

Reviews

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Harry R. Moody (ed.), *Religion, Spirituality and Aging*, Haworth Social Work Practice Press, Binghamton, New York, 2005, 384 pp., pbk \$39.95, ISBN 978 0 7890 2499 2.

A reviewer's heart can sink when receiving a weighty paperback (384 pages) in journal-style close type, described as an 'eclectic set of contributions' (the collection has been published simultaneously as *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 45 (2005), parts 1–3). In the skilful editorial hands of Harry Moody, whose intelligence and enthusiasm are well known to gerontologists, there is however nothing to fear and much to gain. The book is truly readable, with little jargon, and it is obvious that great care has been exercised with the choice and balance of the content, as well as by the authors in writing the chapters. For readers who appreciate an overarching concept as well as a clear structure, Moody's introduction is reassuring. He proposes to follow Kant's three questions: 'What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope?' The book accordingly has three sections: Research (seven chapters), Practice (six chapters), and Search for Meaning (six chapters).

The research chapters are marginally the longest and this section occupies almost half the book. The first chapter is a masterly overview by David Moberg. By the time you have followed his account of basic concepts, key areas of findings, research instruments, relevance to social services, ethics and the needs for future research, you are well equipped and eager to read on. Thereafter you are relieved to find that although the authors of the individual chapters do sometimes define terms again, it is for the particular purposes or contexts of their research. One theme of the research chapters is the difficulty of penetrating the life-worlds of older people, which is especially difficult for spiritual matters and if the demand on the researcher is to produce not only description but also explanation. Most of the authors settle for illuminating the meaning of spirituality to older people themselves, as reflected in the shift in research away from 'religion' (the observable behaviours) and towards spirituality (variously defined, not necessarily theistically). The section contains a good range of topics, methods and applications of research: spirituality as a coping mechanism; religiosity as a feature of carer well-being; the nature and scope of spirituality in later life; congregations as social service providers; and spirituality expressed as ethics in social work practice. Many questions are raised to inspire researchers, such as: how is faith reckoned in post-modern perspectives on social identity in late life?

Most of the work described in Section 2 on Practice is also research-based, but here the emphasis is on the applicability to, or the implications for, social work practice. The relationship between professional and client is a key feature, with often two clients, the older person and his or her carer or relative. The chapters

reveal the potential for good practice in spirituality: of the doors it can open and the creativity and positive forces it can release into difficult, complex and sad situations. The authors variously observe, for example, care-givers' use of spirituality in their daily decision-making, the challenges of practice in long-term care, and the particular role of the geriatric-care manager. Three chapters look ahead to the change in response that will be needed towards the new older people of the baby-boom generations. Mentions of 'Postcards to God', new rituals for 'sacred ageing', and culture-change in long-term care alert us to the balance that has to be struck between clients' contexts, personal histories and personal change over the life-span. I wondered if the relative lack of reference to non-Abrahamic religions (though there is little from an Islamic perspective) was a weakness, but if it is, it is minimised by the focus on universal human responses and the social relations they produce, rather than the effect of particular religions. Most important differences pertinent to social gerontology that are attributable to religion could be discussed by consideration of the forms of culture and faith that they produce.

In the last section on 'Search for Meaning', Moody's editorial hand is most detected, for the topic has been one of his key interests. It is good to see the literature, which is fairly scattered, receiving synoptic attention. As an educational gerontologist with an interest in spiritual life-long learning, I found this section rewarding. Gerontologists who study biography, narrative and mature identity will also find much of interest. As in the Practice section, some chapters are personal stories or accounts of experience, but are sufficiently well written for general points to emerge. The chapters in this section cover: autobiography as a form of spiritual practice and source of personal development; the role of dreams in the second half of life, drawing on Jungian psychology; counselling and spiritual wellbeing and its capacity to create meaning in later life (including a handy three-dimensional model); and dementia care as a spiritual journey. 'Elderhood' is discussed in the final two chapters, the very last being a fine essay on elder wisdom and its acquisition.

I believe that this book is worth reading by all those involved in social care and many others besides, even those without religious affiliation or sympathy. It contributes to our understanding of the spiritual aspects of human phenomena and provides social-science and social-work perspectives and responses. Its good writing and editorial work raises and rewards the reader's interest in topics that they might normally pass by.

