

“Polyester Pants and Orthopedic Shoes”: Introducing Age Studies to Traditional-Aged Undergraduates

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This article describes several in-class exercises that can be used to introduce basic age studies concepts to students within one class setting. These exercises, built around the Age Assumptions Survey and grounded in age studies theory, are designed for use with traditional (late-adolescent) undergraduates but could be used with other populations and across disciplinary settings, such as graduate or professional students in fields ranging from the humanities to the social sciences to the healthcare professions. These engagement exercises are intended to (1) introduce age as an identity category that is variably defined and, at least in part, socially constructed; (2) reveal students' basic assumptions and stereotypes about aging and old age; and (3) provide a limited introduction to ageism. The exercises are designed so that the students generate both content and analysis, structurally forcing students to confront the limitations and ageism in their own assumptions about aging and old age. The self-generated nature of the critique encourages students to accept their own biases rather than profess their impartiality.

When asked to define aging, one of my students, a first-year male I'll call David, responded that aging is “the anatomical degradation of the human body over time,” and that old age begins “at about 40 years old.” The first associations that came to his mind when he thought of old age were “lack of athleticism,” “nursing homes,” and “dying.” In contrast, when David pictured himself at seventy-five, he hoped that his “hair [would] not bald, and instead [turn] into a thick white color, perhaps like Mitt Romney's beautiful hair.” He wanted to “still live a very technologically oriented life” and would “love to have the money to travel as well as develop new hobbies and try new things.” David shared these ideas seemingly oblivious to

the discrepancies between his views of old age and his imagined future self. At least he could imagine a future self. Asked to describe herself at seventy-five, another student wrote, “Hopefully, I don’t make it that far.”

As these students’ responses show and other researchers confirm, in attempting to bring critical perspectives on aging and ageism into the traditional undergraduate classroom, instructors face some significant challenges. In a comprehensive review article on age studies pedagogy, Leni Marshall writes that “most students arrive at college with a set of stereotypes about aging firmly but unconsciously embedded” (57). Anne Barrett and Laura Cantwell, exploring research on views of the elderly, conclude that “among college students and the general population, misconceptions of the elderly and the aging process are widespread” (328).¹ In addition to these false impressions about older adults, most college coeds do not recognize age as an identity category similar to race or sex, have never heard of ageism, and find it difficult to picture themselves growing old. Thus a significant deficiency exists not only in students’ critical awareness of the subject but also in self-motivated interest to learn more. On one hand, there would seem to be obvious stakes to interest traditional college students in aging; as Kathleen Woodward points out, age as a category of identity works quite differently from other identity categories. That is, “age—in the sense of *older age*—is the one difference we are all likely to live into” (“Introduction” x). Yet, because traditional college students so firmly identify as “young” and as the next generation, they find it difficult to see their personal stake in the way our culture represents and regards older people and the process of aging-into-old-age. They think about aging in terms of their grandparents, perhaps even their parents, but when they look at the aging Other—if they look at the aging Other—they just don’t see their future selves. Belonging to the unmarked and privileged subject position of “young adults,” they have little cause even to acknowledge age beyond the anticipated privileges of legal drinking, gambling, and car rental. How might these students become *willingly* invested in age studies?

The field of age studies has a rich corpus of theory that is easily approachable by undergraduates. For example, Margaret Gullette’s

formulation of “progress narratives” and “decline narratives,” especially in her introduction to *Aged by Culture*, registers with students whose college lives are bisected by the significant age marker of becoming legally able to drink. Woodward’s feminist theorization of age as performance, while providing more difficult reading for undergraduates, teaches beautifully; students can work in groups to prepare one of their members to “act” male, female, black, white, young, or old (“Performing Age, Performing Gender”). Discussing the resulting “performances” provides easy entry into exploring the limitations of and basis for our social stereotypes, as well as the ways in which, and reasons why, we might try to “pass” as someone Other than we self-identify. While these arguments register effectively with students, they don’t always mean much to them beyond the walls of our classroom. Unless already motivated by their personal experiences (caring for grandparents, volunteering in a nursing home, etc.), I find undergraduate students typically lack a personal frame of reference for thinking about aging, without which these theoretical concepts are ultimately inconsequential. I am left with the challenge of how to excite their intrinsic motivation to explore age studies.

