

March, 2023 Book of the Month

Breaking the Age Code – Dr Becca Levy (Vermillion/Penguin)

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) ageism is the most widespread and socially accepted prejudice today. Dr Becca Levy, Yale Professor and pioneer in the field of later life studies, sets out to further our understanding of the complicated subject of ageing.

Levy succeeds in challenging stereotypes: “mental illness is much less common in older than in younger adults and most older persons with mental illness can be successfully treated,” offering persuasive evidence to show that in later life we grow in emotional intelligence.

The central theme here is ‘Age Beliefs’, simply put this is about challenging the conventional perception of what it is to be old. Levy maintains negative age beliefs are not only a barrier to good mental health, they are ingrained within society. Looking in detail at our own inbuilt prejudices and cultural stereotyping, Levy successfully argues against assumptions that ageing is purely a degenerative process, pointing out the positive attitude to ageing in Japan; a country with the world’s longest healthy lifespans.

One of the most engrossing chapters is ‘Later Life Mental Health Growth.’ A real eye opener; it boldly challenges the assumption that lethargy and depression are standard features of normal ageing. Founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud comes in for criticism for his attitude to older patients, yet Levy believes structural ageism in the field of mental health care, like our own individual negative age beliefs is reversible.

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Meticulously researched and packed with surprising insights, Breaking The Age Code isn’t some dusty intellectual textbook, it’s highly readable, entertaining and enlightening from cover to cover.

Above all, this is a book about ageing as positive human development. It will completely change the way you look at later life.

John Coleman

