

Carole B. Cox. *Community Care for an Aging Society: Issues, Policies, and Services*. New York: Springer, 2005.

Reviewed by Mary Ann McColl, Queen's University

RÉSUMÉ

Community Care for an Aging Society se révèle une ressource utile pour les étudiants, chercheurs, prestataires de service et décideurs. Le livre présente une solide discussion de questions complexes liées aux soins à donner aux personnes âgées. Il aborde plus précisément trois volets : logement, aidants naturels, ethnicité, et fournit une description détaillée de la programmation associée à chacun d'eux.

Community Care for an Aging Society, by Carole B. Cox, sets out to discuss issues associated with providing community services to older Americans by providing both theoretical and policy frameworks for dealing with these issues. The policy context for the book is American, but the topic is so thoroughly and sensitively handled that I think many Canadian readers will find it of interest as well.

Dr. Cox is a professor in the Graduate School of Social Services at Fordham University in New York. She has a Bachelor's degree from the University of California at Berkeley, an M.S.W. from Virginia Commonwealth, and a D.S.W. from the University of Maryland. Other related books by Dr. Cox include *The Frail Elderly: Problems, Needs and Community Responses* and her most recent book, *Handbook of Social Work and Dementia*.

Community Care for an Aging Society begins with a description of the elderly population and issues that affect them and their care providers. It then provides a detailed description of policies and programs in effect in the United States today relating to older people in the community. It offers chapters on three specific issues: housing, caregiving, and ethnicity. It concludes with emerging challenges and programs responding to the issues of care provision for older citizens.

The first section of the book deals with aging in contemporary America and notes the changing demographics of the aging population. As Cox notes, "[T]he need for care among the elderly is primarily related to physical and functional limitations" (p. 2). She thus very correctly addresses her attention regarding community care to the subset of older people most in need of attention. In so doing, she avoids the tendency to treat aging as a series of catastrophes and provides a balanced and proportional discussion of important topics like housing, health and social services, and caregiving.

Despite what the media have told us in recent years about a burgeoning aging population, recent research

and population-based Canadian estimates show that rates of disability are, in fact, decreasing among the elderly. The 1991 *Health and Activity Limitation Survey* found 46.3 per cent of Canadians over 65 with a disability (for a total of 1,449,000), while the 2001 *Participation and Activity Limitations Survey* found only 40.5 per cent (or 1,452,000). Although the methodology changed somewhat between the two surveys and the results are not strictly comparable, it is noteworthy that while the proportion appears to have decreased, the total population of disabled seniors has increased slightly.

This book is framed within a number of important theoretical perspectives, including social exchange theory, continuity theory, symbolic interactionism, learned helplessness, ecological/environmental theory, and social constructionism. Furthermore, the discussion is driven by an exposition of values, both implicit and explicit. Explicit values shaping community service delivery include the autonomy of the family, the desire for freedom from government intervention, and the expectation of individual responsibility. Canadian readers may find that they differ somewhat from the anticipated American readership on some of these issues. Implicit values driving policy include a humanitarian care ethic, a desire for equity, medical dominance, and a degree of paternalism in attitudes toward the elderly. Cox also notes that North American society has a historical bias towards institutional care for the elderly and disabled, a legacy of the development of our health care systems. Finally, she notes that the ethnic composition of American society has changed over the past few generations, so that cultural sensitivity is an increasingly important value in dealing with older citizens.

This book is explicitly directed toward students in the health and social service disciplines, providers of community services, and planners and policy makers. As such, it has a number of considerable strengths. First, it resists the temptation to sensationalize issues

about caring for older people. Just as in Canada, older people in the United States are, on average, healthier, better off, and more connected to networks of service and support than they have been in previous generations. However, there is a subset of the aging population that has very real needs that are complex and multidimensional. Cox repeatedly and accurately focuses our attention on the subset of disabled elderly and takes care not to confuse or conflate the issues associated with aging and disability.

Another strength of the book is its clear statement of the theory and values governing the existing service and policy environment. The book offers theoretical tools for understanding and analysing the challenges inherent in the system and the range of possible responses to those challenges. It also provides a detailed overview of current American policy, including legislative, regulatory, and program policy, as well as case law on several important issues. Published in 2005, this book provides an excellent primer for American readers on the complex policy environment governing community care for seniors. An obvious concern, with such a detailed treatment, is the potential for obsolescence in a rapidly changing world.

Despite the laudable focus on disability in *Community Care for an Aging Society*, there is some confusion around the definition of *disability* used. Early on, Cox refers to Nagi (1999) and to the World Health Organisation (1980) as reference points for the discussion of disability. While both of these taxonomies of disability held sway for some time, they have been eclipsed by the World Health

Organisation's *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* (2001). This document reflects an international consensus on a number of important ideas about disability, such as the impact of the environment, the social construction of disability, and the universalist versus the minority-group approach. These considerations lead to different types of service and policy responses and reflect a more contemporary view of disability.

Finally, for Canadian readers, there is the potential for a degree of frustration with the exclusively American focus of the book. If readers can overlook some of the more practical coverage of specific policies and programs and instead focus on the exposition of issues, challenges, and approaches, this book can, indeed, be a very satisfying read for anyone interested in the provision of community services to older people.

References

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C. Claassen. *Whistling Women: A Study of the Lives of Older Lesbians*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 2005.

Reviewed by Sharon Dale Stone, Lakehead University

RÉSUMÉ

En plus de présenter une fascinante ethnographie d'un sous-groupe de femmes américaines encore relativement peu connu, *Whistling Women* révisé la prémisse selon laquelle toutes les personnes âgées sont d'orientation hétérosexuelle. S'appuyant sur des entrevues menées auprès de 44 lesbiennes, l'ouvrage présente les récits de vie de ces ré pondantes et examine leur expérience de la vieillesse. Globalement, ce livre présentera de l'intérêt pour les lecteurs intéressés à la question de l'influence du passé sur le présent ou sur les possibilités existantes pour les lesbiennes vieillissantes. Il manque toutefois à l'ouvrage une appréciation plus raffinée de ces questions d'un point de vue g érontologique.

Social gerontology is becoming increasingly attentive to gender, race, and class differences among those who are old—at times, the focus is on a discrete

variable; at other times, the focus is on the ways in which these variables intersect to produce different opportunities and experiences. Yet, it is exceedingly