

Editorial

Any publication will ultimately be judged by the quality, clarity and relevance of what it contains. *Ageing and Society* must also stand this test in the coming years. Some will judge it by this first issue. Others will reserve judgement to some point in the unspecified future. But new enterprises develop and extend. Like human beings they have careers which are shaped by internal drives and propensities, as well as by external events and by their social audiences. Change and responsiveness must be a feature of a vibrant publication; so as Editor I am taking this opening opportunity to draw attention to some of the influences which already exist and to invite your active involvement in shaping the career of *Ageing and Society*.

This first issue will inevitably be treated as a general prospectus and an indication of the identity which will emerge in subsequent issues. Whilst a single issue cannot embody all of the hopes and aspirations which are nurtured for the journal, the main elements are certainly present here. Our first concern will be with developing a greater understanding of human ageing whether it be through theoretical refinement, methodological development, the results of empirical studies, literature reviews or policy analyses. In seeking a balance between these interests, care will also be taken to represent as wide a range as possible of disciplines and topics within the social sciences and humanities. Equally, the international character of the journal must be reflected in the origins of the authors and in a truly universal interest in the diversity of cultural influences on ageing processes. With such a set of criteria and with an audience drawn from many backgrounds and perspectives it is more important than usual for the contributions to be readily comprehensible: avoiding both parochial subjects and the parochial language of jargon, which all too often masquerade as a technical and necessary form of expression.

The founding of a new journal brings with it all the hopes, fears, excitements and responsibilities of any new life. To be the Editor of an infant scholarly publication is therefore a great privilege and at the same time it presents an awesome prospect. In the field of ageing studies – which is itself no more than a gawky adolescent – the addition of a fresh forum for dialogue and debate is bound to have some impact on the nature of this discourse. Those who have new thoughts and new knowledge to offer will direct them to chosen audiences which can be reached through particular

published media. As a consequence any new journal worthy of attention will, in perceptible ways, identify particular audiences, emphasize selected issues, themes and approaches and develop a style of communication which influences its potential authors in the material they choose to present and the ways they write about them.

Readers of this issue will not require further reminders about the social construction of reality and its further re-construction by those whose business it is to study the social world. Yet these are matters which have had much of my attention in the months of preparation. An editor who welcomes everything with equal enthusiasm is not an editor. One who selects only those items which fit his own set of intellectual, moral, ideological and methodological preferences is merely exercising whim and prejudice. My own motives in accepting the editor's chair were linked with a desire to encourage the emergent trends of new thinking, and more diverse forms and topics of inquiry related to ageing (rather than just old age). So I come to the task with a sense of purpose which both authors and readers should have the opportunity to appreciate. To put it in another way, it is an important part of a sound approach to research and teaching, and therefore to editing, that personal predilections are taken into account in the open and not theorized away in spurious claims of scientific detachment.

The stock of existing research on ageing is characteristically about retirement; it is also largely about 'being old' at particular chronological ages and at particular times. It has, in the recent past, been excessively concerned with the social characteristics, experiences, views and maladies of cohorts of retired people. Valuable as they undoubtedly are, these inquiries contained relatively little which recognized the dynamics and continuities of social ageing, nor did they use personal or group history as a tool for interpreting their snap-shots of older people.

There are signs that more historically informed and more processual studies are growing in number and sophistication. Concern with the formative nature of experiences and biographies has percolated through, creating a greater awareness of the ubiquitous nature of ageing and the value of studying it as a topic in itself. So much of the literature of social science deals with age as a variable to be used to classify groups of people under scrutiny for some other purpose. This has led to innumerable studies of the family, class, education, political behaviour, health care, bureaucracy, etc., which use age only as a temporal scale which can be used as a convenient (but otherwise unconsidered) form of grouping. Yet surely those who study these other features of society must be aware at some level, of the need to take account of the impact of the passage of time, and of ageing on these individuals and groups. Indeed it is not too much to

suggest that they have been intellectually blind in not recognizing the significance of the ageing of families, occupational groups, organizations, institutions and whole societies.

Claims of this sort could be interpreted as another piece of academic imperialism. This is certainly not the object. What is suggested, is the incorporation of ageing as a set of social processes (as opposed to a set of variables or descriptions) into the work of other scholars, so that it is understood to be a complex, problematic and intrinsically worthwhile issue in itself; just as class, family, intelligence and gender are no longer seen as simple unitary concepts, capable of simple measurement and interpretation.

Students of ageing may protest that much has already been done. Yet there is still an insularity in our work even in those countries where gerontology has flourished. One of the objects of this journal will be to give prominence to work which advances the boundaries of ageing studies in this way. However, this object must rest alongside the essential development work upon which any field of study must rely.

Earlier in this piece mention was made of responsiveness and change. As an editor I will welcome critical comment on the policy and content of the journal, and look forward to enlarging my own horizons through receiving manuscripts (which are sent out to review anonymously) from many new people, places and perspectives.

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