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Introduction To The Special Issue: Researching Aging and Comparative Reflections

This special edition of *Qualitative Sociology Review* explores and introduces some of the main issues of researching aging through a comparative lens. The four articles in the special issue explore aging in different ways but have a commonality of the qualitative importance of bringing together theory, aging and comparative reflections of places such as US, China and across the globe.

The first paper by Murphy, Arxer and Belgrave uses the important issue of biography and inter-links it to the importance of researching the lifecourse to develop an interpretive gerontology. The paper has implications for understanding aging identity and point to the construction of aging as a 'life project' with fluid representations of older people whose lives are rich, varied and authentic.

Following on from this, the second paper by Carr and Manning has a formidable argument. They explore the notion of the 'third age' and how it can be theorised and understood in a phenomenological context. They suggest that ethnographic research provides 'meaning development' in gerontology. They look to develop social theory on aging through the appropriation of sensitisation of meanings of aging in the USA.

The third paper by Chen takes a different journey. His focus is on China and aging and the implications for qualitative understanding of social policy and its effects. Chen suggests that qualitative research in gerontology illustrates the complex experiences of older people in China and illustrates the comparative lessons for gerontologists to bring together qualitative data with quantitative analysis.

The final paper by Cook, Halsall and Powell explores the gerontological problems and issues associated with global aging and implications for qualitative theorizing and analysis. They attempt to explore the problems of health and pensions in comparative context but illustrate how particular research studies have used qualitative theories to understand global social trends.

The key theme of the special edition has been on researching aging and comparative reflections. The lesson is that analysing aging cannot be analysed as a feature of quantification but that qualitative understanding unravels meanings, motives, policy effects and experiences that epitomise the commonalities of everyday life for older people across the world in general.