

## Reviews

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Caroline Mozley, Caroline Sutcliffe, Heather Bagley, Lis Cordingley, David Challis, Peter Huxley and Alistair Burns, *Towards Quality Care: Outcomes for Older People in Care Homes*, Ashgate, Aldershot, Hampshire, in association with the Personal Social Services Research Unit, 2004, 269 pp., hbk £49.50, ISBN 0 7546 3172 9.

One of the most well-worn yet powerful images of late old-age is of somnolent elderly care-home residents ranged around the walls of a communal sitting-room lit by a flickering, unwatched television. This is disengagement at its worst and it has symbolic and frightening force. Any research that suggests what makes for a home where this does not happen, and where the last part of life can have the kind of quality that the residents want, therefore does us all a favour. The aim of this study was to investigate what makes a good care-home for older people. The researchers asked whether there were any aspects of the home (*e.g.* its physical comfort, staffing, staff-resident interaction and available activities) associated with good or poor outcomes for the residents over nine months, as measured by survival, physical and cognitive functioning, mental health and quality of life.

The complex project studied the residents of homes, their relatives or friends, the staff and the environment, using questionnaires, interviews and observation. It was one of the most carefully conducted research projects that one is likely to find, and was beautifully designed, carried out and written up. This kind of project does not happen without either enormous commitment or adequate resources of time and money. It looks as though this project had both, for which it is to be envied. It followed up over nine months 308 people who were admitted to 30 residential and nursing homes in north-west England. Of course there are limitations to the study: the sample of care homes is somewhat biased; the questionnaire response from staff in some homes was very low; it was a pity the data gathering did not last a little longer, but the numbers are sufficient for useful analysis and the biases are taken into account in the analyses and interpretation.

Along with some quite complex findings, a fairly simple message is summarised in the Foreword by Elaine Murphy: ‘a good home is one which has a lot of things for residents to do’. Although the study found that although outcomes were often caused by factors other than the care-home itself (such as the person’s dependency level on admission), nonetheless the home did make a difference, for (i) the provision of opportunities for occupation and pleasurable activities, and (ii) a helpful, friendly atmosphere between staff and residents contributed to both the survival and the mood state of the residents. Apart from these key findings, the study usefully describes the characteristics of the residents and staff which, although not new, need re-emphasising, such as the sizeable proportion of people admitted – even to the nursing homes – with low dependency levels, the high

rates of prescription medication, the poor ability of staff to recognise depression, and the lack of staff training.

This book (and hopefully other outputs from the study) should be read selectively by several different audiences: (i) social research students, who will learn much about the issues to consider when planning and carrying out a research project, and how to deal with them; (ii) workers or researchers with people who have dementia, because they will see evidence about how people with cognitive impairment are quite able to talk about their living arrangements and wellbeing, and need not be excluded from conversations or interviews; (iii) those who need a well-written summary review of quality-of-life measurement; (iv) people who run or manage care-homes; and (v), most importantly, the funders and enablers of opportunities for a more active, pleasurable life for people who live in care-homes.

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Mary Godfrey, Jean Townsend and Tracy Denby, *Building a Good Life for Older People in Local Communities: The Experience of Ageing in Time and Place*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York, 2004, 239 pp., pbk £9.95, ISBN 1 85935 234 0.

This book is the result of a qualitative research project funded by the *Joseph Rowntree Foundation* on the experiences of ageing in two localities in northern England. Older people describe their experiences of ageing under the theme of a 'good life', which are contextualised in time (specifically situated across the lifecourse) and space (the local neighbourhood or 'community'). The text draws on an impressive array of data from focus groups, participant observation, interviews with community informants, and biographical interviews with 82 older people living in Leeds and Hartlepool. The adoption of a 'partnership approach', whereby older people were not just research subjects but also active partners in knowledge production, appears to have been successful, at least for the Leeds participants.

The book's eight chapters successfully address the thematic aim of demonstrating the importance of local places in the lives of older people; the salient events and life experiences that have shaped their views of a good old age; the impact of bereavement and changes to health and (dis)ability on everyday experiences of old age; and the kinds of services and support needed to sustain wellbeing as people age. The first three chapters introduce the study, outline the methodological approach and place the research within the spatial framework of the study locations. The main findings are presented across these and the remaining chapters. 'Transition and continuity' explores the array of experiences of ageing and responses to changes in circumstances among the diverse, and substantial, group of participants. The diversity of situations, far beyond despair and depression, are summarised well. 'The experience of everyday life' focuses on the everyday events and ways of life for the participants, asking 'what life was like for older people on a day-to-day basis', and 'what were the things that were important to them and gave pleasure and meaning?'