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John Macnicol, *Age Discrimination: An Historical and Contemporary Analysis*,
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, 308 pp., pbk £17.99,
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Currently there is widespread interest among British policy makers in the concept of age discrimination. On 1st October 2006, the Employment Equality (Age)

Regulations that cover discrimination in employment, training and education came into force, so the book is timely. The overall aim is ‘to explore some of the dilemmas and contradictions inherent in age discrimination’ (p. 45) by drawing on the history of employment policies and practices in the United Kingdom and the United States during the late-19th and 20th centuries. In essence, it is a collection of four essays in four parts.

In Part I, Macnicol overviews the literature on age discrimination and provides a less extended account of familiar debates regarding generational equity and health-care rationing. Early on, he distinguishes between ageism and age discrimination by associating the latter (as in the title of the book) with employment. I was not convinced and thought the device somewhat misleading, but it enables Macnicol to raise awkward questions about the relationship between ageism and mandatory retirement. More challengingly, the chapter ends with a contentious discussion about the future of gerontology and the positions taken by social gerontologists on the matter of ageism. Following Neugarten, he speculates that a re-enlistment of older workers into the labour market might mark ‘the end of old age’ and thereby the end of gerontology (p. 46). Obviously policies that affect the relationships between age, employment and income influence the character of later life, but there is much more to age discrimination than such matters, as Macnicol recognises: ‘We all have ambivalent feelings towards older people which we need to confront’ (p. 45). It is disappointing that he does not refer to, or discuss, the history of such feelings.

As a consequence of this concern with employment policies, much of the discussion in Part 2 on the revival of interest in age discrimination in the United Kingdom is oriented towards an analysis of New Labour policies on ‘the hiring, firing, promotion, re-training and mandatory retirement’ of older workers (p. 6). The ‘older worker’ has been researched and debated for over 50 years and, as a historian, I found this book a valuable addition to the literature, but would have preferred a wider analysis that included, for example, pensions, housing, transport and paid employment. There are occasional strange claims. I was interested, for example, to note that Macnicol should see the *1965 Redundancy Payments Act* as a turning point that marked a ‘resurgence’ of interest in age discrimination (p. 79). It certainly led to higher mandatory payments to older workers and to a change in employment practices. The result was that the old rule of ‘last in, first out’ was replaced by something akin to ‘first in, first out’, but I doubt that the Act triggered a revival of interest in age discrimination. In the conclusion to this essay, Macnicol focuses on the tensions between social justice and the regulation of the labour supply. He argues that under New Labour the latter concern has fostered the idea of an active society that promotes equality of opportunity, equal treatment, participation in waged labour and choice in the market. The removal of discrimination from many aspects of life has widened the pool of talent, created a diverse workforce, and imposed an obligation to work. In short, age equality is ‘good for business’ (p. 115).

In Part 3, Macnicol undertakes an expansive historical review of employment, retirement and health. The focus is the unfolding history of policy debates concerning older workers and their fitness for work. The implication is that government and corporate policy – in Britain at least – has been critical in

determining wider understandings of the relationship between work and health. This is politically charged, as is evident in the words of James David Grout, a ‘wire-worker’. When asked by the 1893–95 *Royal Commission on the Aged Poor* if he knew of instances of older workmen being ‘squeezed out’ of employment on account of their age, he answered: ‘That is an awkward question to answer, because you would have to get it admitted that the man was excluded from his trade because of old age, and so far as I can hear no one would admit that it was actually in consequence of old age’ (quoted on p. 142). This response is highly relevant to current deliberations about how evidence of age discrimination might be produced in courts of law.

Macnicol concludes this analysis of work and health with a chapter on ‘the recent debate’. He begins by contrasting three models: compression of morbidity (leading to longer disability-free lives), the failure of success (an increase in health-impaired survivors) and dynamic equilibrium (wherein increased health-impairment is balanced by improved cohort-specific health levels). He then returns to ‘work-disability’ and the inducement effect of early exit incentives. He ends, somewhat disappointingly but perhaps inevitably, with the conclusion that the question ‘if older workers are healthier than ever, “could” or “should” they remain in work longer?’ is complex, and how you might answer it depends upon your philosophical and political position (p. 206).

