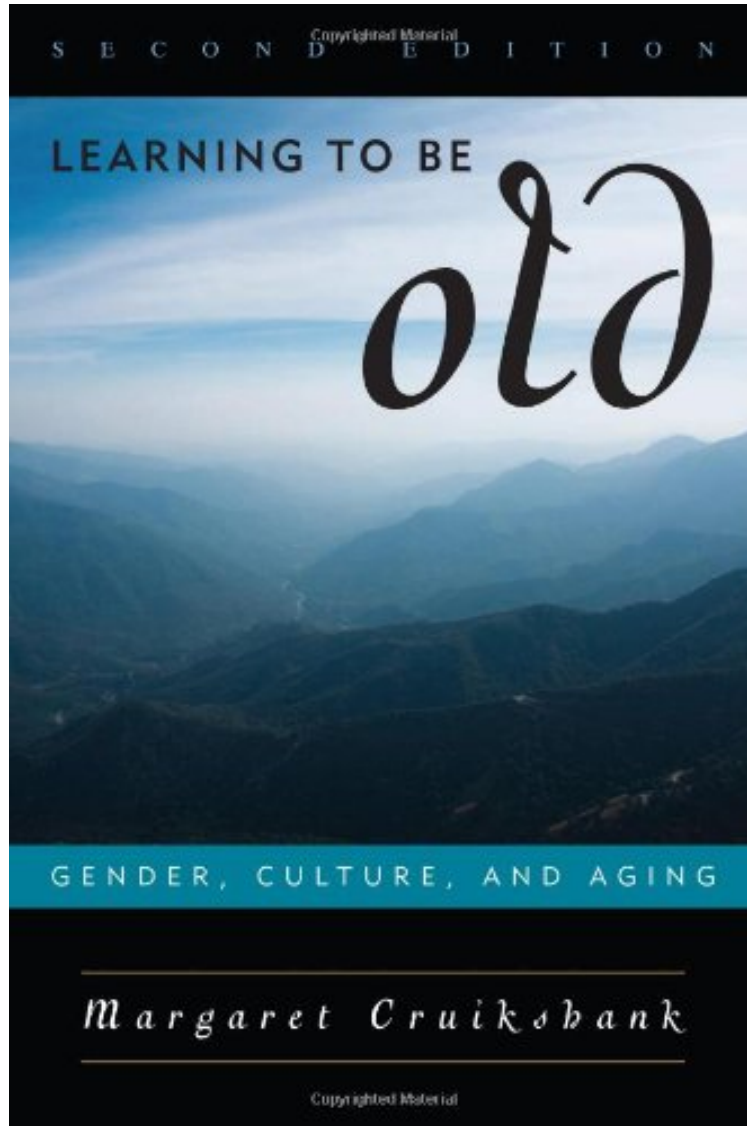


Learning to Be Old: Gender, Culture, and Aging

Margaret Cruikshank University of Maine Women's Studies (retired)
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#1468262 in Books Rowman Littlefield Publishers 2009-01-16 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.14 x .78 x 6.131, .89 #File Name: 0742565947266 pages | File size: 60.Mb

Margaret Cruikshank University of Maine Women's Studies (retired) : Learning to Be Old: Gender, Culture, and Aging before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Learning to Be Old: Gender, Culture, and Aging:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A spirited advocacy for older women By S. Spilka Cruikshank's book provides excellent research and numerous references on the subject of aging women. It is an exhaustive study, filled to brim, like a pomegranate, with bright seeds for thought and renewal. Let me start with what, to me, is the most important element in the book--"mindful resistance to stereotypes" (160). The stereotypical images of older women,

