

In a society that glorifies women for their youth and sex appeal, women often find themselves fearful of growing older. So, is it possible for you as an elderly woman to embrace their identity fully?

According to Mary Pipher, yes you can! In this summary, you will discover the way to embrace your old status more actively and passionately with the proper attitude. Mary Pipher, who is both a cultural anthropologist and clinical psychologist explains how to achieve this state in this part of your life with joy, courage, and bliss.

In this summary, you will realize how some women have used their vast life experiences to their advantage in order to face the usual old age problems like illness, caregiving, and retirement. In doing so, they are able to emerge through these issues a lot happier.

In American society, ageism is common, especially against older women.

For women, the experience of getting older is both challenging and alienating for them. Once, a little girl approached the author in a park and asked her, "Where do old ladies come from?" The author, who was then in her seventies, came to realize the reality of the challenges of old age.

While the little girl's question might seem astonishing, in real sense it isn't quite the case. This is because of how much American culture has excluded and disempowered women in society. The extent of this alienation is so much widespread hence it is quite easy to understand why the little girl was confused.

Consider how older women are often portrayed in American popular culture. More often than not, it is quite negative. For example, mothers-in-law are often characterized as nagging and bossy nuisances. Moreover, the word 'witch' is used more often to describe older women.

In addition to these negative portrayals, these kinds of prejudices can be observed in more subtle ways too. For example, older women are effectively unaccommodated in popular culture. There is a dire underrepresentation of older people, and particularly older women, in American films.

According to a study by the Media Diversity and Social Change Initiative, less than 12 percent of films that won an Academy Award between 2014 and 2016 featured older people. More shockingly still, older women were featured in close to none of them.

Such is the nature of discrimination against older people in Hollywood. This is, in fact, a reflection of American society. The society puts more emphasis on youth and beauty while denigrating the aged. This kind of fear and hatred is called gerontophobia.

In a 2012 study done by the Yale School of Public Health, gerontophobia and its effects are specifically highlighted. The study assessed the extent to which social groups on Facebook dedicated to the elderly expressed disapproval of older people in their group descriptions. The study found that the elderly were often denigrated and infantilized. Many of the users used negative stereotypes against them.

Such discriminatory attitudes towards older people are because of ignorance. Consider that the older people know the experience of what it is to be a child, a teenager, and a middle-aged person. On the other hand, younger age groups do not know the experience of being old. It is difficult for younger age groups to decipher the realities of older people. Due to this, they may lack the necessary empathy and understanding.

Ageism may be understandable, but it's still hugely damaging. And not just to the old, but to the young, as well.

Older women can find caregiving to be both challenging and rewarding.

Generally, women have taken the role of caring for children, the ill as well as the elderly in most societies in the world throughout history. For the author, she was brought up along with her generation of women with the understanding that women must practice self-sacrifice. The importance of female sacrifice which is the act of prioritizing the needs of others before their own is a value that was emphasized greatly to them. Little has actually changed in twenty-first century America.

In most cases, providing care for those around them is nothing new for older women. Most likely, at this point in their lives, they have already spent a lifetime looking after the needs of

their children, helping neighbors, bringing casseroles to friends' families in times of need and making hospital visits to sick relatives.

The trouble is that, as women enter their sixties and seventies, the demands of caregiving, which they have dealt with throughout their lives can suddenly become overwhelming for them.

As women reach older age, they rely on their partners for reciprocal care. However, this sort of support could quickly crumble. This, in turn, puts even more burden on the women. The author interviewed an older woman by the name Willow. She reported that she and her husband had enjoyed a pleasant relationship and independent careers until he was suddenly diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.

Due to this, within a year, she found herself caring for her husband extensively by dressing him, bathing him and organizing extra care like physical therapy which he needed in order to manage his illness. Through this added burden of responsibilities, and with less time to give to her career, she quit her job. Because of this, she even began to resent him for his dependence on her.

A 2015 study by the National Alliance for Caregiving discovered that around two-thirds of caregivers experience depression. In addition to this, 40 percent of them find their work to be stressful. Given that most caregivers are women, and particularly older women, it is clear that there are health risks surrounding older women. This shows that caregiving can be an overwhelmingly difficult task for older women.

Despite this, the role can also be rewarding. For instance, Willow mentions that through caring for her husband, she has been able to develop to become a better person. She changed from seeing herself as a victim from before to seeing herself as a volunteer.

Such opportunities for personal growth that caregiving presents should be celebrated. Especially in a society like America, where a staggering 40 percent of people report that their lives hold no meaning.

As an older woman, your happiness is in your own hands.

Another older woman interviewed by the author, by the name Marlene grew up in poverty and remained in that state. She has been divorced and lives in subsidized housing too. Moreover, she was forced into a career path she didn't actually want. In this state, one could just give up and accept the misery. Instead, Marlene claims that she is happy. Her life motto is literally, "I choose joy."

It is easy to assume that her situation cannot be a source of happiness. In fact, it seems like it literally eliminates any possibility of being happy. However, psychology professor Sonja Lyubomirsky has found that external circumstances only partially contribute to our overall happiness. Apparently, half of our happiness is due to our genetics. The rest is down to a mix of attitudes, behavior, and circumstance.

These findings are particularly important for older women. It shows that while situations and events are beyond our control, it is within our control to change our attitudes and behaviors.

The question now becomes - how can we change our outlook as we age? According to Lyubomirsky, it is important to adopt a new perspective on our present circumstances and approach them positively. In the case of Willow, after quitting her job, she realized how grateful she was for her life.

