The Sociological Aspects of Ageing

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‘Sociologists do not deny that ageing is a process of biological change: rather they wish to draw attention to the social and personal implications of the ways in which the meanings of biological change as ‘decline’ are culturally constructed and interpreted through discourse’ (Hepworth 2003, p90)
Themes of presentation: 4 ‘D’s

• Different influences on ageing
• Diversity of ageing
• Dynamic view of ageing
• Disciplinary contribution to interdisciplinarity
Key contributions: 1

Social constructs of ageing and later life show that social and cultural processes influence ageing, eg seeing Retirement – not natural or normal (Phillipson, Townsend & Walker) – has huge social & individual consequences. New emphases on Active Ageing

Source Getty Images/ Mirror, Nov 2013
‘A total institution is a place of work and residence where a great number of similarly situated people, cut off from the wider community for a considerable time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life’ Frank 2002

Theoretical developments round institutions – from Goffman onwards
Key contributions 3

**Stigma** – ‘Notes on the management of spoiled identity’ (Goffman 1963)

3 types of stigma:
- stigma of character traits,
- physical stigma,
- stigma of group identity.

Relevance to continence – a ‘stigma and taboo’ - Drennan
Body work and Embodiment

What are the links between clothing & age?

How do fashion theory and cultural gerontology illuminate the changing ways age is imagined, experienced & understood through the medium of dress?

Drawing on the views of older women, journalists, clothing designers and retailers, Twigg debates the changing cultural context of later life, and the role of consumption and embodiment in this.
Key contributions: 5

‘Sleep it is clear, as recent sociological research amply demonstrates, is no mere personal or private, biological or neurobiological matter’
Simon Williams

Microscopy sociology – focus on everyday and night life

e.g. SomnIA Study (University of Surrey)
Key contributions 6
Where are the sociologists of ageing?

- Many gerontologists (different types)
- Some sociologists of ageing
- Some medical sociologists
- Some health researchers
- Some blurred identities or discipline of origin
Where is their work?
Thank You

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