Editorial

Welcome to Volume 2, Issue 1 of *Families, Relationships and Societies*. We celebrate our first birthday with this issue and can look back on a year that has been exciting and very satisfying. Submissions have been increasing steadily and, as this issue demonstrates, they are increasingly coming from a diverse range of countries and disciplines, covering issues across the life course. Furthermore, Open Space, under the dedicated editorship of Jacqui Gabb and David Morgan, is proving a dynamic and innovative space for thinking and writing differently.

A number of articles in this issue address longstanding concerns about the gender division of labour in differing contexts. Ransom notes the research consensus that mothers have tended to retain overall responsibility for children and family life – even when they are in full-time employment. However, less is known about the sharing of this executive responsibility in cases where fathers are alternate caregivers, or where fathers’ share of caregiving equals or exceeds that of mothers. She draws from her study conducted in Canada of ‘non-traditional’ couples in which mothers were either primary breadwinners with caregiver partners, or in dual-earner relationships where partners equally shared most caregiving work. Boyle’s article explores the gender division of labour in couples with dementia, presenting findings from a qualitative study in England (funded by the Economic and Social Research Council), which explored the everyday decisions made by married couples where one partner had dementia.

The lack of gender equality in ‘traditional’ cohabiting couples is argued by Nyman and Evertsson to lead to a choice by the Swedish women they researched to remain single. Living apart together (LAT) relationships were identified as a possible way to combine gender–equal intimacy with personal freedom and independence. The article highlights the importance of the Swedish welfare state in making it possible for women to remain single, even those with dependent children.

The issue of gender equality is raised if rather less explicitly in Wei’s article exploring the accounts provided by Chinese wives accompanying their husbands to the United Kingdom (UK) for further education and employment. The women frequently come to the UK as ‘following spouses’, to assist their husbands with their educational and career advancement even though many of them have important careers in China themselves. Wei suggests that although their perceptions of their roles as wives contribute to the reasons behind the decision to come to the UK, most successfully transform their personal sacrifice into a bargaining chip with their husbands in future decision-making processes.

The article by Simpson takes us onto different and very interesting territory, encompassing a range of issues around ageing and family practices. Based on interviews with 27 men aged 39–61, narratives of friendship family are explored. While men developed the emotional and political resources to question the heteronormative family and practise non-monogamy, in the struggle for dominance over meaning/representation, generational claims to differentiation could reinforce reverse ageism. Young gay men were constructed as threat, insubstantial or vulnerable, obliging a duty of care to avoid exploiting them. The discursive strategies men deployed could limit/
thwart the use of ageing capital and undermine men’s claims that ageing involves a linear path towards enhanced awareness of self, other and authoritative knowledge of the relations of gay culture.

De Kok’s study illuminates local practices of family and intimacy also but in radically different contexts. Through interviews in Malawi with women with a fertility problem, she explores how they ‘do’ relationships and intimacy in interaction, and the shared expectations concerning marital relationships and social categories that they draw on. She notes the importance of sexual and reproductive health interventions recognising relationships and their context-specific meanings.

An important aim of the journal has been to showcase the range of research methods that can be used to explore lifecourse events, challenges and opportunities. We are delighted, therefore, to publish findings from a large-scale study from Norway on divorced parents and adult children. Harlofsen highlights the importance of taking gender and generational position seriously in research on intergenerational family relations, using as illustration the association between parents’ marital status and perceived quality of the relationship between parents and adult children. The data stem from the Norwegian Life-course, Generations and Gender Study (N = 15,156). Findings reveal the importance of considering who is being asked and which parent–child dyad (mother–son, mother–daughter, father–son and father–daughter) is in question.

Finally, Open Space in this issue takes us into new and exciting territory. As the editors note, they encouraged contributors to explore novel or less conventional ways of analysing relationships. What was invited included the use of poetry, fiction and autobiography and the pieces provide us with a range of differing contributions as well as a fascinating commentary on the value of exploring ‘writing differently’.

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