Book Reviews

LATIN ELDERS AND THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR CULTURALLY COMPETENT RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

In this publication, Dr. Delgado has edited a series of papers related to the elders in the US, with an emphasis on future challenges in the field of support provision and help for the increasing number of elders of diverse Latin origin now living there; all this from a social worker's point of view.

The book is divided into two sections. The first section with three papers deals with facts related to demographic data of this particular portion of American society and with a novel conceptual framework that research in social work should follow in the future for this particular population group.

The second part of the book consists of eight articles that address the specific needs of the elderly Latino group based on their diversity, emphasizing that the elderly Latino population in the US is not a homogeneous group. The needs and provision of care and service delivery vary between particular cultural subgroups depending on the country of origin.

The book is useful in many respects considering that its usefulness might be short lived and strictly from a social worker's point of view. The new breed of Latinos who will become elders in the near future won't face the cultural problems that overwhelm aged Latinos nowadays. This is not dealt with in the papers reviewed here. Thus this publication, although valuable now, in years to come will probably lose its validity and the problem will need to be readressed.

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INNOVATIVE INTERVENTIONS TO REDUCE DEMENTIA CAREGIVER DISTRESS. A CLINICAL GUIDE

It is quite timely to have a volume that covers interventions to reduce caregiver distress. This 14-chapter edited volume with 39 North American contributors, many of whom are well known for their caregiver research, has potential that is
spoilt by its failure to acknowledge international research. Studies from outside of the US are barely mentioned in any chapter. Hence, its relevance to researchers and clinicians from elsewhere is very limited. Yet, I suspect the editors intended it to have broader appeal.

There are three main sections. The first section of three chapters provides a background review of the American literature and covers theoretical constructs. In Chapter 1, I was struck by the lack of reasonable discourse about whether dementia caregiving is more problematic than other caregiving situations. The authors rely on only one study (their own) to say that dementia caregiving is more problematic, yet there are many other studies from both the US and elsewhere that give contrary findings. This type of selective interpretation of the literature is a problem throughout the volume. Another example occurs in Chapter 2, where outcome measures are reviewed. Here there is no mention of the international efforts to harmonize outcome measures in caregiver research.

The second section has seven chapters that describe a range of practical interventions that have been developed in the US. Many are interesting and contain a lot of relevant suggestions applicable in most places around the world. I particularly enjoyed the skill-building psychoeducational strategies of Chapter 6 and the in-home interventions of Chapter 7. However, there are significant gaps. It is now widely accepted through numerous studies that the behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia are the major source of caregiver distress and ultimately lead to the breakdown of care. Despite this, behavior management skills are covered only in one brief paragraph and in one table. Because there are 150 pages on interventions in the volume, this is paltry.

The third section of three chapters covers some interventions for specific caregiver groups—ethnic minorities, males, and gay/lesbian caregivers. The chapters are again limited by the American focus, especially the chapter on ethnic minorities. The concluding chapter considers future directions for research and identifies that interventions need to be better tailored for individual needs. This is something clinicians have long known. In the penultimate paragraph, it is stated that “one final future direction for caregiving research is the inclusion of studies designed to bridge the scientist-practitioner gap.” Yet, such studies exist in the United Kingdom, Australia, and Europe where the researchers are often clinicians as well, but of course, these were not featured here.

If this volume had been overtly targeted to Americans about American innovations and research, I would have few qualms. For the international reader it is of limited relevance.

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LOSSES IN LATER LIFE: A NEW WAY OF WALKING WITH GOD, 2ND EDITION

Like a phoenix rising from the ashes, successful grieving of the losses of life allows us to be reborn and to experience life anew. Abnormal grief, in contrast, is a form of “idol worship,” in which the person creates a false god out of the lost object and thus deadens his or her own life. Successful aging, therefore, consists of the ability to grieve “naturally and easily and completely” and thus to rebound from the often numerous losses of the second half of life.

Thereby hangs the central thesis of R. Scott Sullender’s monograph on loss and grief. An ordained Presbyterian minister and a state-licensed psychologist, Sullender draws on considerable pastoral experience and numerous vignettes to illustrate the religious idea that faith in the inherent goodness of life allows the believer to move swiftly through the pain of loss and to emerge with new attachments. Those who have learned to suffer well continue to progress joyfully, avoiding the bitterness of late-life despair.

Unfortunately, a number of deficiencies detract from this otherwise worthy book. The conversational style often descends into cliché and the editors at Haworth Press could have pruned much of the repetitive content with little loss of the book’s impact. Furthermore, the many typographical errors smack of amateurism. There are better and more scholarly works on loss and grief: J. William Worden’s Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner (Springer Publishing Company, 2002) comes to mind.

