

Book Reviews

Lynch, Caitrin & Danely, Jason, Eds. Transitions & Transformations: Cultural Perspectives on Aging and the Life Course. New York, NY: Berghahn Books. 2013. ISBN978-0-85745-778-3 272 pp Price \$95.00/£60.00 (Hardback)

Transitions & Transformation: Cultural Perspectives on Aging and the Life Course, officially launches Berghahn Books new book series, entitled Life Course, Culture and Aging: Global Transformations (series editor is Jay Sokolovsky), that proposes to focus on aging and the life course in anthropology. This is a welcome addition to the growing literature on cross-cultural aging that applies creative and multifaceted approaches of anthropological analysis and inquiry to the wonderfully complex subject of age. While firmly situated within the global urgency of burgeoning numbers of aged individuals worldwide, the chapters in this volume resist the panic trope so often summoned in usual representations of the squaring of age pyramids and ominous dependency ratios that preference doom and ruin over dynamic cultural identities and innovative human strategies. The anthropological stance is uniquely well suited to tackling individual and larger social issues embedded in changing cultural norms and practices, and nuanced treatments of aging across the globe are featured in this volume. Focusing on on-the-ground situations within specific cultural contexts, important issues are discussed in the well-written, lively and varied collection of articles displayed here. How to embed meaning, recognize personhood and respect relationships in later years is a strong theme of the

volume.

In the initial section that introduces the essays of this book, the editors describe their dynamic approach of “transitions and transformations.” In the papers that follow, relationships and changes, the interactions of individual, family, and society through time and flux are highlighted. The chapters claim a connection with earlier anthropological collections that focus on diversity and creativity; at the same time, the articles purport to depart from “reductionistic uses of cultural diversity as points on a scatter-plot” (p 5) and argue for enhanced cross-disciplinary inquiry. Organized in sections titled, “Frameworks,” “Bodies,” “Spatiality and Temporality,” “Families,” and “Economies,” the chapters consider an important variety of issues and provide insights to extend the existing literature. An Afterword by Jennifer Cole that focuses on importance of including cross-generational analysis rounds out the volume.

“Frameworks” includes the introductory chapter by the editors that describes the approach of the book, places the volume in historical context of anthropological writings on age, highlights the importance of the “life course” approach to studies of age, and provides brief summaries of the chapters and their relationship to the unifying thread of the book. Following this introduction, Mary Catherine Bateson updates Erickson’s developmental stages with “Adulthood II,” a phase of life she characterizes as showcasing “active wisdom.” She considers the necessity of this stage in light of global aging and the expanded period of time of healthy aging so prevalent today in industrialized nations. Many of the chapters in this volume echo Ericksonian principles of development and psychological growth over time.

Section II contains chapters that explore

the notion of “Bodies” by presenting varied and lively accounts of different subjects rooted in universal biological processes and situated in specific cultural contexts. These chapters examine how individuals cope with chronic pain at different ages in a clinic in the United States and use strategies to construct continuity challenged by the disruption to identify caused by pain (Lindsey Martin); how Chinese middle-aged women construct their experiences with menopause (gengnianqi) to explain and protest through “irritability” and “venting anger” their individual perspectives on growing older in a rapidly changing China (Jeanne Shea); and how men both young and older describe reaction against and identification with traditional and changing notions of what it means to be masculine and Mexican in a rapidly modernizing Mexico (Emily Wentzell).

Section III, “Spatiality and Temporality,” explores the intersection of time and identity and notions of place in relation to individual aging. Jessica Robbins examines the intimate and intricate connection between the national and personal “moral ideal” of identity in Poland, how suffering in old age is entangled with victimization throughout Polish history, and the relationship between kin nearby and abroad. Frances Norwood uses the Dutch window bridging the public and private spheres of life as a metaphor to showcase cultural notions and intense “euthanasia talk,” inspired by the rarely enacted legal choice to die. Jason Danely’s treatment of the temporal world of older Japanese notes individuals’ connections “involving mutual recognition with unseen spirits and invisible worlds that structure memories, aspirations, and emotions” (p109). Narratives of older Japanese individuals as well as various common phrases and sayings emphasize interdependence and exchange across

time and place.

