



The Ageless Self: Sources of Meaning in Late Life (Life Course Studies)

Sharon R. Kaufman

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Among the many studies of aging and the aged, there is comparatively little material in which the aged speak for themselves. In this compelling study, Sharon Kaufman encourages just such expression, recording and presenting the voices of a number of old Americans. Her informants tell their life stories and relate their most personal feelings about becoming old. Each story is unique, and yet, presented together, they inevitably weave a clear pattern, one that clashes sharply with much current gerontological thought. With this book, Sharon Kaufman allows us to understand the experience of the aging by listening to the aged themselves.

Kaufman, while maintaining objectivity, is able to draw an intimate portrait of her subjects. We come to know these people as individuals and we become involved with their lives. Through their words, we find that the aging process is not merely a period of sensory, functional, economic, and social decline. Old people continue to participate in society, and—more important—continue to interpret their participation in the social world. Through themes constructed from these stories, we can see how the old not only cope with losses, but how they create new meaning as they reformulate and build viable selves. Creating identity, Kaufman stresses, is a lifelong process.

Sharon Kaufman's book will be of interest and value not only to students of gerontology and life span development, and to professionals in the field of aging, but to everyone who is concerned with the aging process itself. As Sharon Kaufman says, "If we can find the sources of meaning held by the elderly and see how individuals put it all together, we will go a long way toward appreciating the complexity of human aging and the ultimate reality of coming to terms with one's whole life."

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