

The final chapter of the book returns to social exclusion issues. Here ageism and inequality are discussed explicitly, as is a theme of safeguarding and end-of-life work. Again these issues are covered in a clear way that will help social workers and students clarify key ideas and approaches. But inevitably they provide a brief overview of concepts rather than exploring these issues of social work practice in depth. It is perhaps this that characterises the book. It provides a stimulating and broad international perspective on a range of ideas and services relevant to citizens of an older generation. However, while achieving this, it did not also address some of the specific challenges of the practice of social work for this group in more depth and so for me was a somewhat frustrating text.

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Leonard W. Poon and Jiska Cohen-Mansfield (eds), *Understanding Well-being in the Oldest Old*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2011, 408 pp., pbk £24.99, ISBN 13: 978 0 521 13200 8.

Striving for happiness is a challenge that we all face during our lives, and immense research efforts have been directed at the identification of markers of wellbeing and the study of changes of wellbeing across the lifespan. However, as the title of the book *Understanding Well-being in the Oldest-old* suggests, in late life the challenge is qualitatively different. How can we understand and interpret the repeatedly found paradox that wellbeing appears to be largely preserved despite social and health-related losses?

Although the 'oldest-old' is a well-established age category, it may at first glance seem out-dated to use this label given the accentuated heterogeneity of health and functioning within this age group. To avoid drawing conclusions that neglect the diversity of the oldest-old, one strategy has been to use functional capacity as a more relevant and appropriate way to cluster subgroups of older adults. However, in this book, co-edited by two authorities within the field, novel and existential questions about wellbeing are addressed in a highly refreshing way that again supports the relevance of using the grouping 'oldest-old'. The book consists of 19 chapters where the contributing authors offer a guide to the complexity of wellbeing in late life, representing perspectives on how wellbeing should be conceptualised, relevant models of adaptation, the factors and individual characteristics that could be related to wellbeing and also important measurement issues.

Understanding Well-being in the Oldest-old is a product of a four-day workshop where US and Israeli researchers in ageing gathered to discuss novel and traditional paradigms that could improve the understanding of the oldest-old age group. More specifically, the aim was to direct focus on the complexity of how positive and negative distal experiences and habits together with proximal environmental influences affect wellbeing, and also to explore how society can support individuals in making the most of their potential. Within this frame the 27 authors manage to draw a both deep and

broad picture of wellbeing. The first section offers an exposition of different perspectives on the distinctiveness of investigating wellbeing in the oldest-old and how the paradox of preserved wellbeing despite loss can be understood. The chapters in the following section focus on the way distal experiences and life events in relation to individual resources come to influence adaptive abilities and wellbeing later in life. In contrast, the third section comprises more traditional research on the continuously on-going reciprocal processes between a range of economic, health-related and psycho-social life circumstances and wellbeing. A particular strength in this section is the emphasis on diversity in the ways people age, encouraging readers to look beyond the 'mean score' findings that have dominated the field in the last decades. The last section is of particular interest for researchers in ageing as it focuses on the question of how to measure wellbeing in the oldest-old. A clarifying exposition is provided with the history of wellbeing research, contrasting strategies of global *versus* domain satisfaction and the importance of including aspects of culture and context. Another strength of the book is the final concluding chapters, which provide the reader with reflections on wellbeing and implications for future research and possible interventions to improve wellbeing.

Understanding Well-being in the Oldest-old is not a book that follows a convention of one-dimensional and alarming focus on the 'fastest growing segment of the oldest-old' and the societal challenges that the age group represents. In contrast, it is a unique collection of texts that, within a lifespan perspective, explore in different ways the possibilities and hindrances associated with wellbeing in individuals aged 85+. The ideas, conclusions and new questions posed illuminate the complexity of what it could really mean to feel well during this period of life. The book contributes with perspectives on ageing that manage to keep the balance between glorification and the tendency to draw a black picture of the lives of the oldest-old.

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Amanda Grenier, *Transitions and the Lifecourse: Challenging the Constructions of 'Growing Old'*, The Policy Press, Bristol, UK, 2012, 256 pp., pbk £26.99, ISBN 13: 978 1 84742 691 8.

The notion of transition has been a key concept in understanding experiences of ageing since the late 1970s, with a wealth of literature exploring the experience of change within the lifecourse and the relationship between continuity and change. This timely book calls for a reconsideration of how we understand and approach late-life transitions and takes a critical approach by examining the intersection between policy, institutional practices and lived experiences. A key question is how do issues of diversity and disadvantage impact the experience of transition?