The fourth section of the book focuses on "Families," and its three chapters explore caregiving by Azorean women in Brazil (Diane De G. Brown), Puerto Rican grandmothers who care for their grandchildren in Boston (Marta B. Rodríguez-Galan), and how in Sri Lanka, complex notions of reciprocity in debt and obligation among generations are displayed in changing and discrepant attitudes about using care institutions for older individuals when they become dependent. These chapters, like others in the volume, include vivid quotes, elicit cultural values, provide national context and specific circumstances, and situate the authors in their ethnographic accounts.

The final section, called "Economies," includes chapters on the conflicting meanings attributed to the rise of eldercare institutions in India (Sarah Lamb), how best to provide *seva* (respectful service or care) to elderly individuals and manage the dilemmas of these sparring narratives embedded in "the project of being human" (p177). Membership and mattering are prime concerns of the elderly factory workers discussed in Caitrin Lynch's lively chapter. These workers choose to continue to work, maintain friendships within the factory and thereby preserve a viable identity that seems to cushion old age. It is reminiscent of my ethnographic exploration of elderly New York diamond dealers who find satisfaction and meaning by working whenever possible into their 90s (Shield, 2002). The fascinating chapter by Jane Guyer and Kabiru Salami describes notions of indebtedness and responsibility examined from the perspectives of their separate studies over decades in rural Nigeria. Again, mutuality and interdependence are stressed in how changing contexts reframe the meanings of finances, old age, and worth. Finally, Jennifer Cole's "Afterword" explores the important notion of generations within the

heterogeneity of age and youth. She warns against the "synoptic illusion" and reductionism of definitional shortcuts that stereotype and damage dynamic differences among ages.

This volume is full of good writing, lively situations, some wonderful photos, revealing quotes and stimulating ideas. Its readability makes it appealing as a text to be used widely in the undergraduate/graduate classroom. A brief introduction to each section would have been a good addition as another opportunity to remind the reader of key unifying themes. Still to be explored by anthropologists are their own relationships to their aging and the subjects with whom they interact, a point I've argued elsewhere (Shield 2003). A concern is that the volume claims a radical distinction from prior anthropological works on aging considered static and totalizing in contrast. This argument privileges new contributions without fully recognizing some important precedents such as the "life's career-aging" examination by Myerhoff and Simić (1978), for example. Here the authors attempt "in their analysis of aging to reconcile its culturally stable aspects with its dynamic dimensions conceiving of each particular cultural niche as a distinct and unique resource subject to manipulation and individual interpretation and misinterpretation" (1978: 231). Of course, each generation has the challenge of recognizing its own myopia in thinking itself unique as it discovers and rediscovers these insights. These concerns aside, the current volume makes for excellent reading and launches the new Berghahn book series admirably.

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Chang, Heewon, Faith Wambura
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C. Hernandez. Collaborative
Autoethnography. Walnut Creek,
California: Left Coast Press. 2013.
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Heewon Chang, Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, and Kathy-Ann Hernandez have collaborated to produce *Collaborative Autoethnography*. *Collaborative Autoethnography (CAE)* is a further elaboration of *Autoethnography (AE)*. Researchers in both approaches see themselves as both the subject/informant of the research and the analyst of that research. In CAE, the researcher/subject is part of a team that collects and analyzes her/his data. This book is a review of past research in terms of methodology and a handbook on how to do collaborative research.

The authors place CAE and AE in terms of an evolving field of theoretical interest. Researchers themselves have personal and professional lives that are situated in their institutions and culture(s). AE (as well as CAE) allows the researcher/subject to turn a lens (p.22—their word) on her/his own life as well as the larger society.

AE has addressed abortions, pregnancy, death and grief, and sexual

abuse, among other topics (pp.19-20.) The book's authors agree with other students of AE that while rich in data, more can be gained by a more collaborative approach. Collaborative approaches allow for more depth as well as personal and community building. At minimum, a collaboration can be two people—the researcher/subject and another researcher. They propose an ideal team of at least one more member.

CAE can focus on traditional academic concerns, with a single or several research focuses. It can also extend to performance art, wherein "... autoethnographies are written as theater scripts... [or as] a series of poetry, or performance narratives... (p.51.)" In terms of AAGE's mission on aging, I can see many places where CAE can be used. A few "personal" examples come to mind. People are doing "Story" projects in many communities. Often located in museums or libraries, a person tells her/his story. Teams of collaborators, whether professionals and/or non-professionals trained by professionals, can engage a person or several people to tell their life stories in greater depth. Several years ago I taught a discussion class on "Generations" through our local junior college's Older Adults Program. The discussion group was based in a nursing home. It could have easily been based in a senior center as well. The participants reviewed their lives, providing wonderful information on their similarities and differences according to all our "standard" kinds of foci—gender, class, education, region, job, religion, sexual preference, and so on. The data were rich and could easily be used to add to histories of different periods. Moreover, the data were enriched by each participant's interaction with the others when they questioned or reaffirmed or remembered something or some events another had not. Hopefully, we can

find issues worthy of study that we had not expected as well.

