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Reviews

Christine Oldman, Deborah Quilgars and Jane Carlise. *Living in a Home: The Experience of Living and Working in Residential Care in the 1990s*, Anchor Research, 1998, 68 pp, £15.00 ISBN 0 906178 50 9.

Many may still think of the Anchor Trust as being synonymous with sheltered housing for older people. What is less well known is that currently Anchor is the largest 'not for profit' provider of residential and nursing home care in the UK. In 1995/96 when this research was carried out, two and a half thousand residents lived in 77 homes, 15 of which were registered for nursing care. Anchor Homes have a very specific style. Schemes typically have 40 units and each resident has a flatlet with ensuite facilities, their own letter box, front door bell and keys. The philosophy of care is one which places a strong emphasis on maintaining and extending maximum independence, and respecting and addressing individual need.

This research is the first attempt to look at the experience of residents in Anchor Homes and encompasses the views of residents, relatives and staff. The aims of the study are clear. The researchers were asked to assess residents' satisfaction with the service they receive, and then to consider this provision from the perspective of relatives, providers and purchasers of long term care. They were also to provide Anchor with recommendations which might inform their management of these homes.

The researchers adopted a case study approach and looked in detail at twelve Homes, the majority residential. They were keen to 'see what sort of "fit" there might be between quality standards (set by the organisation) and residents' experience', but, in addition, they have been able to develop uncharted areas in residential care research looking at post-1993 community care themes: contractual arrangements; assessments; choice; and increased dependency. They also included relatives' views on quality; the experience of being 'in home' compared with being 'at home'; and residents' circumstances prior to the move. In total 53 residents and 24 relatives were interviewed. Amongst the residents they included a mixture of self-payers, local authority funded and assessed residents, and those with preserved rights.

The report is a useful addition to residential care research. It provides a profile of the characteristics of Anchor residents which shows them to be roughly in line with national data; 51 per cent of residents being over 85 years. Whilst in the past Anchor residents have moved mainly from sheltered housing and typically from the rented sector, there has been a gradual change as more owner occupiers enter residential care. The majority of Anchor residents are supported by public funds although all schemes are working to a target of 50 per cent public funded and 50 per cent private payers. Prior to admission 26 per cent were in some form of institution: acute or long stay NHS provision, or some other home. They report evidence that residency is getting shorter and that people are entering at a later age when they are more dependent.

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The data on moving to residential care is particularly illuminating for it begins to tease out the impact of the various routes older people are now taking into residential care. It shows how it is easier for people with their own financial resources to move into care for 'social reasons' such as isolation. In contrast others have fallen foul of failures in community care policies, either through a lack of suitable and affordable domiciliary care or due to too rapid hospital discharge with too little rehabilitation. The researchers show that residents and relatives found moving very complicated and the assessment and financial aspects hard to follow. An understanding of the differing circumstances surrounding transitions is crucial to all those involved in providing residential care.

The contradictions of residential living come to the fore in this study. Both the design of the residential units and Anchor's philosophy of care show a respect for individual lifestyles where personal autonomy and independence are valued. However, the research highlights the tensions of individualised group living; the balance between organised social life and isolation; between 'doing for yourself' and 'being done for'; is it a place to live and a place to die? There are no easy answers to these contradictions though they need to be faced by all of us as this form of living arrangement continues to increase for the very old. The authors have raised new issues for residential care research which hopefully will be developed in future research.

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Harry R. Moody, *Aging: Concepts and Controversies*, 2nd edn., Pine Forge Press, Sage Publications Company, Thousand Oaks, California, 1998, 554 pp., £35.00 pbk, ISBN 0 8039 9098 7.

This is a refreshingly different, unusually interesting, gerontology textbook. Moody is an American philosopher who is known for his books and articles about the ethical and spiritual dimensions of ageing. He is a proponent of the communitarian view that society needs to agree a meaning for ageing and old age.

The book is premised on the author's view that 'individual aging and population aging are socially and historically constructed, subject to interpretation, and therefore open to controversy, debate, and change.' Accordingly, it is structured in a format which gives primacy to controversy and debate, rather than to the accumulation of facts about ageing.

Part One 'Basic Concepts' is, in content, fairly conventional textbook fare, covering economic, political, demographic and health care aspects of ageing, and considering the life course from biological, social and psychological perspectives. However, there is a welcome emphasis on a life course which lacks fixed parameters, and on contemporary old age as a state which is not easily characterised and whose meaning is not fixed.

