

life or 'real world' approach rather than the systems approach focusing on service planners and providers. Second, it is the only core chapter of the book in which the concluding section is followed by a plea for much more 'versatile' research. Third, it may be relevant that the two authors of this chapter (Haverinen and Tabibian) were not listed among the authors of any of the detailed empirical chapters. The views of users and carers are scrutinised under the headings of integration, empowerment and social inclusion. On integration, the issue is raised about the relevance to users of professionally detailed integrated care. Great importance is attached to processes such as a single point of access, continuity of care (and carer) and to being involved on decisions on the provision of care. Negative comments reflect evidence of a lack of seamless care. Empowerment, it is suggested, is associated with a focus on the role of the aware, self-confident, critical consumer rather than on frail, very old people who may not be well informed, or indeed curious about, the range of possible providers of services. The authors remain unsure whether empowerment 'is a concept understood, accepted and internalised by older users, or one that is socially constructed by professionals and policy-makers' (p. 202). The commentary on social inclusion also emphasises the importance of continuity of care and familiarity of surroundings, not least in respect of elderly people described as lonely or socially isolated, but little attention is paid to the need for effective procedures for implementing the policy aim of social inclusion. Yet again, the aims are explicit, but achieving them in terms of resources required (or reorganised) is not addressed. This was reflected in the final chapter, which simply summarises the earlier chapters, identifying 'elements for successful integration processes' (p. 245) but noting that most of the case studies depended on vulnerable funding sources. The volume concludes with a plea for the intensification of inter-disciplinary research in care for older people. Perhaps the United Kingdom Research Councils' *New Dynamics of Ageing* programme is one response to this plea.

Reference

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W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Older Americans, Vital Communities: A Bold Vision for Societal Aging*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 2005, 202 pp., hbk \$40, ISBN 0 8018 8237 0.

The aim of this book, written by one of the foremost American historians of ageing, is to provide a new vision and purpose for growing old in the twenty-first century. Such a task raises many complex issues but Andrew Achenbaum rises to

the challenge with book of elegance and substance, built around a clear sense of historical perspective and understanding. His starting point is the possibility of the baby-boom generation – defined in the American context as those born between 1946 and 1964 – providing a new direction and a fuller perspective on later life. Achenbaum argues that it is the sociological and cultural experiences of this generation – their challenging of social mores, their grounding in higher education alongside involvement in political protest – that provides the basis for a new direction for later life. The author uses this theme to examine what he sees as a neglected area in gerontology, namely, the interaction between individual and societal ageing. Drawing on the work of Riley and Riley and Bernice Neugarten, Achenbaum is concerned to examine the ‘interplay between aging cohorts and institutional contexts from a historical perspective’, developing through this an appreciation of ageing beyond the prism of short-term economic and demographic pressures.

The structure of the book, following a review of the changing context of personal ageing, is built around a number of key themes that require, the author argues, various types of radical change to meet the demands of the demographic revolution. These are set out in respect of: production and consumption; networks for lifelong learning; reforming health care; renewing religious experiences; and expanding the civic engagement of senior citizens. The themes are well chosen and Achenbaum assembles an impressive range of material to indicate different pathways which ageing might take in the future. An argument running through all of these is the continuing hold of ageism in diverse fields such as education, medical care and employment, with a variety of constraints placed upon the lives of older people. Achenbaum provides some striking instances in the field of health care, where he notes that, ‘a mere 10 per cent of the nation’s medical schools require course work or rotations in geriatric medicine [and] fewer than three per cent of medical school graduates take electives in geriatrics’ (p. 80). He sees this as illustrative of the failure of institutions to service the varied needs of ageing populations, further exemplified in the gap between what universities and colleges offer in their programmes as compared with the emerging skill needs of older workers.

The book offers a rich portfolio of ideas, notably so in relation to themes such as adult learning and civic engagement. Both of these draw strongly on the ‘baby-boomer theme’, especially in respect of the educational credentials of this cohort and their potential for taking responsibility for issues of global concern. Achenbaum provides an excellent overview of the rich set of activities in the USA directed at older learners (rooted as the author notes in the influence of John Dewey and the pioneering work in the depression years of Lillian Martin), drawing out some important examples in relation to the advent of e-learning and distance learning. Achenbaum goes as far to argue that, ‘advances in computer technology hold forth the possibility of older people taking a structural lead in broadening opportunities to engage instead of being marginalized by structural lag’ (p. 74). The author also explores areas such as volunteering and mentoring as significant fields for the application of lifelong learning, citing the results of one survey finding, that 40 per cent of older respondents involved in community service judged their efforts as enabling them to ‘reclaim their place in society’

(p. 66). Achenbaum concludes here that, 'there is room for even greater engagement by older people to serve as volunteers in civic agencies that traditionally relied on the altruism of younger persons' (p. 66). The extent to which the 'boomer' cohort will indeed embrace volunteering/mentoring activities is itself an interesting question and Achenbaum takes the optimistic view that, 'as the baby boomer generation ages, it too will be at least as inquisitive, altruistic, and vital as the cohort that preceded it' (p. 75). Whether this prediction will hold remains to be seen and it may well be that there will be considerable variations among boomers on their commitment to engagement as volunteers in fields such as education and social service.

Andrew Achenbaum also provides an important chapter examining the case for extending civic engagement in later life. Again, he anchors his argument in the possibility of boomers becoming exemplars of 'global responsibility', both via their immediate social networks within the community and beyond to a larger political stage. His arguments can be linked to the broader debate about the importance of different types of social capital within society, and the potential role of older people in contributing to bonds of trust and reciprocity within an increasingly fragmented social structure. *Older Americans, Vital Communities* is a major contribution to humanistic perspectives in gerontology. In particular, Achenbaum provides a valuable complementary perspective to structural arguments advanced in critical gerontology concerning the nature of inequalities between and among different birth cohorts. The author provides a salutary reminder that such work is only a starting point for re-thinking the nature of growing old and the contribution of older people to the key institutions that influence their lives. Notwithstanding two decades of critical perspectives, much work is still necessary if the lag between structural changes and the changes in people's lives is to be addressed. Achenbaum's study provides a powerful and superbly written starting point for what will be a key area of research within gerontology over the next decade.

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