Nevertheless, I enjoyed reading this book, mainly because its ideas are fresh and their logic is appealing to the religiously oriented. Psychotherapists who see religious patients might wish to buy this book. It may also provide important manna for thought for the sceptical psychiatrist. Three and a half stars out of five.

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GERONTOLOGICAL SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL

Gerontological social workers involved in policy research and academia, as well as those in direct practice, have a strong contribution to make in shaping long-range aged services policy and planning. There is a need for social workers at all levels to become proficient in demographic data trends and projections in order to deliver their knowledge with credibility and applicability in the macro policy and planning arena. This premise is supported by a well-organized selection of meticulously referenced articles edited by Cox, Kelchner, and Chapin. It seems that a significant stimulus for much of the
thinking has come from the John Hartford Foundation and the Gerontological Society of the US, which have provided grants for MSW and social work PhD research in gerontology.

Although the contributors refer mainly to social conditions in the US, the result provides informative reading for practitioners in the field, academics, researchers, postgraduate students, and more able undergraduates in other westernized countries. It should be available in social work sections of academic libraries.

Given the stated intention to stimulate ongoing dialogue regarding the role, status, and potential of gerontological social work, a similar consideration of societies where the profession of social work is less established and social services infrastructure is less developed would have been interesting. Such societies are fields fertile for the development of Chapin’s and Cox’s new paradigms. Perhaps that is a separate task.

Best value can be gained by reading the early chapters immediately rather than by dipping and browsing according to an individual reader’s professional interests or even whims. The early chapters deliver the rationale for considering demographic trends, demonstrating how informative such material can be, juxtaposing data, and teasing out their possible implications in 2005, 2010, and even 2030. With this context established, the later Canadian perspective, Japanese case study, and considerations of more specific realms of social work activity, such as older workers’ issues, elder abuse, and residential care, have a broader significance. Takamura reports notions of “nursebots” (personal robotic assistants with capacity for social interaction), which may affect delivery of aged care in the future. Our capacity to anticipate or imagine other developments that may occur over 20 or 30 years will limit the scope of our long-range planning. Remember how the microchip has influenced the way we live?

When considering minority groups, most contributors give more attention to issues of culture and ethnicity than to gender issues. Scanning the range of research activities in gerontological social work in the US (a methodological challenge in itself), Morrow-Howell and Burnette established that the main foci of investigation are caregiving and ethnicity. Strategies are offered to promote interest in a wider range of aging issues in social work schools. Common conceptual bases in research and direct practice and testable models of intervention are needed to convey social work’s knowledge further afield in an integrated fashion. Astute targeting of funding sources is essential to this plan.

Kaskie’s and Estes’s clear and accessible critique of managed health care in the field of mental health services policy and aging raises important issues for other countries that may be considering this model of service delivery. Their conclusion is that access to specialty mental health care must be increased and clinical outcomes should be monitored more closely. The dollar should not be the only performance indicator.

In her discussion of death and dying, Hobart offers the intriguing suggestion that baby boomers may significantly depathologize dying in a style similar to their normalizing of pregnancy and birth. Social work’s role in the topical field of end-of-life decision making is established well by Hobart.
One wonders how our colleagues in gerontological social work in the year 2030 will view this energetic exercise in anticipating their field.

REVIEWED BY  
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AGING WELL  

George Vaillant is the person who won so many International Psychogeriatric Association (IPA) research awards that the rules had to be changed to give someone else a chance! Now in this summation of 60 years of research, you too can find out just why his work is so highly regarded. The book summarizes and expounds on data collected at several time points on 268 male Harvard graduates born around 1920, 456 men initially selected from inner-city Boston at age 14 in 1940 as controls for a study of juvenile delinquency, and 90 Californian women of extremely high IQ born between 1908 and 1914.

On the face of it, one might question why a long-term follow-up of three rather unusual cohorts of individuals, latterly coordinated by a male, North American, psychoanalytically trained psychiatrist, should be of general interest. The answer is that nobody else has attempted anything remotely similar and that Vaillant presents his data in an accessible, intelligent, engaging way.

