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Book Review

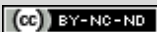
Sugar, Judith, Rieksa, Robert, Holstege, Henry, & Farber, Michael. Introduction to Aging: A Positive, Interdisciplinary Approach. Springer Publishing Company. 2014. 978-0-8261-0880-7. 317 pp., \$75.00 (Paperback)

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The purpose of this book is to provide an accessible textbook with a positive view of aging by focusing on wellness and health promotion. It is arranged in six parts that cover growing older in the 21st century, the realities of growing older, diverse living conditions of older people, support systems, risk and public policy issues. Undergraduates and master's level graduates are the intended audience for this textbook. Each section ends with a brief discussion of practice-based information.

There are many things to like about the textbook. The first is that it is highly accessible and includes a multidisciplinary framework. Undergraduates would likely appreciate the brevity of each segment and the very clear chapter objectives. Each chapter is arranged in manageable segments with clear headings. The textbook has a refreshing focus on normal aging processes and adaptations. The positive approach in this textbook goes a long way toward explaining many issues elders, their family members and caregivers, and society currently face in the United States.

Each chapter begins with a list of learning objectives that give readers an overview of the chapter and provide a "road map" that cues the reader to the important concepts to be covered. The text begins by delivering the foundational vocabulary for meaningful discussions of age and aging. It also acknowledges broad cohort differences between young-old, aged, and oldest-old segments of the population. The authors also situate the information with a strong historical context as they describe the evolution of aging and perceptions of older people from colonial times and the industrial age. Next the authors focus on normal biological changes associated with aging, a refreshing change from the focus on diseases of aging that dominate some texts. They continue their positive approach in a discussion of health enhancement and maintenance—including a significant section on nutrition, activity, and other forms of health promotion. The inclusion of a chapter devoted to mental health with topics ranging from Alzheimer's disease to creativity and art acknowledges the devastation of dementia but also offers encouraging news of ways older people can continue their engagement in society. This biologically focused section also offers a realistic description of sexuality and aging and relays information on factors that inhibit and enhance sexuality in later life. Overall, the entire book follows the pattern of approaching sensitive topics with a straightforward and positive manner.

The sections on practical application include thought provoking questions that would be useful in a classroom discussion. The textbook is very strong in providing the historical context of aging. There are also several things lacking in this textbook. The strength it has from the inclusion of historical contexts of aging is also its greatest weakness. The textbook is almost devoid of current theoretical perspectives. Two chapters include a discussion of theories used by

gerontologists. The first discussion is in chapter 2 in the form of an overview of “historical social theories of aging,” a view that is apparent when reviewing the dates of the citations in this section (1961-1998) but there is no inclusion of more widely used social theories (i.e., Life Course, Feminist, Political Economy of Aging, or Cumulative Advantage and Disadvantage). Chapter 3 includes only a very brief discussion of a few biological theories of aging with no mention of Programmed Theories (i.e., Longevity, Endocrine, or Immunological) or Error Theories (i.e., Cross-Linkage, Wear and Tear, or Free Radicals). There is little attention given to the heterogeneity of the aging population beyond gender and comparisons of Black, Hispanic, and White populations. There is no discussion on the role of immigration on the aging population and no discussion of global issues of aging. The section on widowhood (a few paragraphs in Chapter 7) is far too brief and does not consider cultural or gender differences in experiences of losing a spouse or partner.

The extensive focus on history and lack of depth makes this book inappropriate for master’s level graduate students. The absence of current theories makes this less useful in upper level undergraduate courses where current theories are applied. There would be a great need to supplement the text with more comprehensive readings should this text be used in upper level undergraduate or in graduate classes. This text would be most useful for a lower level undergraduate class as an introduction to aging. It provides clear and accessible information that could spark interests in studies of aging. Moreover, its positive approach is nearly devoid of the inherent ageism of other texts that focus almost exclusively on diseases and disabilities associated with older bodies.