Editorial
Are There Any Concerns About Gender Inclusion?

For social gerontologists who apply to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for research funding, it is now necessary to provide some assurances. The NIH more than discourages population studies of White men alone. If an application lacks appropriate representation of women, minorities, and children and a plan for their inclusion, the application will be flagged by reviewers as embodying an “inclusion concern.” (The inclusion of children is rarely appropriate in gerontologic research.) Further, the proposed data analysis is expected to take advantage of this gender and racial diversity. If diversity and thoughtful analyses are lacking, these concerns may erode enthusiasm for research applications and ultimately can become a barrier to their funding. And yet researchers often flounder for conceptual tools that will turn this hurdle into an opportunity.

You will note that the lead article in this issue is a theory paper by Toni Calasanti focusing on feminist theory and men’s health. I would encourage you to read it. Most of us are satisfied with reporting the differences between men and women in our projects without giving much thought to why these differences are important conceptually. We report gender as an individual characteristic, often forgetting that it is also structural and relational. There are power dynamics and identity formations that underlie and often explain the gender differences that we report. We may need to put on a “perceptual filter” even to become aware of gender relations because they are so invisible to most people. This is why theory is an integral part of good basic research; it provides perspective and enriches the meaning of findings.

Review panels in NIH frequently contain members who are quite familiar with feminist theory. As they examine applications, they pay attention to the way that the investigator justifies and conceptualizes gender issues. During an application’s review, these members often respond when the study section chair asks, “Are there any concerns about gender inclusion?” For those of us who support our ongoing research through the application process, it may be well worth the time to become more familiar with applications of feminist theory in research. That is the goal of Dr. Calasanti’s paper.

Theory-based research manuscripts, of course, always receive a warm welcome at this Journal.

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