

<b>Institution: BRUNEL UNIVERSITY (H0113)</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 29 – English Language and Literature</b>
<b>Title of case study: FICTION AND CULTURAL MEDIATION OF AGEING PROJECT</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The Fiction and Cultural Mediation of Ageing Project (FCMAP), funded by Research Councils UK as part of the New Dynamics of Ageing programme undertook qualitative social research investigating the relationship between ageing, cultural representation and experiential narrative understanding. The project produced specific public policy recommendations in key areas including flexibility for older workers, pensions, targeting benefits, and diverse service provision to support active ageing. Outcomes were disseminated through a series of public events, the Demos policy report, <i>Coming of Age</i>, 2011, and subsequently at a policy ‘Roundtable’, where they were welcomed by the Head of Pensions, Ageing Strategy and Analysis Division at the Department of Work and Pensions and several key stakeholders in the public and third sectors. The work has received substantial publicity and has helped set the agenda and decision making climate for policy makers working to support an ageing population. The Centre for Policy on Ageing endorsed FCMAP for the nomination of the ESRC Celebrating Impact Prize in the category of Outstanding Impact in Public Policy.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The Fiction and Cultural Mediation of Ageing Project (FCMAP), funded by Research Councils UK as part of the New Dynamics of Ageing (NDA) programme (administered by the ESRC), began on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2009 and finished on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2012. The team from Brunel University included, Principal Investigator Prof. Philip Tew (Professor of English), Co-investigator Dr. Nick Hubble (Lecturer, later Senior Lecturer in English) and Co-investigator Dr. Jago Morrison (Senior Lecturer in English) assisted in terms of policy issues by Louise Bazalgette (Senior Researcher, Family and Society Programme) and John Holden (former Head of Culture &amp; freelance consultant) of the think-tank Demos. FCMAP was concerned initially with investigating the relationship between cultural representations of, and social attitudes to, ageing, and second with the potential of critical reflection and elective reading by older volunteers to promote insightful new ways of thinking about ageing.</p> <p>The project’s innovative interdisciplinary approach, utilising the narrative turn in social sciences, sought to minimize any influence from the research team on the participants as far as possible. Rather than direct interviews with volunteers (potentially reflecting an unequal set of relationships) FCMAP drew on the Mass Observation (MO) tradition of independent and anonymous diary response in order to reveal patterns of underlying social opinions. FCMAP commissioned the winter 2009 MO directive on ageing and cultural representation of the respondent’s age group. The resultant material (193 responses) was compared with earlier responses to MO directives on ageing that were sent out in 1992 and 2006, providing longitudinal comparisons of respondent attitudes. In a parallel strand of the project, eight reading groups, comprising 90 volunteers in total, were established across London in association with University of the Third Age (U3A) district associations. Group members read a range of post-war British fiction concerned with ageing-related themes such as David Lodge’s <i>Deaf Sentence</i> (2008) and kept diaries recording their responses to each novel after it was read and again after subsequent group discussion of the narrative book and themes arising. These diaries and associated data have been archived at ESDS Qualidata for future researchers.</p> <p>Extensive narrative analysis of the directive replies and reading diaries revealed widespread agreement on the shortage of older characters in fictional narratives—written or filmed—while certain stereotypes of passive dependency and an inability to manage were readily identified. However, more significantly, the research revealed how the dominant socio-narrative associations of the word ‘old’ interact with older respondents’ narrative understanding of their own lives. The contrast discernible between MO and U3A attitudes towards self-defining as ‘old’—the intense antipathy of the latter to which is conditioned by the fact that the ‘third age’ is defined against a perceived ‘fourth age’ of ‘decay, decrepitude and death’—demonstrated in rich detail how difficult, but nonetheless essential, it is for older subjects to prevent dominant narratives shaping their own</p>

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sense of identity. In particular, the reading diaries show how literary fiction, which tends to foreground the cultural conventions that underpin thought and actions, assists critically-reflective readers to question such conventions when they encounter them in society; while the MO directive responses testify to the capacity of sustained narrative life-writing to provide practitioners with a space to particularise their own experience against the generalising and stereotyping force of dominant cultural values. Overall, the research establishes the central importance to older people of continued control over their personal narratives in maintaining social agency. Engagement with such narratives was seen as beneficial by participants, giving voice to them in significant fashion.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Bazalgette, Holden, Tew, Hubble & Morrison. *Coming of Age*. London: Demos, 2011. Policy report / joint book (205pp). URL: <http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/comingofage>

Hubble & Tew. *Ageing, Narrative and Identity: New Qualitative Social Research*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2013. Joint scholarly book. (REF 2).

#### Key research grants:

£353,200, Fiction and the Cultural Mediation of Ageing, 33 months (1<sup>st</sup> May 2009 - 31<sup>st</sup> January 2012), Tew (PI), Hubble (CI) & Morrison (CI). Part of the New Dynamics of Ageing Programme funded by Research Councils UK (administered by Economic and Social Research Council).

£121,468, FCMAP: New Narratives of Everyday Ageing in Contemporary Britain: An Anthology', 12 months (24 September 2012 – 23 September 2013), Tew (PI) & Hubble (CI), ESRC follow-on funding scheme.

