

such tenants and to sustain meaningful relationships. He is right in this context to raise a concern that task-centred care and allied charging systems could undermine such relationships, raising further questions about the efficacy of housing-with-care in regard to sustainable, balanced communities.

This book will be of use to social care practitioners, housing providers and researchers, as well as to social policy makers and academics. It provides further impetus to inform ourselves more closely about daily life in housing-with-care settings. This is especially true with regard to the meanings attributed by residents to their 'community' and their views on the maintenance of esteem and social motivation in the age-segregated environment, as well as their expectations and preferences in regard to a scheme's social life, given individual lifestyles and previous patterns of valued social interaction. Evans reminds us that whether or not housing-with-care settings can be accurately referred to as communities, older people's experiences of living in close proximity with each other, and the dynamics involved, have implications for quality of life and emotional wellbeing that merit as much consideration as the provision of physical care and on-site facilities.

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Pat Chambers, Graham Allan, Chris Phillipson and Mo Ray, *Family Practices in Later Life*, The Policy Press, Bristol, UK, 2009, 136 pp., pbk £24.99, ISBN 13: 978 1 84742 052 7.

In the Preface of this book, the authors describe how it was conceived while walking towards the Rose Garden at the University of British Columbia that overlooks the Pacific Ocean. The poetry in this opening statement touches the heart of a reader like myself, and includes me in the very experience of becoming open to new ideas when walking in a rose garden, or elsewhere: more likely to happen then than when sitting crunched over the computer. The book begins with the observation that the idea of a stable, highly structured family cycle is no longer viable as an organising framework for understanding the dynamics of people's family lives. From this premise, it is argued that modern families and family lives are of many kinds, with diversity and change as key characteristics, leaving considerable room for 'doing family' in different ways, even in later life. Norms no longer prescribe family practices in detail, but rather suggest how people should organise their lives and relationships. According to the authors, these developments represent 'a shift between structure and agency in family matters' (p. 3); I would add, maybe to the extent that agency has become an integrated part of the structure itself. The structure and agency issue runs through the whole book and is treated theoretically and empirically, with a generous number of narrative illustrations. Still, for me, the striking thing is how resilient 'the family' has remained, possibly because structural flexibility and mechanisms for earlier deviant forms to become absorbed and redefined have enabled the development of an expanded standard. I would have welcomed a further exploration of the agency-structure issue along this line. The concept 'family

practices', borrowed from David Morgan and in the book's title, is perhaps chosen exactly for this purpose, as a tool for exploring the relationship between agency and structure, including how agency may be transformed into structure.

The book is rich in content and perspectives. It is more than appropriate that the authors stand on the shoulders of Finch and Mason, as they not only represent a critical perspective on family research, but do so from the very same location, Keele University in Staffordshire. Chapter 1 (Family practices and family relationships) presents the theoretical position of the book and authors, and introduces the main concepts to be explored and illustrated empirically. This first chapter lays out these perspectives convincingly, and in contrast to the structural functionalism of Parsonian family theory. Subsequent chapters make reference to different family roles and relationships including parents and children, partners, brothers and sisters, and widow(er)s. A chapter on migrants and transnational families, and a chapter looking forward in time, conclude the book. The empirical chapters are illustrated by cases and narratives that give substance to the theorising – although mainly from Britain, they will be relevant to readers elsewhere. The narrative details help the non-British readership to evaluate the extent to which the findings and conclusions may be generalised. The inclusion of same-sex families is appropriate, and illustrates the flexible nature of the modern family. The book also includes generous references and an index. All this is indeed commendable, and the book is a good read.

Although the book has a comparative perspective across time and place, I would have welcomed more explicit comparison of 'family cultures', including how different welfare regimes define and legislate family responsibilities. The culture–structure issue is central in comparative studies on the family, as it allows an exploration of if and how family 'culture' influences policy, and vice versa. Around the world, southern and eastern families are said to be stronger and more stable than the families of the north and west. Are they then more *structural*, with less room for *agency*? What dimensions of family relationships are we considering here: only the normative, or other types of family ties? It seems to me that the comparative approach can help us more clearly separate the roles and relationships of structure and agency in this area. That said, 100 plus pages can hardly say what there is to say about the family in later life. The book helps us see the diversity and fluidity of the modern family, and to understand the implications. No small achievement, and therefore a book to be recommended for students of both ageing and family issues.

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Ricca Edmondson and Hans-Joachim von Kondratowitz (eds), *Valuing Older People: A Humanist Approach to Ageing*, Policy Press, Bristol, UK, 2009, 312 pp., pbk £25.99, ISBN 13: 978 1 84742 291 0.

In his cogent review in this journal of the second edition of the *Handbook of Theories of Ageing* edited by Vern Bengtson, Daphna Gans, Norella Putney and Merrill