Developing such motivation in my students is essential to achieving the four interconnected learning objectives I set when introducing age studies to undergraduates. I want my students (1) to learn to recognize age as an identity category and understand how it functions in order (2) to be able to identify ageism in American culture at large as well as in their own lives and actions, a recognition that is key for helping them (3) to acknowledge their personal investment in, contributions to, and opportunities for resistance against our age-discriminating culture, which will ultimately help them (4) to approach their own aging and their interactions with aged others with critical self-reflection. This article offers a series of practical exercises based on one simple survey that I use to introduce some key aging concepts into the traditional college classroom and to generate the personal motivation necessary for students to achieve the learning objectives.

For me, these exercises represent the basis for a semester-long, interdisciplinary undergraduate course on aging, establishing the foundational

ideas that will guide the rest of our semester's inquiry. I teach at a small liberal arts college, and my course, "Aging, Sex & the Body," attracts diverse students, from first-years to seniors and from all disciplines.² Methodologically, the course is grounded in cultural studies and feminist science studies. It explores the way aging, and aging women in particular, are represented within American popular culture; what assumptions about aging, sex, and gender fuel these representations; and what effects these representations have on the ways we imagine what our own aging can, will, and should be like. Additionally, the course is interested in the medicalization of age-related processes—including senility, menopause/andropause, and sexual function—as well as how aging itself is increasingly represented as a pathological disease by our contemporary anti-aging culture and medicine.

While I use these exercises to launch a full course, they might be used effectively even within the space of one or two class sessions to introduce age studies into a course with a different primary focus. Similarly, they can function as a basic introduction to age studies concepts regardless of the discipline or educational level of the classroom. The usefulness of various aspects of these exercises has been discussed in relation to undergraduate courses in gerontology (Masters and Holley), sociology (Barrett and Cantwell), and psychology (Sheldon); they certainly also fit well in a primarily humanities-based course such as mine. Performing these exercises with older or non-traditional students as you might find in graduate or professional programs will, one hopes, elicit more nuanced responses but could lead equally well to discussion. They might be particularly effective, for example, with a group of medical students about to begin a geriatrics rotation. The exercises are designed so that the students generate both the content and the analysis, structurally forcing students to confront the limitations and ageism in their own assumptions about aging and old age. Because their critique is self-generated, I find that my students react with buy-in rather than resistance, ready to look past their inability to see their future older selves.

THE AGE ASSUMPTIONS SURVEY AND WHAT IT REVEALS

The Age Assumptions Survey and subsequent discussion approaches I present here are designed with several goals in mind that speak to, but do not wholly encompass, my learning objectives for a course on age studies. I use these engagement exercises (1) to introduce age as an identity category that is variably defined and, at least in part, socially constructed; (2) to reveal students' basic assumptions and stereotypes about aging and old age (which provides a measuring stick to which we can return at the end of the course or discussion); and (3) to provide a limited introduction to ageism (limited in that this introduction is focused on prejudicial attitudes and stereotypes but for the most part overlooks discriminatory practices, policies, and social institutions). I am also invested in helping students recognize the kind of exceptionalism to ageist attitudes that they reserve for themselves and their loved ones. The survey itself is simple. On the first day of this course, before any discussion, I ask my students to respond in writing to a series of prompts:

Please complete the following according to your best conjecture.

- 1) Aging is ...
- 2) Old age begins at...
- 3) The first thought that comes to my mind when I think of "old age" is...
- 4) With both words and images, describe yourself at age 75

Students' answers vary widely, of course, but there are trends among them that I have come to count on in the seven times I have offered this course across two different institutional settings and relatively different traditional-aged student populations. Although the initial question asks for a definition of "aging"—a process that defines the entire life course—the majority of students interpret the prompt as referring to aging in later life. Many students define aging as a biological process—sometimes of growth, more often of decline; for example, "the process where the body begins to slow down from years of use and become less efficient." Many students use words like "inevitable" or "unavoidable" in their responses. Some define aging instead in terms of emotional or spiritual changes over the life course; for example, "a

process by which people mature over time and build life experiences.” These non-biological answers tend to be more positive or neutral. In describing when “old age begins,” students typically offer chronological ages (ranging anywhere from thirty to eighty), answers that reference changes in function or situation (“when you can no longer take care of yourself”), or answers that speak to an individual’s psyche (“when you allow it to begin,” “when you feel old,” “when you start feeling excluded from what is currently considered youthful”). Students’ initial associations with “old age” usually refer to physical or cultural markers of age, both visual (“gray hair and wrinkles,” “wheelchairs,” “polyester pants and orthopedic shoes”) and functional or situational (“dementia,” “retirement,” “nursing homes,” “death”), or to specific people (most often their grandparents).³

