

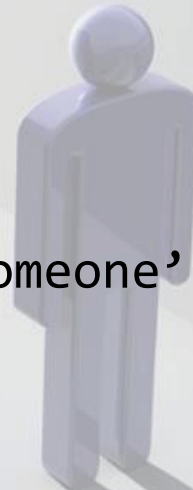
The background is a vibrant, abstract composition of various shapes and patterns. It includes large organic shapes in blue, red, and gold, as well as smaller elements like a yellow oval, a blue circle with a dashed border, and several areas filled with different patterns: white dots on a blue background, white dots on a red background, and white wavy lines on a gold background. The overall style is modern and artistic.

# ***Ageism: A Brief History of Terms and Concepts***

Kate de Medeiros, PhD  
O'Toole Family Professor of Gerontology  
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# ***Ageism***

The devaluation of people based on someone's perceptions of their age.

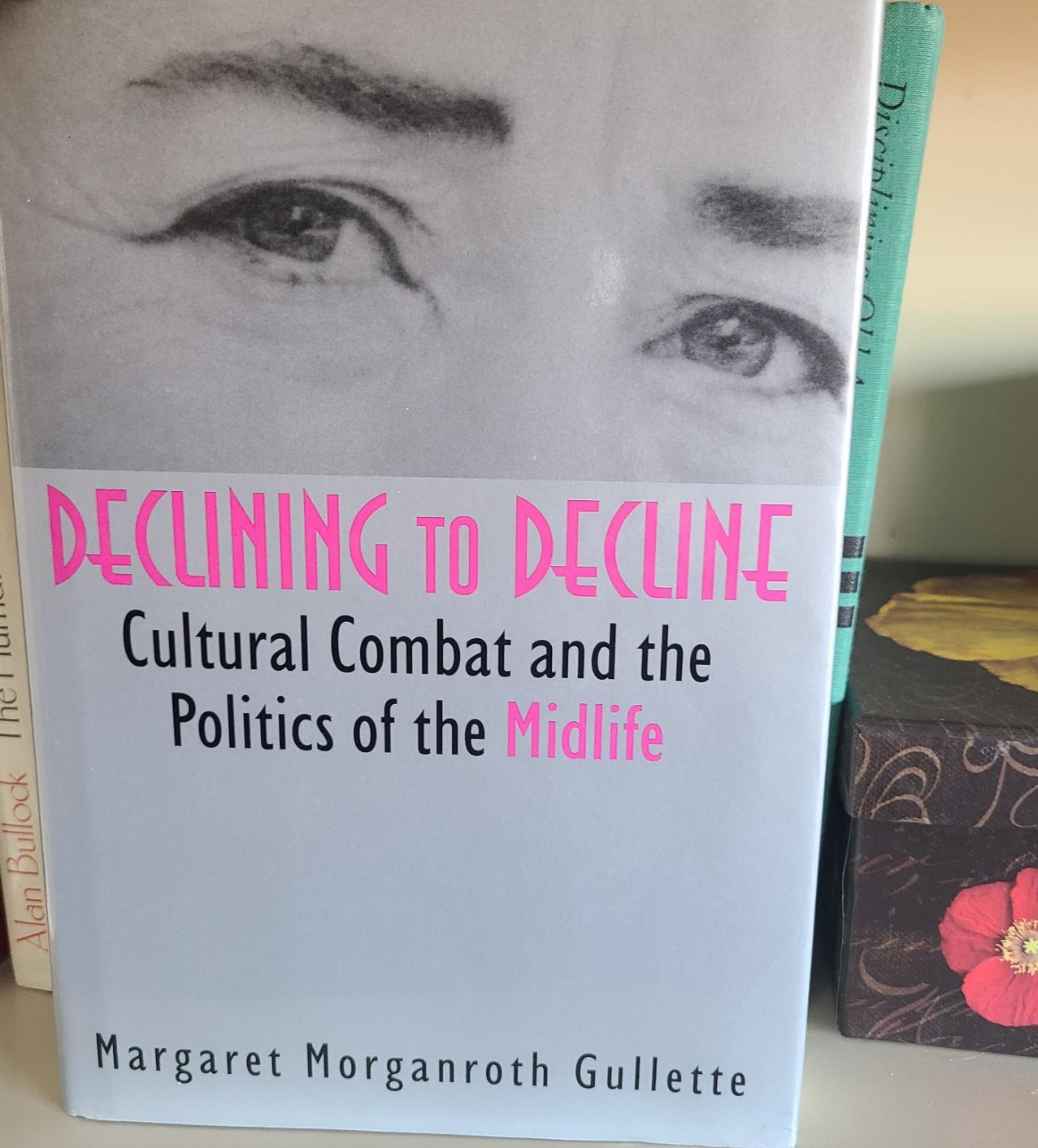


# ***The power of language***

“Language is use to “justify, encode, enact and routinize” discrimination, including ageism” (p. 243)

“old” is pejorative; “young” is positive





Actions are often interpreted by age.

Forget where you left your keys when your 30, you're busy.

Forget where you left your keys later in life, you wonder about cognition.



A microscopic image of plant tissue, likely a cross-section of a stem, showing a central vascular cylinder with large circular vessels. The surrounding tissue consists of smaller, more densely packed cells. A yellow rectangular box is overlaid on the lower-left portion of the image, containing text. The entire image is framed by a thick black border.

# ***Seneca (4 BC-AD 65)***

“Senectus morbidus est” (“Old age  
is a disease”)



# **Sample responses from a recent survey.**

**Completed by 193 people (mean age 45 (±14 years**

Adjectives to describe youth	Adjectives to describe middle age	Adjectives to describe old age
energy, fun, inexperience, learning	busy, settled, responsible, overburdened	unhealthy, wise, slow, unappreciated
beauty, energy, inexperienced, new	gray, veteran, knowledgeable, slowing	stuck-in-ways, white, weak, volunteer
flexible, curious, innovative	busy, burned out, tired	wise, content, free forgotten
fibrate, enthusiastic, energetic, carefree	anxiety, content, settled, hopeful	tired, weary, depressed, slow



***“Eld,” “Elder”***

***and “Elderly”***

- Eld (or eald)