The final essay turns to the United States *Age Discrimination in Employment Act* (ADEA). Macnicol provides an impressive analysis of historical material, of events leading up to the Act, the power of pressure groups, the formulation and enforcement of the Act, and of subsequent evaluations and legal actions. Although he briefly discusses the implications for British legislation, much more could be learned from the American experience: an opportunity to influence policy in Britain and elsewhere has been missed. For example, in the final two paragraphs of Chapter 9 (pp. 261–2), interesting comments are made about how the ADEA has been seen and assessed in recent British policy documents, but no comparisons are made between the current attempts in the UK to set up all-inclusive human rights legislation and the failure of the United States age lobby to keep age in the frame for the 1964 *Civil Rights Bill* (pp. 234–5). Similarly he does not discuss the similarities and differences between the American Association of Retired People and the various age-specific British lobbying organisations.

The brief conclusion tellingly begins, ‘This book has tried to confront the difficulties and ambiguities inherent in ageism and age discrimination’ (p. 263). Rather than the outcome of a completed study, the book reads like a report on work in progress. With over 1,000 footnoted references to primary sources, this is important historical research and much is learnt from it. Nevertheless, we will have to await a further publication before we know what conclusions Macnicol has drawn.

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Diana K. Harris and Michael L. Benson, *Maltreatment of Patients in Nursing Homes: There is No Safe Place*, Haworth Pastoral, New York, 2006, 146 pp., pbk \$16.95, ISBN 13 978 0 7890 2326 1.

This is an interesting book about elder abuse in United States' nursing homes that includes the results of an empirical study of theft from nursing home residents. Although only six per cent of the US older population live in nursing homes, they number around 1.8 million people. According to the book, some two-thirds (67%) of US nursing homes are 'for profit', 26 per cent are 'non-profit' and seven per cent are state-owned. Many are large institutions used for short-stays, such as following discharge from acute hospitals, as well as for long-term care. The long-term care residents are predominantly women over the age of 75 years with mobility or cognitive difficulties or both. It is estimated that approximately one-half of all residents have some form of cognitive impairment (similar to the United Kingdom profile). The relevance of this book outside the United States is that few previous publications have explored the abuse that takes place in nursing homes. This examination of the context of homes and investigation of the extent of theft, and the suggestions for the prevention of abuse, are therefore both valuable and welcome.

The book has several sections. Part I provides information about nursing homes and nursing aides and draws on the North American literature to examine the nature of nursing homes and their staff and the opportunities for abuse in these settings. Part II reports the authors' empirical study of theft in nursing homes, whilst Part III draws on other American research and writing to explore in more general terms physical and psychological abuse and neglect. The final section, Part IV, discusses several additional ways in which nursing-home residents are mistreated, including violations of individual rights, and offers several useful recommendations for dealing with and preventing abuse.

The three initial chapters outline the institutional aspects of nursing-home environments and focus on the employment of 'nursing aides', those workers who have the closest contact with residents. The authors emphasise issues of turnover, under-staffing, burnout, lack of training and the inter-dependence of staff and patient satisfaction, all of which are familiar in Britain. They also emphasise the endemic racism that occurs in American nursing homes. 'Routine activity theory', borrowed from criminology, is usefully used to suggest that nursing homes are vulnerable settings for abuse. This theory proposes that crime is most likely to happen when three factors coincide: a motivated offender, a suitable target and a lack of capable guardianship or protection. Nursing aides may be motivated to commit crime (or abuse) by stressful work, low wages, racial conflict, overwork, generally unpleasant working conditions and, the authors suggest, by the large number of 'poor quality' staff. Many nursing-home residents are highly vulnerable by virtue of their impairments and disabilities and, additionally, in many establishments they are not well protected. This perspective is helpful and could be applied to institutional care in other countries.

In the second part, Harris and Benson explore this theory through their study of the theft of residents' belongings in a sample of nursing homes in 10 US states.