No single lifestyle emerges to encapsulate successful ageing and a thoughtful, if complex, picture of continuity and change based around an individual's biography and position in social networks suggests that a 'good old age' requires more than material wealth or good health. The theme of social capital features strongly in 'Social relations and social support', which considers the importance of self-identity and social support networks. Spatially-based networks situated around 'neighbouring' and what might be termed 'community-ness' were particularly important, and demonstrate how older people play central roles in local communities. The penultimate chapter, 'Support from services: experiences and aspirations', outlines the outcomes for policy and describes older peoples' experiences of using formal services and alternative, predominantly neighbourhood-based, support methods. This chapter also identifies some of the perceived needs of less fortunate older people. The conclusion provides a good synopsis of the main findings. The idea of a 'duality of ageing' (p. 225), which considers old age as both a stage on the lifecourse and a series of life-changing experiences that require readjustment and adaptation, is strongly enforced. That older people are resilient, adaptable and active agents in achieving a 'good life' is clearly demonstrated. That they should be engaged with, rather than stereotyped as the powerless victims of old age, is an important message to emerge.

In spite of these qualities, I do have two reservations, the first concerning the discussion of the participatory method. Although highly commendable, elaboration of the methodological implications of the partnership approach would have been welcomed. For example, what were the implications of recruiting older people as researchers given that they might have been well known in the study neighbourhoods? And did this impact on the type of data produced? To illustrate, many participants were recruited through local groups. While not detracting from the recommendation for more locally-based support and service provision or from the finding that older people are active in their communities, should readers be surprised that locally-active participants found local support networks to be central to their sense of wellbeing? Little is said of the experiences of those excluded from local communities. Although some experiences of 'excluded' older people (such as the house-bound) are documented, more effort to present the voices of the marginalised would have been useful. Instead, their experiences are generally presented through participants empathising with 'a cast of other older people' who may be 'isolated, lonely, awkward, miserable, depressed or struggling' (p. 198). Talking to, rather than about, this neglected group would have added considerable understanding to, and perhaps a critique of, the idea of community.

My second reservation concerns the choice of localities for the study. With an explicit focus on their everyday social geographies, the authors provide a useful summary of the 'community' life for older people. Yet much of the book details the experiences of the Leeds-based participants, potentially to the neglect of those in Hartlepool. I was subsequently left wondering why two localities, and these in particular, were selected. Although much is made of comparisons between the two places, their characteristics (an inner-city neighbourhood in Leeds, and in Hartlepool, apparently the entire town) suggest that what is being compared are ontologically different 'communities' constructed at different scales.

On a related point, the book offers limited discussion of the different geographic contexts in which the communities are situated. Both occupy different positions in the social, political and economic system. Leeds is frequently presented as a multi-cultural, post-industrial city supposedly benefiting from major economic restructuring; while Hartlepool, a predominantly white, poverty-stricken town in north east England, has had persistent economic decline and social marginalisation. Yet little of this emerges beyond descriptive background information. Consequently, although the conclusion is useful, that ‘securing wellbeing in old age requires understanding and action at many different levels: individual, neighbourhood, community and society’ (p. 228), there remain unexplored implications about the role of the local ‘community’ in creating and tackling different experiences of ageing. More discussion of the spatial differences between these places and scales, in addition to the well-documented social differences between older people, might have provided a more nuanced appreciation of ‘local communities’ and ‘place’.

I do not, however, want these criticisms to detract from my praise for the book. The myriad of experiences of ageing, and ways of adapting to the changes induced by the process are well documented and the main findings demand serious consideration. I recommend it to anyone interested in the everyday experiences of ageing.

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Sarah Vickerstaff, John Baldock, Jennifer Cox and Linda Keen, *Happy Retirement? The Impact of Employers' Policies and Practice on the Process of Retirement*, Policy Press, Bristol, Avon, 2004, 43 pp., pbk £13.95, ISBN 1 86134 584 4.

This latest report in the *Joseph Rowntree Foundation* series, *Transitions after 50*, deals with the part played by employers in the retirement decision and process, including its timing and nature. The authors contest that this is an aspect of retirement research that has been neglected. Most literature focuses on individual factors that predict a retirement decision, or discusses the impact of economic or fiscal policies; this literature is helpfully reviewed for those wishing to get up to date. The case is then made for investigating the crucial part played by employers and how this is operationalised within organisations.

The picture is complex and several influences interact: demography, economic policy, cultural and cohort-related expectations, to name a few. The report successfully summarises the current policy climate around retirement, including a trend towards individualisation, which has been accentuated by British government messages about working longer, saving harder and being responsible for retirement planning. The trouble is, the authors believe, that the retirement decision and its circumstances are not actually in the hands of most retirees.

Using three major organisations as case studies and interviewing employees, retirees and managers, the research team from the University of Kent has constructed a model of the factors that produce retirement. This is immensely helpful

for researchers and practitioners alike, since it has the feel of something grounded in a working environment. We know that cultural and cohort (baby boomer) expectations now lead employees and organisations to think that older workers change, their relationship to the labour market from around the age of 50 years, but the role of management in this 'retirement zone' is stronger than previously acknowledged.