  - + The age or period of life at which a person has arrived (10<sup>th</sup> Century)
  - + “Old age, advanced period of life” (1200)
  - + Obsolete (10<sup>th</sup> Century)
  - + An old man (1796)





# ***“Eld,” “Elder” and “Elderly”***

- **Elder**

- + Older in relation to another
- + To become older, to show age
- + To admonish for inappropriate behavior
- + (“eldress” described a “mean old woman”))





# ***“Elderhood”***

- Elderhood
  - + The position or estate of an elder, seniority (1601)
  - + The estate of elders or rulers; the body of elders



# ***“Elderling”***

- **Elderling**
  - + Contemptuous term for elder (1606)
  - + An elderly person (1863): “Two elderlings began to lament their situation”
  - + contempt toward older persons



# ***“Elderly”***

- Elderly
  - + Evolved from the 10<sup>th</sup> century term “eld” (old age or late life”
  - + Offshoots included eldfather (grandfather), eldmother (grandmother) and elder
  - + Like elderling, was often used in contempt







## **“Hag”**

- “Aged women in ancient times were respectfully called ‘hags.’”
- Derived from the Greek term for “holy woman,” *hagia* was related to the ancient Egyptian word *heg*
- The role of older women was transformed from one of wisdom to one that represented fear, abandonment and death.



It used to be that when U.S. citizens aged, they had earned and saved their competence, or their kin kept them. The New Deal changed all that. The New Deal quoted technologists to show that the enormous and soulless modern industrial machine (about which Engineer Herbert Hoover used to worry) throws oldsters on an "economic scrap-heap." Like the New Deal Mr. Downey had an inspiration to do something on behalf of what he calls, for campaign purposes, "our senior citizens." It came at a very timely hour when far cannier politicians were beginning to see the possibility of making pensions for senior citizens a juicier political racket than the ancient political exploitation of pensions for war veterans. Sheridan Downey won California's Democratic nomination for Senator from Senior Citizen William Gibbs McAdoo, 75. The manager of that performance was one Jackson Elliott.

