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Book Review

Growing Up Growing Old: Trajectories of Times and Lives. Nicholas, A. and Flaherty, I. eds.. Oxford, United Kingdom: Interdisciplinary Press. 2013. ISBN: 978-1-904710-94-8, 229 pp. Price £19.99 (Paper).

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Book Review

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One can find volumes on the different generations and interpretations of each unique group but when turning to our older generation many of the terms used to describe this exceptional group reflect an end point: of a career (retirement), health, happiness, and life in general. We tend to think of our aging generation as alone, with declining health, with little understanding of how they got to where they are in life void of any type of celebrations post retirement.

In *Growing Up Growing Old: Trajectories of Times and Lives*, aging is seen through the eyes of different cultures and belief systems. The book is divided into four parts from "Trajectories in Time: Chronology, Age, and Visions of the Life-Course" to "Shifts and Continuities: Reflecting upon Time and Generation" and provides a series of eleven narratives based on different cultural beliefs. What makes this book unique is the stories presented not only represent events that take place later in life, but within an individual's overall life course; events that one might take for granted not recognizing the impact each play in defining old age. All the stories in this book share a common interest in the topic of ageing and in the different ways that life-courses may be shaped in different historical and cultural contexts. The authors engage in a fruitful mutual exchange, and they do so from different angles and perspectives. The interdisciplinary approach in this book provides a most promising arena for the discussion of ageing.

In many cultures, age is celebrated as a "fundamental" principle of life. Chen Hee Tam presents a narrative about the Chinese culture and describes how their society is "age-graded" not only in the way Chinese people relate to one another but also in how they describe their individual historical situations in generational terms (pp.47-60). The Chinese relate to one another in terms of age hierarchy; not seen as a negative but a placement in society. Tam's story is supported by the idea of the "Mannheimian concept" which basically says generations can become distinctive from other generations based on their "participation in life events" (p. 48). Mannheim's concept requires socially meaningful age parameters rather than arbitrarily delineated markers for generations (p. 49).

In the narrative entitled "Without a Centre that Holds: Contemporary Adulthood and the Devolving Life Course" Blatterer (pp. 27-47) defines aging as a linear, 6-step process defined by childhood, education, adulthood, work, retirement, and age and stresses how difficult it is to "dislodge" oneself from this cultural belief. It is interesting to note how many of the authors presented in this book recognize common historical experiences during the formative years of an individual's life stepping stones for shaping a specific group or generation. Looking back to the different generations and how each have addressed aging, for example, the "Silent Generation"

(circa 1924-1945) this group of individuals basically followed the footsteps of their fathers. They did not make a mark for themselves like those following them (e.g., Boomers) have, but transitioned throughout life from childhood to old age, reaching each benchmark in life, but as Blatterer describes, found it difficult to dislodge from the traditional belief. When this group approached their early 60's they assumed work life was over and retreated to the golf courses of Arizona or Florida and became known as the snowbirds. Unlike the Boomer generation who celebrated throughout life, continuously growing both personally and professionally, who refuse to stop living (and working) just because they reach a specific age identified as retirement by those who came before them.

A major takeaway after reading this book is to celebrate life and the historical events associated to specific benchmarks over time and recognize the impact each has in moving forward and most importantly celebrate life far beyond the age of 65. Don't accept the linear process as reaching an end point; but as a progression and celebration that should continue no matter what age, if alone, or at the end of a career. Utilize the ebbs and flows throughout midlife as a period of "reassessment" evaluating one's achievements, assessing the present and most importantly, plan for the future (p.120). Growing up and growing old is not attempting to reach an identified end point based on a linear timeline but recognizing the different shifts presented throughout life and to continue to strive and accomplish things far beyond what generations past have identified as old age.

This is a great book for anyone particularly those in midlife who are experiencing initial life changes, who are grounded in the traditional theory of aging as a linear process, who have not "dislodged" themselves from tradition and are struggling with what they have been taught about growing old.