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Marian H. J. Assink and Johannes J. F. Schroots, *The Dynamics of Autobiographical Memory Using the LIM Life-line Interview Method*, Hogrefe Publishing, Göttingen, Germany, 2010, 162 pp., pbk with CD €49.95, ISBN 13: 978 0 88937 370 9.

Denise Tanner, *Managing the Ageing Experience: Learning from Older People*, The Policy Press, Bristol, UK, 2010, 248 pp., pbk £24.99, ISBN 13: 978 1 86134 885 2.

Both of these books, although taking very different approaches, offer valuable insights into people's lived experiences through the use of longitudinal studies.

As Assink and Schroots, in *The Dynamics of Autobiographical Memory Using the LIM Life-line Interview Method* explain, until now there have been 'no studies in which respondents are asked to report spontaneously events they recall from their past and expect from their future at different points in time' (p. 2). Their study aims to fill this gap by following three groups of men and women, of young, middle and older age, interviewing them three times over a five-year period. Assink and Schroots use an interesting method to elicit memories from their participants. The LIM life-line method, which is presented as a manual in the appendix, is a semi-structured interview that asks people to draw their life-line and tell their life-story for both their past and their anticipated future.

The book is a challenging read, packed full of data, which is also supplemented with additional data on the accompanying CD. However, each chapter stands alone with sufficient introduction and explanations of the methodologies to enable readers to explore independently different aspects of the participants' past, present and future life-stories, such as the number and distribution of events; the ratio and distribution of positive and negative effects; the content of memories and expectations; and stability and change in memories throughout the lifecourse. Clear summaries of the findings are given at the end of each section to guide the reader. The findings of each chapter are discussed independently and then drawn together in the final chapter.

Although, at first sight, this book may appear daunting, it provides fascinating insights into how people's life stories both remain stable and change over time. The data are presented in terms of the perspectives of all participants in each group and of those individuals in each group who completed all three interviews. This approach enables the researchers to tease out some of the effects of cohort and time-after-the-event. The researchers seek to address challenging questions, such as 'What type of events do men and women consider to be important?' and 'Do these patterns change over time?' The findings are of great relevance to all interested in people's development over the lifecourse and in using narrative approaches to explore people's experiences, especially as the authors suggest that both the past and the future are reconstructed over time (p. 103). The findings also reveal that both the number and intensity of memories from adolescence and early childhood are higher compared with the remainder of older people's life-stories, which may be of significance for professionals and carers using reminiscence to assist people with dementia to keep their past alive and maintain their sense of self.

Students and researchers alike will find the overview of the current debates in the field of autobiographical memory valuable and all researchers will find the final categorisation of the findings into principles, hypotheses and trends invaluable indicators for future research. Finally, the authors tempt you to continue following their studies by mentioning that they have extended the longitudinal study to cover a ten-year period and that, at each time-point, participants have completed coping and subjective wellbeing questionnaires, amongst others, suggesting there are more publications in the offing.

In *Managing the Ageing Experience: Learning from Older People*, from the Ageing and Lifecourse series, Tanner aims to learn from the ways in which older people manage ageing, through their experiences of ageing and the meaning they give to these experiences. Building on the premise that social policy and practice should be based on understanding the lives of older people, she seeks to enable older people to participate in generating the 'knowledge' about their lives. She explores the evolving strategies of 12 older people, deemed by their local councils as not needing social support, to manage their difficulties through the following three-year period. The book introduces the participants, seven women and five men aged between 70 and 90 at the start of the study, through pen profiles that give such rounded accounts of each participant that you feel you know them as you follow their lives through the study.

The findings, drawn from five interviews and diaries kept by the participants throughout the three-year period, are presented initially under three main themes, 'keeping going', 'staying me' and 'the slippery slope', and are discussed in relation to a broad literature within each theme. 'Keeping going' focuses on practical strategies used by older people to maintain their social roles, to keep up their standards and to preserve what they perceive to be an acceptable balance between giving and receiving in relationships. These activities were seen as fundamental to managing ageing, and not managing to keep going was perceived as 'giving up', which the participants were determined not to do. 'Staying me' discusses older people's cognitive ways of coping to preserve a sense of continuity in their life and to sustain their sense of self, even if their situation changed, for example they had to move home, or give up some activities. The 'slippery slope' examines the personal, social and community threats and resources that the participants perceive were either supporting or underpinning their efforts to cope and remain independent.

The concluding two chapters are the most insightful. First, Tanner presents a thought-provoking model for 'Sustaining the Self' which shows the impact of the threats and resources identified in the 'slippery slope' on older people's practical and psychological strategies. The model, illustrated by examples from the life-stories of participants and discussed in relation to other models concerned with experiences of illness or ageing, leads Tanner to assert that it is 'older people's own assessments of their behaviour and their own evaluations of how other people view them that is significant in terms of sustaining the self' (p. 184). Tanner then draws on this chapter to explore the implications for social policy and practice arising from the older people's experiences and perceptions, such as the need for sensitive and attentive listening during assessments, as older people are likely to present a 'positive picture of coping'; and to provide 'help' in a way that

supports older people's chosen strategies for living their lives and sustaining their sense of self.

Tanner's book should be recommended reading for all policy makers and professionals involved with older people. In particular this book highlights the difficulties older people experience as they try to remain independent in the face of policies they find incomprehensible, such as needing medical grounds to justify wanting to have a shower; or bureaucratic obstacles, such as waiting over two years for a shower or stair lift to be installed. By bringing to the fore the discrepancies between older people's needs and expectations and social policies and practice, this book provides real impetus for change. Students and professionals will find the overviews of policy and research in this field valuable and the findings are invaluable for all those interested in the lifecourse, and people's experiences of everyday life. But this academic text is also a delight. Written in a clear and engaging style that draws the reader into the everyday lives of older people, it reveals the independent spirit and coping abilities of many of the older participants and is an inspiration for readers who have reached or are approaching these older ages.

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