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Rural Ageing: A Good Place to Grow Old? (review)

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unequivocal finding that chronic illness is a strong and consistent predictor of CAM use (see systematic reviews by Bishop & Lewith, 2008; Harris & Rees, 2000). Whereas most research indicates that use of CAM is neither an outright rejection of medicine nor an unrealistic search for cure, this book, at the very least, could have entertained the notion that the complex relationship between CAM and chronic illness warrants attention. Examining the relationship would be worthwhile particularly given criticisms, from afar and from within medicine itself, that in its current form the conventional health care system is ill-equipped to address the needs of an aging population in an era of chronic illness. Whether and to what extent CAM can complement medicine rather than be integrated *into* it is open to debate. This book makes an effort at elucidating the complexity of this issue.

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Nowhere is the need to debunk the prevailing assumptions about rurality more acute than in regard to older people. To paraphrase Wenger (2001, p. 126), rural aging is not a clear-cut rosy picture of chocolate-box cottages in the glow of hazy sunshine. Rather, as *Rural Ageing: A Good Place to Grow Old?* demonstrates, growing older in rural communities is a complex, subjective, and often challenging phenomenon that has received surprisingly little attention in the literature. The gap persists despite the rising proportions of older adults in rural areas and the attendant calls to understand how communities might better support them.

Rural Ageing is the most recent title in The Policy Press's Ageing and The Lifecourse Series aimed at providing critical perspectives and cutting-edge debate on new and traditional areas of aging studies from a social rather than a medical perspective. Edited by a leading international authority in the field, the book is a collection of research, primarily from Canada and the United Kingdom, framed within a critical human ecology perspective. The authors are a mix of established and

rising scholars working in gerontology and related health and social science disciplines.

As a coherent effort to deconstruct the complexity and diversity of the processes and contexts of aging for older rural people, the book is an important and timely addition to the literature. At 168 well-written pages, it is limited in scope but succeeds in advancing a critical perspective while bringing focus to the key issues and evolving state of knowledge on rural aging. It is at once a primer, an agenda-setting treatise, and a policy-relevant resource on rural aging that will be of interest to instructors, researchers, policy makers, and the gerontology community at large.

The book sets out to challenge traditional views of the contexts of older rural people's lives and the prevailing concepts employed to interpret them. To begin, Keating and Phillips (chapter 1) carefully unpack the contested nature of "rural" and blend the holistic view of human ecology with critical gerontology into a guiding framework for researching aging in the rural context.

Daly and Grant (chapter 2) extend the conceptual foundation by elucidating the importance of time and the lifecourse perspective as they relate to building understanding of the interconnectedness of lives in rural communities, particularly in terms of disability.

The book continues with nine chapters devoted to rural aging themes and issues. The chapters apply a range of qualitative and quantitative approaches, from ethnography to statistical analyses, featuring both primary and secondary data. Chapman and Peace (chapter 3) focus on older people's connections to rural places, contrasting the physicality of rural landscapes to illustrate how personal identities of older women are connected to their interactions with the rural context through time. Wenger and Keating (chapter 4) examine the importance of support networks in rural communities and how these evolve and adapt over time, creating instances where rural places can be either highly caring or socially isolating. Sims-Gould and Martin-Matthews (chapter 5) investigate the issues of providing and receiving home care in rural areas, highlighting the critical challenge of overcoming distance, lack of privacy, and independence as key to sustaining rural care for older people. In chapter 6, Chappell, Schroeder, and Gibbens focus on informal care by family and friends, and reveal important lessons from intervention projects to provide respite to caregivers in remote and isolated rural settings. Fast and de Jong Gierveld (chapter 7) analyze whether rural communities are more likely than their urban counterparts to facilitate participation and social inclusion of older people. Rozanova, Dosman, and de Jong Gierveld (chapter 8) illustrate the ways in which characteristics of rural communities may or may not lead to social participation among older adults, especially the contrast between opportunity and preference. Dobbs and Strain (chapter 9) examine the relationship between mobility and older rural adults' abilities to meet their needs, particularly in terms of staying connected through driving. Scharf and Bartlam (chapter 10) focus on social exclusion as a means of exposing the often hidden disadvantages facing older rural people and highlighting the various material and social forms of rural exclusion. In chapter 11, Eales, Keefe, and Keating address inclusion in the form of community development to determine what features make rural communities age-friendly.

The book ends with a critical reflection on these contributions for the purpose of building knowledge about older rural people, aging processes, and the rural context. In doing so, Keating (chapter 12) reminds us that "rural places are both idyllic and difficult just as rural adults are both resilient and fragile" (p. 129), which is a poignant take-home message for anyone interested in rural aging research, policy, or practice.

