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Book Review

Review of Howell, Britteny M., and Ryan P. Harrod, eds. *Anthropological Perspectives on Aging*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida. 2023. pp. 350. Price: \$90.00 (Hardcover); \$35.00 (Paperback).

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The book *Anthropological Perspectives on Aging* by Britteny Howell and Ryan Harrod brings together work by social and biological anthropologists across the world to discuss the heterogeneities of aging populations and older adults across different socio-cultural contexts. It provides a rich anthropological perspective on aging through evolutionary and biological lenses while also incorporating socio-medical and cultural perspectives, with a specific focus on research methodologies. Incorporating social and biological anthropologists allowed the authors to discuss aging both as a biological and cultural experience across various geographical locations and time periods. The contributors reveal that aging is further complicated through physiological decline and the continuous adaptation that happens across the life course. Debunking the myths of historical aging, the editors place this work broadly at the intersection of biological and cultural narratives of aging in a global context (United States, Tibet, Turkey, China, Nigeria, and Mexico) and contribute to the theoretical framework of cultural gerontology, within the broader ambit of social gerontology. Overall, the chapters contribute towards multiple understandings of growing old.

Interestingly, the editors touch upon theories that remain overlooked in aging studies. They discuss two crucial theories – (i) the life course theory and (ii) political economy theory of aging. The life-course perspective takes a longitudinal approach to life histories, utilizing ethnographic and other life record data, to investigate the variation that exists between individuals and groups of people in the past and present. The political economic theories on aging investigate how social conditions provided by society at large, often limiting access to resources, create unequal labor distributions and other structural inequalities that cause premature aging.

The first part of the volume elaborates on evolutionary and biological perspectives including both human and non-human primates, where aspects of adaptability, reproduction, microbiome, child-care and menopause are discussed. For instance, Joyce Parga (Chapter Two) shares how models for human aging derive from non-human primates and focuses on reproductive senescence, resulting in difference in social behavior among males and females. Ryan P. Harrod and Alyssa Willet (Chapter Three) extend these dialogues by focusing on human adaptability due to biological changes in humans and how it is bio-culturally shaped. Utilizing a bioarchaeological perspective (along with occupational theory and ethnomedical research) on aging, the authors conclude how individuals develop ways to mitigate aging through ideas of cultural support. Melissa Melby and colleagues (Chapter Four) discuss the relationship

of the human microbiome with changing lifestyles, behaviors and environment and its role in affecting mortality and morbidity in contemporary times. Sofiya Shreyer and Julie Hemment (Chapter Five) bring other aspects of everyday living, such as unpaid activities (household chores and care work), and discuss the biocultural approach to understand childcare and grand mothering in Ukraine. Using both qualitative and quantitative findings, the authors examine how childcare affects grandmothers' health and wellbeing across paternal and maternal grandparents. They draw on post-socialist scholarship to raise important questions around identity formation in later life, health, and intergenerational solidarity. This is further extended in Chapter Six, through the discussion on post-reproductive lives of older women. The authors, Peteneinu Rulu and Lynnette Sievert, use a lifespan perspective and also analyze the different stressors that are culturally embedded in shaping women's experience of menopause.

In Chapter Seven, Heather Norton elaborates on biological changes of skin and how it impacts the everyday perception of attractiveness through pushing forward the nascent field of skin-aging genetics and the growing consumerism around it. In Chapter Eight, Suzan Yazici and Nulifer K. Yaylagul, use a medical anthropological approach to understand aging from a cultural perspective. For instance, the authors discuss the under-researched issue of age understood as a numerical value, and how that contributes to inaccurate medical diagnosis and supporting health systems. Although briefly, the chapter brings up issues around chronological age among minorities in Turkey, namely the migrated and low socio-economic background groups. Similarly, Chapter Nine by Britteny Howell and colleagues, explores the ideas around healthy aging among natives in Alaska as they negotiate these through traditional foods and subsistence activities. Going beyond the universal definitions of 'successful aging,' the authors emphasize human adaptability, resilience, and culture in understanding health behaviors. In Chapter Ten, Jing Wang criticizes the ideas of successful aging but instead of dismissing the concept entirely, she reorients it to include decline and death as meaningful and necessary aspects of the aging process. Through rich ethnographic details from Tibet, Wang sees death and decline in positive light – fostering empowerment and interdependence between children and older adults, caring and its contribution towards karma and eventually, rebirth. Contributing towards a more holistic approach towards aging, Cortney Rinker in Chapter Eleven incorporates the role of religion, particularly, Islam, in defining aging bodies in the US, while also including experiences of family caregivers of people with serious illness(s) and of end-of-life care. This interaction between the US health system and religion informs the readers about the shifts and continuities in religious beliefs, practices and identities. In Chapter 13, Ojo Melvin Agunbiade reveals how dementia has been colloquially understood through folklores in China. These folklores emphasize the role of cultural values, beliefs, and practices. Using the lens of generativity and social practice, the author also aims to draw possible implications on aging-in-place.

In Chapter 14, Douglas E. Crews and Kathryn E. Marklein conceptualizes frailty (in the living and the dead) through physical limitations and functional decline by proposing a set of characteristics. This helps us understand concepts of physical decline, the role of culture, and the concept of aging-in-place. Chapter 15 delineates methodological issues in participatory research, especially with subjective ideas of chronological versus social age, health, and overall functionality. In this chapter, Jean J. Schensul emphasizes hermeneutics in understanding the aging process along with other collaborative methods (like participatory or community-based action research) with elaborate model building exercises in the chapter. Continuing with exploring sensitive themes within already vulnerable aging populations, Chapter 16 deals with recruiting participants for dementia research. The concluding chapter by the editors brings together the themes of cultural gerontology and its intersection with social and biological gerontology to guide the future of the fast-emerging sub-discipline, anthropology of aging.

Overall, the book presents readers with a holistic description of different theories and cultural contexts in aging studies and of data collection methods and their challenges. It extensively discusses the linkage between biological and cultural aspects of aging and how that plays out in the everyday lives of older adults and thereby, contributing towards the growing field of cultural gerontology. However, unfortunately, it does not elaborate on these theories, or make connections across the chapters.