Most employees perceive that they have little or no control over their retirement date, yet all sorts of factors come into play that will contribute to their propensity to retire, such as work satisfaction, family circumstances, health status, financial resources, and the pull of their 'other life'. The authors go on to describe three categories of retiree, with several variant sub-groups within each type. This is helpful for those who wish to understand and steer such processes, but also interestingly illustrates another previously unacknowledged aspect – the actual lack of planning on the part of the employer. If there were manpower planning policies around age-related exit (retirement), these were often short-term and responding to current or imminent circumstances. This resulted in unpredictable and inconsistent treatment of the employees at different times. It had the effect of decreasing people's sense of control, which we know is important for a satisfactory withdrawal from work. It also discourages personal planning, since all could be overtaken by events. Another outcome, hinted at by the authors, is that employees could respond to this policy vacuum by seizing the initiative to negotiate, even if retirement or flexible working appears non-negotiable. For employers the message is clearer: see the value in pro-actively developing an age-positive policy in human resource planning, or else lost opportunities, inefficiencies and inequalities in the way retirement is managed will continue, to the detriment of workers and organisations.

This report provides a valuable picture of the complex and changing face of retirement, as experienced in three large organisations. They all had occupational pension schemes, so cannot represent the majority of employees; and though all were located in South East England, they were in different economic sectors and in both buoyant and depressed labour markets. By throwing particular light on the employer/employee setting, the individual retirement decision-making process (which the UK Government is attempting to influence) is seen to be much more contingent on several factors that no-one is actually directing. The *Joseph Rowntree* series, including this title, continues to be a clarifying and illuminating source of research-based material for anyone interested in late middle age and how it affects later life.

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Tony Maltby, Bert De Vroom, Maria Luisa Mirabile and Einar Overbye (eds), *Ageing and the Transition to Retirement: A Comparative Analysis of European Welfare States*, Ashgate, Aldershot, Hampshire, 2004, 310 pp., hbk £49.95, ISBN 0 7546 0922 7.

For some time, European governments have recognised the need to extend the working lives of its older citizens. The consensus which prevailed in the 1980s and

early-1990s among policy-makers, employers and many older people themselves, that early retirement was an economic and labour-market necessity has largely ended. It has been replaced by policies and, to a lesser extent, practices, which encourage gradual and extended periods of work beyond the long customary retirement ages. It is timely, then, for Maltby and his co-editors to have brought together this fascinating collection of papers on transitions to retirement in 12 European Union countries. The book is the product of a European network on early retirement, set up under the European Union *COST Action A13* programme, 'Changing labour markets, welfare policies and citizenship'. There were four cross-national working groups which examined the effects of social security systems and welfare institutions on the processes of social and political marginalisation.

The four-page introduction lists the core research questions and the target audience for the book (academics and policy-makers). The editors' main intention was to map the most important institutional changes that have taken place at the end of the working life. In Chapter 2, Bert de Vroom introduces the Working Group's conceptual framework, which provides a broad structure for the 12 country-specific chapters. The framework incorporates the multiple dimensions involved in retirement transitions. These 'age arrangements' are said to consist of age cultures (norms, perceptions, values and ideas), age programmes (rules, systems, policy initiatives and practical guidelines), and actor constellations (involving the actions of unions, managers and staff). Each chapter is written by a national of the country it examines, and they range from relatively new researchers to well-established academic experts. The country profiles cover Norway, Denmark and Finland, Hungary and Slovenia, Italy and Spain, Germany, The Netherlands, France, Belgium and the United Kingdom.

There are many excellent chapters in the collection. The most satisfying are those which summarise succinctly the labour market trends, the alternating approaches of policy-makers, and the impact of these measures on older people. In these chapters, country-specific approaches are compared over time, set within a broader European context and then reviewed with a critical eye. In a few cases, the chapters fail to capture the broad themes sufficiently clearly and concisely. Overall, however, the book is a much-needed update on the seminal collection edited by Kohli, Rein, Guillemard and Gunsteren (1991). Martin Kohli, Anne-Marie Guillemard and Bert de Vroom (a contributor to the 1991 collection) also have chapters in this book.

The collection would have benefited from a synthesis of the many insights and contrasting patterns to be found in the country-specific chapters. These 12 European countries have designed and implemented many different welfare regimes, employment pathways and retirement initiatives. It is left to the reader to assimilate and compare the approaches and their relative success over the last few decades. Without this kind of overview, I suspect most readers will be inclined only to dip in-and-out of the chapters on the countries where their chief interests lie. This is a loss, but perhaps a small one compared to the many important perspectives on current European approaches to retirement transitions that the collection provides.

