Intersections of Ageing, Gender and Sexualities

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Foreword

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Over the past decade there have been profound societal changes in attitudes towards and institutional practices regarding sexualities and gender identity. The legalisation of same-sex marriage is just one example, but others include increasing public discussion about trans individuals. Within the field of ageing, the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) individuals, the analyses of sexualities and of trans ageing have been largely neglected. This insightful and timely edited collection successfully redresses this imbalance, while also offering new insights into the dynamic interrelationship of ageing, gender and sexualities.

A novel aspect of the book is that it critically examines not only the intersections of ageing and sexualities, but also the interconnections of gender and sexualities in later life. The chapters provide a nuanced illumination of the intersections of ageing, gender and sexuality, while also considering the importance of intersections with other sources of social division, including race, ethnicity, social class and disability. These are not only discussed as representing sources of social division, but also representing relations of power, privilege and oppression.

A particular feature of ageing is the impact of the cohort in which individuals were born, and the ways that institutional changes throughout their life courses have influenced their early lives and later life experiences. For LGBT elders, feelings of dislocation and ‘unbelonging’ may have accompanied them throughout their lives and continue to influence their later years. Key concerns are how normative expectations may have been disrupted and reformulated.

This edited collection clearly shows there can be no single understanding of ageing, but a need to understand the various contours shaping diversity among older people. It is equally important not to homogenise the ‘category’ of older people, but seek to understand their unique experiences that may be patterned by gender, sexuality, social class and ethnicity, as well as historical and societal contexts. The book highlights the ways that intersections of ageing, gender and
sexualities are influenced by societal context, in particular through the international nature of the collection with chapters from a wide range of countries, including Australia, Iran, Italy, South Africa and Spain.

By taking a multi-disciplinary approach, Intersections of Ageing, Gender and Sexualities highlights how various disciplines provide depths of insights into a range of inequalities associated with gender and sexualities in later life. Multi-disciplinarity is fundamental to the book’s organisation around four key themes. Chapters in the first theme focus on ways of theorising gender and sexualities in later life, including intersectionality theory and queer theory. The second theme explores the impact of culturally dominant representations of ageing and how these affect and are resisted by different groups of elders. The third theme illuminates how the alterative and often unexpected ways that power, privilege and oppression influence experiences of ageing according to gender and sexuality. The final theme focuses on the important area of health and well-being, including how dominant ideas of sexual health and well-being are gendered and heteronormative.

This thought-provoking collection questions existing ideas and perspectives relating to ageing, gender and sexuality. It offers novel insights of central relevance for researchers, policy makers and practitioners within the field of ageing and also within gender and sexuality studies. An important empirical and theoretical collection, it provides insights and exemplars that will have a lasting influence on scholars and practitioners in the field of ageing.