As for academic collaborative teams, the authors contend that they work best when the participants are located where they can have continued social interaction. They are located in the same city. They meet for coffee, lunch, dinner, and other events and they meet over time. In terms of proposed methodologies, they suggest different models of collaboration, which can offer differing degrees of complexity. It would be interesting to see what kinds of data and studies can be gained by on-line collaboration or a mixture of the two. As noted above, it may be possible to add that to the repertoire of CAE for older people that they can do by themselves or with some help.

As they lay out their models for research and their places in theory, they note that many of the studies involve women in the academy, immigrant experiences, and people of color. They situate themselves in all the above ways and especially in terms of motherhood (pp.185-6.) The authors build upon both feminist theory and feminist critique and the whole field of qualitative research. The ends they seek say it all: "It [CAE] is a transforming process that allows scholars to build community, advance scholarship, engage in social activism, and become empowered in their social context (p.148.) What makes this book even more interesting is that as the authors lay out their formulations, they share relevant anecdotes about their own lives.

The authors also address some of the dilemmas this kind of fieldwork entails. One always has to ask: How much should I reveal about myself? How much should I reveal about others—especially without their consent? How should I present my data? They recognize that collaboration helps reveal issues that are not always apparent to

the subject (p.28.) Lastly, they see the research process as supportive for the person studied as she experiences or re-experiences trauma or a difficult situation (p.30.)

I have several suggestions for the book. First, I think the title should have been Collaborative Autoethnography: A Handbook. That makes it clearer as to what the book is about. Second, the authors should tie their research into other related research about the psychology and anthropology of fieldwork experiences, (cf. Davies and Spencer 2010.) Third, in terms of my self-disclosure about my comments, I am an anthropologist as well as a licensed psychologist. I would have liked to see much more of a discussion of the handling of trauma and denial, among other psychological issues (e.g., p.29.) In sum, I would strongly recommend this book for those unfamiliar with this emerging field and who want to do this kind of valuable research.

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Paradigm Press. 2011. ISBN
9781594519079, 222 pp.
Price \$ 28.95 (Paper).

As the population rapidly ages and people are living longer, today's Boomers are faced with the complex decision of determining who is going to provide proper care for their elderly parents. Dependent upon medical, financial, physical, mental and other specific needs, some individuals may decide to care for their parents on their own while others seek out long-term care facilities such as assisted living, adult day care, respite care or nursing homes that provide optimum care. While finding a facility takes time and much thought, the complexity of the issue lies in finding long-term care where elders are treated with kindness, respect, and cared for as human beings; not abused, neglected, ignored or treated as "impersonal, material items" (84).

Authors Jason Ulsperger and J. David Knottnerus investigate the root causes of abuse in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities based on systematic research and sociological theory to help one understand the different types of nursing home maltreatment. The book is divided into nine chapters. Beginning with identifying the bureaucracy that encompasses today's nursing homes and other long-term facilities, the text transitions into the history of nursing home care. Final chapters focus on the organizational dynamics and everyday rituals that can unintentionally lead to elder abuse and neglect.

Although present in the 1960s, nursing home care and maltreatment

drastically emerged as a social problem and came to the forefront in the 1970s. This resulted in the establishment of the nursing home reform movement and efforts by organizations such as the National Citizen's Coalition for Nursing Home Reform (NCCNHR) to continue to assume important roles in the history of nursing homes. Interestingly as the authors point out, even with the development of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1987 (OBRA) also known as the "Nursing Home Reform Act" (59) elder abuse and maltreatment continued to plague our nation and impact the care of aging adults. But why?

