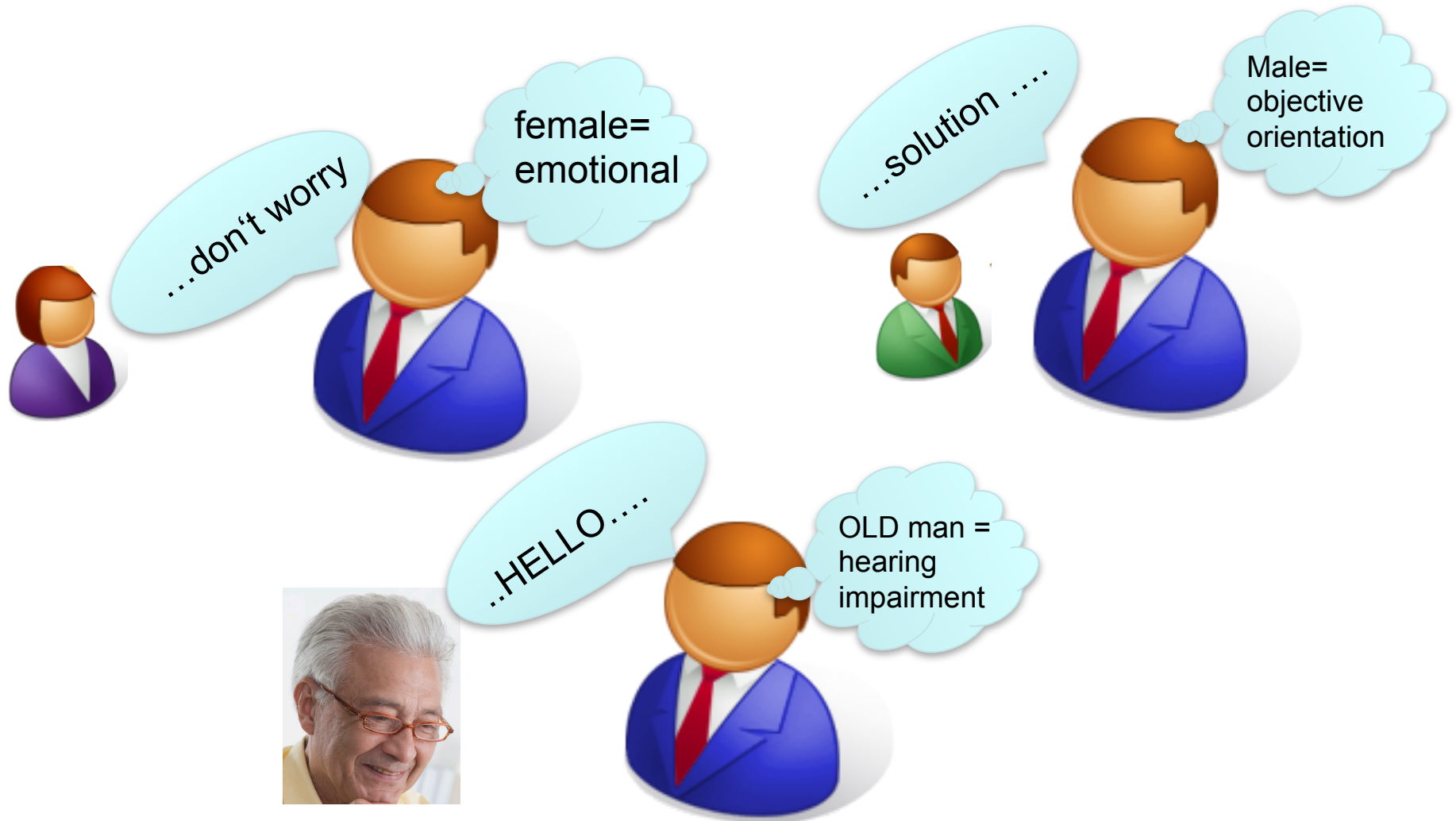


Social Categories in Communication

- Language/Speech mirrors our internal representations
 - Social Categories = ordering of people along (social) attributes and associations with certain characteristics and expectations for action
 - Social Category „Old Age“ is associated with multifacet (pre-)judices
- Is „Old Age“ a risk factor for partner-oriented communication?