The study was beset by immense difficulties of conducting valid and reliable research. One of the techniques they adopted was a postal questionnaire to nursing-home employees, to elicit self-reported theft, and then, to support these findings, to distribute another questionnaire to the relatives of nursing-home residents. The response rate to the employee survey was only 22 per cent, and given the absence of a relatives' database and the refusal of homes to divulge contact details, the survey of relatives had to rely on questionnaires being picked up in the nursing homes, so that the response rate could not be estimated. A minor weakness of the book is that, although the authors recognise the limitations of their work, they occasionally get rather carried away and generalise beyond the evidence.

The survey of employees obtained a very low rate of self-reported theft: 17 of the 1,116 respondents admitted theft, in most cases of food, sweets or flowers, not more valuable items. The survey also asked about theft by colleagues, and over one-half of the respondents reported that they had seen or suspected other employees of stealing money, credit cards and cheques. This was roughly the same (very low) proportion as those stealing food, sweets or flowers. Among the 196 relatives who responded to the survey, nearly half had noticed some items missing and 20 per cent suspected that staff were involved in theft. The most common item that relatives reported as stolen was clothing (49 cases) followed by money, credit cards and cheques (27). These are challenging rather than reliable findings, but even so, they raise important questions. The principal suggestion by the authors for the prevention of theft in this type of setting is for the establishment to be run as if it were a hotel. This translates into advice to residents not to trust anyone who has access to their room. Such suggestions might be somewhat alien to countries, not least the United Kingdom, where care homes are regarded as homes rather than institutions.

The book concludes with six basic recommendations about: screening and vetting of employees; more training for staff; adequate staffing levels; action to be taken on all cases of reported abuse; employees working together rather than on their own; and to establish a culture of zero tolerance of abuse. Most of these will be familiar to British readers, for the need for such measures has recently been recognised (Association of Directors of Social Services 2005). This book provides useful support for the introduction of such methods and should be of interest to all those concerned with institutional care or elder abuse.

Reference

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Vee P. Prasher, *Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia in Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disabilities*, Radcliffe, Oxford, 2005, 176 pp., pbk £29.95, ISBN 1 85775 608 8.

The life expectancy of people with a learning disability has improved considerably with better health and social care. As a consequence, people with a learning disability now experience many of the conditions and illnesses that are associated with old age. One area of significant concern is the prevalence of dementia, particularly amongst people with Down's syndrome (Kerr 1997). This change in the needs of people with a learning disability places a demand upon services to adapt and respond. Services need to review models of the assessment and delivery of care to take account of these changes. This book addresses various critical issues, reviews the implications of dementia in people with a learning disability, and focuses on Alzheimer's disease. It also covers the assessment of dementia, management and treatment issues, and carers' support. The book is aimed at carers and professionals who wish to increase their clinical knowledge in this area. It seeks to inform planning and practice and to improve outcomes for people with a learning disability and dementia. The book also seeks an international readership, so for example terms such as 'intellectual disability' are used instead of the common British term 'learning disability'.

The first three chapters set out essential background knowledge for professionals working with adults who have a learning disability. Chapter 1, 'Overview of dementia in intellectual disabilities', is well researched and guides the reader to more detailed information on various aspects of dementia in a clear and easy-to-follow way. The terminology and style of this and subsequent chapters' will nonetheless be more familiar to health-care professionals and academics than to lay readers. On the other hand, the chapter on dementia could be read by someone wanting to know about dementia. Chapter 5 on assessment is structured in a way that enables the reader to understand why specific assessment processes need to be in place for the successful delivery of support to the person with a learning disability and to their carer, should they develop dementia.

The author goes on to describe the clinical management and treatment of dementia in people with Down's syndrome and other learning disabilities. Chapter 7 gives a lot of attention to the use of pharmacology and to the 'management' of the person. For example, the first sub-section is on cognition-enhancing drugs, but addresses 'reminiscence therapy' and 'insomnia' only very briefly – sometimes with no more than a paragraph. Although non-pharmacological interventions are recognised, such as adaptations to the environment, the space dedicated to these topics is inadequate to provide the reader with an overall understanding of how to support a person experiencing dementia. The chapter on carers does however provide information about the challenges of this role and the structure and services that need to be in place to support carers.