Part Two 'Controversies' takes up three-quarters of the book and is more innovative. Ten controversies are presented, ranging from 'Should we ration health care for older people?' to 'Does old age have meaning?' The format is as follows. Moody outlines some main approaches and arguments on a broad

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topic, and then introduces four or five readings by authors who explore it from different and sometimes conflicting perspectives. For example, in the case of health care rationing the first reading is Daniel Callahan's controversial call for age-based rationing of certain kinds of health care. This is followed by four short papers by critics each setting out their own position on the issue. Each controversy also has short sections called 'Focus on Practice' (eg. 'Managed Care'), and 'Future Forecast' (eg. possible scenarios for rationing in the future, derived from science fiction); and ends with 'Questions for Writing, Reflection and Debate' and 'Suggested Readings'. This part of the book therefore has some of the characteristics of both an open learning text and an Open University Reader. Its great virtue is that it is engaging and informative whilst demonstrating that issues are not clear-cut, and that values are inseparable from debates about ageing. Other controversies include: Should families provide for their own? Should older people be protected from bad choices? Should people have the choice to end their lives? Is retirement obsolete? Why do we grow old? Does creativity decline with age? And does old age have meaning? The breadth of each controversy allows for important sub-topics to be explored. For example, within the bad choices controversy, risk and vulnerability, elder abuse, sexuality and crime, are all included and there are readings on legal issues, self-neglect, and ethical dilemmas in elder abuse. The book ends with appendices on how to research a term paper in gerontology and (a nice contemporary touch this) 'How to find information on aging on the Internet.'

Inevitably there is an emphasis on ageing in the United States but the main focus is on issues which are relevant to most developed societies. Moody's concern with the meaning of old age gives the book a thematic unity which textbooks often lack and the whole volume is clearly written. I think this book is much to be welcomed and should prove very useful to both students and teachers of gerontology.

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Kyriakes S. Markides and Manuel R. Miranda (eds), *Minorities, Aging and Health*, Sage Publications, London, 1997, 480 pp. hbk. £45.00 ISBN 0 8039 5973 7, pbk. £22.00, ISBN 0 8039 5974 5.

There is growing academic interest in the impact of the large and increasing population of minority ethnic elders in the USA. *Minorities, Aging and Health* is a substantial volume providing a fascinating overview of the health of a hugely diverse population comprising African Americans, Hispanics, Asian/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans. The editors have brought together recent research by American gerontologists to produce a wide ranging and important book, containing extensive and useful reading lists at the end of each chapter.

In Part 1, under the theme of mortality and life expectancy, the debate over the alleged 'mortality crossover' is explored, in which Black/White mortality ratios appear to change in favour of Black older people at advanced years. Questions over the reliability of existing data are raised: inconsistencies in the

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coding of race on birth, death and census records, and problems over independent assessments of the race of decedents. Part 2 deals with chronic disease and disability, highlighting raised levels of obesity, diabetes and hypertension in most ethnic groups. As the authors of this chapter argue, the use of longitudinal data will be vital to examine the 'disablement process' in order to understand more clearly how and why such high rates exist. Part 3 reviews the evidence concerning diet and nutrition, drawing out the significance of high fat, low fibre diets and the impact of poverty. Obesity among older African American and Hispanic women is highlighted as posing a health risk.

Under a subsequent section on mental health, there is full discussion on the conflicting evidence suggesting acculturation influences psychological well-being. It is interesting to note that, as in Britain, Asian older people are often erroneously treated as a homogeneous group. It is assumed that families undertake all the necessary caring and that mental illness is not a major problem. Parts 4 and 5 look at health services and social policy. It is apparent that though racial differences in accessing health service have declined due to Medicare and Medicaid, there are still inequalities in the quality of care offered and less use of preventative services by many minority ethnic groups. Lack of sensitivity in nursing homes for older Hispanic people is particularly highlighted. In terms of health policy it appears that minority older people are 'invisible'. Budget cuts and controversies over immigration have led to such groups receiving a low profile. The authors of most chapters admit openly to the methodological problems of research, not only the inconsistencies in coding ethnic origin but also misclassifications over causes of death and doubts about the accuracy of population estimates. The paucity of existing data for the American Indian population in general presents a major gap in research. What detracts from the book's overall message is insufficient emphasis on the positive health experiences of minority older people. We get a glimpse in chapter 7 of how adherence to a traditional diet has positive effects on mortality rates in Asian and Pacific Islanders. However it is difficult not to feel the weight of evidence presented here portrays ethnicity as a problem for health providers, rather than a challenge where lessons can be learnt from minority groups' practices.