In contrast to these typically neutral or negative responses, students’ depictions of themselves at seventy-five are almost invariably positive, even if couched in conditional language. Occasionally, there may be a student who pictures himself dead or severely debilitated and alone, but the vast majority of the descriptions speak to hopeful, positive scenarios. In fact, the word “hope” usually appears in a majority of the answers, as does the word “still,” referring to the maintaining of physical and mental capacities:

At age 75, I *hope to still* be an active adult and have maintained good health psychologically and physically. I would like to have grandchildren with whom I am able to interact with and who think of me as youthful for my age. I would like to live on my own, or with my husband, not having to depend on my children or others to take care of me but instead being able to take care of myself.

Students imagine families and friends, lives that are active both physically and socially, retirement accompanied by leisure opportunities like travel and hobbies, and a sense of themselves as happy, independent, and still relevant in the world.

Once students have completed these tasks individually, the responses must be examined in the aggregate to be an effective learning tool. Given

the time span of two class periods, it might be ideal to collate the students' answers anonymously and present them back to the class for close analysis; however, it is also possible to engage the students directly within the same class period in comparative analysis work and guided discussion.

TURNING ANSWERS INTO ANALYSIS

Traditional undergraduates have varying degrees of facility in recognizing race, class, sex, and gender as identity categories whose meanings shift across cultures and times; however, few of them will have ever considered age as an identity category that might be variably defined and socially constructed. To defamiliarize age for them, I ask them to begin by sharing their answers to the question “Old age begins at... .” As the students contribute their responses, I map out on the board the many different ways we have of defining age.⁴ I adapt my definitional schema from Woodward (“Performing Age”). The numerical answers, usually the first offered up, map to *chronological* age, although the wide range of suggested ages (30-80) reveals the lack of any consensus. The responses that deal with the decline of an individual's physical capacities map on to *functional* age. Those that address the individual's feelings about their age map on to *subjective* age. Those that reference social policy measures like Social Security or senior discounts map on to *social* age, while the responses that reference our cultural meanings and associations with age (gray hair, grandparents) map on to *cultural* age. While students' answers rarely evoke this category, because my course explores the medicalization of aging, I also introduce the possibility of *biological* age, illustrated by the sorts of online longevity quizzes that purport to test one's “real age” as determined by lifestyle and health habits, and the recognition that disability—which may affect function—is not always tied to age.⁵ Depending on the disciplinary approach of the course, it might make good sense to introduce other possible categorizations of age, such as *statistical* age (Woodward, “Performing Age”), *cosmetic* age, or *economic* age (DiGiovanna), or categories that specifically explore positive and negative stereotypes such as *active* or *timeless* aging (Katz) or *usual* and *successful* aging (Rowe and Kahn, additionally see Holstein and

Minkler for a very student-accessible critique of Rowe and Kahn).

With these varied definitions of old age in front of us, I raise questions about potential relationships between these categories to guide students towards the relativity of all definitions of age, particularly that which seems most innate: chronological age. Steeped in a culture where Harrison Ford still plays action heroes in his late sixties and John Travolta recently became a father again at age fifty-six, students readily understand how a fifty-year-old who is a grandparent, has fully gray hair and suffers from various chronic health conditions may seem “older” than a seventy-year-old who is still gainfully employed, dyes his or her hair or has had a face lift, and is in excellent health. The exercise reveals how slippery and relative a concept age (especially old age) is. In the midst of this taxonomic uncertainty, students often return to the maxim that “you are only as old as you feel”; this response allows for variation but comfortably suggests one’s future age is in one’s control. Their emphasis on subjective age, particularly its connotation of control, provides the opportunity to frame some of the central concerns of the class: can one “feel” positive about one’s aging even in the midst of our prominently “anti-aging” culture? How much influence does cultural age have upon subjective age? These questions set the groundwork for recognizing how age is socially constructed, a theme we explore throughout the rest of the course. By asking students to focus on “old age,” the course elicits students’ examples from within each categorical definition of age that work to separate “old” from “not old” or “young.” This separation forms the conceptual groundwork for recognizing age as an identity category and “old” as a subject position within that category, an *unprivileged* subject position, as our continued discussion reveals.

