

N. Chappell, E. Gee, L. McDonald, and M. Stones. *Aging in Contemporary Canada*. Toronto: Prentice Hall, 2003.

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*Aging in Contemporary Canada* est un bel ajout à la documentation canadienne en gérontologie sociale. Logiquement organisé, l'ouvrage nous propose des discussions actuelles et critiques des recherches disponibles et ce, dans un style simple et cohérent. Il comporte cinq parties : introduction, points communs et diversité, santé et bien-être, institutions sociales et politique sociale. Dans l'ensemble, l'ouvrage présente un examen fouillé et à jour des dimensions importantes du vieillissement au Canada. Il intègre avec succès macro-théories et données empiriques aux dimensions micro- ou individuelles du vieillissement. Son approche critique permet au lecteur de déconstruire la perception traditionnelle de la vie des personnes âgées au Canada. Le lecteur est encouragé à poser des questions, s'attendre à du changement et assumer que ce changement résultera de l'interaction dynamique de valeurs et intérêts concurrents. Ce livre est une lecture obligatoire pour mes étudiants et étudiantes; il les stimule comme d'autres livres n'ont pu le faire.

This is a welcome addition to the Canadian social gerontology literature. It combines a logical organization, current and critical discussions of the research literature, and a very readable and coherent literary style: not a small feat, given four authors. The book is organized into five parts: Introduction; Commonalities and Diversity; Health and Well-being; Social Institutions; and Social Policy.

The Introduction provides an overview of forthcoming chapters on demography, social theory, and the nature of research in social gerontology. One strength of the chapter on demography is the section featuring Ellen Gee's well-known thesis that apocalyptic demography and its implications that population aging generally, and a homogenous view of older persons in particular, are used as scapegoats for the failings of the welfare state. The chapter on theory of aging makes a strong and well-articulated case for the value of theory, particularly when the more extreme proponents of postmodernism suggest that predictive patterns can only be false. Another strength of this chapter is its ability to balance micro, macro, and linking theories. For too long, gerontology texts have minimized structural theory and the critical theorizing of feminists and political economists. The chapter on knowledge and the nature of research in gerontology effectively describes useful methodological designs and provides an outline for interpretive or constructivist approaches to understanding data. In other sources, constructivism is too often covered simply as a conceptual framework.

"Commonalities and Diversity" has three chapters: "The Gendered Life Course," "The Cultural Context of Aging," and "Attitudes about Aging." The first examines the role of gender in later life and the implications of gender across the life course. The chapter on culture is a welcome and timely analysis

of ethnic diversity in Canada, alongside a clear statement on the conditions of Aboriginal elders in this country. Combined with the discussion on the growing diversity of family structures (i.e., gay/lesbian, single-parent, and step families), the reader is provided with a depiction of an aging population rich in diversity, one that goes much farther than the view provided by traditional analyses focused on age grading. The chapter on attitudes continues to illustrate the strength in this section by devoting considerable attention to recent research on the normalcy and diversity of sexuality of older persons. Taken as a whole, this section provides a multi-dimensional understanding of diversity that sets it apart from other texts.

"Health and Well-being" is a four-chapter section that, while sometimes exploring the micro/macro interface, is focused on individual well-being. Rather than a focus on the physical decline associated with aging, the physical competence chapter emphasizes the "type of aging" model and its ability to distinguish changes associated with the passage of time from external social context influences. A significant section of this chapter is devoted to performance as competence and, more so than most texts, treats individual and team competitive sports as normative for older persons, while illustrating that with declining physical powers and increased experience, aging competitors are more likely to gravitate toward sports requiring strategy as much as—or more than—physical abilities, such as golf. The chapter dealing with mental well-being and disorders does a good job of balancing well-being with disorder, and notes the established reality that prevalence of mental disorders, such as depression, declines with age at the same time as severe cognitive disorders increase. The cognitive competence chapter deals with memory, intelligence, competence, and exercises that

provide the possibility of cognitive gains, as opposed to inevitable loss and decline. The health chapter includes a well-developed discussion of the determinants of health. While discussion such as this has existed in some quarters for more than 25 years, it has not often been the focus for understanding health beliefs and practices in most gerontology texts; the tradition has been far more individualistic. In contrast, the determinants of health model provides a coherent framework for integrating cultural, gender, and socio-economic influences that affect individual health circumstances.

In part four, "Social Institutions," three chapters examine family life, work and retirement, and social support and caregiving. The family life chapter is notable for outlining the importance of looking beyond census data to, instead, examine economic families and different household structures. Such examinations reveal the complexities of family life reality that census family data do not fully convey. This chapter also confronts topics such as the "sandwich generation," the degree to which it is both real and over-stated, and the growing phenomenon of "boomerang kids" in "cluttered" households. And finally, the chapter reports data that enable readers to see the extent of transfers up and down the generational ladder. In "Work and Retirement," the well-known material on the history of retirement is covered; more important, the political economy of the institutionalization of retirement and pensions is also described. The chapter proceeds to discuss the phenomenon of "clocking out," the unravelling of the life course as it pertains to retirement as we have known it for the past several generations, and the diversity of situations where retirement may assume different forms in future. By outlining new retirement possibilities, data are presented on who retires when and why. As we look forward to changes to mandatory retirement and pension eligibility in coming years, there may well be a need for a new edition of this text in the near future. The chapter on social support begins by debunking the myth of seniors living alone without support. Early research documented extensive social interactions among intergenerational families, but much more research needs to be undertaken on the nature and extent of social support, especially non-familial relationships. Another feature of this chapter is its discussion regarding the overt emphasis on caregiver burden and the comparative neglect of positive caregiving relationships.

In Part 5 the focus is on social policy; the first two chapters emphasize two central social policy issues affecting older persons: economic security and health care. The chapter on pensions details the political economy of developing pensions in Canada, the debates of the 1980s, the retrenchment of the 1990s, and the reason why Canada, notwithstanding huge advances in the fight against poverty, still falls short of providing full economic security for its seniors. Whereas significant gains have been made to reduce poverty among older adults with programs such as the Quebec and Canada Pension Plans, the authors contend that room for further advances lies in private pension plans (e.g., RRSPS and employer plans). These, however, reflect and reproduce economic divisions between the financially privileged and the poor in this country. If all Canadians are to continue to advance in economic well-being, the retrenchment of public plans must be compensated for in the public system, not just in greater private opportunities. Health care is "the debate" in Canada right now, and from pharmacare to home care, older persons are a group with a great deal to win or lose, depending on whether further restructuring of the health care system is driven by the principles of globalization or pluralization. This chapter compares and contrasts medical models of health care to those that reflect health promotion and prevention. The authors suggest that the growing diversity of aging Canadians will require reforms that extend the principles of the *Canada Health Act* to community-based care delivered by multidisciplinary teams of social and health care professionals. Only in this way will those who are disadvantaged by the determinants of health have greater opportunities to attain and maintain well-being in later life.

Overall, this book provides a comprehensive, topical, and up-to-date examination of the important dimensions of aging in Canada. It does a very good job of integrating macro theories and empirical data with the micro or individual dimensions of aging. Its critical approach to issues allows the reader to deconstruct conventional understanding of the lives of older persons in Canada. The reader is encouraged to ask questions, expect change, and assume that change results from a dynamic interaction of competing values and interests. This is the book I make required reading for my students, and it challenges them in ways that other texts do not.