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Charlotte Greenhalgh, *Aging in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Berkeley Series in British Studies) Oakland: University of California Press. 2018. Pp. xiii, 262. \$34.95.

A compelling, persuasive and rewarding read, Charlotte Greenhalgh's *Aging in Twentieth-Century Britain* provides a challenge and complement to the existing, limited literature on old age in this period. Arguing that historians such as Pat Thane have 'produced excellent knowledge' of the material conditions of and policies relating to older people, Greenhalgh's book aims to examine 'the new forms of affective and social life' by considering the voices of older people (p.19). This is achieved throughout in a sophisticated way; not only do those testimonies emerge from the rigorous research here, but so do questions of how older people's voices were heard, ignored, studied and understood throughout the period 1930-70 and since. The book therefore integrates policy and political change, changing health and social care provision, cultural context and the study of older people with a centring of the lives and experiences of those older people themselves.

The book is divided into five principal chapters, each focusing on different aspects of the source material and of old age itself: social research and expertise, Peter Townsend's interviews of older people at home, residential care, grooming, and autobiographical writing. At first glance, it might seem that the perspectives of social researchers and the materials they produce dominate here, in a book that claims to focus on the voices of older Britons. Yet, what Greenhalgh achieves is a methodologically sensitive reading and secondary analysis of existing social research, principally that of Peter Townsend, conducted for his seminal works on old age, *The Family Life of Old People* (1957) and *The Last Refuge* (1962). Greenhalgh shares Townsend's desire to get inside the lives and worlds of older people. Yet, she uses his work in a sophisticated way, complementing recent work by scholars such as Mike Savage, Jon Lawrence and Helen McCarthy, in carefully interrogating the premises and context of the original research to reveal rich information and thinking about both the older people studied and the research itself. This methodological sophistication continues with other sources, such as fashion magazines and autobiographies, with careful analysis of those media themselves alongside analysis of their content. In doing so, Greenhalgh's book adds to both literatures of aging in modern Britain and to scholarship of these particular source types.

The book uses insights from social history into the life cycle, history of emotions, and recent scholarship around subjectivity, self and social science to good effect. This sensitive and sophisticated use of the existing scholarship means that, in turn, the book contributes to some of the key debates in twentieth-century beyond the question of aging, too. What happens if we re-examine key historiographical debates about changing gender roles or marriage, say, by looking at older people's lives rather than focusing on the young as so often happens? It's clear that doing so can disrupt key chronologies and accepted thinking. Aging and ill health could encourage couples to renegotiate the domestic workload, for example, and navigate cultural expectations of masculinity and femininity in new ways, such as the couple who found that the wife's poor health led to a new-found enjoyment of cooking on the part of her husband (p.67). Only by looking back at this material, examining

Townsend's interpretation of this interview, and others, in the context of the 1950s when he was writing, can we start to better understand how social change was happening. Whilst historians have focused on earlier moments in the life cycle – teenage years, becoming a parent – to understand how change occurred, it's easy to ignore the latter years of life as less relevant. Perhaps changes in people's lives were borne of necessity, or mattered less because they were to last for only a short period before death, and therefore had less of an impact? Greenhalgh makes a compelling case that this isn't so, and the book makes a case for all social historians to think more carefully about this group of people.

As such, what this book does well is think about older people as experiencing a stage of life, rather than divorcing their experiences of older age from their past life experiences. As Greenhalgh finds in the original interviews, this is how older men and women, unsurprisingly, positioned themselves: as parents, grandparents, friends, workers, and the like. Oldness was not a predominant identity, and here Greenhalgh shows effectively what taking seriously the perspectives of older people looks like: it means understanding the whole life cycle and their past experiences in totality, rather than divorcing off only testimonies of being over sixty or sixty-five. An example of this is in her chapter on autobiography, 'Games with Time', in which Greenhalgh pays as much attention to childhood memories in autobiographical material as writers' recollections of their later life experiences. As she argues, returning to their early lives allowed autobiographers to 'comprehend both the aging process and the nature of rapid social change' (p.136).

This book is ambitious, and covers a huge range of subjects – everything from clothing to residential care. It's clear more research is needed if we accept the idea that old age is a life stage worth thinking about and age is a category worth taking as seriously as class, race, and gender. As with the history of children and childhood, we need to consider precisely how we categorise age, and further think through both chronological and relative aging. Greenhalgh's book covers a wide range of people too, from those still working in their sixties to the very frail and elderly. Further work should use this excellent addition to the literature as a springboard to interrogating further the category of 'oldness' and picking up on the many strands Greenhalgh highlights. Overall, I was left with a feeling of wanting more – and that's a testament to the way this valuable book has opened up new topics, approaches and ways of thinking about oldness and aging in twentieth-century Britain.

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