the author rightly claims, are as negative and toxic as any racial or religious stereotypes. The "perception that old women's bodies are ugly" (151) is still strong and pervasive, Cruikshank says. Thus, older women no longer attract men (who can always find younger women) and lose their sex appeal. There is a double standard of aging here, for the older men do not evoke "the primal loathing" that older women do. For widows, for example, looking old "can lead to being ignored" (153). These negative stereotypes distort and demean older women because men and younger women view them through a biased prism rather than through their character and human characteristics. For older women, our cynical and shallow culture is particularly hard to cope with. Judgments are swift and stereotypes reign supreme. Therefore, as the author points out, the face-lifts industry is so successful. When I see an aging celebrity with no wrinkles, I feel pity mixed with contempt for her. If these celebrity women showed their wrinkles ("the tracks of love," as somebody said), we'd all be better off. But they'd rather lie than tell the truth, rather follow the demands of culture than lead. And so mindful resistance to stereotypes, which I wholeheartedly support, is difficult to enact. Furthermore, even feminist scholars do not focus sufficiently on ageism, as Cruikshank claims, and thus older women, unlike say blacks or gays, do not have leaders or a movement to help them fight the negative stereotypes. At the beginning of the book, Cruikshank discusses a topic much relevant to our present political campaign: individualism vs. community. For all people, community is essential, but even more so for the elderly. The entitlements programs are also very important. In chapter 2, the author brings up a brilliant point about Social Security, which no one on the campaign trail, to my knowledge, has ever mentioned: "Without Social Security and Medicare, the old would be entirely dependent on savings or families, if they had either one. Thus payments to the old can be seen as payments the young and middle-aged need not make. Without the so-called 'entitlements,' the old would have fewer assets to pass on to their children" (29). Can somebody call President Obama and tell him about this argument before the debate? Chapter 7, which provides information on gender, class, and ethnicity, is the most heart-breaking: "The health of poor people and people of color is undermined by the new morbidity--that is, threats to health from domestic violence, drug abuse, crime, and the 'pervasive sense of inferiority that is the result of discrimination' (Angel and Angel, 1156)" (118). The list of atrocities and injustices that the author provides is shocking and mind-numbing. And we are doing little about it, whereas in Europe older people are much better off. In her conclusion, Cruikshank repeats the central purpose of her book, which is calling for "resistance to the all-encompassing category of 'old' that places such strong emphasis on difference from others" (208). Older women, over sixty-five, are "very diverse," she says, just as Afro-Americans, Chinese, Mexicans, and Jews are diverse. This is the humanistic shout that we should all hear: we should be judged by our character, not by our age, religion, ethnicity, or wealth. Bravo! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By janeherenow I enjoyed her feminist and age-affirming viewpoint. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By Elizabeth Nistler Arrived exactly as promised

A third edition of this textbook is now available. What does it mean to grow old in America today? Is "successful aging" our responsibility? What will happen if we fail to "grow old gracefully"? Especially for women, the onus on the aging population in the United States is growing rather than diminishing. Gender, race, and sexual orientation have been reinterpreted as socially constructed phenomena, yet aging is still seen through physically constructed lenses. The second edition of Margaret Cruikshank's *Learning to Be Old* helps put aging in a new light, neither romanticizing nor demonizing it. Featuring new research and analysis, expanded sections on gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender aging and critical gerontology, and an updated chapter on feminist gerontology, the second edition even more thoroughly than the first looks at the variety of different forces affecting the progress of aging. Cruikshank pays special attention to the fears and taboos, multicultural traditions, and the medicalization and politicization of natural processes that inform our understanding of age. Through it all, we learn a better way to inhabit our age whatever it is.

From *Library Journal* Age discrimination is alive and well in America. Despite increased knowledge about aging and improved longevity, myths and stereotypes abound. This book's title refers to the need to dispel those myths and to see old age as characterized by new opportunities and the development of new talents and strengths. Gerontologist and women's studies expert Cruikshank (Ctr. on Aging, Univ. of Maine) examines the issues from a decidedly feminist viewpoint. She elaborates on two basic ideas: that aging is affected more by culture than by biological changes and that awareness of societal beliefs and customs about aging is essential if women are to achieve "comfortable aging." She also rails against "medicalization" and the overemphasis on bodily decline in old age. Cruikshank raises important issues, but at times her position might strike some as overly strident, as when she suggests that the aged are overmedicated as a result of an inappropriate relationship between the pharmaceutical industry and mainstream medicine. This thought-provoking book is recommended for academic social science and medical collections but would likely prove to be too dense for general readers. Linda M.G. Katz, Drexel Univ. Health Sciences Libs., Philadelphia Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. Praise for the first edition: In her excellent book, *Learning to Be Old*, Margaret Cruikshank compares the aged to a 'colonized people', suggesting that ageism goes beyond dehumanization into actual scapegoating of the old.... (The New York Times Magazine) Dr. Cruikshank has done a tremendous amount of research for this book. She covers so much in such little space, that you marvel she gets