Overall this is an excellent resource book for students of gerontology as well as service providers who wish to broaden their understanding of cultural and racial issues. It is enlightening, accessible and should stimulate valuable future research.

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MARGARET BONEHAM

Janet Z. Giele and Glen H. Elder Jr., (eds) *Methods of Life Course Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Sage Publications, 1998 ISBN 0 76191437 4.

As a doctoral student involved in life course research on older widows, I welcomed the opportunity to review this edited collection. The editors state

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explicitly that it is their intention to focus on how one does life course research, with a particular emphasis 'on the art and method of the appropriate research design, the collection of life history data, and the search for meaningful patterns to be found in the results' (xiii). The book is aimed at social scientists and students interested in collecting and analysing life course data. The editors, both sociologists, acknowledge the sociological bias of the collection but they do cite a number of major works in life span psychology.

The book is in three parts. Part One introduces the life course approach and includes an informative chapter by Mathilda Riley which charts her own autobiographical journey through life course research. Her reminiscences follow the theme that 'changing lives (aging and the succession of cohorts) are in continuing interplay with changes in society and its structures' (p. 29). Part Two considers the collection and organisation of longitudinal data. This section offers a wealth of 'nuts and bolts' advice to researchers. A particularly useful chapter by Scott and Alwin debates the advantages and disadvantages of retrospective versus prospective designs in the collection of data. I also found the chapter by Dempster McCalin and Moen on finding respondents in a follow-up study extremely interesting; their account of their own detective work provides useful guidelines for others involved in similar research. The final part of the book discusses several analytic perspectives. Clausen considers the strengths and weaknesses of life reviews as research data and debates the advantages and disadvantages of different types of reviews. I found his classification of turning points (p. 204) particularly illuminating.

The strength of this collection lies in the wealth of research cited and discussed. Each of the authors has been actively involved in life course research and each chapter focuses on one particular aspect which is then discussed in detail. As such it is an extremely useful research text, to be dipped into for guidance and advice. However I do feel that at times the links between the chapters are fairly tenuous. This is always a problem with an edited collection and the editors have tried hard to overcome this by introducing each of the sections and offering explanations.

I certainly recommend this book to other gerontologists involved in life course research; it raises both theoretical and practical issues which should be of concern to us all. I also feel that it would be a useful addition to reading lists on Research Methods courses, particularly at post graduate level.

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PAT CHAMBERS

Susan Rasmussen, *Poetics and Politics of Tuareg Aging: Life Course and Personal Destiny in Niger*, Northern Illinois University Press, DeKalb 1997, 208 pp. $32.00, ISBN 0 87580 220 6.

From our early socialization in western societies we are imbued with the naturalness of the use of *chronological age* in the marking of our lives. So culturally immersed are we that we almost take it for granted that there is no satisfactory alternative to chronology as an indicator of age. This is reflected

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in a spectrum of ways: from the social recognition of the importance of annual ageing, with the emphasis on anniversaries such as birthdays, to the legal entrenchment of chronological age as a marker for a series of life transitions – age of consent, age of majority, age of retirement, etc. The question raised by Rasmussen is how would our image and relationship with later life change if we lived in a culture in which *biological and social transitions* measured our progress through the years. For this is the experience of the Tuareg, a semi-nomadic people in northern Niger. Marriage, childbirth and death mark ageing, not number of years survived.

In an added twist, the life transitions defining the ageing process are predominantly social rather than biological. A girl becomes a woman not at menstruation, but at marriage; a woman becomes an older woman not at menopause but on having a child marry. These social transitions are expressed in both public and private conduct and religious ritual: forms of dress, song and dance, and use of public space are carefully delimited by social age. They form the structure to Tuareg society. Prominent in Tuareg ideology is the didactic relationship of youth and old age with secularism and music, prayer and peace respectively. These are further enhanced by metaphors of kinship and social stratum; Tuareg society is acutely hierarchical. Thus rituals surrounding life transitions serve not only to change the status of the individual but also to realign roles, and reaffirm and integrate social relationships, particularly between social cohorts. The solidarity between mothers, and between mothers and grandmothers, is particularly powerful. The emphasis on cohort unity is stressed from an early age as children are encouraged to take over daily responsibility for younger siblings on weaning, and eventually to take them beyond the village or camp to form daytime play groups.

