

Reviews

doi:10.1017/S0144686X13000123

Sara Arber and Virpi Timonen (eds), *Contemporary Grandparenting: Changing Family Relationships in Global Contexts*, The Policy Press, Bristol, UK, 2012, 256 pp., pbk £24.99, ISBN 13: 978 1 84742 967 4.

While the title of this collection draws attention to contemporary grandparenting and changing family, social and global contexts, the text itself remains well grounded in classical perspectives within this field. The two editors cover this ground comprehensively in the first chapter, offering ‘a new look grandparenting’. The claims made in this chapter are ambitious: that the collection will advance conceptual and theoretical frameworks about grandparenting, while filling gaps in the research field, and also demonstrating the scale of social transformation within multi-generational families around the world. Their concluding chapter looks back at the contributions within the book, and forward to new directions for grandparenting in the 21st century, leaving the reader with a sense of satisfaction that the 12 chapters of this book have fulfilled their claims – and equipping me with both a sense of continuing engagement as a grandmother, and an interesting set of research and reflective pathways ahead.

Contributions to the book come from a mix of established and emerging researchers, based on data from various parts of Asia (China, Hong Kong and Singapore), Europe (Portugal, Norway, Ireland, Germany and England) and the United States of America (USA). The book is in two parts, each offered as coming from contrasting points on the research spectrum. Part One is arranged under the banner heading ‘Grandparents Responding to Economic and Family Transformations’, and each of the five chapters explores a different dimension of social transformation: Chapter 2, by Herlofson and Hagestad, deals with comparisons between welfare states and their social policies relevant to family life; Chapter 3, from Baker and Silverstein, compares the wellbeing of grandparents caring for grandchildren in rural China and the USA; in Chapter 4, Meyer looks at how US grandmothers juggle paid work with their ability to provide active child care to their grandchildren. Chapters 5 and 6, by Ko and Sun, respectively, consider multigenerational residence in Hong Kong, then Sun’s Singapore study deals with attitudes to grandparenting in the context of care for grandchildren by foreign domestic workers.

Part Two shifts the focus to ‘Grandparent Identities and Agency’, although the segue to the initial chapter in the second part (by May, Mason and Clarke) is extremely subtle, and could follow almost unmarked from the previous chapter where the focus had been as much on grandparents’ *responses* as on the transformations in the household economy relating to the

employment of foreign domestic workers. The following chapters (Chapters 8–11) strengthen the conceptual clarity of the terms ‘identities’ and ‘agency’, through careful elaboration, very much in the way of a series of musical variations, each making the underlying theme more recognisable, and meaningful. Chapter 7 opens Part Two with one of the classic paradoxes of grandparenting: ‘being there, yet not interfering’. In Chapter 8, ‘Grandparental Agency After Adult Children’s Divorce’ (by Timonen and Doyle) is demonstrated in the context of the strong cultural constraints surrounding divorce in Ireland; the examples of sustained and determined agency from grandparents whose sons have experienced divorce are compelling. This chapter in turn links well, through the attention paid to men’s place and, by derivation, that of paternal kin in Irish law, to Chapter 9 on the cultural construction of grandfathering (by Tarrant). Tarrant’s English qualitative study allows grandfathers to present expressions of their identity as a grandparent in particular masculine ways. Chapter 10 shifts the perspective again, this time to consider grandparenting from the point of view of adolescent grandchildren, recognising that agency can be a reciprocal relationship. Matos and Neves show how adolescents influence their grandparents in a variety of ways, adopting the terms ‘buddies’, ‘carers’, ‘playmates’ and ‘companions’, based on a declining scale of influential relationships with their grandparents, with buddies exerting the most influence, and companions the least.

Chapter 11 (by Mahne and Huxhold) offers a complex analysis (addressing the methodological challenges with clarity) of the three-generational dataset of the German Ageing Survey (DEAS). They conclude with a statement which sums up the rationale for the book as a whole, as well as their own study: ‘Since being a grandparent is a rewarding and valued role for many older people, the factors supporting or hindering the enactment of the grandparent role can provide important insights into the conditions for the quality of later life’ (p. 239).

The early tradition of considering the functional contribution of grandparents (as ‘family savers’, ‘mother savers’ or ‘family maximisers’) is reinforced by this collection. Similarly, the widening empirical basis for theories of intergenerational solidarity (in all its various dimensions) is evident, alongside consideration of aspects of conflict and ambivalence. Grandparental ‘styles’ are also explored, and reciprocal ways of being a grandchild are added, and shown to vary by age, gender, structural position within the family, in rapidly changing geographic and historical contexts. The complexity and fluidity of intergenerational relationships, including the directions of transfers of various forms of capital, makes this field of family and social research both challenging and necessary, if gerontological research is to take seriously claims to adopt a lifecourse perspective.

The overall integration between the papers, introduced and concluded by the editors, Arber and Timonen, shows the benefits gained from their initial presentation (for all but two of the papers) at the Gothenburg conference of the International Sociological Association in 2010, within the Research Committee on Ageing. The publication of the book thus adds enduring and

shared value to the various communities of interest in this topic. It will make a significant contribution to students and researchers in family studies as well as in the sociology of ageing.

University of Otago, Christchurch, New Zealand

SALLY KEELING

doi:10.1017/S0144686X13000135

Brian Findsen and Marvin Formosa, *Lifelong Learning in Later Life: A Handbook on Older Adult Learning*, Sense Publishers, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 2011, 236 pp., pbk €45.00, ISBN 13: 978 94 6091 649 6.

The title of this book is significant. The book is concerned with what the authors call ‘the interface between lifelong learning and later life’, an area of study which, they say, ‘is crucially understated’. Investigation of this interface leads them to survey a wide range of disciplines and topics. The title also describes it as a ‘handbook’ – which one may take to be a companion to thinking and to understanding, partly a survey of literature and a book of reference, but also an interpretation of the growth of the study of learning in later life, set within a developmental framework which the authors elaborate.

Findsen and Formosa are two well-known contemporary scholars in the field who work at opposite ends of the globe: Malta and New Zealand. Their definition of later life is life post-work and post child-rearing: a social construct. Theoretical and empirical investigation of such a construct is bound to be both problematic and paradoxical. The authors state their target audiences clearly – educators of older adults, students in higher education, academic administrators, professionals working with older adults, workers in public-sector departments and voluntary agencies, and others. It is a wide range and not exclusively academic. This sets the authors challenges in terms of communication, exposition and explanation, with which they cope well. The authors organise their handbook into three parts and 15 chapters. Part 1 explores the context and discourses of older adult learning and later life, drawing on a range of disciplines. Part 2 discusses research, perspectives and insights from particular disciplines, notably psychology, sociology and philosophy, which contribute to issues around older adult learning. Part 3, the longest, considers forms of provision of older adult learning and ways in which older adults do (or may) learn outside formal provision, as well as some related contemporary concerns such as learning and wellbeing and intergenerational learning.

To a significant extent the book succeeds in its considerable ambitions: it covers a wide range of literature both historical and contemporary and its summaries and comments are largely clear and succinct. It shows what is already known and understood about older adult learning and what still needs to be researched and clarified. It indicates what has not yet been thought out and the connections already made, and yet to be made, between a multiplicity of disciplines and perspectives. This book provides a valuable