## References

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Studs Terkel, *Hope Dies Last: Making a Difference in an Indifferent World*, Granta, London, 2003, 326 pp., hbk £14.99, ISBN 1357910842.

It was, I believe, late in the summer of 2004 when I was asked to review this book. I am not alone in being a long-time admirer of Studs Terkel, and the topic of his latest book, *Hope*, was something I felt I both wanted and needed to read about. In fact I did not begin reading the book until 4th November, the day after the United States election. As the election returns began unfolding, I took solace in these pages, and they did not disappoint.

The book has contributions from 56 diverse women and men. They are sung and unsung heroes, (mostly) ordinary people doing extraordinary things. As Terkel comments, they ‘challenge the official word’, which is what he has done throughout his long life. The contributors are teachers, preachers, 1960s activists, bicycle couriers, corporate executives, cleaners, new immigrants to the United States, and others. Most of them share some form of Terkel’s progressive politics, and can generally be described as activists, people with a fundamental belief in the human potential to alter situations through sustained, organised action.

But there are a few surprises among the authors. For instance, there is a Republican congressman, who, having been physically abused as a child, has dedicated his life to challenging bullies at all levels. (Consistent with Terkel’s style, he does not push this contributor to address the ‘bullying’ tactics, both domestically and internationally, of the current US administration.) More surprising still is the inclusion of the pilot of the *Enola Gay*, the plane that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Almost boastfully, the Brigadier General quotes an historian on the effects of the bomb being dropped: ‘In one microsecond, the city of Hiroshima didn’t exist’. More than half-a-century later, he has, he says, no ‘second thoughts’ about dropping the bomb. Asked about the possible use of nuclear weapons in the post-9/11 world, he responded, ‘I wouldn’t hesitate if I had the choice. I’d wipe ‘em out’. As for the potential loss of civilian life? ‘That’s their tough luck for being there’ (p. 54). Not a lot of hope there.

But such views are the exception. The book is full of stories of people fighting for their rights and for the rights of others. Some of the contributors are household names, others known only to those whose lives they touch. Terkel interviews Tom Hayden, for instance, in the month of the 40th anniversary of his drafting the *Port Huron Statement*, a key document of the 1960s student movement. Forty years on, what has happened to Hayden, to his ideals? He talks candidly about the challenge of rescuing our ideals from the rubble of 9/11: ‘Bin Laden and these guys handed the conservative right-wing in America an opportunity they never

would have achieved on their own'; and he talks of the importance of 'recovering rage'. For Hayden, there has been no dying of the light. He describes himself in his early sixties as being in the third stage of life: 'Here you try to bring together the best of the idealism you had when you were a kid and what you've learned about the world and the rat race. So at worst you're compromised, but at best, you're a smart idealist, you've learned something, you've matured' (p. 70). He describes old age as 'the only opportunity you'll have for wisdom'. Time and again I was reminded of Albert Schweitzer's words of wisdom: 'Grow into your ideals, so that life may never rob you of them'.

Although Terkel is aged in the nineties, this is not a book about ageing, but more fundamentally a book about life, and about what it means to live with hope, especially in hard times. This book is about taking stock of lives – not only the lives of those whose stories are contained within it, but of our own lives. How far have we travelled off the 'path with heart'? Have we lost our way? The book affirms that small actions can and do make a difference, even when we might not know the effect they are having.

Of course, some will find fault with Terkel's unorthodox methods, especially his insistence on omitting his own questions and presenting the portraits of his contributors as 'stand alone' pieces. But his introductions to his 'characters' are alluring; they have the character of the opening notes to a play, in which the author conveys just the information that s/he thinks the reader needs to enter the opening scene. Sometimes there is just one line ('Bill is 32 years-old'), and sometimes a full page. Terkel's goal is to pull his reader in – to make us love hearing these stories as much as he has loved recording them – in which he is very successful. There is, indeed, much hope to be found in these pages: it is not only the stories which Terkel documents which inspire hope in the reader, but the very person Terkel himself. In 2005 he will be 93 years of age, and he continues to be very passionate about life – his own and others. Maybe this is a book about successful ageing after all.

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Carol Levine and Thomas H. Murray (eds), *The Cultures of Caregiving: Conflict and Common Ground among Families, Health Professionals, and Policy Makers*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 2004, 187 pp., \$35.00, ISBN 0 8018 7863 2.

If you have ever confronted the healthcare system on behalf of a frail older relative who is in need of professional help and service, you will probably recognise the frustration that has produced this book about the conflicting cultures of care-giving. The basic premise of the editors is, in their own words, that 'families, health care professionals, and health policy makers and administrators have distinctive cultures – ways of viewing the world – which affect their priorities and actions in the care of an elderly or ill person' (p. 1). And more so, that the dominant medico-technical culture is in conflict with the more holistic, and



relation-oriented way of thinking in families. So far so good; if not a new perspective, it is certainly a sympathetic and humane one that is well motivated in these times of cost containment and consumerism.

