

suffer the greatest inequalities; (4) the struggle over the choice of a strategy which demonstrates the group's strengths or unfair treatment; and (5) the struggle to prevent or challenge a backlash which would arise among powerful groups or other relatively powerless groups'. These conceptual themes are drawn from a wide-ranging discussion which includes the following areas: women and biological ageing; their health and self-image; the parallels between ageism and sexism; why women who have experienced the consciousness-raising of feminism may now be espousing age consciousness, and why some have ignored this perspective up until now. This last theme is explored in depth, the author using numerous examples of personal experience to illuminate how 'being female is a continuous developmental process'. Women's powerlessness is continued into old age and this is illustrated in relation to the caring work of women in later life, their employment histories, and the feminisation of poverty.

Finally, on a positive note, a call is made for the 'blending of feminism and anti-ageism'. The author feels strongly that both perspectives have a great deal to offer each other. She states: 'the major contribution that the issue of aging can make to feminism is the mandate to re-examine all feminist theory in the light of this dimension. And the major contribution that feminism can make for those concerned with aging is to provide a model and some of the personnel of a successful social movement.'

In this sense the paper by Arendell and Estes discussed above provides a prime example of the cross-fertilisation of ideas from both fields. Shulamit Reinharz's paper is of particular value to all those doing gerontological research who have consequently been drawn to the feminist perspective, and those doing feminist work whose interests now lie within the scope of gerontology.

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Human Development

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Natalie Rosel, 'Clarification and application of Erik Erickson's eight stage of man'. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 27 (1988), 11-23.

This is one of a number of recent articles which explore themes from Erikson's theory of psychosocial development over the life-span. It

testifies to the continuing inspiration provided by his account of old age as a struggle between despair and integrity. Its purpose is to refine further Erikson's conceptual model of the 'eighth age of man'. Natalie Rosel's method is to explore how three women of different life-styles and educational backgrounds reflect upon their lives in late life. The accounts are very different in other respects too. One is autobiographical – Florida Scott-Maxwell's book *The Measure of My Days*.¹ Another is a biography, a portrait of an octogenarian living in rural North Carolina, based largely on interviews with 'Aunt Arie' herself.² The third account is a work of fiction, Wertebaker's novel *Perilous Voyage*.³

The mixing of fictional with real accounts might seem surprising. But Erikson himself established a precedent in his own analysis of Dr Borg in Bergman's film *Wild Strawberries*.⁴ Wertebaker's novel also describes a conflict within a person's mind as to whether her life has been well lived or not. It depicts the case of Augusta Turnley, left mute and immobile from an automobile accident. She withdraws from those who would communicate with her to discover what meaning her life has had. 'Was I superfluous?' she asks. It is not often enough stressed that for Erikson the dialectical relationship between integrity and despair is crucial. The possibility of a despairing answer must be admitted if the person is to achieve an eventual balance in favour of integrity. Wisdom is the fruit of this struggle.

Augusta Turnley reviews her childhood but will not allow herself to linger too long on these happy memories. It provided the security, the strong roots, to allow her to grow strong and independent. She reviews her brief marriage: 'did she love her husband enough?' Becoming a war widow, she resolved to bring up her daughter as a mirror-image of her own independence. But in middle age she entered a time of stagnation which still troubles her. Unable to resolve questions about this period, she hurries through to when she was seventy years of age, her 'plateau of elderly well-being'. At this point in her journey of review, she dies. The author's point seems to be that the quest for an answer to the meaning of one's life is important, not the answer itself. Augusta feels the pain of being unable to share the questions of her life's meaning with others, but eventually the pain passes and in its place comes love.

Florida Scott-Maxwell's reflections on old age provide vivid illustrations and elaborations of Erikson's ideas. 'Now that I have withdrawn from the active world I am more alert to it than ever before.' She refers to this concern for the world as 'heroic helplessness'. She cannot help herself feeling in turn disappointed, excited and concerned. She seeks an experience of oneness that will unite herself

with the whole specie of man. But here too she is tentative, more certain of mystery than of what it is she seeks. Despair is ever present, especially in the frailties of body and circumstances. 'Age forces us to deal with idleness, emptiness, not being needed, not able to do, helplessness just ahead perhaps.' She speaks explicitly of a balancing act, 'a veritable tightrope of keeping well enough, brave enough...to remain a sentient human being. On the day when we can boast none of this, we must be able to wait until the balance is restored.'

Aunt Arie speaks quite another language but similar themes emerge. 'Livin' by yourself you learn to do things you never did think you could do. I have t'learn to make myself not be lonesome.' Caring continues. While she can no longer 'doctor people' or give them her home-made quilts, she lavishes good humour, wit and wisdom on the friends and young people who come to visit. 'Th' saddest thing that's come down my road, though, is not bein' able t'do near what I used to... But I can still love.' She expresses often and in direct terms the interconnectedness she feels with others.

Natalie Rosel draws out a number of points from her exploration of these three books. They all illustrate the dialectical nature of integrity versus despair. The three women were never entirely free of despair, but in each case it provided the potential for growth. The latter two women in particular also point to a time-span beyond the critical period itself, a time of simply coping with age on a day-to-day basis. Scott-Maxwell uses the term 'indifference', a response of emotional neutrality, of not being able to be concerned, somewhere between or beyond integration-versus-despair. The wisdom they all possess is reflected both in activity (knowing how to live well) and contemplation (understanding the nature of life). Scott-Maxwell also articulates well the need for 'terminal clarity' – another Eriksonian concept. She seeks it also in the small physical space she inhabits. 'Order, cleanliness and seamliness make a structure that is half support and half ritual, which if it does not create decency maintains it. I make my possessions appear at their best as they are my only companions.'

