

Reviews

doi:10.1017/S0144686X18001666

Susan Pickard, *Age Studies: A Sociological Examination of How We Age and Are Aged Through the Life Course*, Sage, London, 2016, 312 pp., pbk £25.99, ISBN 13: 9781446287378.

Age Studies is a sociological exploration of the ‘age system’, which Pickard argues is an ideological collection of social forces that drive inequality. Her attentions are especially directed towards deconstructing the attribution of meanings to age, and how those meanings might be reimagined to emancipate us from the age system. While the sociology of age is Pickard’s explicit focus, the secondary issue of gender saturates her monograph. A third thread of continuity is identity, delineating a coherent course through traditional structuralist, interpretivist and critical approaches to age. Finally, inequality provides a fourth focus throughout the book. Taken together, these foci indicate Pickard’s alertness to contemporary academic sensibilities, and *Age Studies* will particularly appeal to critical scholars of age and ageing.

Chapter 1 outlines the intellectual and material foundations of the book’s key themes. It describes interwoven social processes that shape the age system and positions the book as a critical sociological contribution to ageing studies. Chapter 2 pursues a post-structuralist approach to class stratification, emphasising meaning and individualisation. It refurbishes traditional sociological analyses of class to examine age, and reveals how the age and class systems intersect. Chapter 3 approaches gender similarly, exploring the intersections of the age and gender systems. It suggests that gender studies provides a template for critiquing the naturalisation of ageing bodies. Chapter 4 considers the lifecourse in relation to meaning-making, arguing that the late-modern dissolution of age norms conceals sustained structural hierarchies. Chapter 5 explores age identity in relation to the enterprising self, centred around productivity and consumerism. It argues that an ethic of self-realisation through choice disregards structural influences and equates adulthood with success. Chapter 6 turns to embodiment, describing the ascription of gender-related characteristics to bodies at various lifestages. Chapter 7 focuses on sexuality as a vehicle for inequality that works through the gender and age systems. It presents lifestages as defined in relation to sexuality, such as anti-sexual childhood and sexualised youth. Chapter 8 centres on health and illness, outlining the ways in which intersecting age and gender systems ‘enfranchise’ women and produce psycho-pathologies at different lifestages. Chapter 9 explores how media representations of ages and lifestages are ideologically dominated by adults at the expense of the young and the old. Chapter 10 argues that the concept of generations is an ideological device that naturalises conflict between age groups, obscuring intersecting class and gender

systems. Chapter 11 considers potential methods for developing age consciousness as a means of challenging false age ideologies. Finally, Chapter 12 recaps the book's key arguments and suggests how we might liberate ourselves from the age system through reimagining age.

The major strength of *Age Studies* is its impressive breadth and accessibility, which is mostly delivered without any detrimental depletion of depth. Pickard admirably spans traditional sociological topics such as class and the media. She begins each chapter with familiar debates and gradually develops novel analyses. She also moves beyond the strictly sociological, offering insights into psychological, philosophical and literary facets of ageing. Moreover, by maintaining the central threads of gender, identity and inequality, diverse considerations are integrated within a coherent and streamlined argument. However, comprehensiveness is rarely limitless in practice. By favouring gender as her major intellectual route into the age system, Pickard inevitably risks diminishing other concerns in comparison. Gender sometimes elucidates issues (*e.g.* age consciousness), but at other points it dominates and obscures discussions purportedly centred on other topics (*e.g.* embodiment and health). More problematic is the absence of ethnicity, nationality, migration and globalisation. Of particular concern is the dismissal of racial inequalities as often being attributable to class. This is surprising given the book's commitments to inequality, identity and intersectionality in late modernity.

Age Studies is principally an academic text. It offers much to stimulate scholars of ageing, but age-related practitioners will find little of applicable use. That said, many non-academics will likely enjoy this user-friendly foray into theorising ageing. Readers of *Ageing & Society* should, however, be aware that *Age Studies* is about age generally, and includes substantial discussion of childhood and mid-life. The book's primary audience is undoubtedly the student of age studies or cultural gerontology. Though far more innovative than a textbook, students will benefit from various typical textbook features. Inset boxes provide accessible explanations of various complex ideas, bullet-pointed summaries neatly tie up each chapter, and thoughtful 'talking points' inspire further reflection and debate. One can easily envisage university modules being constructed around this text, which is both an entertaining and an essential read within age studies.

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doi:10.1017/S0144686X18001678

Sally Chivers and Ulla Kribernegg (eds), *Care Home Stories: Ageing, Disability, and Long-term Residential Care*, *Ageing Studies* Volume 14, transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, Germany, 2018, 420 pp., pbk US \$40.00, ISBN 13: 9783837638059

There is something for everyone in this collection of personal and scholarly reflections about long-term residential care for older people, whether your