As well as detailing the demographic and statistical information generated by the Harvard study of adult development, Vaillant provides a rich fund of anecdote derived from subject interviews, and a wealth of sensible and interesting interpretative comment. The core message is uplifting and empowering. Although the small number of people who live to extreme old age (over 85) or die young (before 60) may be afflicted by random environmental and genetic factors over which they have limited control (e.g., war, genetic endowment), for the bulk of us who will live to be between 70 and 85 years old at death, a very large portion of the variance in physical and psychological health outcomes between these ages appears to be modified by factors over which we can exert considerable control. Not being a smoker or stopping smoking at a young age, absence of alcohol abuse, mature psychological defenses, healthy weight, stable marriages, and taking some exercise all proved to be predictors of “healthy aging” (in the broadest sense), whereas in this sample cholesterol levels, stress, parental characteristics, childhood temperament, and ease in social relationships did not.

Of course one can quibble with certain elements in the text. I was bothered by the detailed reports of the lives and circumstances of specific individuals.
Vaillant states that details have been changed to protect privacy. If this is so, then the anecdotes are to some degree fictional rather than factual; if not, then confidentiality has been breached. When asked about this directly, the author says that very basic details (job, geographic location) have been changed, but the stories themselves are unaltered. For those with good outcomes who are still alive, permission to use the anecdotes has been obtained. To avoid distress or embarrassment, all the anecdotes relating to people with poor outcomes are limited to those who were dead at the time of publication. Readers will have to decide for themselves how comfortable they feel with this approach and whether it would get past the scrutiny of their own local ethics committee, but it is true to say that without the fascinating illustrative life stories that pepper the text, the book would be far less compelling.

I found only one howler in the whole book (better than I can manage in most of my far briefer papers and reviews!!). On page 16, Vaillant notes that Madame Calment, the French woman who is documented to have lived to age 122, had not been "studied." This is not strictly true, as IPA luminary Karen Ritchie (1995) published a detailed report on her mental state at age 118, though it is fair to say that Calment was not the subject of serial, prospective assessments.

It should be clear by now that I consider Aging Well to be an important, entertaining, and well-constructed book. Rather than summarizing it in more detail here, I would urge all professionals who work with older people to read it from cover to cover. Anyone who plans to live past age 50 should have a look at it too!

REFERENCE


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INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS: UNDERSTANDING WHAT WE HAVE CREATED

Can an older generation become a resource for younger people at risk? Can young people contribute to a renewed sense of self-worth and social value for older people? What kind of intergenerational programs are likely to promote interdependence between generations?

These questions underlie some common themes addressed by Valerie Kuehne and her colleagues in this collection of U.S.-based intergenerational programs. Kuehne’s explicit purpose for this collection is a smorgasbord of program research designs, and evaluations focusing on productive and rewarding interactions between diverse age groups. Community problems, family issues, and the personal needs of youthful and older

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citizens can be addressed by promoting interdependence across generations, by espousing shared responsibility for social issues, and by drawing on the largely untapped resources of the growing and increasingly healthy and capable population of older adults. However, little scholarly research exists to substantiate anecdotal evidence of program effectiveness or to provide ready access to generalizable knowledge. This volume seeks to inspire the growth of empirically researched and evaluated intergenerational programs in order to capitalize on the gains made in various programs. Kuehne acknowledges that the field lacks clear direction, as is evident in her subtitle “Understanding What We Have Created.”

Although the range of topics and approaches is a strength of the volume, as Kuehne asserts, it also may be a limitation for the reader, due to lack of coherence across contributions. There are 13 research and evaluation papers, in four sections.

The first section focuses on three distinct conceptual bases for research. Ward proposes the benefits of applying an ethnographic approach to intergenerational program research. Intense, longitudinal examination of older and younger generations’ interactions in context, she argues, provide a richer picture of program processes and outcomes than standardized instruments. Smith and Yeager point to the value of constructivist and sociocultural approaches to framing and evaluating teaching and learning. Older adults can become collaborators in school-based learning. We particularly resonate to VanderVen’s claim that intergenerational programs require stronger links to contemporary life span developmental theory. She suggests that the theoretical underpinnings of programs need to expand their age ranges (e.g., going beyond 75 years of age) and emphasize the reciprocal and contextual nature of intergenerational contributions (seeing developmental exchanges as bidirectional across age groups in their effectiveness).

Program impact and evaluation are the concerns of the second section that reports three studies, where school students and parents benefited from the mentoring and supportive efforts of older people. Brabazon, for example, reports the merits of enlisting older people in school programs for at-risk students, where their involvement helped students to avoid dropping out of school or failing. Taylor, LoSciuto, Fox, Hilbert, and Sonkowsky found that students who experienced a mentoring relationship with an older adult showed improved attitudes toward school, elders, the future, and healthier approaches to drug use. Griff’s positive role for grandparents was in family therapy. Grandparents positively influenced parental treatment of their children, although they themselves did not perceive any changes in their grandchildren’s behavior. Finally in this section, Travis and Stremmel examined factors that may increase or decrease the likelihood of intergenerational activities in child and elder day care. Administrators’ attitudes toward intergenerational interactions are critical, and should be specifically targeted to aid the introduction of cross-generational programs.

