EDITORIAL

Theory Welcome Here

I see hundreds of reviews each year, mostly for this *Journal*, but also for other journals. I was very surprised to read a reviewer’s comment in another top social science journal—one that is familiar to many of our authors and reviewers. The reviewer’s comment was in response to a theory submission: “A regular issue of ____ is generally not an appropriate outlet for such work.”

Interesting . . . and this comment raises some questions: Are scientific journals solely for original empirical works? Would a reviewer—or an editor—be justified in excluding a topical area? Probably not. Why then would theory be treated as a topic for exclusion?

Although some reviewers may not think that theoretical articles should be published in scientific journals, I want to make it eminently clear that theoretical works are welcome at the *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*. Moreover, there are special reasons to encourage theoretical works in journals—not just for anthologies or “theory journals” but for all top scientific journals.

If a journal claims to be a venue for science, then I believe it also needs to be willing to publish papers that are primarily about one or more scientific theories. Most scientific methods entail testing hypotheses about the relationships between variables. Hypotheses do not come out of thin air but are typically generated from either previous research or theories.

Hypothesis generation from prior research is a wholly acceptable means of advancing scientific inquiry, but overreliance on it can lead to a science of the commonplace. Research can easily evolve into tiny extensions of a basic research question. Incremental science is in many respects good for replication, but it is usually less innovative.

Generating hypotheses from a theory, on the other hand, may lead to a more diffuse set of research questions than would result from tests of hypotheses generated from prior research alone. In this sense, theory can enhance scientific innovation. Good theory, moreover, incorporates empirical generalizations; thus, it will also be more efficient for hypothesis formulation because it integrates both past findings and reasoned statements about such findings.

Theoretical manuscripts are welcome here—works that incorporate theory with empirical tests and those that seek to extend or develop a theory. Essays do not ipso facto constitute a theoretical work. Neither do manuscripts that make a reasoned argument on a policy issue. Theoretical papers should be explicit in developing or extending one or more theories; they should link concepts, hypotheses, and empirical generalizations in a logical way.

Reports of original research are the building blocks of science—always have been, always will be. But there is a need to assemble the blocks into a meaningful structure. Theory, like an architectural design, helps us see how the stones or blocks might be related to one another to create something meaningful and enduring.

One should not conclude that theory is permanent and a panacea for the social scientific study of aging. Rather, it is expected that theories will be revised in response to specific tests of falsification and new empirical generalizations. Otherwise, “theories” are more like ideologies for social discussions of aging. Theories that are useful are also stated in a straightforward manner. Jargon does not demonstrate theoretical sophistication, neither does academic mysticism. Cogent writing with conceptual precision will win the day.

Readers of this Journal may assume that there is a bias against publishing theoretical works. I know that my predecessor, Chuck Longino, went to great lengths to encourage theory submissions—and I am following his lead. At the same time, editors know very well that articles on a specific topic or using an approach will never be published unless they are first submitted for review.

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### Big Changes at Journals of Gerontology: Social Sciences

The Gerontological Society of America decided to transition to a new means of production and publication, and we are very pleased to work with Oxford University Press Journals. Of course, this transition and our migration from Allentrack to Manuscript Central have required both patience and steady hands. Margaret (Peggy) Favorite has masterfully managed this transition; she is, in fact, an exemplary *managing editor*.

Other changes are unfolding this year. The Editorial Board and I have been discussing double-anonymous review for some time, and the transition to Oxford Journals and Manuscript Central seemed an apropos time to implement it. Virtually all social science journals use double-anonymous review, so we are just lining up with our peers.

True to my commitment for a more inclusive gerontological community, we have several changes to the Editorial Board. It is with sincere gratitude that I publicly thank outgoing members who gave tirelessly to our scientific community. I will continue to call on their expertise, but I believe that they have earned a downshift in their service to this *Journal*.
I extend my deepest appreciation to Jacqueline L. Angel, Helen K. Black, Thomas A. Glass, Stephen M. Golant, Neal M. Krause, Scott M. Lynch, Jan E. Mutchler, Jill Quadagno, Karen A. Roberto, Scott Schieman, Glenna D. Spitze, William J. Strawbridge, Robert Joseph Taylor, Judith Treas, John F. Watkins, Douglas A. Wolf, and Fredric D. Wolinsky. For the past three years, Jacqui Angel and Neal Krause also served as associate editors. I leaned on their judgment on many occasions, and they handled all manuscripts for which I had a potential conflict of interest. Thank you.

I am also pleased to announce several new members of the Editorial Board whose terms began in January 2009. I look forward to working with this distinguished group of scholars who well represent the diversity of social scientific approaches to the study of aging: Thomas A. Arcury, J. Scott Brown, Daniel O. Clark, Philippa J. Clarke, Joe Feinglass, Jonathan D. Fisher, Joseph E. Gaugler, Karsten Hank, Stanislav V. Kasl, Karl D. Kosloski, Mitchell P. LaPlante, Jersey Liang, William Spector, Maximiliane E. Szinovacz, Sharon W. Williams, and Linda A. Wray. Our two new associate editors will be Carlos F. Mendes de Leon and Janet M. Wilmot.

We continue to welcome new reviewers. Whether you are a distinguished professor or a graduate student, we invite you to participate in the scientific review process. For those who are new to the process, we have a novice reviewer program in which we typically add an extra reviewer to a manuscript. This gives new reviewers a chance to gain valuable experience reviewing and to see the comments of other anonymous reviewers on a given manuscript. Of course, our hope is that novice reviewers will soon shed that novice descriptor. If you would like to review for this Journal, simply send a copy of your vita along with a brief note indicating the topics for which you are willing to review to jgss@purdue.edu.

Finally, I am very sorry to report that Charles F. Longino, Jr., former editor of this Journal, passed from this life on December 25, 2008. Professor Longino was a world-renown gerontology scholar, with particular expertise on retirement migration, and served as President of both the Gerontological Society of America and the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education. Chuck was an extraordinarily gracious man—an adoring husband and father and an exceptional mentor to many of us. He will be missed, but his imprint on this Journal and our scientific community will remain.

Kenneth F. Ferraro
Editor