Radtke, H.L., Young, J. & Mens-Verhulst J. van (2016). Aging, Identity, and Women: Constructing the Third Age. *Women & Therapy, 39*:86–105. ISSN: 0270-3149 print/1541-0315 online DOI: 10.1080/02703149.2016.1116321

Abstract

The “Third Age” offers a conceptualization of the lives of those who

are retired and beyond middle age but not facing any disability

stereotypically associated with the “old.” Emphasizing good health,

freedom from the responsibilities of younger adulthood, and

continuing engagement with the world, it articulates a specific

form of positive aging that has received very little attention within

psychology. We adopted a feminist and critical discursive

approach in exploring how eight women, who fit the Third Age

profile, understand their lives and who they are. Audiotaped

semi-structured interviews were transcribed and analyzed. The

participants drew on four pairs of interpretative repertoires in

constructing the meanings of aging. Their identity work involved

positioning themselves as “not old” and establishing continuity

between who they have been in the past and who they are now.

The results highlight the women’s agency as they negotiated

between the discursive resources available to them. Drawing on

a framework for feminist therapy that incorporates an emphasis

on social change, we discuss the implications of these results.

KEYWORDS age identity, discourse analysis, third age, women