Also startling is Rasmussen's reflection on her own life and her position as an ageing researcher. In the US she is an unmarried mid-life Western woman. Yet by Niger reckoning she is still in the full flush of youth, having yet to pass through the *rites of passage* of marriage and childbearing. At the same time she is a social contemporary of some 20 years standing to a cohort of Niger women who are now attaining later life through grandparenthood. There is also particular pathos in the description of the rapid physical decline of many of her friends. In previous times she and they danced together as young maidens. Now, while she still biologically has the physical body of a young woman, some of her contemporaries have died, most are older women with grandchildren scarred by the physiological disease and decay of the harsh Niger environment. The Niger women are eager to discover the creams, herbs and potions which keep her young.

The Poetics and Politics of Tuareg Aging is of significant interest to gerontologists because it addresses a vital, and often ignored, question: to what extent does culture influence our concepts of age and ageing? However, at the bottom line, it is an ethnography, and for many general readers of gerontology it will prove far too detailed an account of life in northern Niger. However for those concerned with questions of the construction of age and later life, it provides an important pause in our own cultural analysis, and begs the question as to whether life course transitions, and cohort experiences do

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not indeed present a constructive framework within which to view and indeed operationalize the experience of later life.

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José Alvarado and John Creedy, *Population Ageing, Migration and Social Expenditure*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, 1998, 191 pp. £45.00, ISBN 1 858 98724 5.

This Australian study analyses the associations between population ageing and social expenditure. The authors stress that the analysis is 'strictly limited to an exercise in demographic and economic measurement' and indeed the primary contribution are sets of population and social expenditure projections for variant assumptions about the volume and national sources of immigration. Australia's future age structure, even more than the USA's, is a function of these flows. But nearly half of the book is a studiously fashioned and prepared review of contextual issues, including the economic aspects of demographic transitions and population ageing, the profiles of immigrants, and the macroeconomic implications of immigration.

These sections are an accessible short primer to the issues and, as such, will be a useful addition to undergraduate reading lists for economics students, at least in Australia. The section on 'immigration impacts' has perhaps most general value. It is disappointing, however, given the themes of the book, that the authors fail to transcend the 'labour market implications' of this field of economic evaluation. There is not one reference to retirement age immigrants and their impacts on consumer expenditure or social and health spending. There are many hundreds of thousands of European retirees in the country drawing pensions and 'disinvesting' from their home countries.

Part IV (of five chapters) presents the primary research and technical accounts. Two chapters are expositions on population projection techniques, with less on the principles and the decisive matter of the selection of assumptions, and most on the construction of the data stocks and the arithmetic manipulations: the authors quickly proceed to the rudiments of matrix algebra. Chapter 9 opens with a short history and explanation of the Australian pensions system (without the politics), and proceeds to a similar essay on the country's health and social care systems (also without the politics). They then present their social expenditure projections. Variant scenarios are principally based on higher and lower rates of continuing immigration, and whether or not future immigrants do or do not maintain the relatively high level of demands on social expenditure of their predecessors. This section would have benefitted from a stronger summary of the main findings. Chapter 11 is a sensitivity analysis of their projections in the form of stochastic models of the variability of social expenditure outcomes in relation to 'variability in the component variables'. 'The results are for illustrative purposes only, with emphasis being placed on the statistical properties of the resulting distributions' (p. 161).

Chapter 12 helpfully summarises the conclusions. Most, one regrets to

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report, are nothing new: 'the results suggest that immigration can retard population ageing to some extent' and 'can reduce the growth of the ratio of social expenditure to GDP [and] the birthplace composition of immigrants has a negligible effect on the projections'. The quantitative specifications will be of interest to government actuaries in Australia and maybe a few elsewhere. The writing is consistently clear and the authors have worked hard to convert a focused exercise in applied research into an account of wider educational and policy value. But for students there are better introductions and, for those concerned with the reform of social welfare systems (and particularly those fighting to persuade governments that they should examine these issues from social policy perspectives and not exclusively those of macroeconomic management), most will find the book a dry and narrow exercise that reaches entirely predictable results.

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