THE MEANING of the term gerontology is a matter of continuing debate. On the one hand, the answer is simple; gerontology is the scientific study of the aging process and emphasizes a life course perspective. On the other hand, some scholars focus more on the study of older people (or organisms) and their problems, rather than the aging process per se. The difficulty in defining the boundaries and the foci of gerontology is not surprising, given that the field is only beginning to develop a paradigm (Ferraro, 1990). Although defining a paradigm for the field is a far-reaching task, it may be helpful as I assume the editorial reins of the Journal to attempt to define the boundaries and intellectual foci of this publication. Readers and authors alike wonder, what can we expect from the new editor? Are certain topics privileged? Will certain methods or theories be elevated?

My general response to these queries is to frame it as an issue of inclusiveness. Does gerontology favor certain topics, theories, and methods? Perhaps it does, but I do not believe that it is the editor’s job to foster exclusivity. Rather, my message is simple: I welcome submissions from every sector of gerontology.

The Journal has been in very capable hands over its history, but I feel especially fortunate to be following Charles Longino as editor. Chuck worked hard to strengthen theoretical and conceptual integration in the Journal and to assure that all types of scholarship were valued. I very much want this legacy to continue.

Lest the specter of exclusivity seem exaggerated, it may be helpful to identify a few of the possible threats to inclusiveness in the Journal. I see the threats as having four main sources. First, we are well aware that health issues are inextricably related to the aging process. Thus, it is understandable that topics related to epidemiology, health status, and health care will assume a prominent position. At the same time, gerontology flirts with being medicalized. We need scientific investigations of topics that are not directly related to health—ageism, politics, and social bonds to name a few.

Second, although the methods debate may seem in-terminate, the Journal has welcomed and will continue to welcome both qualitative and quantitative approaches as well as those that combine methods. The title of the Journal includes the word sciences, and all scientific approaches are important to gerontology.

Third, diversity is one of the watchwords of the field, and I welcome submissions related to heterogeneity and variability. This includes studies of minority aging as well as other axes of social stratification. Diversity in subjects is good for science (i.e., external validity) and often draws attention to social inequality.

Fourth, the Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences has a reputation for being the preeminent journal for empirical work on aging. Indeed, the Instructions to Authors state that review articles are “mainly solicited by the Editor.” Although exacting standards need to be applied to review articles, I hope that we can open this up a bit for review papers that offer insight into an area of study. Review articles must be concise and extremely well organized, but it is my sense that we should not exclude them.

With these threats to inclusiveness in mind, there is one area where I hope to receive more papers: early origins of variability in later life. My goal is not to unduly privilege this area of inquiry but to compensate for what many scholars feel has been an artificial discontinuity in the study of aging (Riley, 1987). Long-term longitudinal studies have been pivotal to advancing our understanding of the early origins of adult health, but I find that relatively few of them have been published in the Journal.

My vision for the Journal during the next four years is shaped by many factors, but a few deserve mention. First, I have learned much from editors who oversaw the review of my papers for this Journal. I have been an author under seven editors, and I learned something from each one that I will try to use for the task at hand. Second, I and many others have long regarded this Journal as the flagship for social science research on aging. Exclusivity in the publication process should not arise from the topic studied or the scientific method used but from the judgments of quality rendered by the reviewers and editorial board. Indeed, the backbone of any preeminent journal is a strong and dedicated editorial board and pool of reviewers. Third, you will see the names on the masthead changing over the next issues, and I see this as another way to foster a more inclusive gerontology. Although membership on some editorial boards lasts for a decade or more, I want a more fluid board. The editorial board for the Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences is a working board, and most editors are concerned about overworking board members and faithful reviewers. Shorter editorial terms are one way to expect vigorous service and open the door to more colleagues interested in such a role.

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REFERENCES