<http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19381024,00.html>

**October 24, 1938**





<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/senior-citizen>

# ***Senior Citizen***

“an older person, usually over the age of 60 or 65, esp. one who is no longer employed”





## ***Positive words that aren't positive***

Feisty

Spunky

Spit fire

Elfin

Cute

“young at  
heart”

“70 years  
young”











- “gray peril” = when large groups of people age 60 and over move to a community.
- Assumptions are that older people “lack” productivity and are subsequently a “drain” on a community
- Belief that it is “natural” to have lower expectations for older people and vice versa



# ***Ageism***

## ***starts young***

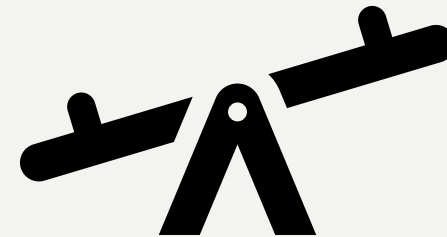
- Edward Ansello's 1977 study of children's literature:
  - + Three most common words to describe older persons: "old," "sad" and "poor."





# **Ageism starts young**

- J.B. Hurst's 1981 study of children's books:
  - + "nice" or "wise" were used in three of the books sampled
  - + "funny, small, little, grumpy, lonely, poor, and weak."



Hurst, J. B. *Social Education*, v45 n2 p138-43 Feb 1981





- Jessica L. Danowski (2011) re: picture books published between 2000-2010.
  - + Older persons were disproportionately portrayed as white (77%) and male (60%)
  - + Older persons comprised only 5.6% of all characters

**Ageism starts  
young**





“funny, small, little, grumpy,  
lonely, poor, and weak.”



#### Adjectives to describe old age

unhealthy, wise, slow,  
unappreciated

stuck-in-ways, white, weak,  
volunteer

wise, content, free  
forgotten

tired, weary, depressed, slow

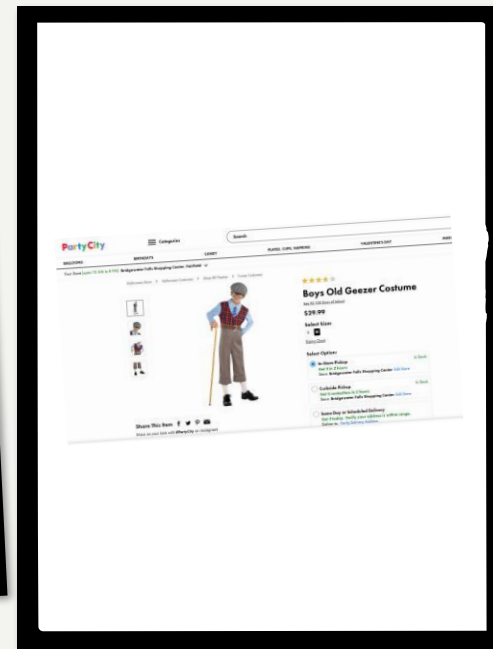




## Why Are All The Powerful Female Characters Evil?

[Previous](#) / [Next](#) - [YellowMagazine](#) / August 15, 2019 / Art and Culture, Features, Politics





"Today marked their 100th day in school this year, and Principal Kathleen Erhard said all first grade classes chose to dress like 100-year-old senior citizens and parade around the school.

So they "dyed" their hair silver, borrowed canes, walkers and Mom's pearls, and made themselves look as old as possible.

The best part? The entire school lined the hallways at the end of the day and watched all the first-graders parade around the school."





THERE ARE  
THREE SIGNS  
OF OLD AGE.  
THE FIRST IS  
MEMORY LOSS.  
I FORGET THE  
OTHER TWO.





***Consider  
this logo***







***Consider  
this logo***





# ***Western Folklore***

- “Meeting an old woman on the road brings bad luck, a folk belief epitomized by the saying, ‘If the devil can’t come himself, he sends an old woman’” (p. 140).
- Some fairy tales depict the old stealing from the young; outliving their value/importance.



# ***Traditional***

# ***Eastern***

# ***Perspectives***

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Many traditional attitudes toward aging rooted in Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist philosophical traditions that characterize aging as maturity.

