

Understanding the Life Course: Sociological and psychological perspectives

Lorraine Green

Cambridge, Polity Press, 2017, viii + 295, ISBN 978-0-7456-9793-2 (pbk), £18.99

It is always a pleasure to review a new edition of a book that has served the community so well, especially when the revised text is written so well and its updates address socio-political matters that arise from and have such a bearing on perturbations across the life course. Green's book weaves a critical path through many of the assumed aspects of human development that focus on linear, Eurocentric models describing birth, maturity, decrement and death. Readers are challenged to consider alternative ways of understanding and to draw upon a range of disciplines that combine in offering ways of knowing about the ways in which people may development and change. Of course, as with any text presenting aspects of the life course, the models remain heuristic and the chapter structure still suggests linearity and chronology but the coverage and questions belie this conceit, exposing the pabulum of traditional models.

Green employs the term life course to underline the fluidity and adaptable aspects of human growth and development which works well in considering the multiple diversities in which social workers practise. As such it is a valuable text for students, but it also works for those in practice who often benefit from being reminded of the need for criticality. She argues for a more integrated approach using sociological and psychological thought that expands both knowledge and questions and moves way from single methods or perspectives that can blinker our discipline as much as other human services. It was good to see that the impact of economic globalisation and the European Union were considered. Whilst this dates the book, the ramifications of the disaster of Brexit are key to understanding psychosocial processes on development, intergenerational and international relations as well as individual experiences within these contexts.

As regards the format, it may be that students have become used to the practice example or case study. If so, this book may come as a shock. However, it is important that any reader is stretched to consider the application of theories and models presented and to place a developing understanding within the critical discussion of such; this demands a deeper engagement with the material. The book is presented in a way that readers can adapt to their own needs – reading through to gain overall knowledge, or focusing on specific aspects of development after reading the important introductory material and first chapter which articulates the particular approach that Green takes. It is also accessible in the way it is presented comprehensive in its coverage of specific topics. One of the key strengths of Green's second edition remains its critical questioning style. This ensures that whilst traditional life course and developmental approaches are introduced and discussed in clear and informative ways, they are subject to testing against new ideas and ways of understanding the world, its impact and the experiences people have throughout their lives. Thus multiple diversities are considered across a world in which trans-national families and relationships abound. The demonisation of certain groups and the power of those who can

make those groups deviant; the increasing longevity and healthy old age of many people form important elements of the discussion.

Green claims that her book 'explains and analyses and then contrasts and compares' (p. 228). This is certainly the case, and in it lies the book's strength. It is critical and demands that readers grapple with dynamically changing worlds inhabited by complex, diverse human beings at various points in their life course.

Jonathan Parker
Professor of Society & Social Welfare
Bournemouth University, UK