

Reviews

doi:10.1017/S0144686X1200089X

Simon Biggs and Ariela Lowenstein, *Generational Intelligence: A Critical Approach to Age Relations*, Routledge, Abingdon, UK, 2011, 186 pp., pbk £24.99, ISBN 13: 978 0 415 54655 3.

This book revolves around the concept ‘generational intelligence’ which is defined as ‘an ability to reflect and act, which draws on an understanding of one’s own and others’ life-course, family and social history, placed within its social and cultural context’ (p. 2). In other words, this refers to one’s ability to place oneself in the position of a person of a different age or generation and also work towards negotiated and sustainable solutions. The first chapter sets the context for the rest of the book by providing a detailed explanation of the concept ‘generational intelligence’, and outlining the steps one must take to achieve a higher level of generational intelligence. Thereafter the book is set out in two parts. The first part focuses on the role of self in achieving a higher level of generational intelligence, discussing both the internal world of self-awareness and imagination and the external phenomena of the ‘age-other’. The second part focuses on specific areas in which intergenerational relations are played out (*i.e.* in families; in caregiving; in relation to elder abuse; in the workplace; and in community programmes) and discusses how a higher level of generational intelligence could have implications for these areas. The concluding chapter identifies sustainable generational relations as the primary objective of generational intelligence and discusses what such relations might involve.

The concept of generational intelligence, as a move beyond the bipolarities of generational conflict and solidarity, is an engaging one. The book makes a strong argument for the merits of interrogating the intergenerational space through encouraging and empowering people to put themselves in the position of the age other. Overall, this reader was left with a feeling that the concept of generational intelligence is a promising way of approaching intergenerational relations in a time of rapid population ageing and changing cultural demands on social systems, families and individual lifecourses. The book moves logically through the process of gaining a higher level of generational intelligence internally and how this may be applied and nurtured externally.

However, the main weakness of the book is that focusing on self-improvement in the first half of the book leaves the non-psychologist waiting until the concluding chapter to get a sense of its central purpose. As the book progresses, one becomes more enamoured with the idea of generational intelligence, particularly the authors’ identification of the important link between individual action and social outcomes. One feels, however, that an opportunity to produce a theory of generational intelligence to challenge

the ‘deletion’ of older citizens from social life, hasn’t quite been seized. The book begins to gain some ground in this direction in the closing chapters through the application of the idea of generational intelligence to big questions such as sustainability and responsibility to future generations. At this point, the ‘self-help’ chapters at the beginning of the book begin to make more sense.

Intellectually, the book is appealing, the authors are obviously immersed in the literature in their respective fields and so the book will be of use to students and scholars alike. However, the authors come from different social science disciplines, social psychology and sociology, and as such have different disciplinary orientations and writing styles: as one moves through the chapters it is at times difficult for the reader to maintain a focus on what is important. Chapters vary in tone. Some read like a list of ideas or a self-conversation, particularly Chapter 3. Others are more purposeful, directly tackling how the issue of generation has been dealt with in the social gerontology literature to date. A high note is the section on theoretical perspectives on intergenerational family relations, which raises some interesting questions about the main approaches to studying generation, such as lifecourse ambivalence *versus* solidarity-conflict. The authors’ clear statement on why the family is central in understanding intergenerational relations at both individual and societal level is compelling regardless of whether one views experiences of ageing as a construct of social policy (Townsend 1981) or consumer choice (Gilleard and Higgs 2000). The remainder of the book develops these theoretical ideas by applying the idea of generational intelligence to care-giving, elder mistreatment, workplace and community. These chapters ought to be compulsory reading for anyone working on intergenerational solidarity in 2012, the European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity Between the Generations.

References

- Gilleard, C. and Higgs, P. 2000. *Cultures of Ageing: Self, Citizen and the Body*. Prentice Hall, Edinburgh.
- Townsend, P. 1981. The structured dependency of the elderly: a creation of social policy in the twentieth century. *Ageing & Society*, 1, 1, 6–28.

Irish Centre for Social Gerontology,
National University of Ireland

GEMMA CARNEY AND
CAROLINE FINN

doi:10.1017/S0144686X12000906

Malcolm Payne, *Citizenship Social Work with Older People*, The Policy Press, Bristol, UK, 2012, 208 pp., pbk £22.99, ISBN 13: 978 1 44730 127 1.

I was keen to review this book since its title suggested to me a radical and challenging approach to ideas about support to people in their old age. In