Model of Communicative Assimilation (z.B. Fiehler, 2009)

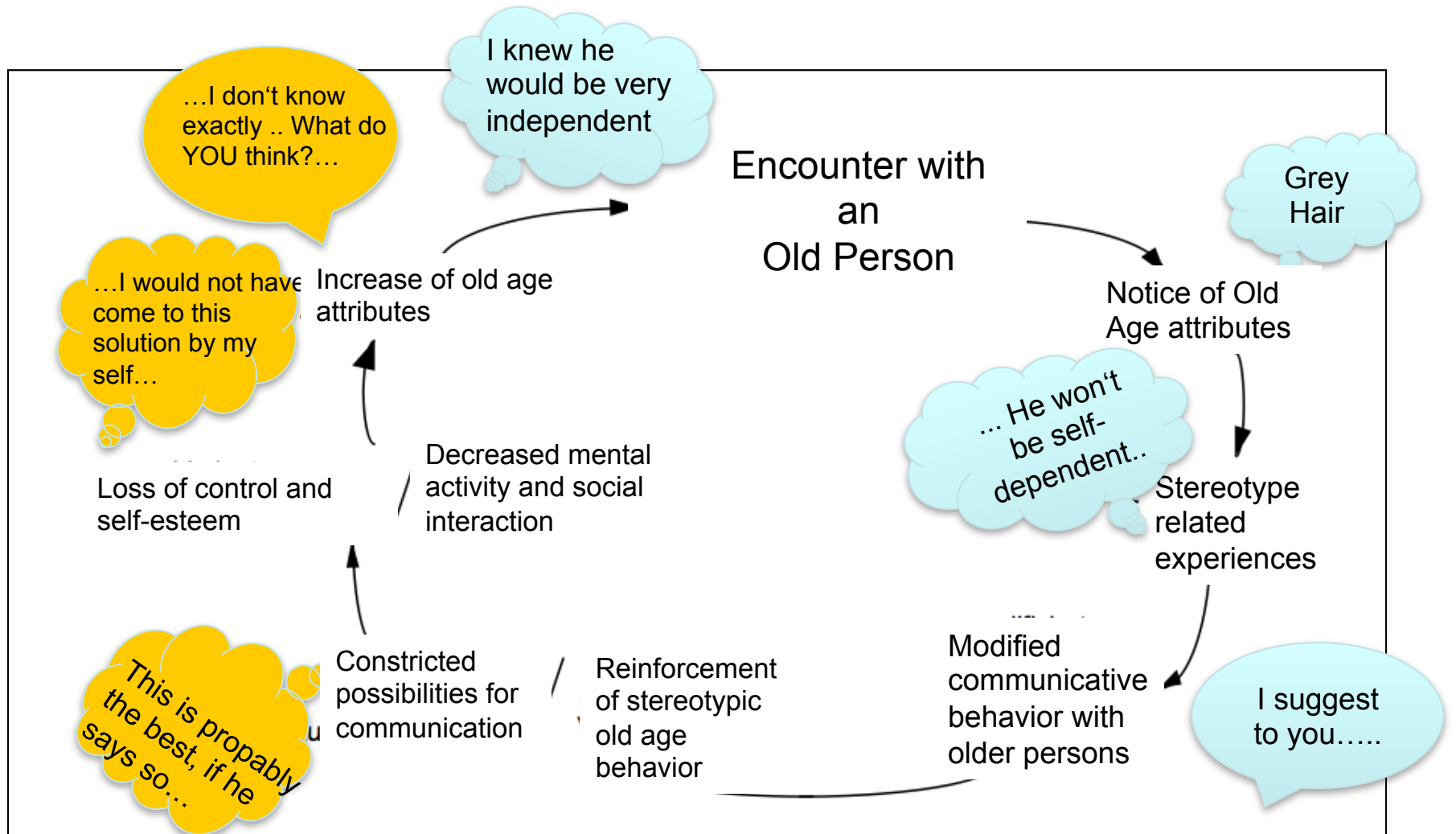




Patronizing Speech

- „baby talk“ (high and loud voice, trivializing expressions)
- Indirect Speech (to talk about instead of with sb.)
- Simple grammatical structure of sentences
- Leaving out of informationen
- Longer pauses, slow speech
- (very) often use of check-up questions
- (very) often use of paraphrasing
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Communicative Prejudice of Old Age





5 Behavioral Strategies

1. Under-adaptation as a consequence of social categorisation: „now I have been alone and by myself for such a long time and have managed to raise the children for 25 years“
2. Under-adaptation as self-protection:
Not asking any questions
3. Self-degradation:
„I am sorry, but I don't feel really well today, so my brain isn't working properly“
4. Self-stereotyping:
„now you have to discuss with such an old woman“
5. Emphasizing of social (group-)difference:
„You're the expert, I am old and I don't know exactly what to do“



Consequences for Mediation

- Mediator is evaluated
 - less competent
 - less respectfull
 - (Role) negotiation processes might become necessary (danger for escalation)
 - Clients are less satisfied with the consulting and mediating process
- Patronizing speech challenges the mediation process



Conclusion

- Easygoing ≠ careless in the contact and mediation with older persons
- Reflection of our own social representations of old age
 - Growing awareness helps to prevent at least some communicative barriers
 - Supervision and reflection should be important issues in mediation training



Thank You For Your Attention!!!!

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