

Gender and Age/Aging in Popular Culture: Representations in Film, Music, Literature, and Social Media, edited by Nicole Haring, Roberta Maierhofer, and Barbara Ratzenböck. Bielefeld: transcript, 2023, Pp.188. €39 (paperback); open access (PDF).

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In a 1985 NWSA plenary session, Barbara Macdonald challenged feminists by asking, “[h]as it never occurred to you that ageism is a core feminist issue as you develop feminist theory?” (qtd. in Marshall vii, emphasis added). Over the years, there has been a slow but steady growth in the intersectional analyses of age with other axes of differentiation—race, class, sexuality, disability, and nationality—revealing how ageism both shapes and is shaped by broader systems of power. Existing research in this area spans from Toni Calasanti and Kathleen Slevin’s *Gender, Social Inequalities, and Aging* (2001), which marked an initial push for a “gendered” approach to gerontology (41-42), to Margaret Morganroth Gullette’s *Aged by Culture* (2004), which critiques the dominant cultural narrative of decline (10-12), and more recently, Courtney S. Thomas Tobin et al.’s “Intersectional Approaches to Minority Aging Research” (2022) has also contributed to this discussion.

Gender and Age/Aging in Popular Culture adds to this pertinent scholarship and provides a thorough academic analysis, exploring the relationship between gender and age across different media platforms. By highlighting these associations, the volume emphasizes the need for intersectional approaches to further examine the cultural and media contexts of aging in the twenty-first century. Editors Nicole Haring, Roberta Maierhofer, and Barbara Ratzenböck curate contributions from scholars working in the fields of cinema, literature, music, and digital cultures, illustrating how popular culture both reproduces and contests the complex dominant narratives of gendered aging. The collection produces a multidimensional perspective for understanding the intricacies of age/aging and gender by drawing from various interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks such as feminist theory, cultural studies, critical age studies, and media studies.

Aside from the introduction, the anthology comprises eight chapters. The introduction outlines the historical and socio-political dynamics of gender and age in

popular culture, laying the groundwork for the anthology's central concerns. The editors promote a feminist and intersectional analysis, examining how gender and age intersect with race, class, and sexuality, drawing on critical theorists such as bell hooks, Susan Sontag, and Kimberlé Crenshaw. The following chapters reject “single-axis thinking” (10) and emphasize hooks's assertion that popular culture is “a powerful way to share knowledge” (7), bringing together diverse approaches to underscore the urgency of exploring the complexities of gendered aging in cultural representation.

Each chapter undertakes a multi-level analysis, exploring various genres of popular culture. Most notably, these stories come from around the world, with case studies from Italy, Spain, and Brazil demonstrating that age and gender politics play out differently across socio-cultural contexts yet remain remarkably similar. Leonor Acosta Bustamante's “Introspective Conflict in the Middle of a Moveable Feast” (Chapter 1) highlights the struggles of vulnerable yet powerful aging masculinities by examining Paolo Sorrentino's film, linking the protagonist's introspection and nostalgia to the ruins of Rome. Raquel Medina's “Cinema and Glory: Almodóvar's Journey Through Space, Time, Pain, and Loss” (Chapter 2) uses cinematic analysis to explore the metaphorical journey of aging by focusing on themes such as loss, nostalgia, and decline, leveraging late-life creativity as a vital tool to combat senescence. While Shlomit Aharoni Lir and Liat Ayalon's co-authored “The Celluloid Hurdles: Israeli Women Film Directors in the Prism of Gender and Time” (Chapter 3) employs qualitative interviews to reveal systemic ageist hurdles faced by Israeli women filmmakers, including societal expectations, career setbacks, and discrimination, which hinder their professional advancement, Isabella Hesse's chapter ““Be the Captain they remember: Fandom Responses to Ageing *Star Trek* Protagonists” (Chapter 4) also exposes the double standards of ageist fan culture by analyzing how viewers interpret aging through a qualitative analysis of social media posts. Karen Fournier's “Gender, Rage, and Age in Alanis Morissette's ‘Reasons I Drink’” (Chapter 5) and Melinda Niehus-Kettler's “On Being Silenced and Breaking Cycles: Deliberating Patterns of Violence in Tori Amos' Works” (Chapter 6) together offer compelling critiques of the systemic erasure and silencing of older women in music culture—Fournier through the lens of ‘transaging’ in rock, and Niehus-Kettler through an analysis of age-related invisibility as a form of gender-based violence in Amos' music. Nicole Haring's chapter “Intersectional Ageing:

An Anocritical Reading” (Chapter 7) stands out for its innovative use of cross-disciplinary anocriticism to examine gendered aging as intersectional resistance in literary novels. Finally, Mariana Castelli-Rosa and Mariana Lins’s chapter “WhatsApp Aunts: Ageism, Sexism, and the Marginalization of Older People in Brazilian Politics” (Chapter 8) sheds much-needed light on the digital activism carried out by older aunts in the Global South, demonstrating that reclamation and political activism know no age boundaries.

The strength of *Gender and Age/Aging in Popular Culture* lies in its interdisciplinary approach and in addressing a wide range of cultural phenomena, from mainstream European film movements to overlooked narratives of older generations in literary texts and social media in Brazil. Together, the chapters do not just sit side by side; they build on each other, adding new fields (genre, geography, social setting) to expose how popular culture serves as both a reflection and a battleground for the complex interactions between gender, age, and the heteropatriarchal society. However, the collection’s comprehensive approach to intersectionality could be expanded further. While the editors emphasize the significance of intersectionality and intersectional analysis, only two chapters—Shlomit Aharoni Lir and Liat Ayalon’s co-authored “The Celluloid Hurdles” and Mariana Castelli-Rosa and Mariana Lins’s “WhatsApp Aunts”—explore constructs of gender and age/aging, including those of women of color, from the Global South. There is also a substantial absence of the representation of older queer people of color within the debates of gender and aging, leaving room for potential growth and future research to fill the gap.

Haring, Maierhofer, and Ratzenböck’s carefully curated anthology prompts critical questions about gender and aging in popular culture. While the collection could have been more cohesive in its handling of intersectionality, it makes significant contributions. It sets the stage for further exploration in this rapidly evolving area of scholarship. The anthology will be valuable to scholars in feminist studies, media studies, film studies, and gerontology.

WORKS CITED

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