

Anthea Innes (2009). *Dementia Studies*.
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REVIEWED BY YIU TUNG SUEN*

Dementia has certainly gained increased attention among the public and academics over the past decades. Anthea Innes' book *Dementia Studies* is a timely addition that critically examines our current understanding of dementia and its implications on individuals, communities and societies. The book clearly shows that tension is almost everywhere if one seeks to understand dementia more thoroughly. There is discrepancy between the ideal and actualised care that people living with dementia receive; between prioritising carers and people living with dementia themselves; and perhaps most significantly, between theory and practice. As Innes notes, the book unfolds "contradictions, paradoxes and multiple interpretations and representations surrounding dementia and dementia care provision" (p. 2).

The book starts by questioning knowledge about dementia with concepts of power, culture and knowledge production, drawn from the literature of sociology of health and illness and sociology of knowledge. Chapter One seeks to unpack what "dementia" is from different disciplines, including biomedical approaches that focus on cognitive functioning, psychosocial approaches that ask us to look at personhood and person-centred care, and social-gerontological approaches that

*Yiu Tung Suen, Department of Sociology and Oxford Institute of Ageing, University of Oxford, UK.

examine how “dementia” is socially constructed. The chapter provides an interesting discussion that shows “knowledge about dementia is not as straightforward, nor as consensual” as generally seen (p. 4) and challenges “what is ‘known’ about dementia” (p. 25). This part of the book could be especially useful for medical students and practitioners or indeed anyone who might have taken for granted the “scientific” knowledge about dementia.

Chapter Two moves on to contextualise dementia studies in global and local political, economic and cultural environments. It demonstrates how issues around dementia and dementia care have become politicised because of population ageing and fear of rising associated financial costs of informal and institutional care for people living with dementia. At the same time, it also highlights the fact that dementia still carries with it certain stigma in different societies.

The discussion in the book then shifts to the care for people living with dementia. Chapter Three unpacks the gap between the “utopian ideals” (p. 45) and “the reality of the care situations paid and unpaid carers find themselves in” (p. 69). While the ideals of care are generally driven by moral values and policy frameworks, realities of care are, however, heavily influenced by who provides the care and where. People living with dementia are also heterogeneous which makes care ideals that come in only one size difficult to fit all. The author uses ethnicity and rural location as two examples when the issue of diversity is discussed. Although the two examples are both useful and important, the debate on diversity seems to be rather limited. For example, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people who are either living with dementia or who are undertaking a carer’s role (e.g. Newman 2005) and people who experience younger onset dementia (e.g. Keady & Nolan 1994) can be examples of useful additions to this section to expand our imagination of diversity among people who experience dementia.

Chapter Four discusses dementia studies in cultural contexts. Culture is understood in two ways: (1) cultural groupings, including people living in different countries and people from different ethnic groups living in the same country and (2) cultures of care.

Chapter Five reflects on researching dementia itself. It describes a general shift from research looking at the experiences of formal and

informal carers to understanding the experiences of people living with dementia through proxy informants, to the beginning of incorporating the accounts of people living with dementia themselves. The part on conducting research on dementia (pp. 114–131) poses thought-provoking questions and can be especially useful for people who want to conduct research with people living with dementia. Difficulties such as obtaining consent and practical issues such as communication and accuracy of accounts are discussed. The discussion on research methods is encouraging as it shows that if research design is creative and carefully implemented, soliciting viewpoints from people living with dementia is difficult but certainly not impossible. This part can be substantially expanded, but given the fact that the book has a wider appeal than only to researchers, the brief discussion is understandable.

The book closes with Chapter Six which proposes a model of dementia studies that is reflexive and takes into account the many issues discussed in the previous chapters and summarised above.

Overall, the book can be useful to readers of a variety of backgrounds, including students and researchers in Gerontology, Health and Medical Sciences, Social Work, Social Policy, Sociology and Psychology. It should also appeal to practitioners who work with people living with dementia. I could imagine even friends and family members of people living with dementia might find the book interesting.

As stated above, from a reader's perspective, the discussion on dementia and diversity in the book could be expanded. The section on research methods and associated difficulties can also be dealt with in greater length, especially as research interests on dementia have been growing. However, as a whole, the book *Dementia Studies* is both useful and highly readable.

References

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