Overall, *Rural Ageing* fulfils its dual aim to deconstruct assumptions about aging and rurality. In addition to articulating the critical importance of confronting a neglected field of study, the book is particularly strong in explaining and applying a critical approach that connects social gerontology, human ecology, and lifecourse perspectives into a coherent framework for studying aging, place, and time. Indeed, the opening chapters by Keating and Phillips, and Daly and Grant, will bring readers not familiar with these bodies of literature up to speed very quickly. Collectively, they challenge us to view aging as more than an aspect of location or time and to confront notions about agency, social structures, place, and space in relation to the transitions and experiences of aging in rural communities. A curious omission in the interdisciplinary discussion is the emergence of "geographical gerontology" as a field of study within which much consideration has also been given to the contexts, environments, and places in which rural aging occurs (see Andrews, Cutchin, McCracken, Phillips, & Wiles, 2007).

Taken together, the various chapters illustrate a range of empirical, policy, and program research on aging under way in Canada and the United Kingdom, and they provide a useful resource for scholars interested in rural aging approaches and issues in developed countries. For instance, various types of rural places are considered, ranging from Chappell, Schroeder, and Gibbens's study of remote arctic communities to Fast and de Jong Gierveld's rural-urban comparison. Considered, too, are the various scales at which processes and experiences of rural aging occur, from Chapman and Peace's focus on the body to the regional and national analyses of Dobbs and Strain, and some in-between.

The country- and place-specific nature of the contributions to the book is, however, also its major limitation. In the foreword from the World Health Organization's Ageing and Life Course Programme, global population aging is declared "the demographic imperative of the 21st century" (p. v). Yet, beyond reference to literature from Australia, the United States, Sweden, and so on, and the United Nations and WHO initiatives, there is little consideration of rural aging research internationally or the potential transferability of the approaches, concepts, and findings outside of the Canadian and U.K. contexts. Although incorporating studies from other developed countries – not to mention developing countries of Africa, Asia, and South America – is clearly beyond the scope of the book, the authors have missed an important opportunity to lead the call for a more inclusive and global perspective on rural aging and aging rural communities.

As the title suggests, *Rural Ageing* asks readers to consider whether rural communities are good places to

grow old. The question resonates with concern for understanding the implications of aging as it relates to the individual and the contexts, environments, and places in which older rural adults live. In applying a critical human ecology lens across a breadth of rural aging issues and topics, the contributions to the book provide theoretically informed, evidence-based, and policy-relevant insights. At risk of revealing the ending, ultimately, the editor is right to conclude that "The answer to the question ... must be that 'it depends' – on people's place in the lifecourse, on the community settings in which they live and on the ways in which they construct their relationships to people and place"

(p. 129). Indeed, convincing readers of the importance of developing nuanced understandings of rural aging, situated critically in time, space, and place, is perhaps the book's most significant achievement.

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Robert C. Atchley. *Spirituality and Aging*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2009.

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Questions open us up to a process of discovery. Other questions form and we are off on a hunt of magnificent proportions. Spirituality and the journey of aging are, for this expert author, fundamentally about the questions one poses in research, practice, teaching, and other forms of service. Accordingly, *Spirituality and Aging* is first and foremost a book framed by core questions, such as What does it mean to grow spiritually? How does spirituality influence identity and self? What is spiritually centered service to the community? Answers abound as well, but the answers are set in a broad historical spectrum of literature on spirituality. (Spirituality was often defined as religion in mid-20th century and before which leaves a lack of crispness in terms as meanings evolved over time.) Consequently, we are presented with a very rich perspective on this topic.

It is well established that there is currently a tension in the field of religion, spirituality, and aging surrounding the development of scientific knowledge in, and guidelines for, evidence-based practice. Much of the research in religion and health, for instance, follows an empirically based framework. Yet, at the same time, it is recognized that work in the area of spirituality and aging often grows out of a contemplative, intuitive, and reflective stance that lies squarely outside the ability of scientific method to confirm or disconfirm. Atchley is clearly cognizant of these contradictions in methods. He is an emeritus professor of gerontology at Miami University who has published widely on sociology and aging. For all of this author's immersion in that first world of empiricism, he yet understands the

importance of other ways of knowing and so he identifies many aspects of his own spiritual journey for the reader. Along the way, he refers in this book to data from his longitudinal study of spirituality as well as work by some of the classic writers in the areas of religion and spirituality, such as William James, Aldous Huxley, and the transpersonal theorist Ken Wilbur. A range of others who have made important contributions to understanding a spiritual perspective in aging both from within and outside of academia are also mentioned. These include developmental theorists Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnik's work on aging and development (1986), sociologist Wade Roof's *Spiritual Marketplace* (1999), Eckhart Tolle's ideas about solving problems "in the now" (1999), and Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Ronald Miller's (1995) book on "saging." In addition, Buddhist, Hindu, and other world perspectives on spirituality are briefly (though no less emphatically and carefully) integrated.

In blending his personal and professional insights, Atchley offers the reader some of his own valuable experiences and grounding in this topic. He notes a time when he attended a ritual of blessing performed by elders and was unexpectedly invited to participate as an elder. Prior to this experience, he did not view himself as old enough at age 60 to even be considered an elder. Initial bewilderment about how to provide a blessing gave way to inner certainty that he did know how to bless others: this was in turn validated by the recipients of his blessings. Acknowledging his own aging became a gift to himself and others. Such self reflection and