embrace elders. However, little agreement exists about whether elderhood is a valid and useful construct. The first presenter questions the aging “mystique” through an analysis of the concepts of elderhood, sageing, croning, and eldering in popular and academic literature, underscoring the importance of avoiding othering and critically thinking beyond labels, even if positive. The second presenter explores the concept of agency in later life through a feminist philosophical lens, arguing that confrontations with one’s existential vulnerability need not be an obstacle to agency in elderhood, but rather can inspire alternative conceptualizations of it. The third presenter contrasts his personal and professional experiences of studying cultural aspects of aging, concluding that elderhood is neither a stage of life nor a rite of passage but rather an individual, voluntaristic process. The fourth presenter explores 943 texts written by Finnish older adults, finding that the writers creatively position themselves as a group of older persons with a special contribution to make to society, even where elderhood is not explicitly mentioned, and potentially offer an alternative view to countering ageism. The fifth and final presenter explores a novel elderhood video intervention among first-year medical students (N = 585). Thematic findings of neutrality, elderhood as development, elderhood as othering, and elderhood as an opportunity to reframe stigma suggest that elderhood may be a viable and productive anti-ageism strategy.

THE ELDERHOOD MYSTIQUE
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While elderhood recognizes untapped potential and continued growth and creativity in later life, it also risks becoming a dismissive label that positions older people as different, otherworldly, and mysterious. By analyzing the concept of elderhood and similar movements (e.g., sageing, croning, eldering) in popular and academic literature, paying close attention to how elderhood is defined and framed, I found that elderhood has a role in some religious and cultural practices. However, newer approaches to elderhood have emerged from middle-aged writers who imagine an idealized role in later life – the elderhood mystique. Often grounded in introspective passivity and selflessness, elderhood parallels Kathleen Woodward’s depiction of wisdom as a disempowering label that discourages activism and resistance by older people. Subsequently, elderhood and wisdom risk becoming new forms of othering or exclusion. Overall, findings underscore the importance of critical analysis of age-related terms, regardless of how positive they seem.

ELDERHOOD, AGENCY AND EXISTENTIAL VULNERABILITY
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Popular conceptualizations of elderhood often use a spiritually inspired language of personal growth and wisdom. These conceptualizations are rightly critical of the language of activity and productivity that abounds in dominant successful aging discourses. Instead, the emphasis is placed on embracing our diminishing strength and increasing dependence with an attitude of resignation and gracious acceptance. Problematically, however, this can reinforce the ageist cultural assumption that old age lacks agency. If the emerging discourse about elderhood is truly to serve as a more inspiring cultural image of late life, it requires a reconceptualization of agency in the face of existential vulnerabilities. This paper aims to present a possible philosophical outlook for such a reconceptualization. It will draw on sources from feminist philosophy to argue how confrontations with vulnerability need not be an obstacle, but rather inspire alternative conceptualizations of agency that are a welcome addition to gerontological thinking.

ELDERS OR OLD MEN?
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Thomas R. Cole, GSA Abstract, 3.9.2021 Elders or Old Men? My book Old Man Country is about 12 successful, respected older men who think back on their lives and current aging. When starting my research, I first questioned my own aspirations for aging: What would my aging be like? Who would I become? What would be my purpose as an old man? Although I expected that strength and resilience would be the common thread of elderhood, it was actually their vulnerabilities that defined them (accepting losses, acknowledging dependency.) More so, these vulnerabilities did not demarcate a descent but rather a continuous uphill struggle that differentiates elderhood from growing old. Ultimately, I argue that elderhood is not a life stage or a rite of passage but rather an individual process to be worked through, if one so chooses.

ELDERHOOD IN PROTESTANT RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS: STEPPING STONES IN RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE
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Elderhood is an emerging concept for making meaning in older age, often contextualized in spiritual but not religious traditions. But what kinds of frameworks for elderhood are woven into protestant religious contexts? This paper explores 943 texts written by Finnish older adults in study groups organized by a pensioners’ organization. A key finding is that religious language – known through religious songs and prayers learned by heart at school – offers a medium to explore and express their elderhood. The writers creatively use the rhythm and wordings of these textual patterns to position themselves as a group of older persons with a special contribution to make to society. These results will aid examining elderhood and its potential in various contexts where the concept might not be explicitly used. This examination potentially leads to new ways to support experiences of elderhood and thus to offer an alternative view to countering ageism.

ELDERHOOD AS AN ANTI-AGEISM INTERVENTION
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Ageism is a complex, multi-layered phenomenon impacting feelings, thoughts and behaviors toward self and