Bureaucracy and rules impact the overall care for our elderly. Rules replace compassion. Government regulations impact how assigned, everyday duties or "rituals" go unnoticed or undone due to daily tasks assigned to specific employees based on skill/knowledge levels. Simple things such as removing dirty dishes from the table in a resident's room or seeing a resident stranded in a hallway waiting for someone to roll them back to their room may not get done if top-level employees are the only ones available. I totally agree that in our complex world rules are a necessity. However environments where people are dependent on compassion and quality care at a time in their life when they are alone, afraid, and/or ill, rules can contribute to unethical and inhumane care.

This book addresses the core issues of elder abuse and maltreatment and provides case vignettes of everyday situations that long-term/nursing facility residents tolerate due to bureaucratic policies. I was angered when I read many of these short stories which depict bureaucratic induced dehumanization of care. The authors stress the need for culture change; shifting away from the traditional

nursing home model (130) to a positive, "resident-centered care" model, thus transforming a facility into a home. The authors remind the reader to acknowledge the elderly for the human beings they are and not "unemotional work products" (83). Engage them, don't isolate and be responsive to individual needs. Hire employees who have the compassion and desire to care for the elderly and not just fill bureaucratic positions based on policies/demographics.

I would recommend this book to any lay person, healthcare provider, nursing facility employee; or anyone from the Boomer generation who may be faced with the decision of one day finding the proper home for a parent. This book should be required reading for anyone working in a nursing home or long-term care facility as a reminder how not to treat those they are caring for. Although a quick read, this book provides a wealth of advice and strategies for lessening elder abuse and maltreatment. In one of the chapters the authors compare today's nursing homes to zoos; stressing the point that residents who are unruly and labeled "troublemakers" are often tranquilized and restrained to protect themselves and those around them much like a zoo keeper would do to a wild gorilla. Both have staff ready to contain unruly creatures that cause disruptions throughout the workday, even if the physical welfare suffers.

Two other types of maltreatment the authors identify is "spoken aggression" and "infantilization" (122). Spoken aggression involves speaking to residents in an intimidating, cold tone or calling names (e.g., calling an older female resident a "mean old woman" or yelling at someone to "shut up and eat your dinner") (123). Infantilization is speaking in a *condescending way that reduces the status of the resident to a young child* (117). *Healthcare providers need to*

be attuned to the subtle nuances that can degrade the status of those they are caring for by treating them like children instead of the adults they are.

The world around us is aging and providing compassionate care is the model all facilities should strive toward. The authors summarize the book nicely by concluding that in order to provide such care, nursing homes must undergo culture changes that downplay bureaucracy, revise staff policies, counter loneliness and isolation from the inside, empower residents and respond to their individual needs.

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*Sanjek, Roger. Gray Panthers.
University of Pennsylvania Press.
320 pp. Cloth 2009 ISBN 978-0-8122-4137-2, \$65.00; Paper 2011,
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Ebook 2011, ISBN 978-0-8122-0351-6, \$26.50*

Studies of elder activism are rare indeed. Much more so the kind of rich and detailed account which veteran anthropologist and activist Roger Sanjek offers us here. *Gray Panthers* has much to give those interested in older people, not just because of the quality of the study itself, but also because the Panthers to whom we are introduced are themselves experts on aging from whom we need to learn.

Some professor once taught me that the test of a good ethnography was the degree to which the data it presented could enable another scholar to re-analyze it to answer different questions.

I was reminded of this criteria as I read *Gray Panthers*. The careful study of the emblematic activist organization is rich enough in data to speak to a dozen different research agendas: relating to the history of left politics in the United States, the activism of older people, social movement organizing, leadership and gender, ideas about older people, intergenerational politics, and insider anthropology, among others. The life history of a social movement, *Gray Panthers* traces the story of the eponymous organization from the moment of the group's inception in 1971 in a fight against mandatory retirement and the ageism it represented. The group grew to represent the interests of older Americans in a variety of ways: denouncing living conditions in nursing homes, unethical practices in the hearing aid industry (in collaboration with Ralph Nader), media portrayals of older people, for example. Yet, it has been much more than that. Its slogan, "Age and Youth in Action," signals the group's intergenerational philosophy. It took up pressing social justice issues of the moment, including the war in Viet Nam, public health care, sexism and racism. It is to this larger critique that the group owes its name, an intentional reference to the Black Panthers. The story spans several decades and many states, including specific chapters focusing on the Panthers in Berkeley, New York, and Washington. (Sanjek originally encountered the Panthers in Berkeley in 1977. He and his wife both became personally involved with the Panthers. The author only later took up the group as an object of study.) The account continues through the organization's various ups and downs, including internal conflict, and the death of its found Maggie Kuhn in 1995, to the time of writing.

