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ALEXANDRA RETKOWSKI (2011): GENERATIONAL CARE -TAKING. A QUALITATIVE STUDY ABOUT AGEING BETWEEN YESTERDAY AND TOMORROW.

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WALLSTEIN, GÖTTINGEN.

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Summary:

Barely any other issue connects autonomy and dependency, self-concept and superimposition, solidarity and conflict like ageing does in the present Western world. Despite a sustained interest in the changes within the area of intra-family care, as well as demographic changes as such, little empirically based knowledge exists about how people who already have lost one or both parents reflect on their experience of care-taking, and the conclusions they draw from this for their own ageing process. The qualitatively based study 'familial care-taking' fills this gap. Based on narrative interviews the research examines how the care-taking children experienced the final phase of their parents' lives and how these experiences informed their own ideas about their very own ageing process. The study sets out to allow for a broader understanding of the implications of 'care-taking.' This wide approach allows the research to answer the following questions: What are the perceptions of age and worry? What positioning occurs for the daughters and sons in terms of experiences and expectations of familial care-taking? And finally, what culture of care do they assume for their own future? The interviews were evaluated following the method *Dokumentarische Methode*, which aims at revealing the habitual background of doings and sayings. The application of the method allowed generating three different habitus types of care-takers. These are the solidarity-based habitus of care-taking, the ambivalent habitus type of care-taking, and the conflicted habitus type of care-taking. While the results fit with established theories and results of intergenerational relationships, they allow differentiating, amending, and modifying these. The study contributes in particular to the nexus of the changes of relationships within families and the relationship of these changes to societal changes. Furthermore, it contributes to understanding expectations of ageing in regard to subjective positions within the family, and the emotional framework of the carers. Finally, the research offers an in-depth analysis of what each single family member understands as intergenerational relations, and how they approach being a family member. On the methodological level the narrative interviews reveal that the care-takers first and foremost narrate their own positioning within the family constellation. In summary, all three habitus types assume that they did more care-taking for their parents than they expect from their own children, or that they would want from them. This result reflects clearly that the ageing process is seen as part of the own biography, and it is not constructed as part of the family history. It is not assumed as an issue within the inter-generational communication.