

practice guide on involving older people in research developed by European Research Area in Ageing (ERA-AGE), a consortium of 14 countries. In Chapter 5, Ethna Parker (with Joseph Allen and Eeva Beveridge) gives a detailed account of planning and carrying out research about older carers, with the carers treated as ‘co-researchers’. In Chapter 6, Josie Tetley draws on her experience of involving older people in a number of different research projects to suggest ‘pearls, perils and pitfalls’. Jonathan Hughes’s concluding chapter reflects on issues raised by seminar participants. He stresses that although these new ways of working with older people are valuable, problems remain, not least about translating research into change.

Anthony Gough ‘only interviewed people aged over 50’ (p. 10); Ethna Parker’s ‘co-researchers’ were ‘older adults over the age of 55’ (p. 41). These are the only attempts to indicate what might be meant by ‘older people’, a phrase used throughout the book. CPA, CABS and others involved in the seminar may use this as shorthand, taking for granted that their colleagues understand the complexities, and the danger of assuming homogeneity. For those coming new to the subject, however, it would have been good to say something about this at the beginning. Another surprising omission is any suggestion that professional researchers may themselves be ‘older people’ – of particular relevance when older people’s advantage as lay researchers is seen as the ability to relate to the experience of older subjects. Could it be class or status rather than age which is really at issue here?

If there are further volumes in the series, I hope that more attention will be paid to final proof-reading. Some chapters have many typographical errors, and in a few cases it is unclear whether a view expressed is that of the presenter of the seminar paper or the editor. Overall, the book gives a thoughtful and realistic picture of the practicalities and potential of using older people as lay researchers. The reference lists at the end of most chapters provide further opportunities to explore the subject. To a reader in the United Kingdom in 2011, the question must be whether such involvement will continue to develop, and will be valued sufficiently to withstand cutbacks in public expenditure and research funding.

London

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doi:10.1017/S0144686X11000456

Courtney C. Coile and Phillip B. Levine, *Reconsidering Retirement: How Losses and Layoffs Affect Older Workers*, The Brookings Institution, Washington DC, 2010, 156 pp., hbk £19.99, ISBN 13: 978 0 8157 0499 7.

This unusual and interesting book investigates the influence of both the financial and housing markets together with labour market conditions on retirement decisions and subsequent retiree wellbeing. The discussion is narrowly located focusing on the United States of America (USA), where the economic downturn since 2008 has hit older Americans the hardest. Its underpinning theme is that Americans are poorly prepared for retirement

and, against a background of corporate downsizing as one response to the recent economic crisis, many older Americans have lost their jobs and have been forced into premature retirement without adequate resources to maintain preferred lifestyles and ongoing health-care costs.

This, however, is not the whole picture painted by Coile and Levine who skilfully draw out the complexities of the interconnected impacts of falling property values, reduced returns from capital investments and the rising cost of health insurance, which mean that a significant proportion of older workers are unable to retire, or afraid to do so. Because in the USA financial security in old age rests increasingly on private savings, the diminishing returns on savings have forced many prospective retirees to cling on to their jobs, deferring long-held retirement plans. A dual picture is created, of delayed retirement for some and earlier retirement for others, showing retirement behaviour in the US context as subject to complex and diverse variables.

The book is well structured and is organised into eight themed chapters, providing the reader with a good framework of understanding about key aspects of the market model (in its widest sense) that can help shape decisions about retirement. The narrative has a strong fiscal emphasis and would have been enhanced by more information about social and community factors that we know are also influential. The second chapter, 'Defining and Explaining Retirement', is key in setting the context for the later discussion. The authors explain that their approach to defining retirement is shaped by the data at their disposal rather than by any particular philosophical view. This reads almost as an apology for the very limited discussion of aspects such as status and identity that other labour market theorists (*see e.g.* Casey and Laczko 1989; Porcellato *et al.* 2010) argue are theoretically and materially important to understanding the impacts of withdrawing from paid work. Because retirement has become a much longer and more important phase of life, these elements merit much deeper consideration, particularly in relation to the wellbeing of retired people.

The key findings of the research on which the book is based are presented in Chapter Seven; weaker long-term investment returns lead more skilled workers to delay retirement, while higher unemployment rates result in earlier retirement for less-skilled workers. The impact of changes to the US housing market does not appear to significantly influence retirement behaviour. These conclusions are discussed in relation to retiree wellbeing and I found this chapter to be the most engaging because of the theoretical and empirical connections made between work, leisure, health status and the capacity for consumer participation within the market. As with the authors' attempts to define retirement in Chapter Two, the discussion of how wellbeing can be measured is brief and under-theorised with reference to constructs such as 'happiness' and 'utility' not sufficiently developed. That aside, the authors argue convincingly in the US context for the critical importance of financial market conditions at the point of retirement in having long-lasting effects on the wellbeing of retirees. Without much ability to alter income streams once they retire, individuals who are exposed to high

unemployment or falling stock prices as they approach their expected retirement run the risk of reduced income for the remainder of their lives.

Although very specifically geographically located, this book contains material that will be useful to students, researchers and practitioners with interests in both ageing studies and labour markets. The book's final chapter, which discusses implications of the research findings for policy development, draws together some key issues for those involved in US policy making in this area. The ideas discussed by Coile and Levine, to underpin strategic social policy making, are also of relevance for those engaged in this task more widely beyond the USA.

## References

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doi:10.1017/S0144686X11000468

Tamsin Oglesby, *Really Old, Like Forty Five*, Oberon Books, London, 2010, 113 pp., pbk £8.99, ISBN 13: 978 1 84002 982 6.

'I was inspired by Jonathan Swift's classic satire *A Modest Proposal*, where he walks through streets full of hunger and quite rationally proposes the idea that an eight pound baby could feed a family of four for three weeks. I'm not proposing we eat babies but I wanted to provoke the kind of shock that is funny at the same time' (Oglesby, quoted in an article by Keith Watson, *Metro.co.uk*, 27 January 2010). Oglesby has succeeded admirably in achieving her aim in this wickedly funny and irreverent play about ageing and society. She confronts the audience with a somewhat heightened version of the current demographic, set in the not-so-distant future, with older people living ever longer, many with dementia, families who cannot or will not care for them, and a government that feels that it cannot afford to do so.

The action moves between the parallel universes of a private London family and a government-backed scientific research unit. Both are physically represented on stage, separated in the first half, but with the boundaries blurring in the second. In Act One, we see the family in various locations, at the UK's National Theatre, in the Natural History Museum, and at home, while above them on a raised platform we meet the scientists in front of their computer screens and predictive graphs, attempting to juggle their findings to fit their scientific and financial targets. In Act Two, much of the action moves to the Ark, the sparkling new government hospital from which