For scholars interested in aging, the book is doubly fruitful. There is much to learn about how older people organize and do politics. Most striking

perhaps is the symbolic politics which the Panthers were so good at: intentionally interrupting mainstream views of older people and aging by doing "outrageous" things. Another important question for older activists is time. In *Gray Panthers*, we see this particular relation to time in at least three ways. First, older people are often retired, thus have more time available to dedicate to their causes. Second, older people also benefit from long experience and extensive networks. Once and again in *Gray Panthers* we see how members make use of expertise and contacts acquired in earlier stages of their lives. One of the most personally compelling aspects for this reader was the way the Panthers connect us to earlier activist movements and political struggles that have been all but forgotten in US political memory -- in particular the pre-cold war left traditions. Third, the activists and their organization have to contend with the fact they are nearer the end of their lives, than the beginning. This can create a sense of urgency, that time is limited. It also creates practical challenges for political organizing. Experienced and knowledgeable members are more likely than their younger counterparts to be sidelined by illness, or even to die. The particular strengths of and challenges faced by the elder activists here can thus inform our understanding of the third age more generally.

In sum, *Gray Panthers* is a book that needed to be written. Evidently Sanjek was the man for the job. The Panthers have played an important role in *redefining what it means to be old*. *This book both describes and continues that project.*

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Haber, David. Health Promotion and Aging: Practical Application for Health Professionals. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company. 2013. ISBN978-0-8261-9917-1, 536 pp. Price \$90 (Paper)

Dr. Haber's text delivers exactly what the title says and more. Like most books on aging, this book begins with a demographic perspective of aging in the United States. It then moves onto a clinical perspective of the current state of health (or disease based on your perception) in older adults. The book continues with a frank discussion of how we as helping professionals should focus on wellness vs. health care (or disease management, again based on your interpretation of the health care system). The text provides examples of evidenced based practical applications of wellness that can be utilized by gerontologists, public health professionals and everyone in between who works with older adults. The book ends with a look at the ever changing public policies and programs for older adults such as Medicare, Social Security, and the Affordable Health Care Act. The final chapter provides words of wisdom, ideas, and hope for the future to continue to serve and care for the growing older adult population. One can only hope that policy makers have a copy of this book on their shelves and take Dr. Haber's words to heart.

Health Promotion and Aging is now one of my favorite books and I look forward to using it in class. It takes many of my interests in the professions of gerontology and public health and combines them all in one book. This is perfect for the jack of trades professional. Every health educator, health care administrator,

and community planner could benefit from the research and application examples described in this text. This is the perfect "crossover" text for the public health professional who says they don't work with older adults and the gerontologist who says they don't focus on health care. This book provides a "big picture" look at our society and how we plan (or have not planned) to meet the needs of the fastest growing segment of our population. This would be an excellent text for an applied gerontology course. It provides valuable examples for future professionals in the world of recreation, wellness, and administration for older adults.

As a former senior center director, I particularly liked chapter 13, where Dr. Haber provides five unique career paths for students. The first one, being to redesign existing senior centers as wellness centers. This book would have been a great asset to assist me in new program development. As an instructor, this book provides examples for future service-learning projects. Dr. Haber provides ideas for new programs using evidenced based practices and a good amount of detail to write the policies and procedures (if not the actual procedure) to get a new project off the ground without having to reinvent the wheel. As a bonus, Dr. Haber provides suggestions on agencies for community collaborations.

I found the author's writing style particularly engaging. While reading the text, I felt as if Dr. Haber were speaking to me as if we were old friends or colleagues. I enjoyed reading his personal insights and thoughts even in areas of the text I would have been tempted to skim just to read what his impression was of a particular topic or situation.

There is a wealth of history along

with current events described in the text. For those of us who have been around, I really liked how Dr. Haber provided "then and now" examples. For example in chapter five, Dr. Haber describes the USDA's new program MyPlate vs. MyPyramid in teaching about balanced meal planning. In chapter four he provides examples of the Surgeon General's recommendation for activity that used to focus on targeted heart rates and now focuses on the accumulation of activity most days of the week and explains why we changed from one method to another. If there is a weakness in the book, I have not found it, unless you are not a fan of Dr. Haber's style of humor and blunt honesty.

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