The book has 11 chapters organised into four sections, starting with perspectives on family care-giving, and continuing with historical trends, societal (political) contexts, and a concluding section on how to bridge the gaps between cultures. There are also introductory and concluding chapters from the two editors. Most chapters are well-phrased and interesting, and the whole integrates more distant scholarly pieces with narratives and case studies. The latter help in understanding the former, which is a good thing for European readers, as this is a book about the United States reality, with the implication that the policy issues raised are not easily transferred elsewhere. The volume would in my mind have profited from an inclusion of comparative, cross-national perspectives, if not in separate chapters, then at least in the review of earlier studies. Even the review, as far as I can see, is exclusively (north) American.

The guiding concept, 'culture', is defined loosely as 'world views' and as shared values and practices within a group. Certainly, when visiting nursing homes, we can very quickly sense that they indeed have different atmospheres. So also with families, from the warm and affectionate, through those that maintain instrumental relations to those that are hostile. The latter are fortunately less common than the former, but there is some evidence that poor health and care-giver burdens represent a strain on the quality of family relationships. Hence, some people – and families – are better off when they are relieved from such stress. To be sure, there are different ideals, as there are different tasks, roles and regulations among the stakeholders in care-giving. 'Culture' may be an appropriate metaphor for these differences, but is rather vague for analytical purposes. The authors illustrate convincingly that different world views clash in the common arena of long-term care, but does 'culture' – however intriguing it may sound – help us understand this better? It remains to be seen.

The book focuses on the low status of home-care in US policy and practice. This is, in fact, a common condition for liberal and conservative welfare states. They tend to leave such needs and tasks to the family. Quite a few European welfare states, as in Germany and Spain, also enforce family responsibility through legislation. Why this is so can hardly be explained simply by 'culture', and if such an explanation is attempted, something remains unexplained. It doesn't help my understanding to read, for example, that 'health policy makers also have a particular culture that governs their attitudes, assumptions and values' (p. 103). There must be other forces in action. 'Culture' may better be seen as an ideological construction of an established reality than as the explanation for the reality.

I would have liked to have seen a discussion along these lines. A comparative perspective would have been useful, as it would make it possible to contrast, for example, the United States with Germany, which has expanded public responsibility in this area through an obligatory long-term care insurance scheme. Other interesting contrasts would be with the Scandinavian countries, which have given far higher priority than other welfare states to home-care services relative to institutional care. I agree with the editors that we need more research

in this area, but we do in fact know more than ‘very little about home care, and (the) interaction between family carers and professional home care aids’ (p. 173). There are several studies in countries with a relatively strong tradition of home-care services, like the United Kingdom, The Netherlands and in Scandinavia. The authors do not, however, refer to any studies from these countries.

This may be an easy and slightly unfair criticism; the book should be evaluated in its own right. There is, for example, an interesting reference to the ambivalence among policy makers towards family care and carers, including the idea that service provision risks substituting or replacing family care. Family care persists more strongly than is indicated by the substitution thesis, as is well illustrated throughout the book. In many countries, however, the comparative contribution of the family is far less than the ratio of nine-to-one assumed by the editors for the United States.

The book calls for a more family-centred approach to care-giving policy, but there are risks to such an approach, as individual rights may lose out to family needs. There is no easy solution, but just as policies should acknowledge and support families, they need also to recognise that there may be conflicting interests. Scandinavian studies indicate, for example, that when organised services are available and of sufficient quality, a rising percentage of older people (and now the large majority) prefer formal services to family care. A return to family responsibility rather than individual rights as the basis for social policy is not sustainable, and could moreover compromise rather than support family (*viz.* female) care-giving.

The book is stronger on goodwill than analytical rigour. It is very readable but a touch naïve and sentimental. Take, for example, the claim that ‘the fundamental questions that must be raised to bring the policy and caregiver cultures together is: Are we as a society willing to share the burdens of caregiving?’ (p. 112). Most readers will subscribe to the good intention of the editors, as expressed in the final message: ‘The book wants to create humane and compassionate environments for care. This is not just a matter of benevolence; it’s also a matter of justice’ (p. 182). Amen to that.

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Julia Neuberger, *Dying Well: A Guide to Enabling a Good Death*, Radcliffe, Oxford, second edition, 2004, 176 pp., pbk £21.95, ISBN 1 85775 940 0.

The first edition of this book, which focused on spiritual care and was written for those involved with the care of dying and bereaved people, was published in 1999 and has been recognised as a key text in death and dying literature. It provided a clear guide to enabling a good death, and while most readers were likely to be professional carers, its accessible and engaging style made it a useful book for all carers of dying people. The treatment considered all age groups and, while most of the points applied to older people, only a part of one chapter was specific to later life.

