

Health and Human Services, the National Institutes of Health or the National Institute on Aging, except where noted.

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Kate de Medeiros, *The Short Guide to Aging and Gerontology*, Policy Press, Bristol, UK, 2017, 243 pp., pbk £14.99, ISBN 13: 978-1-4473-2838-4.

The purpose of this book, as stated by the author, is to ‘provide a concise overview of the field of gerontology’ (p. X), with the hope that it will ‘open new discussions about how we think about and study aging, gerontology’s evolution as a field and new directions for research’ (p. X11). The book explores not only why we age but the phenomena of how ageing has been defined, experienced and studied throughout the history of time. The work focuses on a wide range of literature from the social sciences, but excludes the medical and biological literature as being beyond the scope of the book. One of the strengths of the book is the way it deals with issues, so that as you read, it appears to be more of a conversation about a series of interrelated and connected topics unfolding through the different chapters. This has the virtue of demonstrating the holistic nature of gerontology and the complexity of the concepts explored.

The book divides naturally into two parts: the first provides a challenging look at the meaning of age, ageing and gerontology, and challenges where these fit into the experience of age for the individual. The second part explores different themes in the gerontology repertoire including family, death, grief, loss and loneliness, social location and place, financing of age, and narrative and creativity.

In the first part of the book (Chapters 1–4), the author provides an extensive exploration of the meaning of ‘ageing’ and ‘gerontology’. This section deconstructs some of the theories and common assumptions related to functional abilities in later life and shows that many are embedded in the biomedical model. The author makes a good argument for disassociating older age from decline and, instead, much of the discussion is aimed at encouraging the reader to reflect on new opportunities and the positive

aspects of ageing. This is a strong theme throughout the book. These chapters also provide a critical overview of the theories that have traditionally been considered relevant to our understanding of how individuals age. In Chapter 2, there is an excellent table summarising the ‘major perspectives and explanatory stances in gerontology’ (pp. 31–4).

The second part of the book picks out key issues in the field of gerontology and provides a historical timeline as well as many challenges to traditional thinking about these topics. These chapters provide a rich discourse on issues such as rethinking family and family structures; death, grief, loss and loneliness; social location and place; financing old age; and narrative and creativity. Each chapter critically discusses the issues with reference to past realities and ensures the reader focuses not only on traditional views but embraces the changing status of current thinking and research. For instance, in Chapter 5 the author provides some excellent arguments and discussion about how we view family relationships. She argues there is a need to rethink our assumptions and view family relationships within the wider context of individual expectations and evolving cultural definitions of family structures. In Chapter 6 the author looks at death, grief, loss and loneliness. The introduction to the chapter explores the cultural meaning of death and how it is seen across the lifecourse and posits whether this contributes to the negative view of ageing held by many in society. The author argues that ‘death, apart from end of life care, is not talked about in the context of aging overall and suggests that if dying is the last stage of the lifecourse, it deserves a more prominent place in the gerontological literature’ (p. 137). The final chapter reinforces the positivity of the book by presenting the role of narrative, creativity and wisdom as a means of providing ‘new ways to focus on the “growth” part of growing old’ (p. 208).

Overall, the book is aptly named as it provides a comprehensive snapshot of the history of gerontology in what is a constantly evolving field of study. It makes a valuable addition to the literature on gerontology, and is written in an easy and accessible language, making it an excellent text for students new to the subject area. The structure of the book is clear and easy to read. The number of tables throughout the book provide an additional strength to the text. A limitation of the guide, as acknowledged by the author, is its Western focus and the heavy influence of literature from the United States of America and the United Kingdom. The work could have a greater contemporary feel with more recent references, but it does provide a substantial background to today’s challenges and appears to meet all the aims it set out to achieve.

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