

pletteness, opting for a self-contained micro-society, not least of all because the prospects for assimilation are ruled out by racism.

Encounters with Aging: Mythologies of Menopause in Japan and North America

Margaret Lock

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This book will be essential reading for many audiences. Lock grapples with issues central to anthropology, including the relationship between biology and culture, and that between individual experience and cultural expectation. She does this through the study of a portion of the life cycle, the mid-life period of transition (*konenki*), as understood by Japanese women and health professionals. She compares her Japanese findings with those from surveys on menopause conducted with women in Massachusetts and Manitoba. The analysis is presented within a larger discussion of the ideological representation of women's bodies and lives.

The material collected in Japan, where Lock has conducted periodic research over 20 years, includes interviews with middle-aged women in more than 100 households. These narratives reveal much about women's experiences at mid-life. For example, the event of final menstruation is of relatively little significance to them. Social roles, such as rearing children and caring for elderly mothers- and fathers-in-law, are of more concern than the change in their reproductive status. Questionnaires completed by over 1000 Japanese women, and comparisons drawn from the Massachusetts and Manitoba studies, suggest that menopause is not experienced in the same way by women in Japan and North America. Discomforts that North American women associate with menopause (such as tiredness, hot flashes and night sweats) are less commonly reported by Japanese women, who are more apt to experience backaches and headaches during the mid-life transition period.

Culture contributes to the interpretations that Japanese women have of their mid-life experiences, including their understanding that menopause is only one aspect of *konenki*. However, Lock discounts culture as the sole factor responsible for disparities between the way Japanese women interpret and experience the mid-life transition and the way North American women do. She suggests that endocrine-system differences may contribute to the dissimilarity in symptoms reported by Japanese and North American women at mid-life.

Various chapters constitute self-contained essays on the following topics: the medicalization of the life cycle in Euro-American culture (chaps. 11 and 12); modernization and gendered activity (chap. 4); social change and the family (chaps. 5 and 6); or socialization and world view (chap. 8). For those scholars interested in the relationship between biology and culture, medical anthropology and gender and aging, the volume should be read in its entirety. Lock's prose is elegant, and her coverage of the literature extensive. The volume well demonstrates that the anthropological study of aging has much to contribute to anthropology as a whole.