Incredibly, a positive mental attitude can influence how we age as well. Research from the field of epigenetics has shown that our attitude toward aging has a tangible impact on our DNA.

In order to live fulfilled happy lives as we become older, the key is to translate a positive attitude into positive behaviors. The problem is, many older people are not keen on taking action towards this. For example, a recent study by Nielsen found that the average retired American watches around 50 hours of television per week.

This statistic is saddening. In order to achieve a state of happiness in old age, this is surely not the best way to pass time. Instead of switching on the box, try to put more thought into how you spend your precious time.

What do you have to lose now? You have retired after all. There are many activities you can engage in such as kayaking lessons, learning how to cook or even volunteering at a local

refugee center. These will help you develop your unique gifts and engage with others around you.

You could take retirement as a great opportunity to make some positive changes in your community.

Nora used her retirement to make a positive change. When she retired, Nora and her husband set their minds to give something back to their neighborhood. They realized that they did not have a local park. So they began to raise funds and seek permission to create one. The park came to completion after four years of their efforts to organize and marshal resources. It will be available to serve the community even after she and her husband are gone.

Her story demonstrates that retirement does not have to be a time of being inactive. On the contrary, it may be the best time to act on certain things. Moreover, she proves that you can do that close to home. This provides the perfect condition for older women.

Since most older women have lived in the neighborhood for a long time, they almost certainly know how the system works. They understand their local area's unique challenges and know how to handle bureaucracy to create change that serves the interests of the wider community.

Moreover, some may be natural connectors. This means that they can connect those around them to others and help them find the resources that they need.

In case you are hesitant to participate in your local community simply because you think you don't have enough to offer, remember that you're probably more capable than you think. Surely, you have more life experience on your side and all the free time you need. This will be key as you delve into solving the complex issues that people tend to avoid. Even if you're more interested in tackling global issues, you'll likely still make the biggest impact in your immediate area. In other words, global problems are often local problems, too.

So, whether you're hoping to address climate change, education or political issues, bear in mind that the greatest opportunities for change are usually up for grabs right around the corner.

In our later years, our friends can be a source of solace.

For millennia, women have been working together to bringing up children, singing together over campfires and grieving for the dead. Even today, women seek friendship from each other. However, the difference today is that these precious bonds can be difficult to maintain. Catching up with friends often takes planning, long-distance travel as well as commitment. Basically, modern culture puts negligible value or emphasis on keeping meaningful long relationships.

Earlier in our lives, in order to keep us busy and give our lives purpose, we had to work towards commitments and family. Once we hit our sixties and our children have flown the nest, this often changes. At this point, we may be divorced, widowed and maybe even retired or about to retire.

During this time, these areas of our lives require less attention. So we rely on our friends to bring us hope and joy. They help to keep everything in perspective. They listen to us without judgment and help us laugh at our troubles. They give us the understanding, comfort, and companionships that we need to flourish. Also, they offer something that our families often can't.

Meanwhile, we end up with the role of caregiver to various family members. During this period, we have a different dynamic altogether with our friends. In the best friendships, we feel the other person is looking after us. This could provide something distinctly profound from what we obtain from our families.

The problem with this is that establishing such meaningful friendships in our older years is not an easy task. Just like any other relationship, our friendships need generous attention and time. Take the example of another old lady, Louise, who frequently visits her friends and brings them pastries when they have a hospital appointment. Therefore, in order to keep your later years sweet, ensure that you tend to your friendships with love and dedication.

We can experience both difficulty and bliss in our final steps in life.

The author was struck by how frail and thin her friend Jackie looked when she saw her. Even though she was not yet in her sixties, Jackie had terminal cancer. As they sat peacefully on a beach overlooking the lake, the two friends talked. During this time, the author came to realize that Jackie was not only suffering heartache as she neared the end of her life, but she was also experiencing bliss.

Usually, terminal illness and the last steps towards the end of one's life can be a tough period full of pain, anger, and worry. However, this period could also be a source of transcendent commitment, joy, and bliss.

Initially, Jackie was outraged about her terminal diagnosis. She could only wonder why this happened to her. Even after she had lived a healthy and productive life. Why did God hand her this fate? She was in a lot of pain. This is in addition to her existential concerns. Her bones were becoming weaker and some were even breaking. She had nausea when she ate. Her treatment was causing her a lot of confusion. Yet despite all these, at times her life was filled with a lot of gratitude and an incredible sense of wonder.

Her bliss came after her diagnosis when she realized that so many people in her life truly loved her. Prior to that, she was a steely businesswoman. She hardly even accepted to be cared for by others. Now, she felt joy from what her loved ones would do for her, even the small acts of kindness would make her cry from overwhelming gratitude.

Jackie was able to see the enchanting beauty of the world around her as she and the author sat beside the peaceful lake. Everything now seemed more precious to her now that she knew that she had very little time left. She appreciated the singing of the meadowlarks, the reflection of the clouds shimmering on the lake's surface and the swallows that played around them.

Although it is a humbling thought that we all don't know when our lives will come to an end it should not be a cause for us to be frightened. Indeed, sitting by the lake that day, Jackie

eventually gestured at the magnificence of the nature around her and said, “This is happiness – to be dissolved into something complete and great.”

Women Rowing North: Navigating Life’s Currents and Flourishing As We Age by Mary Pipher Book Review

There are many difficulties associated with growing older, especially as a woman. Old age can feel overwhelming while facing ageism in society as well as the newfound caregiving duties and chronic illnesses. The good news is, we can age with grace and confidence by engaging with our communities, finding a good company as well as trying to acquire an appreciation for the wonder of the present moment.

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