



Spiritual Resiliency and Aging: Hope, Relationality, and the Creative Self (Society and Aging)

Janet L. Ramsey, Rosemary Blieszner

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Spiritual Resiliency and Aging offers a corrective to anxious, dichotomized visions of aging that either deny the realities of growing old (leading to exclusion, patronization, and labeling) or present unrealistic views of aging (leading to romanticizing of older persons and their lives). It demonstrates how narrative theory can increase an appreciation for implicit themes, roles, and tones in the stories of resilient older adults. And it demonstrates how denominationally specific research and theologically informed analysis can increase gerontologists' understanding of older adults' spiritual resources. The book contributes to theorizing a positive psychology of aging by highlighting the importance of spirituality as a core resource in the lives of older adults, and contributes to the area of religion and aging by focusing on specific aspects of spiritual resiliency not previously explored. Realizing that contemporary society is highly individualistic and frequently ageist, Ramsey and Blieszner theorize on direct quotations from the life stories of strong, courageous elders (in the United States and Germany) who are deeply anchored in their communities and not only have coped well with aging but have transcended the numerous losses in their lives. Through the use of narrative theory as their primary conceptual lens, and aided by a variety of developmental theories, the authors explore the dynamic intersection of gerontology and spirituality within the meta-narrative of one particular religious tradition, Lutheranism. Acknowledging the necessary tension, in the human experience of aging, of hope versus reality, interconnected personhood versus self-differentiation, and creative change versus stability, the authors use these polarities to structure their exploration of themes in resiliency. Chapter topics include personal and communal emotions, forgiveness, the creative self, spiritual practices, hope and gratitude, rediscovering vocations, and the practice of critiquing self and community. Two chapters are in-depth case studies. Each chapter concludes with specific suggestions for scholars, educators, and practitioners. Intended Audience: Instructors and students in gerontology/aging studies, religious studies, pastoral counseling, congregational leadership, psychology of aging, family studies, lifespan human development, marriage and family therapy, social work, health promotion, geriatric medicine and nursing, long-term care and community-based care, recreation therapy/activities, and intergenerational programming. Clinicians/professionals including pastoral counselors, family therapists, clinical psychologists and geropsychologists, licensed professional counselors, social workers, gerontology practitioners, clergy and older adult program ministers, hospice workers, activities directors, long-term care administrators, and health care providers.

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