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The Encyclopedia of Adulthood and Aging

Edited by Susan Krauss Whitbourne

Wiley

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Modern westernised societies are slowly coming to terms with the fact that increasing proportions of their native-born population are past what has been the normal point of retirement and are suffering from diseases and disorders associated with old age. This is not the case in the rest of the world: – in most countries, from Egypt to Iran to Guatemala, the average age is under 30 and the truly elderly form a tiny minority. As I pointed out elsewhere, “Modern developed societies are historical anomalies, having a high proportion of people of my age and upwards, coupled with the disappearance of traditional social structures in which children live with their parents up to the point where parents live with their children. This anomaly is reflected in the quantity of the literature – twenty-five years ago I would have been hard put to it if asked to recommend a guide to looking after people with dementia [. . .]. My successors at the Institute of Psychiatry library must nowadays be equally hard put to it, choosing which of so many to recommend” (Guha, 2013).

In amongst this mass of literature are a quite remarkable number of specialised encyclopaedias. Every publisher seems to have at least one on the market: I have come across two from Springer, *The Encyclopedia of Aging* (Schulz, 2006) and an *Encyclopedia of Aging & Public Health* (Loue and Sajatovic, 2008), which was recommended in these columns as “a useful quick reference source” in spite of it being overly

“American-focussed” (RR 2008/309). I, similarly, recommended the Macmillan *Encyclopedia of Aging* (Ekerdt, 2003) in four volumes, though once again noting the “very strong North American bias” (RR 2003/306). Sage has an *Encyclopedia of Health and Aging* (Markides, 2007) and Academic Press an *Encyclopedia of Gerontology* in two fat volumes (Birren, 2007), just to name a few. Even publishing minnows, such as Illinois University Press, have got in on the act (Kausler and Kausler, 2001). The editor of this book has previous convictions, having already jointly edited both *The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of Adulthood and Aging* (Whitbourne and Sliwinski, 2012) (new edition forthcoming 2016) and *Adult Development and Aging* (Whitbourne and Whitbourne, 2014). This new encyclopaedia therefore faces some very stiff competition.

Given that there are so many reference books on the topic, I was slightly disappointed to find that this one follows the well-worn path trodden out by its predecessors rather than striking out in a new direction. It might be an interesting exercise to compare the contributors’ lists of all these encyclopaedias and handbooks to see how many of the nine associate editors and just under 500 contributors to this have taken part in other similar ventures. The editor claims that this “provides a truly global perspective on aging”, but, in fact, all the associate editors and over four-fifths of the contributors come from the USA or Canada, with just a scattering from the UK and Europe, plus one or two from other westernised countries – Israel or New Zealand. This does not make for a truly global perspective. Thus, just for example, there is a thorough and informative entry on Physical Health of Afro-Americans – two solid pages of text buttressed by a page-and-a-half of references, but there is nothing about the physical health of Africans or even about the physical health of people of African origin in other countries to compare it with. Similarly, the entry on Latinos (people of Latin American origin living in the USA) discusses the “Hispanic health paradox” that Latinos show a longer life expectancy than would be predicted by their average income, social status and general health. It suggests that this is because [a] people have to be fairly fit to migrate and because significant numbers of elderly immigrants tend to return to their country of birth when they fall ill. I could not find anything in this encyclopaedia about the health of the elderly in, say, Mexico, to give us any standard of comparison. Mexico does not even rate a mention in the index.

The index, of course, plays a vital role in a work like this, in making up for the problems

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caused by the choice of headings. The entry on Physical Health of Afro-Americans is indexed under “Afro-American Physical Health” – in fact, there is even a reference in the index “Physical Health, Afro-Americans see Afro-American Physical Health”, which is somewhat confusing. It might have been better to have collocated all the information on different aspects of Afro-American life by putting this entry under “A” rather than “P”, but, whichever heading was chosen, an accurate index entry would have helped. This, of course, matters less to readers using the online version of the book rather than switching between one printed volume and another, but even then there are advantages in bringing related material together.

On the plus side, this encyclopaedia is remarkably up-to-date. The editor boasts with justifiable pride that she achieved her ambitious goal of producing a complete manuscript in two years from start to finish. Coordinating such a vast team in producing about 330 essay-length entries is a noteworthy achievement. There have been no major breakthroughs in the past decade or so – no miracle cures for Alzheimer’s or arthritis, but there has been a steady increase in knowledge, which is well covered here. I did not notice any entry which I would regard as obsolete, and the references I have looked at are well up on the recent scientific literature. Some of the entries, but not all of them, make a useful distinction between references that are there to support points made in the entry and suggestions for further reading for the general enquirer. Most of the entries have *see also* references which help link topics separated by the alphabetical arrangement.

All in all, this is a sound workman-like encyclopaedia on a well-worn theme. Aging is a topic of interest to physicians, nurses, psychologists, sociologists and economists, so nearly all academic libraries need reference books on it. It is also, obviously, a topic of wide general interest in westernised countries, so public libraries need appropriate reference tools. American academic and public reference libraries that are not already satiated with encyclopaedias of aging will find this one a useful addition to their armoury. Libraries in other westernised countries will find it no more Americanised than its rivals and currently more up to date. Libraries in non-westernised countries will not find much of value in it.

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Encyclopedia of Modern Ethnic Conflicts (2nd edition)

Edited by Joseph R. Rudolph

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This second edition of *Encyclopedia of Modern Ethnic Conflicts*, reviewed here in its e-book format, is an updated and hugely expanded version of the original edition, also reviewed in these columns (RR 2004/014). The editor is again Joseph Rudolph, a professor of political science at Towson University in Maryland and author of several books on ethnicity, nationalism and related topics, notably *Politics and Ethnicity: A Comparative Study* (Rudolph, 2006). Although billed as an encyclopaedia, this book, as with the 2003 original, is more of a collection of essays on specific ethnic conflicts and does not set out to provide comprehensive global coverage of conflicts in which ethnicity is a factor. Each essay is individually authored, most being penned by