

THE SOCIAL DIVISIONS OF LATER LIFE

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FROM SOCIAL CATEGORY TO SOCIAL LOCATION

Traditional approaches to the study of old age have treated it as a social category whose boundaries formed part of the institutionalisation of the life course, the development of the modern nation state and its role in securing the life and well being of its citizens

As a social category old age was relatively undefined beyond its exit from the labour market

For some time now this life-course categorisation seems no longer viable as the main sociological framework of analysis

“It is less and less plausible to define the process of becoming old by reference to conventional market positions” Tom Schuller, 1990, p.53

LATER LIFE AS A SOCIAL LOCATION

Better to think about later life as a social location, intersected by numerous structuring influences, most of which are not directly implicated in the relations of production

Later life intersects with gender and sexuality, with ethnicity and race, with health and illness and with lifestyle and lifetime

Its boundaries - chronological corporeal or consumerist – are, to some extent, more liquid now, but retirement from work and from social reproduction retain an obvious if perhaps less easily evident influence

LATER LIFE AND ITS SOCIAL DIVISIONS

This shift from social category to social location encourages a new look at the differences, distinctions and divisions intersecting and echoing through as well as generated by this period of life

Old age as a category has fragmented: rather than ignore all but the few that have benefitted little or at all from this social individualisation, pay attention to the assets and resources that are fostering richer and more inclusive later lives experienced by the many

LATER LIFE: ITS DIVISIONS AND DISTINCTIONS, ITS IDENTITIES AND INEQUITIES

This is the broad framework we have adopted for our forthcoming book: the presentations today focus upon two contrasting sources of division intersecting through later life

“Social class” and “Corporeal capital”

The book will obviously cast a wider net

- Tom Schuller (1990) "Work-ending: Employment and ambiguity in later life" in [eds.] Bill Bytheway, Teresa Keil, Patricia Allatt and Alan Bryman, *Becoming and Being Old: Sociological approaches to later life*, Sage Publications, London, (pp.41-54)