Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

DAVID CHEAL, ed. *Aging and Demographic Change in Canadian Context*. **Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 2002, 288 p., $24.95 paper.**

Aging and Demographic Change in Canadian Context is one of a series of books issued by the Government of Canada's Policy Research Institute. Its purpose, "to show how implications of demographic projections need to be examined within a larger context [that is] economic, political, social, familial, cultural, and temporal" (p. 5), is familiar to those who read literature in the sociology of aging. In chapters that deal with topics ranging from aging, language and culture (Thorpe) to issues related to families (Connidis; Tindale, Norris and Abbot), work and leisure (Thomas and Venne), and productivity (Prager), the authors challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about the impact of population aging and the policy responses required to address it. They demonstrate the shortcomings of what is known in gerontological circles as apocalyptic, alarmist, or catastrophic demography. This agenda that has been prominent in Canadian gerontology for several decades (see, for example, McDaniel's Canada's Aging Population (1986) and Gee's and Gutman's The Overselling of Population Aging (2000)).

In his introduction, Cheal argues that demography is not destiny and that it is essential to contextualize population aging and take into account both micro and macro processes. Susan A. McDaniel, who has written numerous articles and book chapters challenging apocalyptic demography, has contributed a very long first chapter entitled: "Intergenerational Interlinkages: Public, Family, and Work." Intergenerational interlinkages (IGILs) is an unwieldy term and initially struck me as redundant. Aren't all linkages "inter"by definition? But, McDaniel is emphasizing the complexity and "dynamic set of social and economic processes among different generations in different contexts" (p. 24), and IGILs does communicate the multidimensional nature of these processes. This chapter brings together almost all the topics covered in the remaining chapters– work, health, and intergenerational family relationships. Although overlong, it is well written and accessible. McDaniel always does a good job critiquing oversimplified demographic approaches, and this chapter is no exception.

Several chapters contain important discussions of how language and discourse contribute to our seeing demographic aging as a problem. Thorpe's chapter, "Aging, Language, and Culture," addresses this issue

head on. Thorpe points out that age is often equated with decline and questions the propensity to use chronological age as a proxy for functional and social age. In a similar vein, Tindale, Norris and Abbot argue that scholarly as well as popular approaches to intergenerational relations often conceptualize caring for older relatives in terms of "burden"and "intergenerational conflict" rather than "global reciprocity" that recognizes that "intergenerational relationships are characterized by mutual interdependence and reciprocity" (p. 225). Similarly, in his chapter on aging and productivity, Prager argues that older workers are often seen as burdens. As Thorpe points out, an "ageist discourse infects" (p. 78) much research on demographic aging.

Connidis' and Tindale et al.'s chapters address intergenerational relationships and support within families. Both explore the negotiation and availability of family ties between adult children and their elderly parents. These two chapters successfully illustrate the reciprocal and interdependent nature of family ties and observe that scholars and policy makers need to take into account the availability of children and diversity of families on several dimensions including ethnic differences.

Diversity is also a characteristic of the workforce regardless of age. Thomas and Venne's chapter on work, leisure, and time, relies heavily on time use studies that address the balance of work and leisure in contemporary life. I had trouble seeing how this particular chapter fit into the overall theme of the book, and it does suffer from the shortcomings of time-use studies, not least of which is the assumption that people only do one activity at a time that can be slotted into a simple category. Thomas and Venne acknowledge this difficulty and use their analysis to argue that employers need to recognize diversity among workers rather than treat the labour force as "monolithic" (p.211). Their discussion of phased or transitional retirement is also useful. Prager's chapter on work and productivity addresses the shortcomings and contradictory findings of scholarship on older workers. He suggests that policy makers need to take "the research option" if they want to develop effective programs.

It may be that ageism is to blame for the marginality of aging research in many disciplines including sociology and anthropology. If that is the case, then this book ought to be required reading. Two important themes permeate this volume: the importance of recognizing the diversity that characterizes older people in terms of socioeconomic status, health, ethnicity, family situation, and productivity and the urgent need for good research that is not infected with ageist assumptions and discourse to inform policy.

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