COMMENT

As Rosel herself stresses, the clarification of concepts is a key step in research. Although Erikson has provided us with some attractive concepts, they are relatively undeveloped. We can seek further elaboration both by examining the comments of articulate commentators on their own lives and from relevant material on others selected by judicious biographers. The role of novels and other imaginative

material, as films, in this process is more controversial. One of the invaluable roles of literature, however, is to articulate human experience in ways which are original and recognisable to the reader. Such descriptive material then becomes available for more general use. The best literature gives a guide to the frontiers of thinking within a culture.

Rosel's exploration of the well-articulated thoughts of these three women highlights many themes relating to integrity, some of which have been mentioned. One that struck this reader with particular force was the felt need to relate to the society and culture in which they lived, or to what Rosel calls ethos. Erikson makes clear that achieving integrity does not mean simply respecting the value of one's own life but also recognising the value of alternatives, feeling simultaneously distinct from and akin to humanity. Older people's role in culture is a key question for our society, and one that has received most powerful expression recently in the work of one of Erikson's students, David Gutmann.⁵

Barbara K. Height, 'The therapeutic role of a structured life review process in homebound elderly subjects'. *Journal of Gerontology*, 43 (1988), p. 40-44.

Literature reviews on the efficacy of reminiscence work with elderly people have concluded that there is scanty evidence of its therapeutic value and that 'it is best regarded as a diversionary activity'.⁶ However, a major problem for researchers has been the failure to distinguish between different uses of reminiscence. The paper under discussion focuses on one type, the life review. This term was made popular by the American psychiatrist Robert Butler in an influential article published in 1963.⁷ The underlying thinking shows distinct similarities with Erikson's eighth stage and, significantly, Butler in his original article also cited Bergman's Dr Borg as an example of the phenomenon he had in mind. Unfortunately the meaning of the original concept has been almost lost in the welter of reminiscence-based activities which have flourished during the last fifteen years.

In the study reported in this paper, Barbara Haight of the College of Nursing of the Medical University of South Carolina evaluates a proper life-review process. This consisted of a series of six 1-hour visits purposefully structured to guide the older person through his or her memories. Questions covered childhood and adolescence as well as adulthood. The last two sessions focused on summing up the main

themes and the value of the person's life. The instrument was one the researcher had developed over eight years.

For the evaluative study that she undertook, sixty housebound elderly subjects were randomly selected from lists of those receiving meals-on-wheels and home health services. Of these, 51 completed the study, with 16 in the experimental group, 16 in a control group, and 19 in a non-treatment group. The control group received only 'friendly visits'. The study was conducted as a double-blind trial, with the investigator and those doing the testing remaining ignorant of the group assignments until the scores were tallied. Of the four variables investigated, life satisfaction and psychological well-being appeared to be affected significantly by the life review process. A depression measure was not affected, there being little evidence of depression, nor was a measure of the activities of daily living.

In her discussion, the author raises salient points, including the importance of having just one therapeutic listener with whom to review one's life, and the need to engage negative memories if successful integration is to be achieved. If the life review is taken as seriously as in Butler's original account and conducted as a structured process, the therapeutic results, she suggests, might live up to its early promise as a pathway to integrity.

COMMENT

Although few generalisable conclusions can be drawn from so small a study, the author deserves credit for evaluating her procedures so rigorously. Structured life-reviewing led to increased scores on the life-satisfaction index, a well-chosen measure for this research since it was developed originally in part to measure Erikson's notion of integrity. The absence of results with a measure of depression is also noteworthy. Butler indicated the possibility of a depressing outcome to the life review, and Thornton and Brotchie considered it strange that the negative effects of reminiscing have been so little considered. 'This study at least indicates that life reviewing cannot be too dangerous, although as the author points out there was no long-term follow-up. It was interesting that the interviewers reported that the life-review subjects were more ready than the control subjects to terminate contact once they had completed the life review. They felt that they had accomplished a task whereas the control group had not achieved a goal by receiving visits. This study deserves replication and should encourage others to take the concept of the life review more seriously.

Its potential value is supported by other recent literature which points to the greater value of structured versus unstructured reminiscing, and to the association of 'integrative' reminiscing with good adjustment.⁸

NOTES

- 1 Scott-Maxwell, F. *The Measure of My Days*. Penguin, London, 1979.
- 2 Page, L. and Wigginton, E. *Aunt Arie*. Dutton, New York, 1983.
- 3 Wertenbaker, L. *Perilous Voyage*. Little & Brown, Boston, 1975.
- 4 Erikson, E. Reflections on Dr Borg's life cycle. In Erikson, E. (ed.), *Adulthood*. Norton, New York, 1978.
- 5 Gutmann, D. *Reclaimed Powers: Towards a New Psychology of Men and Women in Later Life*. Basic Books, New York, 1987.
- 6 Thornton, S. and Brotchie, J. Reminiscence: a critical review of the empirical literature. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, **26** (1987), 93-111.
- 7 Butler, R. N. The life review: an interpretation of reminiscence in the aged. *Psychiatry*, **26** (1963), 65-76.
- 8 Fry, P. S. Structured and unstructured reminiscence training and depression among the elderly. *Clinical Gerontologist*, **1**, (1983), 15-37. Watt, L. M. and Wong, P. T. P. Successful aging: typologies and themes of reminiscence. *International Journal of Ageing and Human Development* (in press).

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