Reviews

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Torbjörn Bildtgård and Peter Öberg, *Intimacy and Ageing: New Relationships in Later Life*, Policy Press, Bristol, UK, 2017, 212 pp., hbk £60.00, ISBN 13: 978-1-4473-2649-6.

Scandinavia has long been of interest to family demographers because it has been at the forefront of a variety of family changes in reproductive years, including non-marital childbearing, co-habitation and same-sex marriage. Less attention has been paid to family experiences in these countries in later life – particularly those surrounding the formation of new romantic and intimate relationships. Bildtgård and Öberg's *Intimacy and Ageing: New Relationships in Later Life* examines the changing dynamics of intimate relationships (which include 'living apart together' or LAT, co-habitation and marriage) between opposite-sex individuals in contemporary Sweden. The authors contextualise their investigation against the demographic backdrop of increasing life expectancy and better health, as well as cultural shifts tied to increasing emphasis on values such as consumerism and individualism. These demographic and social changes have given rise to what Peter Laslett (1989) called the 'third age' of life – after working life but before frailty. This 'third age' allows time for individuals to pursue new avenues of self-development and identity formation, and often includes new relationships. The authors employ a lifecourse perspective to explore how the past and current relationship and sexual experiences of older adults (defined as age 60–90) are intertwined. They also capture the attitudes of older adults regarding new relationship formation in later life as well as the actual consequences of re-partnering for levels and sources of companionate, emotional and practical support.

One of the book's core strengths is the use of data from diverse and complementary sources: in-depth qualitative interviews in Sweden, results of a Swedish national quantitative survey and information from Eurostat, which includes national census data from a variety of European countries. The qualitative study took place in 2010 and 2011 and included 28 Swedish men and women aged 60–90 who had either started a new relationship since turning 60 or were looking to start one. Of particular note regarding the qualitative study is that, in many cases, individuals within a couple were interviewed, which provides insights into the process and negotiations of relationship formation (including what form the relationship would take), as well as gendered experiences with relationship formation in later life – a theme that is well-integrated throughout the text. The qualitative data are also valuable for the insights it provides into the motivations for and experiences in LAT and co-habiting relationships which, as the

authors note, may not be recognised as formal civil statuses, and thus excluded from census and other data sources.

The authors also present results from their quantitative survey, conducted in 2013, which consisted of a random sample of Swedes aged 60–90 with an over-sample of the non-married population. This sampling strategy was driven by the desire to understand experiences, attitudes and behaviours of those who might initiate relationships in later life. The quantitative survey is an important complement to the qualitative studies because it provides some benchmark for the representativeness of the experiences captured in qualitative interviews, as well as information about single people who are not interested in re-partnering and the long-term married – groups that were not captured by the qualitative study. Unfortunately, the response rate for the survey was low overall – 42.5 per cent (58.5% for married respondents, 36.5% for non-married respondents), and follow-up analysis of non-respondents suggested that many may have objected to the sensitive nature of the survey content. As such, the quantitative survey results likely over-represent the 'leading edge' (according to Eurostat statistics) of a country that is part of the vanguard of new forms of intimate relationships in later life.

Another strength of the book is the thoughtful examination of time through demographic and developmental-psychological lenses. In several chapters, the authors explore the relative importance of the demographic concepts of age, period and cohort in shaping attitudes and behaviours, as well as how these notions of time intersect with one another and with gender and relationship status. The authors also draw from developmental and psychological perspectives including Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (Carstensen 2006) to frame their discussion of how individuals' perceptions of their remaining time impact their goals, motivations and emotions regarding the formation and negotiation of intimate relationships.

Several topics in the book merit exploration in future research. First, while I applaud the authors for not restricting their focus to how physical health influences sexual functioning and partnership availability in later life, longitudinal analysis – both qualitative and quantitative – of how individuals and couples negotiate illness, disability and the end of life would shed needed light on how individuals transition from the 'third age' to life's inevitable close. Also, the authors were not able to recruit any same-sex couples for their qualitative analysis. Additional work on the experiences of same-sex relationships in later life will provide an even richer picture of how intimate relationships in later life are changing. In all, however, this book presents a rich portrait and would be of interest to a variety of audiences, including sociologists, family demographers, gerontologists, sexologists and policy makers.

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Health and Human Services, the National Institutes of Health or the National Institute on Aging, except where noted.

References

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Kate de Medeiros, *The Short Guide to Aging and Gerontology*, Policy Press, Bristol, UK, 2017, 243 pp., pbk £14.99, ISBN 13: 978-1-4473-2838-4.

The purpose of this book, as stated by the author, is to 'provide a concise overview of the field of gerontology' (p. X), with the hope that it will 'open new discussions about how we think about and study aging, gerontology's evolution as a field and new directions for research' (p. X11). The book explores not only why we age but the phenomena of how ageing has been defined, experienced and studied throughout the history of time. The work focuses on a wide range of literature from the social sciences, but excludes the medical and biological literature as being beyond the scope of the book. One of the strengths of the book is the way it deals with issues, so that as you read, it appears to be more of a conversation about a series of interrelated and connected topics unfolding through the different chapters. This has the virtue of demonstrating the holistic nature of gerontology and the complexity of the concepts explored.

The book divides naturally into two parts: the first provides a challenging look at the meaning of age, ageing and gerontology, and challenges where these fit into the experience of age for the individual. The second part explores different themes in the gerontology repertoire including family, death, grief, loss and loneliness, social location and place, financing of age, and narrative and creativity.

In the first part of the book (Chapters 1–4), the author provides an extensive exploration of the meaning of 'ageing' and 'gerontology'. This section deconstructs some of the theories and common assumptions related to functional abilities in later life and shows that many are embedded in the biomedical model. The author makes a good argument for disassociating older age from decline and, instead, much of the discussion is aimed at encouraging the reader to reflect on new opportunities and the positive