In this second edition, the author examines the concept of a 'good death' and what this might mean to individual dying people. The book does much more than offer guidance, it informs the reader of the way that the notion of the 'good death' has changed. Chapter 1 charts the ways in which universal ideas about death have been constructed over time. Here the author distinguishes between culture and belief, locating the 'good death' in ancient, religious writings. The contemporary 'good death' in Britain is associated with the hospice way of death, but the author acknowledges its limited provision.

Chapter 2 covers grief reactions and the author presents guidance to supporting people with both 'normal' and 'abnormal' reactions. While the normalising grief thesis has recently been contested by Walter and Prior, Neuberger acknowledges the need for individual diversity. Any guide to grief support will meet with the dilemma of offering universal guidance, while, at the same time, acknowledging the need to respect difference and diversity. Not all readers will feel comfortable with the central argument that carers can only help people if they are in touch with their own feelings. Even if this approach was uncontested, then the support available to carers to do so is unlikely to be available, except in the special circumstances described by the author. These situations of good support are most likely to be available to those working in palliative care teams, and to carers in small communities and religious groups.

In Chapter 3, the author provides clear guidance to various carers who could enable a 'good death' for dying people. It was pleasing to note that the need for training and education that is appropriate to all carers was acknowledged: it certainly does not currently exist (Sidell 2003). The consideration of religious and personal care in Chapter 4 (the longest chapter) sets the scene for a detailed discussion of specific religious beliefs and customs. When describing different approaches to death, it is difficult to avoid a 'fact-file' approach. I would have welcomed more guidance to carers on how it might be possible to facilitate opportunities to discuss 'dying wishes'; that would have given greater recognition to individual diversity as well as difference. The penultimate chapter discusses the issues surrounding euthanasia. It puts aside the discourse of guidance and moves to a nuanced and sensitive discussion of ethical dilemmas at the end-of-life. I found this chapter one of the most interesting in the book, because it was not prescriptive, even though the author's own point of view was clear.

The final chapter returns to the debate about a 'good death' and the nuances of the concept. It reviews the practical tasks that can be done by all carers, regardless of their professional qualifications, and the need to be emotionally engaged with the dying person and how best to respond to grief reactions. My sense, however, was that there was too much emphasis on grief and not enough on the difficulties that arise from the competing notions of a good death among small groups and in society. Even a carer and a dying person can disagree on what makes a good death, with consequences for the way that a 'good death' is interpreted and enabled. Apart from these difficulties, to provide care for everyone to the standard that meets the needs of each individual dying person has enormous resource implications. While the focus is on non-physical care, without pain and symptom relief to the standard that the dying person needs, any communication will be difficult.

This book will be useful to those who, regardless of their background and experience, are involved in caring for dying people. It offers both prescriptive guidance and nuanced discussion of death and dying issues. It is well written and acknowledges the right of all dying people to access the services that will enable the type of death that is appropriate to their own needs, even though the emphasis leans towards death and grief rather than the period of dying.

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Faith Gibson, *The Past in the Present: Using Reminiscence in Health and Social Care*, Health Professions Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 2004, 336 pp., pbk \$32.95, ISBN 1 878812 87 4.

For the past few years, narratives in their myriad forms – autobiographical memory, life stories, reminiscence, life review or narrative gerontology – have gained increasing currency among contemporary researchers and practitioners in academic nursing, psychology and social work, and in the humanities and oral history. Theoretical and applied insights are beginning to accrue to the point where, at present, we can identify several relatively robust findings upon which sound research and practice principles can be based. This emerging sense of clarity and growing confidence is nowhere more evident than in this excellent book by Faith Gibson. In her engaging, balanced and expertly-crafted volume, Gibson draws upon her extensive, pioneering practice and the growing body of theory and research findings pertaining to the psychosocial components of personal memories.

This is one of the few applied volumes to ground recommended treatment approaches conscientiously in prior theory and empirical results. In so doing, it mitigates the often-remarked chasm between experimental researchers and applied practitioners of reminiscence and life review interventions. This alone is a laudable result. But the 10 chapters of Gibson's treatise go well beyond this auspicious start. The main purpose of this work is to provide theoretically situated, practically productive, and ethically-sensitive guidelines to the front-line workers most likely to engage in reminiscence work.

Part 1 has three chapters. The first sets the foundation of reminiscence work squarely within the parameters of theoretical memory systems, specifically autobiographical memory, and addresses important dimensions of recall, such as its dynamic, reconstructive nature, developmental significance and multiple functions. Individual difference variables such as context, age, gender and health are also discussed. Chapter 2 presents a balanced contrast between legitimate reasons

for encouraging reminiscence with the multiple concerns that the process is harmful or a waste of time. Chapter 3 is an important contribution in its articulation of the potential benefits for staff development of reminiscence programmes. It makes explicit that reminiscence is a social process with reciprocal effects: both the listener and teller gain. Moreover, it illustrates the power of listeners to co-construct narratives in both positive and negative ways.