While this initial discussion allows students to recognize the many different ways they might evaluate age and perhaps stereotype old age, it does not require them to look critically at their own basic assumptions about aging and old age. Students need to acknowledge their personal biases and fears about aging to recognize that their views need changing and to have a baseline from which to measure any change that

might occur throughout the class session or semester. To initiate this self-recognition, I have each student share first their definitions of what “[a]ging is” and then the “first thought” that comes to their minds when they think of “old age.” While their answers are helpful for reinforcing the various ways of defining age that we have mapped out, the more important part of the exercise is asking each student to classify his or her answer as positive, neutral, or negative while I keep a running tally on the board. The student is not only required to face up to his or her own inherent value judgments, but the class also recognizes once again the contingency of all associations, as a “first thought” of “my grandfather” may be positive for one student, but negative for another.

The students’ definitions of aging are most often negative or neutral, with the more biological answers tending to be more overtly negative as they include verbs like “degenerate” and “deteriorate.” The exercise reveals that even words like “growth” that seem inherently positive are subject to other cultural judgments, as students typically classify “growing older” as a negative, not neutral, answer. While there are often some positive responses to the “first thought,” typically those that relate to grandparents, the vast majority of these immediate associations are student-classified as negative. The visual tally on the board, listing heavily to the negative side, makes it patently clear that our primary narratives of aging and old age are what Gullette calls “decline narratives.” Associations like “sickness” or “dementia” may seem quite obviously to evoke decline, but this exercise presents the opportunity to question why responses like “gray hair,” “wrinkles,” or “wheelchairs” are so readily classified as negative. If they are not yet prepared to respond with “because our culture tells us so,” students may retreat by offering ever more biologically-based responses, citing functional declines in hair follicles and skin elasticity, as though science might provide definitive justification for ageism. Associations like the wheelchair, however, move us to comparisons with disability, and the students—typically more sensitive to disability prejudice—squirm while trying to defend how a wheelchair with a young person in it might be positive, but with an old person in it would be negative. Students’ inability

to justify their negativity beyond acknowledging that they believe old age is “bad,” and their discomfort at that bald acknowledgement, are the signs I am looking for that the discussion has been effective. The social construction of age, our negative associations with the identity “old age,” and the specter of ageism materialize through the conversation, as do the students’ active participation in perpetuating all of these.

While exploring the full reach of ageism is essential to the course as a whole, on this first day, my interest is more narrowly in having students recognize that ageism (a word they may have never heard before) exists, and that they may unknowingly perpetuate it. I bring this message home by asking students to share their descriptions of themselves at age seventy-five. Coming after their overwhelmingly negative associations with old age, the overwhelming positivity of their future selves is striking. While their self-depictions are couched in the conditional language of “hope” and “still,” virtually none of them picture the physical and mental functional impairments they associated just a moment previously with “old age.” Only a few seem resigned to the cosmetic changes they have associated with old age, and even these sometimes mention plastic surgery and Botox. I push them to acknowledge the obvious disconnect: “Do you all plan to be exceptions to your expected ‘norm’?” They reply that they do “hope to be exceptions,” but as they look around themselves at a room full of hoped-for exceptions, they realize that exceptionalism is not a solution to the problems they envision. The exercise offers us the opportunity to identify their visions of their future selves as progress narratives that “[affirm] the value of aging in time” and to question why we don’t more often tell progress narratives about *other* people’s aging (Gullette, *Age-wise* 147).⁶ Those rare classes where someone offers a decline narrative about their future self—“I hope I don’t make it to 75”—present an opportunity to invite students to speculate about how the experience of aging might differ for someone who has a personal decline narrative versus a progress narrative.

The students leave our discussion aware of the clear cognitive dissonance between their perceptions of “old age” and the possibilities they

imagine for themselves in older age, a dissonance created by their, and our culture's, continual Othering of the subject position "old." In later weeks of class, I offer them different possibilities for explaining this phenomenon. For example, we read opposing explanations of ageism. Woodward, in her theorization of the "mirror stage" of old age, suggests that we instinctually reject the aged because their condition of decrepitude is "an intolerable sign of our own mortality" ("Instant Repulsion" 47). This same life instinct, she suggests, leads us to see even our own aging bodies as Other than the "real" and youthful selves inside us and thus contributes to what she calls "youthfulness as masquerade," or our attempts to appear young in a denial of age ("Youthfulness as Masquerade"). In contrast to Woodward's articulation of ageism as instinctual, Gullette presents ageism as cultural, "as a learned set of beliefs and practices" (*Age-wise* 34). Similarly, Betty Friedan lays particular blame on popular media that fail to show actively engaged, vital older people and instead endow age with the mystique of "problem" and decline, engendering dread. She suggests that in what appears to be a healthy reaction to this dread mystique of age, we deny our aging and shift the "problem" of age onto Them as We continue to try to "pass" as young, never challenging that mystique (41–2). I have my students replicate Friedan's survey of popular magazines to count how many images of older people there are and in what contexts. Their findings not only affirm Friedan's claims, but suggest that in the two decades since Friedan wrote *The Fountain of Age*, popular media has grown even more age-phobic. I ask my students to argue, in writing, for whichever explanation of the root cause of ageism—Woodward's or Gullette's—they find most compelling and support their reasoning with examples from their own lives.

