

Age at Work: Ambiguous Boundaries of Organizations, Organizing and Ageing

- Jeff Hearn - Hanken School of Economics, Finland
- Wendy Parkin

We've all been told, "Too old for this, too young for that." In this masterly study Hearn and Parkin show how organizations organize human beings into categories. Calendars, chronologies and "ticking clocks" mobilize to tell us what we are and who we are becoming. Birth and death are certainties, but age and ageing are where power meets opinion.

Terrell Carver
Professor of Political Theory, University of Bristol, UK

In reviewing this book, the phrase that continually comes to mind is 'at last – a serious study of ageing and organization.' There are so many positives to this book, not least of which is the authorship of Jeff Hearn and Wendy Parkin, who build on a lifetime of high impact research on various aspects of power and diversity. The other must-read elements include timeliness (it includes discussion of Covid-19); personal reflections and self-critique (joining theory to experience); engagement with age hegemony and the discourse of ageing at work; all written in an engaging style; that explores a topic that is relevant to us all.

Professors Albert Mills and Jean Helms Mills
Saint Mary's University, Canada

“This fascinating discourse offers subtle and subversive insights into the ways we enact age and aging. It deconstructs conventional social scripts in ways that can improve both our own self-understanding and the shape of public policy.”

Nancy Folbre
Director, Program on Gender and Care Work, Political Economy Research Institute,
University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA

Hearn and Parkin bring long careers' worth of organizational research to bear on this mission to rescue the field. They show how regimes of age structure institutions, from the rise of bureaucratic authority and trajectory of the ideal career, to the management of dependency and death in the age of pandemic. Enjoy this book for its sly humor and obvious pleasure taken in the writing. Let it inform your theory as you design your organizational research. It brings encyclopaedic knowledge of the histories of institutions to bear on the management of old age, the penetration of bureaucracy into familial and personal authority, the organization of daily care, attempts to extend the human lifespan, and memorials built to honor our heroes. This book ought to reshape the field of organizational studies.

Professors Toni Calasanti and Neal King
Virginia Tech University, USA

Combining keen scholarly insight with personal testimonies, Jeff Hearn and Wendy Parkin provide a sensitive and sophisticated analysis of age and organization. *Age at Work* brings together age and organization studies in a comprehensive, highly accessible and contemporary account that addresses key concerns within cultural gerontology and the critical role of age in organizational construction and inequality. This timely book expands new domains of interest within a neglected area of research, highlighting how age, ageing and ageism 'figure' in organizations and raising fascinating issues that will be an invaluable resource across the social sciences.

Professor Ruth Simpson
Professor of Management, Brunel University, UK

How can such a thought-provoking book – paradoxically full of strokes and dementia and other geriatric challenges - be so wonderful to engage with? What Hearn and Parkin have succeeded in producing in this new work is a comprehensive survey of just how age and organization intertwine - ambiguously. Thus, the organizations through which we experience ageing are our places of work but also our places of health care, and of death. The authors show that age is a major issue for the young as well as the old; that age is a fiction but it is also a social fact; that age is contingent, intersectional and a social construct. Yet ageing is an event horizon from which there is no return. This unidirectionality notwithstanding, *'Age at Work'* is a proper learning event to which one will be able to return, over time, on many occasions and, each time, feel more informed about oneself and those around you.

Gibson Burrell
Universities of Leicester and Manchester

Age as a 'number' is so deceptive, as this insightful book shows. Age is infused with socially constructed meanings, shaping and shaped by organizations of all types. The authors cast a critical sociological eye over this disparate field to expose age's varied appearances and what may lie behind them. Amongst other things, they show us how age becomes politicised, commodified and exploited at different junctures of the lifecourse. Helpfully, the book enters the less fashionable, yet crucial, terrain of sickness and dying, focussing on the enterprises that transform these experiences into more or less palatable transitions, even beyond the grave - of particular resonance in the era of Covid-19. The authors add their personal experiences to parts of the book, effectively grounding their conceptual analyses.

The book succeeds in both scope and depth. It exposes age as a rich phenomenon, conceptually and in practice. Age is shown to be fundamental to our identities and how we are treated by others. This book should be essential reading for advanced students of organization.

Stephen Fineman
Professor Emeritus, University of Bath

This is an exhaustive, erudite and comprehensive look at age and ageing. It playfully explores the idea of age 'at work': how it works, where it works and what it does in societal and organisational contexts. It includes but moves beyond paid work to look at various types of

organisations: their structures, boundaries and regimes up to and including those involved in death and post death. It is particularly timely in its consideration of the meaning of age, the experience of ageism and the ambiguities involved in negotiating paid work boundaries from a liminal position.

Pat O'Connor

Emeritus Professor of Sociology and Social Policy University of Limerick, Ireland and Visiting Professor, Geary Institute, University College Dublin, Ireland

With its dynamic framework of age, aging and ageism enacted through organizations, *Age at Work* is pathbreaking, fundamentally challenging our perception of age in terms of fixed categories or specific life stages. The evolution of this book, a product of years of collaborative work between Hearn and Parkin, is reflected in its theoretical breadth and reach, which I would describe as Kaleidoscopic. Each new section reveals news aspects and processes shaping the dynamics of age in organizations: how age and organizations interact through societal regimes and age organizational regimes, how the configurations of age hegemony operate in organizations, sustaining the power of older white men. The latter is an example of the nuanced intersectional analysis of hierarchies in age, gender, race, ethnicity and generation that appear throughout this book. In the *Doing of Organizations*, Hearn and Parkin shift our focus to how boundary making within organizations define insiders and outsiders, leading to marginalization and non-recognition of the latter. These processes are embodied in narratives of their own experiences at various stages of retirement. *Age at Work* is both personal and provocative, seen in Hearn and Parkin's engagement with the paradoxes in age in an organizational context. Age is both social fact and a fiction; it is invisible and visible in organizations, embodied and disembodied. Most provocative are the last chapters on awareness of and the ultimate boundary, post-death, including the role of organizations in how we cope with and manage death. *Age at Work* is an important book. It resonates in our era of the pandemic. It will generate an entire new body of critical age studies and reinvigorate organizational studies with an awareness and sensitivity to age, aging, and ageism, an area of research much neglected.

Barbara Hobson

Professor Emerita of Sociology at Stockholm University

Age at Work is a ground breaking book in a number of ways. At the core of the authors' thinking around age, organizing and organizations is their fundamental plea to move away from static and limited concepts of age, ageing and the old as othered, to more fluid and critical ways of bringing non-essentialist, anti-ageist thinking and being and intersectional perspectives to the forefront of enquiry.

It is refreshing to see how decades of previous research from the authors on gender, sexuality, violence and emotions inform a truly interdisciplinary perspective, contributing to a 'slow research and writing' process. Furthermore, this allows the authors to ask difficult questions for which there are no easy answers, about how we might look anew at 'age at work' in the context of organizations. Core to this endeavour is a refusal to ignore the problematics such questions raise, and there is a careful dismantling of ambiguous boundaries surrounding the topics under scrutiny, so that even the organization of the unfixity of post-death is considered.

The book is especially timely, due to the consideration here of the COVID-19 global pandemic, and issues of power and the politics of age and aging figure in the book more generally. The authors auto-ethnographic approach, where both academic relationships and personal life course trajectories are reflected on, adds to the spirit of intellectual honesty in which the book was written by all involved.

Professor Victoria Robinson

Director of the Centre for Women's Studies, University of York, UK

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