



Learning to Be Old: Gender, Culture, and Aging

By Margaret Cruikshank University of Maine Women's Studies (retired)

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Margaret Cruikshank's *Learning to Be Old* examines what it means to grow old in America today. The book questions social myths and fears about aging, sickness, and the other social roles of the elderly, the over-medicalization of many older people, and ageism. In this book, Cruikshank proposes alternatives to the ways aging is usually understood in both popular culture and mainstream gerontology. *Learning to Be Old* does not propose the ideas of “successful aging” or “productive aging,” but more the idea of “learning” how to age.

Featuring new research and analysis, the third edition of *Learning to be Old* demonstrates, more thoroughly than the previous editions, that aging is socially constructed. Among texts on aging the book is unique in its clear focus on the differences in aging for women and men, as well as for people in different socioeconomic groups. Cruikshank is able to put aging in a broad context that not only focuses on how aging affects women but men, as well. Key updates in the third edition include changes in the health care system, changes in how long older Americans are working especially given the impact of the recession, and new material on the brain and mind-body interconnections. Cruikshank impressively challenges conventional ideas about aging in this third edition of *Learning to be Old*. This will be a must-read for everyone interested in new ideas surrounding aging in America today.

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Editorial Review

Review

Doug Kimmel, writing in the Division 44 Newsletter, Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues, a division of the American Psychological Association: This third edition of Cruikshank's widely-used text makes two main points: 'The first is that aging in North America is shaped more by culture than biology, more by beliefs, customs, and traditions than by bodily changes. In other words, it is socially constructed. The second is that awareness of social constructions and resistance to them is crucial for women's comfortable aging.' She develops these two themes while making significant important points about countercultural gerontology and presents a feminist's view of aging. . . . This book is a useful tool to challenge student thinking about conventional views of aging and to help them broaden their horizons about ethnicity, race, class, sexual orientation, and aging from the standpoint of an old lesbian who is not about to go quietly into that good night. (*Division 44 Newsletter, American Psychological Association*)

Compared to traditional aging texts, *Learning to Be Old* is superior in that it conveys a critical point of view that is rarely present in most texts. (Catherine S. Murray, Saint Joseph's University)

This book is unique, in that it 'gets at' the socially-constructed nature of aging better than any other book I've worked with. Cruikshank does a particularly good job of examining and discussing these differences as they relate to the experience of aging. (Jan Burhmann, Illinois College)

A compelling book that reminds us, among other things, that 'the personal is political' when we study women and aging. (Terri Promo, University of Cincinnati)

Cruikshank's writing is accessible and timely; she expertly shows how 'old' is a socially scripted reality in an ageist society. (Meika Loe, Colgate University; author of *Aging Our Way: Independent Lives, Interdependent Realities*)

Learning to Be Old is a book as bold as its title. I have tremendous gratitude for the way Margaret Cruikshank rescues readers from societally induced self-blame. She sends us on our way better able to spend our final decades in informed, conscious, and competent ways, resisting the forces that discount us, but never discounting the reality of aging itself. Cruikshank is a welcome author for people who want to get beyond Hallmark simplicities and be accompanied honestly through the aging process by a vibrant scholar and staunch ally. (Peggy McIntosh, Ph.D., senior research scientist and associate director, Wellesley Centers for Women)

Hard-hitting, crystal-clear, packed with information and zesty quotations, *Learning to Be Old* deserves its popularity. It is the best introduction to age at the intersections – gender, race, class, sexuality – that a general reader could want. It uncovers a wide range of urgent issues – the minefields of American ageism that younger people need to know about before they get there. (Margaret Morganroth Gullette, Women's Studies Research Center at Brandeis University; author of *Agewise: Fighting the New Ageism in America*)

In *Learning to be Old*, Margaret Cruikshank successfully “imagines new ways of understanding and experiencing late life,” with a substantial amount of supporting data. Throughout the book, Cruikshank is attentive to aging as an individual, cultural, and intersectional experience. She considers how age interacts

with diversities of race and ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and bodily ability. This edition's organized, compact sections make the information accessible to general readers. In the classroom, each section is sure to generate discussion. This book presents well-documented evidence about the ways in which people are schooled in aging, and discusses the many benefits that can come from changing how people learn to be old. (Leni Marshall, Ph.D., University of Wisconsin - Stout)

Praise from a previous edition: 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*)

Praise from a previous edition: 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*)

Praise from a previous edition: This text is such a gem that it is tempting to quote from it non-stop. (*Canadian Woman Studies*)

Praise from a previous edition: *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*)

Praise from a previous edition: 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*)

Praise from a previous edition: 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*)

Praise from a previous edition: A valuable book on aging. Scholarly and well-documented. (*The Senior Times*)

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About the Author

Margaret Cruikshank is retired from the women's studies program and the graduate faculty of the University of Maine. She continues as a faculty associate of the Center on Aging.

Users Review

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William Martel:

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Ann Wheeler:

A lot of people always spent their very own free time to vacation or even go to the outside with them family members or their friend. Are you aware? Many a lot of people spent they free time just watching TV, or maybe playing video games all day long. In order to try to find a new activity this is look different you can read some sort of book. It is really fun for you. If you enjoy the book that you read you can spent 24 hours a day to reading a guide. The book Learning to Be Old: Gender, Culture, and Aging it is very good to read. There are a lot of people who recommended this book. These people were enjoying reading this book. If you did not have enough space to create this book you can buy the actual e-book. You can m0ore easily to read this book from your smart phone. The price is not to cover but this book offers high quality.

Alisa Gordon:

In this age globalization it is important to someone to acquire information. The information will make a professional understand the condition of the world. The fitness of the world makes the information easier to share. You can find a lot of recommendations to get information example: internet, classifieds, book, and soon. You will observe that now, a lot of publisher which print many kinds of book. The actual book that recommended to you personally is Learning to Be Old: Gender, Culture, and Aging this publication consist a lot of the information on the condition of this world now. That book was represented how can the world has grown up. The vocabulary styles that writer require to explain it is easy to understand. The actual writer made some investigation when he makes this book. Honestly, that is why this book ideal all of you.

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