it all in . . . definitely factual and informative. (Golden Threads)One of [the book's] strengths is its weaving of themes from different fields and disciplines. . . . Another is in presentation-it is informative, lively, and well researched. (Journal of Women Aging)Learning to Be Old is full of analyses and insights. . . . It can inspire consciousness raising, group discussion, and social and political activism. It will stimulate thought, rev up your indignation, furnish your brain, and probably prove that your mother was a damn sight more astute than you realized. (Marie Shear The Women's Of Books)The major contribution may be her analysis of the potential negative effects of women's family roles and her suspicion that grandmothers are being exploited. This book . . . raises a number of important questions. (Journal of Marriage and Family)Praise for the first edition:In her excellent book, Learning to Be Old, Margaret Cruikshank compares the aged to a 'colonized people', suggesting that ageism goes beyond dehumanization into actual scapegoating of the old. (The New York Times Magazine)This text is such a gem that it is tempting to quote from it non-stop. (Canadian Woman Studies)Learning to Be Old is a nice text for both the graduate and undergraduate levels, either in courses on the sociology of aging or in women's studies courses to provide a feminist perspective on aging. (The Gerontologist)Compressing a significant amount of important information on issues of race, gender, social class, economics, and ethnicity, Cruikshank has created a readable book on the general theme of gerontology. The current research, theories, and practices outlined by Cruikshank will give readers of all ages insights into 'learning to be old.' An extensive bibliography is provided for further study. Essential. (CHOICE)Sheds light on a particular bias inherent in studying this country's burgeoning aging population and asks why unlike gender, race, and sexual orientation identities that have been reinterpreted as socially constructed phenomena, aging is still seen through physically constructed lenses. (Tucson Weekly)A valuable book on aging. Scholarly and well-documented. (The Senior Times)Praise for the first edition:In this lively and engaging book, Margaret Cruikshank challenges the concept of successful aging, which imposes a competitive and male standard on a complex social process, and argues that we adopt instead the notion of 'aging comfortably. (Jill Quadagno, Pepper Institute on Aging and Public Policy, Florida State University)Praise for the first edition:The American view of aging is dominated by cultural myths, simplistic media portrayals, and public relations science. In this confusion, strong voices are needed to help us reflect on important issues. Learning to Be Old is a strong critique of the views of aging contained in our culture, and it is a very welcome addition to the growing humanities literature in the field. (Robert C. Atchley, Naropa University)Praise for the first edition:Through its underlying feminist perspective, Learning to Be Old raises the promise of a transformative approach to the paradoxes of aging. Margaret Cruikshank argues that aging is socially constructed and therefore we can (and must) change, unlearn, or rethink what is accepted as the 'truth' about aging in order to learn to age comfortably. (Nancy R. Hooyman, University of Washington School of Social Work)Praise for the first edition:Margaret Cruikshank's approach is innovative and creative. Many of her ideas are essential for fully understanding the personal and societal aging experience. She integrates ways to help us age successfully with the larger social and economic questions. Well thought out. (Laura Katz Olson, LeHigh University)Praise for the first edition:Exciting and important . . . this pioneering work addresses an area that is desperately in need of critical analysis. (Virginia Gillispie, R.N.-C., N.D., C.C.M)Cruikshank's thoughtful analysis challenges our cultural myths about women and aging and invites us to transcend the social constructions and expectations of aging. (Association Of American Colleges and Universities)The second edition of Learning to Be Old will be an excellent textbook for graduate or undergraduate students enrolled in gerontology, women's studies, psychology, and social work, to name a few. However, this book should be required reading for all individuals who aspire to 'age comfortably.' Margaret Cruikshank eloquently addresses the social construction of aging and encourages all of us to unlearn, rethink, and/or reject the current aging myths and stereotypes. Her innovative approach to the 'paradoxes of aging' is informative, thought provoking, and pioneering. Cruikshank indicates that 'learning to be old may be the last emotional and spiritual challenge we can agree to take on,' and Cruikshank's ideas and teachings can illuminate this journey. (Nancy Orel, Bowling Green State University)About the AuthorMargaret Cruikshank is lecturer in women's studies and faculty associate of the Center on Aging at the University of Maine.