

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Caroline Lodge, Eileen Carnell, and Marianne Coleman. *The New Age of Ageing: How Society Needs to Change*. Bristol, ENG: Policy Press, 2016

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This book is informed by the conviction that both individual aging and the aging of societies are events to be welcomed. In the former case there are many positive aspects of growing old for the individual, which can also benefit societies in general. In the latter, the aging of societies is not just a huge success story more generally (in that we are not just living longer but doing so in better health) but a revolution for women in particular (the lower childbirth rates reflecting the opportunities open to women that were not present in previous generations). Indeed, the feminist activist background of the writers also motivates their aim to challenge ageist stereotypes found at all levels of society and to debunk the powerful myth that depicts aging as wholly negative: harmful to individuals, to intergenerational relations, and to society more generally in the context of an aging demographic.

The authors' hope is that improved knowledge will underpin a more measured planning for the needs of an aging society and infuse public debate with more-positive elements. The authors explain that, as they are in their 60s and 70s, they have experienced ageist attitudes first hand as well as by observation and thus have a personal stake in this goal. They specifically wish to influence a broader readership, and so they ensure, although they back up their arguments with a wealth of theoretical knowledge and the latest scholarly evidence, that this is always done in an approachable and jargon-free manner. Vivid illustrations and case studies are drawn from media stories and news reports as well as from the voices of older individuals obtained from interviews – some carried out by the authors themselves – and this further increases the book's appeal and reach.

In the first 11 chapters of *The New Age of Ageing*, the authors explore the marginalizing practices that exist in a number of areas of society including consumerism and marketing, media representations, employment, beauty, housing, and care. In each case, they present alternative and more positive approaches, and end chapters with a short and useful summary detailing "what needs to change". The chapters on demographics and economics and on "How Society Ages People" challenge the social construction of old age in terms of

decline and deficit and present a convincing alternative case for continuity of self across ages and stages, and for similarities of older people to people of other ages.

Although inevitably the authors cover the standard themes found in nearly every social policy text on aging – such as caring, housing, and the like – the chapter on older consumers is a welcome and original addition, making the point that older consumers are not well catered to in a whole range of ways, from the type of consumables on offer to their development and design, packaging, and instructions, all of which both disadvantage older consumers and fail to tap into the potential of this market (showing that age ideology is so powerful it can even undermine capitalist profit). Similarly refreshing and original is the chapter on media exclusion which covers both the absence of older women from key roles in media and, relatedly, the stereotypes of old age produced by this same youthfully biased media.

The last three chapters focus on positive aspects of aging from both an individual and societal perspective. Herein the authors set out to demonstrate that old age can, like any other stage of life, be a time of fun, happiness, freedom, and continued growth. Additionally, they identify wisdom as both an advantage to individual older people as well as a uniquely valuable resource to society in general and younger people in particular. A chapter on the role that many older people continue to play in political campaigning, including (and contrary to the stereotypes of old age as conservative) in *radical* politics further emphasises their oft-forgotten contribution to the communities in which they live and presents this as beneficial to the working of democracy. This challenges the depiction of older people as burdens or, alternatively, as standing in the way of progress itself.

The book tackles subjects such as social and psychological theories of aging, intergenerational justice, and the intersection of age, gender, class, and race, among other things, in a way that is both accessible and yet informative. At the same time, the book departs from the more cautious approach that usually characterises more-academic texts in its bold prescriptions of the

changes needed regarding aging and old age which, as well as forming the concluding sections of most of the chapters, are collected in the final summarizing chapter, "Our Vision for the Future".

The book successfully bridges the gap between the scholarly community and the informed reading public. It succeeds in both its aims of giving information and in reappraising old age as a positive rather than negative event. This can be seen if we consider a case study that appears at the very start of the book, in which the authors discuss the example of the healthy and active retired British nurse, Gill Pharaoh, who decided in 2015 at the age of 75 that she would end her life by euthanasia rather than live on to be a burden to her family. By the

end of the book, the reader is in no doubt that being old is not the wholly negative condition characterised entirely by decline, dependency, and other dreaded attributes that Pharaoh assumed, and society encouraged her to believe, and that old age is, indeed, infinitely better than being dead.

I have used this text, with success, in my second-year undergraduate course on age studies, and although the course is a little U.K.-centric, I have no doubt it will serve as a useful resource for many gerontologists, both as a handy reference and for teaching, as well as for social scientists, cultural critics, advocacy groups, and all those, lay and professional, interested in a lively and engaging overview of the politics of aging and old age today.