Part 2 has four chapters on reminiscence practice, which provide helpful information on the 'nuts and bolts' of planning, executing and evaluating a creative array of reminiscence interventions and outcomes. Several performance (dance, theatre, music shows, singing), visual (collage, memory boxes, murals, quilts, pottery, CD-ROMs) and written (poetry, memoir, scrapbook, spiritual autobiography, diary) representations of reminiscence and life-review are described. Moreover, several case illustrations and organisational success stories are used to highlight the many innovative ways in which reminiscence enriches and empowers people of diverse backgrounds, such as *Elders Share the Arts* (USA) and *The People's History Initiative* (Northern Ireland). It is important to recognise that these positive reports are not like Pollyanna's, naïve and selective, but rather moderated with appropriate caveats and adequate discussion of their potential limitations.

Nevertheless, Gibson's astute observations, based on many years of running such groups, allow the reader to develop confidence in and enthusiasm for reminiscence as a powerful tool for increased life satisfaction, identity enhancement, creativity development, social interaction, and community involvement. As an adjunct to Part 2, several practical appendices are included, featuring sample forms, reference charts, historical timelines, and Barbara Haight's *Life Review and Experiencing Form* (LREF), perhaps the most comprehensive and structured life-review framework currently available (pp. 301–6).

The third part has three chapters and is an honest and sensitive reflection on the potential strengths and possible limitations of using reminiscence with a particular subgroup, suffering from dementias, particularly Alzheimer's disease. Gibson compassionately shows that patiently and collaboratively engaging another individual in the co-construction of their life story, or at least parts of it, provides opportunities for profoundly intimate contacts among family, caregivers and those even with late-stage Alzheimer's.

This book will 'age well' as an invaluable reference and guide to good health-care practice for advanced undergraduates and graduate students, teachers, family members, and, not least, front-line workers and administrators responsible for programmes. They will return again and again to its sage insights. Moreover, experimental researchers of autobiographical memory, reminiscence and life-review will be reminded that good theory and research eventually finds a practical outlet. That the practice which flows from this solid empirical base can be life-affirming, serves as a positive incentive for both researchers and practitioners to continue their collaborative efforts to investigate how personal narratives improve lives. Gibson's book is a bright beacon for the joint endeavour.

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Samantha Holland, *Alternative Femininities: Body, Age and Identity*, Berg, Oxford, 2004, 256 pp., pbk £15.99, ISBN 185973 808 7.

Clothes are the vestimentary envelopes that hide our bodies yet reveal our identities. This fascinating study explores the experiences of a group of women who adopt a consciously alternative style of dress; and in doing so it unpacks the complex and personal meanings of femininity as they are worked through at the level of body and clothes. The book sadly contains no pictures, and the reader has to scan the text to gain a sense of the richly alternative appearances adopted by these women, with their extensive pierces, whole arm or leg tattoos, black bondage or Goth clothing, and pink and purple dreads. It is an assertive, in-your-face look that defies convention. These are consciously-fashioned and self-created bodies and identities. There is little interest here in ideas such as the 'natural'. To this extent, they stand in contrast to earlier feminist aspirations, at least of the second wave, which held that to be natural was the way of freedom and that fashion was itself oppressive. By contrast, these women embrace artifice and self-fashioning, and many of them associate feminism with limitation not freedom. They are, however, still interested in being 'strong' women. Some felt that their appearance made them more able to occupy public space and to feel less vulnerable; though it also exposed them to negative comment. Some felt, however, that this had its advantages in teaching them how to stand up to, and return, the appraising gaze of conventional culture.

The central theme of the book turns around femininity, and the ways in which it is rendered, played out, resisted and understood through clothes and appearance. Though the identities of these women were constructed against an image of conventional 'fluffy femininity', which was actively despised, they did not reject femininity as such. Some adopted aspects of dress associated with men – very short hair, leather bikers' clothes, but they did not regard themselves as 'masculine' or unfeminine. For them, masculinity and femininity remained distinct and polar categories that did not lie on a gender continuum. Rather, they saw femininity as an arena where negotiation, variety and radicalism were possible. It was not always clear, however, how their alternative appearance related to wider oppositional identities. Though the links were there, the one could not always be read automatically from the other, certainly not at a political level, for these forms of dress could be as much aesthetic as ideological. One of the striking features of the study concerns continuities with the experiences of other women. Though these women were self-consciously alternative in their appearance, with a critical edge to their relations with High Street and suburban culture, they shared many of these preoccupations with other women. A number, for example, expended considerable time and effort on their appearance, and derived much pleasure from the process of creative self-fashioning. They experienced their clothes and appearance as expressive, and closely linked to a sense of their own femininity.