This book provides a really useful account of clinical responses to dementia in people with Down's syndrome or a learning disability. It will be valuable for staff working in the planning and provision of services to an ageing population of adults with a learning disability. It contains much of the critical information

needed to inform the structure and provision of services, but it is not written in a style that encourages recommendation to paid or unpaid carers. The chapters on how to support a person with dementia are too brief and have too little practical information. There is also too much emphasis on the role of medication and not enough on practical ways of working with the person. This book is a well-written clinical handbook and should be read in conjunction with a practice guide.

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Lisa Cliggett, *Grains from Grass: Aging, Gender and Famine in Rural Africa*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 2005, 224 pp., pbk \$19.95 or £10.50, ISBN 0 8014 7283 0.

For 10 years from 1994, anthropologist Lisa Cliggett spent several months a year in the Gwembe Valley, Zambia, taking part in a long-term research project to record the impact of the building of the Kariba Dam. Cliggett's particular project was to understand how men and women in the valley differently build up, over their life-times and in the context of the changing environment, the physical and social capital needed to ensure support in their old age. *Grains from Grass* records her work and the findings. Before 1959, agricultural production in the area depended heavily on hoe cultivation, carried out mainly by women. Gwembe society was matrilineal, so that people drew their family identity, and some of their property rights, from their mothers' line. After the dam was built, people moved to land more suited to ploughing with cattle, an activity controlled by men, especially older men. As the agricultural economy became more cattle-based, patrilineal groups (men and their sons) acquired greater power than matrilineal groups. This shift from matriliney to patriliney was critical and provided a valuable case study of the dynamics of changing gender relations.

Cliggett describes the various activities that men and women carry out to procure a livelihood in this very fragile and unpredictable environment, and how they adapt their strategies according to their family circumstances and to changing economic opportunities. Younger people migrate in search of farming land and jobs; those who stay struggle to get by in times of scarcity. While older men acquire provisions by selling or loaning assets acquired during their lives (such as animals or agricultural equipment), women's primary strategy for support in their old age must be to build social networks, to 'invest in mothering' (p. 94*ff.*). Without such support, they may be reduced to plucking 'grains from grass', as the book's title alludes.

Cliggett undertook this study of ageing in a non-western society to document the diverse ways in which people across the world show resilience and ingenuity in their response to poverty, an issue which is aired in the introductory chapter. Chapters 2 and 3 describe how the research was planned and carried out, and explore the theoretical literature (for example on vulnerability) which it attempts to illuminate. The book's substantive chapters (4–8) describe how people of different ages and at different points in their lives exploit the economic niches provided by the environment of the Gwembe Valley. Cliggett explains how an individual's survival is further influenced both by their family relations and by their individual capacities and social standing. I particularly recommend Chapter 6 on spirituality, where the risks of witchcraft accusations, and hence financial ruin, run by wealthy older men are described, and Chapter 7, which presents an unconventional slant on migration by discussing its impact on the life-chances of the elderly relatives whom young migrants leave behind. Cliggett took a holistic approach to her role as ethnographer: 'theory, method and interpretation are completely intertwined' (p. 33). Anthropology students and development workers will gain much from this very comprehensive and reader-friendly account, which interweaves fact, theory and personal insight at every step. From a methodological perspective, it exemplifies the principle that readers should know not just what the researcher found out, but under what circumstances she came upon the information, and how her personal response conditioned her presentation of it. Cliggett develops important insights and tells a rich and often inspiring story.

So far so fascinating, but not all readers will warm to the personal style, and it prompted two quibbles. First, much of the book's value lies in its rich description of the work of an anthropologist, which illuminates and induces admiration at one level but frustrates at another, since it never once questions the rightness of the fundamentally extractive relationship between researchers and the researched. Secondly, the anecdotes and periodic forays into theory (often interspersed with comparative references to features of western society – this is a book about Africa for non-Africans) can be irritating if your interest in the book is to get to the 'meat'. The introductory chapters are essential, because dotted within them is the theoretical and contextual grounding, and take up more than half the book. This is not a book for dipping into, and does not provide condensed reference material. Read it if you want to know about the richness and complexity of the research process and findings; if you are looking for striking illuminations on ageing and society, you will not find them here.

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