---

Old age is viewed as a socially valuable part of life, even a time of “spring” or “rebirth” after a busy period of working and raising children

---

Individuals are expected to gain transcendental understanding as they age, including an accepting attitude toward death and to be an impartial contributor to social interactions

---

Filial piety and feelings of obligations to care for family members, older and younger



# ***Challenges to traditional perspectives***

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Globalization has shifted attitudes toward older people

---

Some argue that modernization has meant that older people are no longer valued in the same ways

---

Reports of elder abuse and suicide among older persons is increasing







# Ageism

- Chancellor Otto von Bismarck
- Established first social security program in 1889 for people age 70 and over.
- Later changed it to 65.





## **ageism**

- Term coined by then-42-year-old Robert Butler in 1969 during a *Washington Post* interview about an age-segregated, low-income housing community that was being built (and opposed) in Chevy Chase, Maryland.





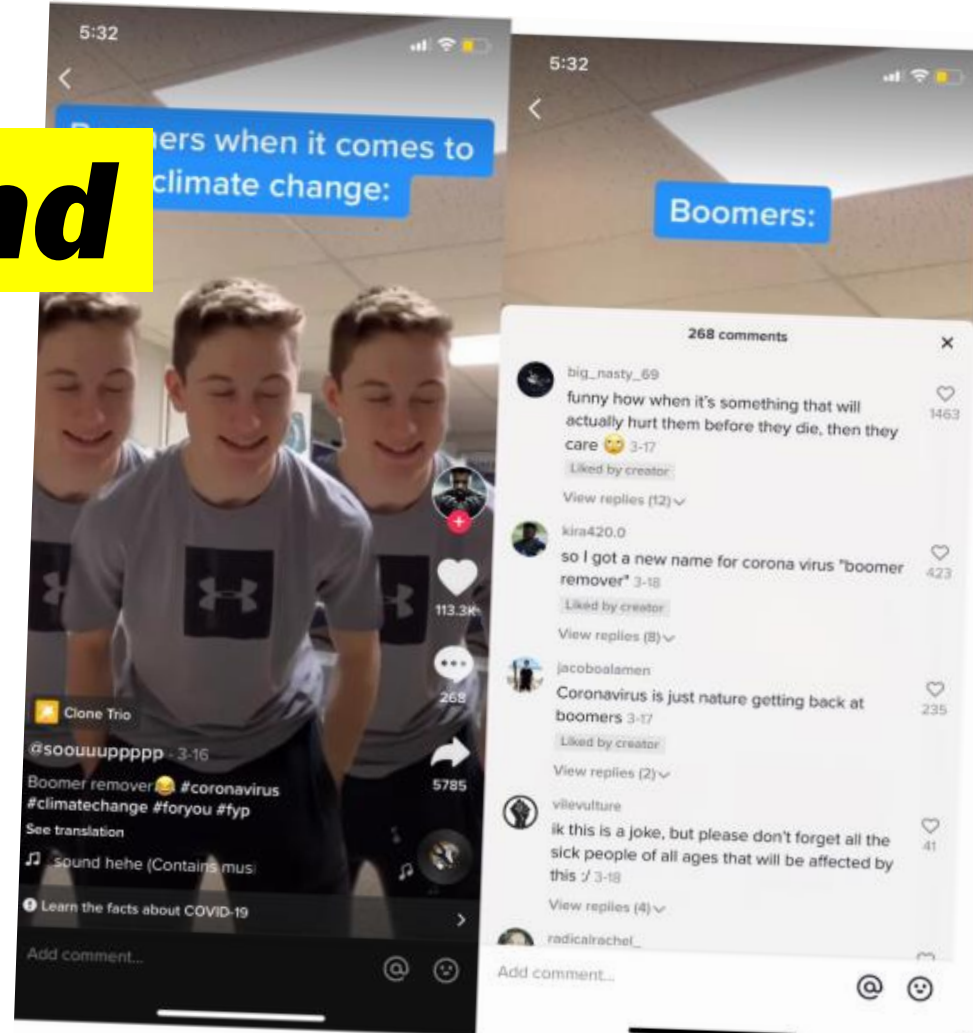
## **“Greedy Geezers”**

- “*The New Republic* depicted older people as “greedy geezers” who squandered their life savings and depleted Social Security funds (Fairlie, 1988), which further the notion of a generational divide” (Achenbaum, 2015)





# COVID-19 and Ageism





***Ageism is the most condoned form of prejudice and is often unchallenged. Unlike other racism or sexism, though, ageism is not experienced over one's entire life course.***

