

Marian Barnes, Beatrice Gahagan, Lizzie Ward

Re-Imagining Old Age

Wellbeing, care and participation

VERNON SERIES IN SOCIOLOGY

Summary

The understanding that humans are relational beings is central to the development of an ethical perspective that is built around the significance of care in all our lives. Our survival as infants is dependent on the care we receive from others. And for all of us, in particular, in older age, there are times when illness, emotional or physical frailty, mean that we require the care of others to enable us to deal with everyday life.

With this in mind, this book presents the findings of a project that seeks to understand what wellbeing means to older people and to influence the practice of those who work with older people. Its starting point was a shared commitment amongst researchers and an NGO collaborator to the value of working with older people in both research and practice, to learn from them and be influenced by them rather than seeing them as the 'subjects' of a research project.

Theoretically, the authors draw upon a range of studies in critical gerontology that seek to understand how experiences of ageing are shaped by their social, economic, cultural and political contexts. By employing a broad body of work that challenges normative assumptions of 'successful' ageing, the authors draw attention to how these assumptions have been constructed through neo-liberal policies of 'active ageing.' Notably, they also apply insights from feminist ethics of care, which are based on a relational ontology that challenges neo-liberal assumptions of autonomous individualism.

Influenced by relational ethics, they are attentive to older people both

as co-researchers and research respondents. By successfully applying this perspective to social care practice, they facilitate the need for practitioners to reflect on personal aspects of ageing and care but also to bridge the gap between the personal and the professional.



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About the author

Marian Barnes is Emeritus Professor of Social Policy at the University of Brighton. Now retired, her research has focused on care, ageing, and mental health. She is well known for her use of participatory research methods and studies of user involvement and collective action by service users. She has been published widely with titles such as 'Taking Over the Asylum: empowerment and mental health' (2001, with Ric Bowl, Palgrave), and 'Care in Everyday Life' (2012, Policy Press).

Beatrice Gahagan is Health and Wellbeing Development Manager at Age UK Brighton and Hove where she has worked for the last 20 years. Her work has centred on developing and running services for older people and in building a strong culture and value base of person-centred practice. During the last ten years, she has worked with her research colleagues to develop collaborative research work involving older people. She is a chartered psychologist and associate fellow of the British psychological society and has a D Phil on human consciousness and nature.

Lizzie Ward is Principal Research Fellow in the School of Applied Social Science at the University of Brighton. Lizzie is a qualitative researcher with research interests in age and ageing, care ethics, participatory research, experiential knowledge and gender and feminist methodologies. She works in the field of community-based participatory research and has a particular interest in co-production and working with older people as co-researchers. She has published in the areas of applying care ethics to research practice and social care practice with older people.