

Reference

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Dawn C. Carr and Kathrin Komp (eds), *Gerontology in the Era of the Third Age: Implications and Next Steps*, Springer Publishing Company, New York, 2011, 288 pp., hbk \$75.00, ISBN 13: 978 0 8261 0596 7.

The preface to this book claims that it is timely and pedagogically powerful in terms of its contribution, given the centrality of understandings of the emergence of the Third Age to exploring the potential of later life. The collection is presented in three parts, each with four chapters, intended to offer in turn conceptual, methodological and applicability aspects of the extent to which gerontology addresses the Third Age. Part I (Theoretical Development and Frameworks in the Era of the Third Age) includes four useful chapters, each reviewing a dimension of theoretical evolution shared by both gerontological and Third Age studies. In turn, the contribution of lifecourse perspectives (by Moen), cultural studies (Gilleard and Higgs), political economy (Komp) and feminism (Calasanti and King) are evaluated. Along the way, current issues and debates are aired, signalling some of the recurrent themes and controversies which will be revisited in the third and final part of the book. At this opening-up stage of the book, one wonders if this circularity will in the end be satisfactorily resolved, or if fresh insights will arise. For me, the chapters by Moen and Calasanti and King add particular value, with their cogent critiques of hegemonic analyses, and persuasive challenges of the use of the singular term, 'The Third Age', when it is clear that there are many third ages, and agers. The other two chapters in Part I reinforce this, but none directly questions the international relevance of these debates, leaving the impression of a prevailing European/Transatlantic bias. Globally, there is an inference that the Third Age is not a construct which has yet reached the Third World: when and if it does, both terms may have outrun their utility.

Part II adds light and thereby detail to the perspectives offered, as each chapter argues for and demonstrates empirically diverse data, drawing on Third Age studies. Each chapter in Part II offers three very different methodological approaches for Third Age Research, starting with two developing demographic approaches: Chapter 5 (Brown and Lynch) outlines both demographic and epidemiological transitions, before exploring in more depth aspects of the construct of active life expectancy, alongside measures of disability and inequality. The words of caution with

which this chapter ends are repeated and developed further by the authors of the next chapter (Komp and Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik) as they explore the use of Third Age socio-demographic variables on cross-country comparisons. Time-use studies of everyday activities are the subject of the next chapter (Chatzitheochari and Arber), and this for me was a valuable addition of a naturalistic perspective as a balance after the previous two abstract chapters. Similarly, the final chapter in the methodological part of the collection (Rowles and Manning) continues with this acknowledgement of the significance of the lived experience of the Third Age, and the potential for the contribution of qualitative inquiry.

Emerging themes and controversies in the era of the Third Age are reviewed in Part III. Each of the four chapters highlights a field of controversial issues which it could be argued is relevant to both gerontology and Third Age studies. In Chapter 9, Bass tackles the key (some might say the defining) notion of work and retirement, and its associated rhetoric of 'Productive Ageing'. Next, Brothers and de Jong Gierveld explore the diversity of experience in relationships, particularly in the context of families and households, reminding readers that while at the personal level people lead 'linked lives', when demographers count the apparent manifestations of individual behaviour this data can be stripped of its context and meaning.

Overall integration between the chapters and parts is threaded throughout, with helpful internal cross-referencing, although there is inevitably some repetition between chapters. Each chapter can be read on its own terms, and independently of the others, although I found that in some places, the overall editing had let slip some 'isolationist' clues (such as the use of the phrase 'in this country'). It is my view that generally, location should be specified, or left as broadly irrelevant, but certainly not assumed if a global perspective is being claimed.

As a reviewer, I am obliged to consider the whole, and assess the extent to which it is more than the sum of its parts. In that endeavour, I was well served by the introductory chapter by the editors and particularly by the Afterword by George. A consistent and powerful critique of oversimplified Third Age perspectives is offered by almost all of the authors as they argue individually and collectively for an inclusive approach in light of the prevalence of inequalities in health and social outcomes across the lifecourse. Privileging Third Age research and commentary serves to further marginalise both the individuals and populations of the Fourth Age: like the book itself, and potentially this review, this brings us back to the beginnings of gerontology itself. How far have we come, since the term was introduced? Has the shelf-life of the term Third Age expired? By the end of my reading of the book, I did still wonder what has changed in the vocabulary and repertoire of gerontological research and application since Laslett's discovery of the Third Age over 20 years ago.

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