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A new age of old age?: Gerotranscendence and the re-enchantment of aging

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Abstract

Gerotranscendence theory is reviewed regarding its content, development, diffusion, impact, empirical results, and ontology. Gerotranscendence theory describes a "natural" alteration of consciousness in old age leading to "wisdom" and a qualitative break with a mid-life rational and materialist world-view. According to the theory, gerotranscendence is obstructed by a lack of alternative values and roles in old age in Western societies. Theoretically and in clinical practice, gerotranscendence theory has been linked to psychoanalysis. It is concluded that gerotranscendence theory is empirically weak, has parallels in the New Age movement as well as in romantic Orientalism, and can be understood as an attempt to re-enchant aging.



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Keywords

Disengagement; Gerontology; Gerotranscendence; Theory; Wisdom

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