Like Ward, in the third section, papers by Angerbach and Jones-Forster, and Newman, Morris, and Streetman present the case for focusing analyses on the transactional processes involved when members of different age groups communicate or work on collaborative tasks.
Life-span developmental theory, again, offers a dialectical basis for such analyses, although many program developers are unaware of its potential for looking at the nature of the processes that are likely to be effective. Indeed, the conceptual foundation of program development is one of the main challenges of the field, as VanderVen points out. Although it may be asking too much for more conceptual analysis in a smorgasbord-type volume, the absence of any unifying approach to program development impedes any penetrating evaluation of program objectives and outcomes.

The final section outlines some hopeful, practical directions. Kocarnik Ponzetti and Ponzetti discuss how corporations may be able to institute inter-generational care facilities. Employees in the sandwich generations often have care responsibilities for both previous or following generations, and these responsibilities can impinge on work performance. Three further practical initiatives involve changing negative perceptions of the elderly by working within contextual constraints and focused objectives (Vernon), using retirees alongside working mothers to benefit schools as well as volunteers (Strom and Strom), and promoting interdependence among indigenous older and younger people to support indigenous children’s rights (Cook).

Either despite or because of its smorgasbord nature, Kuehne’s collection is useful for researchers and practitioners who contemplate designing intervention programs in which older adults are either givers or receivers of living resources. Some of the ideas and applications transcend their local contexts, although methodologies and findings may be contextually circumscribed, as Kuehne acknowledges. The collection is true to its major aim of encouraging programs to bring together insights from geriatric and life-span theories to promote the interdependence of older and younger generations, and the benefits of programmed interactions for both age groups.

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**The Aging Individual: Physical and Psychological Perspectives, 2nd Edition**


This is the second edition of a book written with the aim to give students, who do not focus primarily on biology, detailed and updated information on the physiological changes that accompany us when growing old. The author deserves respect for the approach trying to combine the physiological with the psychological perspective of aging.

Dr. Whitbourne, a professor of psychology, points out several important changes and revisions she introduced in this second edition: (a) the biopsychosocial perspective; (b) more social and demographic data including race, gender, social class, and attitudes towards aging affected by cultural background; (c) new information on chronic...
diseases in the over-65 population including data on causes of disabilities and death; (d) new material on successful aging with a focus on disease prevention; (e) an increase in charts, tables, figures, and diagrams; (f) a "focus on" section at the end of each chapter, with the summarized relevant information of the chapter with a strong connection to the World Wide Web.

The laudable approach of addressing both the physiological and psychological perspectives of aging and with that recognizing the aging individual in toto and not only from one specific angle has to be pointed out as a strength of this book. However, this strength uncovers also a weakness.

The author is an expert in the field of psychological gerontology and that is reflected in the more impressive parts of the book. In the first chapter on "models of identity and the aging process," important psychological concepts including the identity process theory and Erikson's psychosocial theory are discussed. In the second chapter ("Who Are the Aged?") a comprehensive overview is given on the demographics of the older population. In the third chapter ("How Aging Is Studied"), relevant research designs in the psychology of aging are introduced and explained. In the fourth chapter ("Aging of Appearance and Mobility"), age-related changes the body undergoes and how healthy or more unhealthy behaviors can affect these are presented.

Chapters 5 to 10, however, and with that half the book, focus on physiological and pathological changes related to aging, with a substantial part covering major physiological and medical areas, including cardiovascular and respiratory systems, dementia, chronic diseases, and sensory and perceptual processes. Although the author argues in her preface that she performed a helpful service to her social science colleagues in translating biological and physiological research into terms that could be easily comprehended, this approach comes at a cost. The text as well as the diagrams and figures of these chapters often remains vague with sometimes biased conclusions when areas such as underlying disease pathology, prognosis, and treatment options are discussed. These chapters would have benefited from coauthors with a medical and physiological background helping with the difficult task of translating scientific terms more correctly in appropriate lay terms. With this, the now commonly accepted evidence-based medicine approach, including meta-analysis results or reviews from the Cochrane Library, could have been incorporated as well as leaving readers the option to come to their own conclusions on the increasingly important topics of research in the aging population.

In conclusion, the book can be a helpful asset for gerontology and psychology students, but should be supported by additional medical and physiological reading.

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