Even before they have been exposed to these ideas, I own up to my agenda on the opening day; like Gullette, I see supporting progress narratives, from childhood through old age, and for all elders, not just our future selves, as "an ethical imperative" (*Age-wise* 166). The tension between aging as inevitable biological decline ultimately tied to our mortality and aging as a culturally defined experience that has the potential for dramatic change

plays out throughout the rest of the semester based on the seeds sown in this initial discussion. Having recognized through the recent discussion that our cultural definitions of age may well constrain and influence our subjective definitions of age, my students are then ready to recognize that they, too, have a stake in combatting dominant decline narratives of old age if they want to preserve their personal progress narratives of age.⁷

TURNING ANALYSIS INTO ACTION

My goals for the course are, naturally, much larger than the learning objectives I set for this initial exercise. I want students not only to be competent age critics who understand the complexity of age as an identity category and who recognize ageism and acknowledge their own contributions to it, but also to be age activists who identify opportunities for resistance against our age-discriminating culture and who ultimately approach their own aging and their interactions with aged others with critical self-reflection if not passionate zeal. I realize how Pollyannaish such goals sound (especially given that my euphemism, “Pollyannaish,” is rooted in the unbridled optimism of *youth*), and yet I do register affirming changes in my students’ outlooks and behaviors throughout the course. Rather than require age advocacy from students, I instead inspire them to be age critics, believing that the latter is a surer way of leading to impassioned engagement in the former. Throughout the course, I encourage students to bring in representations of aging they come across in their daily lives and submit them to a group analysis. From Betty White’s *Off Their Rockers* to the commercial Taco Bell rolled out for Superbowl 2013 featuring old people partying to the song “We Are Young,” students learn to argue with their peers over the lasting impressions these complex representations leave on viewers. They report back on conversations about such representations that they have had with roommates, with friends in the dining hall, with their parents. The competent age critic is an activist, intentional or not. On the final day of class, I ask students to respond to the prompts of the Age Assumptions Survey once again and then return their original answers for comparison. Students are not always more optimistic about aging after our journey together—some of them

admit that learning more has heightened their anxieties about aging—but I am confident they all see *differently*, and more discerningly, in the end.

One male student (who could easily have been David) told me with surprise in the third week of class, shortly after we had watched Jennifer Abod's documentary *Look Us in the Eye: The Old Women's Project*, "Wow, I'd never even thought of ageism before." A few weeks later he shared with the class an experience of catching and correcting his own ageist behaviors. He was delivering mail to the women in the registrar's office and said, "I'll see you girls later." Then, he corrected himself, "no, that's ageist. I'll see you ladies later." The women responded by saying that they would prefer he call them girls, "as young as possible." He tried to explain what he was learning in our class but couldn't convince them that calling grown women "girls" might be promoting ageist assumptions about the value of youth over age. This lack of persuasiveness might have been due to his own inarticulateness with a newly acquired concept (or the level of understanding that sees "ladies" as a vast improvement on "girls"), or it might be because the women were so thoroughly indoctrinated into our ageist culture that "girls" registered as a compliment. Either way, moments like this convince me of the great importance of exposing undergraduates to age studies. If I want my students to become age activists and change the world around them, they need to start by recognizing—and then amending—their own contributions to ageist culture. Gullette argues that, in the face of all the cultural forces that "predict" decline, "Children...need a foundation of heightened age consciousness on which to build their future age identity and confront future risks. Adults need to become good enough age critics to explain the joke" (*Aged by Culture* 20). Even though he may not have been able to explain the punch line persuasively, this student at least got the joke. And I hope, about fifty-five years from now when this student turns seventy-five, he'll still be laughing.

NOTES

¹ Speaking to younger adults more generally, a 2009 study by the Pew Research Center compared the expectations about “growing older” from younger adults (age 18-64) to the experiences of growing older from older adults (age 65+). They found that younger adults anticipated both far more positives and far more negatives than older adults actually experienced, concluding that younger adults’ “expectations overshoot reality,” but aging is also “not as bad as younger adults think” (28-9).