Most of the women in the study were aged in the late-twenties and thirties, but their thoughts had begun to turn to questions of ageing, and its impact on their appearance. Alternative culture has its roots in youth culture, and the values it expresses are those of youth – rebelliousness, shock and edgy sexuality. The study

raises questions of what happens when these groups reach midlife or old age, particularly those who have remained faithful to an alternative identity in dress, and it explores the tensions that those who self-identify as ‘alternative’ women will experience. All of them wanted to age disgracefully and to retain radical dress and behaviour, but they shared the wider, largely negative, cultural estimations of old age. The older ones noted with resentment and resignation that they had begun to ‘tone down’ their appearance. They watched what other women did, and used this to gauge how appropriate or inappropriate their appearance might have become. In youth the aim had been to be as outrageous and different as possible, but the approach of older age presented a different potential meaning to that appearance – not wild and sexy, but monstrous or grotesque – and that anxiety acted to discipline and control their responses. One of the messages of this excellent book is that there is no escape from style, just as there is no escape from ageing.

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Kate Davidson and Graham Fennell (eds), *Intimacy in Later Life*, Transaction, Somerset, New Jersey, 169 pp., pbk \$24.95, ISBN 0 7658 0557 X.

Most chapters in this volume arose from a symposium on *Repartnering after Late-Life Widowhood: The Gendered Perspective*, which was held at the 17th International Congress of the International Association of Gerontology, Vancouver, Canada in 2001. The volume has eight contributions from six countries. Each one raises interesting questions and issues about companionship and remarriage following a first marriage. The topic of new forms of intimacy is still rather neglected and surrounded by myths, stereotypes and, in some countries, aversion.

The first contribution by Sofie Ghazanfareeon Karlsson and Klas Borell focuses on the structural differences between married partners and ‘Living-Apart-Together’ (LAT) partner relationships. They suggest that the bond between LAT partners is based principally upon mutual emotional and moral commitments, rather than upon structural factors such as shared housing, children or mutual friends. Deborah Carr and Rebecca Utz review new directions in research and theory on late-life widowhood in the United States, and in particular stress methodological issues (longitudinal approaches), the importance of pre-loss data and the multi-faceted nature of the widowhood process. What appears very important is how the death of a spouse is experienced, whether it is a sudden death or a slow one following gradual and progressive decline and increasing care. Nan Stevens reports two Dutch studies of late-life widows and widowers. She identifies three types of new partnerships: consummate partnerships; steady companions; and a pattern in which participants regularly exchange instrumental services according to gender roles. Kate Davidson reports a small qualitative study (25 widows and 26 widowers) of gender differences in new partnership choices. She questions the two most frequently cited (demographic and cultural) reasons as to why the remarriage rate of widowers is much greater than that of

widows. None of the widows in her study wanted a new relationship, regardless of age, health or wealth status. The principal reasons for not wanting a new relationship, she found, were that they did not wish to look after another man, they had had a happy marriage and their late spouse could not be replaced. Deborah Kestin van den Hoonard's qualitative study reported in Chapter 6 presents similar results.

Jenny Gierveld presents findings from an empirical study of 173 widowed and divorced men and women aged 55 to 89 years. They were classified by the bonds and living arrangements adopted by the new partners: remarriage, unmarried cohabitation or LAT. She concludes that, in general, compared to sharing one home, LAT relationships offer better opportunities for the partners to continue their accustomed lives and to optimise their family relationships and social activity. In-depth interviews with a few people in LAT relationships showed that they were realising the benefits of combining a partner relationship with maintaining their own 'one-person' household. Alinde Moore and Dorothy Stratton report a very interesting qualitative study of 51 widowers aged from 58 to 104 years, most living in the United States with a few in Canada. The question was: What is the experience of widowhood for older men? In particular, the researchers were interested in how (new) women had come into their lives and how they had been approached both in terms of companionship and sexuality. Almost all of the men had developed a sustaining relationship with a 'current' woman. The last chapter by Kalyani K Mehta is about the perceptions of remarriage by widowed people in Singapore. It appears that the idea of 'a marriage for a lifetime' is still strong, although more so for widowed women than men. Consequently, there is very limited acceptance of any form of repartnering.

This neatly composed volume is very welcome and informative. Family medical practitioners, nurses, social workers, psychotherapists and relationship consultants who advise people in late adulthood may well profit from reading this book. It provides insights and understanding of the relational options and constraints among those confronted with widowhood or divorce in later life. Many questions remain unanswered, however: on the one hand, being confronted by widowhood or divorce is a very disturbing experience which takes time to recover from and to re-adjust; on the other hand, meeting the need for intimacy (which appears to be in some way or another universal) is a process that requires an open mind and subtle moderation. Can both processes work alongside each other? There are also questions about the role of the children of the first (or former) marriage, to which the contributions give little attention. Nevertheless, this volume is an important step forward in understanding new forms of intimate relationships during the second half of life.

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