² Hiram College has a strong commitment to interdisciplinary study. My course counts as one of our students’ two required “Interdisciplinary” courses. It additionally counts towards the Biomedical Humanities (premed) major and the Gender Studies minor.

³ I additionally ask students to complete a fifth task that I do not have room to discuss in this article. The prompt is as follows: “The ‘life course’ has been variously defined as (1) an individual’s life from birth to death as it plays itself out in social & historical contexts; (2) the stages of growth and change of an organism’s life; (3) a term that refers to the culturally defined sequence of stages in human life, rather than to precise periods of years or to biological development. Use the following page to draw a visual representation of the typical human life course.” This exercise typically results in elaborate depictions of early stages in the life course (from gestation through schooling occasionally to the start of a family or career) and often (perhaps prompted by the preceding tasks) a reference to “old age” (whether as leisured retirement or decline and impending death), but mid-life is almost entirely *unrepresented* on the students’ life course drawings.

I save these pictures for a few weeks into the course once we have read some basic age studies theory and as we are exploring how work and retirement fit in to our popular representations of aging. I first use Thomas Cole’s brilliant study *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America* to provide students with a historical progression of visual depictions of the life course, from the medieval “Wheel of Life” to the stair-stepped “The Ages and Life of Man/Woman,” to twentieth-century renderings like George Beard’s “Law of the Relation of Age to Original Work” and cartoon reactions to William’s Osler’s “Fixed Period” speech. After guiding students through analysis of these images, I then hand back their anonymous drawings, have them pass them around, and ask them to analyze what they see and what they don’t see. As their omissions are so much more glaring than the images they have already been critiquing, the exercise provides the opportunity for measuring, partway in to the course, how far they have come in their critical age analysis.

⁴ With a smart board or other equivalent technology in the classroom, it would be very useful to save this “map” to return to at later points in the semester.

⁵ Different age studies and social gerontology texts quite variably present categorical definitions of age; I prefer to draw on literary and aging studies scholar Kathleen Woodward’s essay “Performing Age, Performing Gender,” which provides a very helpful overview of the multiple ways that we define age and makes a clear distinction between *social* and *cultural* age: “*Chronological age* refers to the number of years a person has lived. *Biological or functional age* refers to the state of a person’s physical capacities... *Social age* refers to the meanings that a society accords to different categories of age,

with the instruments of social policy [such as eligibility for Social Security] providing clear-cut measures. ...Like social age, *cultural age* refers to the meanings or values that a culture assigns to different people in terms of age, but here status and power are crucial. ...*Psychological age* refers to a person's state of mind in terms of age. ...Finally, by *statistical age* I mean predictions concerning age based on large data sets" (183fn5). This final category of statistical age fits nicely with Woodward's analysis of the film *About Schmidt* featuring a retiring actuary, but I have never found it to arise organically from students' responses and thus do not include it.

Others who teach about aging to undergraduates use similar approaches. For example, Barrett and Cantwell have written about a similar exercise for social gerontology or sociology of aging courses based on asking students to draw a picture of an elderly person and then collectively analyzing the resulting images. As part of the discussion, they introduce students to four ways of defining age: functional, social, subjective, and chronological ("Drawing on Stereotypes").

⁶ There are variations on this classroom exercise that reveal the same disconnect. In her impressively comprehensive review article on age studies pedagogy, Leni Marshall shares some of these approaches. For example: "Kathleen Woodward asks her students to write two prose portraits, one of an elder person in the family (students usually choose a grandparent) and one of an elder stranger, someone that students might have seen as they rode a city bus to class that day. Invariably, says Woodward, descriptions of the family member revolve around relationships, character, temperament, and history, whereas the person on the bus is described only via physical characteristics, most of which reflect negative prejudices about aging. As students report about their writing, they are able to see that there is a difference between the specular body and the person, and that social participation and personhood are mutually constitutive" (Marshall 68). Taking a much less narrative approach, Mosher-Ashley and Ball offer students lists of paired positive and negative characteristics; students must first select those characteristics they feel describe elderly people and later those that would describe themselves at age seventy-five (Mosher-Ashley and Ball 93).

⁷ To see a full copy of my syllabus and to find inspirational examples of other age studies-influenced syllabi, visit the syllabi collection on the website of the North American Network in Aging Studies: http://agingstudies.org/NANAS/?page_id=218.

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