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

In order to make the insights revealed by the project available to policy makers, the FCMAP team supplied Demos with regular analytical reports, which culminated in an intense collaborative drafting of a 200 page report *Coming of Age*, 2011, published both in paperback form and as a free online download (comparable Demos publications achieve download rates in excess of 80,000). The report focuses on the FCMAP research insights revealed by separating older people's self-understanding of their ageing from the surrounding dominant cultural narratives; and applies these insights across the major social policy areas affecting the old. In particular, the research questioned a number of assumptions such as that older people are disproportionately concerned with crime and disproportionately prone to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Such staple media representations, which frequently inflect on public and policy debate, were demonstrated to reside in the circulation of a set of culturally dominant narratives and shown to return to levels in line with the rest of the population in cases where older people were able to separate their personal narratives from those surrounding them. Policy-makers and public audiences (see below) immediately saw the potential benefits of being freed from such stereotypical structures. The report also includes a prominent section, 'Older People's Experiences of Ageing', which directly quotes from FCMAP respondents and thus gives direct voice to older subjects at the heart of the policy debate.

*Coming of Age* was launched at a public-day event opening the FCMAP 'New Cultures of Ageing Conference' (Brunel University, 8-9<sup>th</sup> April 2011). An audience of over 120 was able to respond to panel debates on 'third age subjectivity' and 'ageing policy' featuring Hubble, Tew, Pat Thane, Dorothy Sheridan (MO), Keith Richards (U3A), Holden and Bazalgette (who can corroborate the subsequent demand in public and policy circles for briefing on the research findings). The day concluded with a separate evening event featuring Will Self and Fay Weldon discussing ageing and fiction before an audience of 250, which Self described in a widely-read review in *The Guardian*: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/may/01/looking-very-well-lewis-wolpert-review>.

Subsequent public dissemination of the report findings included: Suffolk County Council considering its possibilities at a July 2011 meeting with its partners and older people's representatives as featured by the Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership; and a one hour talk show on LBC radio on 4th December 2011 concerning later life working and increases to the state

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pension age.

An earlier series of FCMAP public events in which authors discussed the representation of ageing in their work: Jim Crace and David Lodge (3<sup>rd</sup> February 2010 at Brunel University), Caryl Phillips (19<sup>th</sup> March 2010 in Central London), Trezza Azzopardi (10<sup>th</sup> June 2010 at Brunel University) attracted 450 participants.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> May 2011, the Brunel team and Demos researchers presented the FCMAP research findings to national, regional, local government and third sector stakeholders at the 'Coming of Age Policy Roundtable' hosted by Demos at their Tooley Street offices in London. Speaking alongside the presenters, the Head of Pensions, Ageing Strategy and Analysis Division at the Department for Work and Pensions, described the FCMAP research as beneficial and excellent, outlining how the report's recommendations were relevant to current policy developments. Three key stakeholders then responded to the report under Chatham House rules, all engaging with the implications of the research and all praising the innovative nature of the research. As one said, '*It's a really fantastic, very detailed report. I thought there were several particularly useful aspects of this research. I found the use of narratives as a research method particularly helpful, in providing a rich, bottom-up take on issues that are often dealt with in a very top-down way.*'

Subsequent policy dissemination of the report findings include reviews, summaries and links in such influential locations as Social Policy Digest, the DEFRA Sustainable Development in Government website, the Centre for Policy on Ageing website, the Local Government Chronicle, and other bodies. The Centre for Policy on Ageing nominated FCMAP for the ESRC Celebrating Impact prize in the category of Outstanding Impact in Public Policy.

The Centre for Policy on Ageing endorsed FCMAP for the nomination of the ESRC Celebrating Impact Prize in the category of Outstanding Impact in Public Policy. The Director, in its endorsement letter, stated that 'Among policymakers and stakeholders like myself the project's method of giving voice to older subjects has achieved a concrete and immediate impact, allowing politicians to realize the kinds of prejudices that have been commonly circulated even by bureaucrats and politicians involved with policies concerning older people.' She also said that the report 'has become a standard text for all those concerned with policies concerning the welfare and well-being of older people, and has been widely cited and recommended. The report has contributed to a better understanding the issues relevant to older people such wellbeing and human rights as regards older subject, and it has helped to shape the political agenda regarding older people's rights.'

On 15<sup>th</sup> November 2011, the Liberal Democrat Health Committee, chaired by the Minister for Care Services, on policy proposals for 'Healthier old age' considered the research findings in *Coming of Age*. In Ireland, the report was summarized with a link by the Ageing Well in Ireland Network and the Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland, as well as being quoted in the latter's April 2011 Report.

On 12<sup>th</sup> February 2013, Tew and Hubble took part in the Birmingham Policy Commission workshop, submitting a position paper and a sample of salient respondent diaries, on ageing and cultural attitudes. This submission was included in the report produced by the by the Birmingham Policy Commission.

The economic and societal impact has been largely through the dissemination of recommendations for policy in *Coming of Age*. For instance, all major political parties in the UK have adopted its appeal for targeting spending so that unnecessary universal benefits may be phased out to aid public spending targets, and help foster a sense of intergenerational justice. Among policymakers and stakeholders the method itself of giving voice to older subjects rather than ventriloquizing their perceived concerns seems to have a concrete and almost immediate impact. The *Coming of Age* report has become a standard text for all those concerned with a variety of provision focused on older subjects. It has been widely cited and recommended.

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

**Corroborating statement:** a letter of endorsement for the nomination of FCMAP for the ESRC Celebrating Impact Prize – Outstanding Impact in Public Policy, provided by the Director of the

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Centre for Policy on Ageing

**Contactable:**

1. Development Manager, NSPCC (formerly in Demos)
2. Honorary Professor Dorothy Sheridan, Trustee, Mass Observation
3. Special Project Organiser of The University of The Third Age (U3A)

**Other corroborating sources:**

a. Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership:

<http://www.surreyllp.org.uk/resources/National+Research/Coming+of+Age+-+exploring+ageing+in+culture+and+society+and+investigating+how+public+policy+should+r>

b. Recommended reading DEFRA Sustainable Development in Government website:

<http://sd.defra.gov.uk/2011/04/publications-round-up-ingenuity-values-environmental-limits-age>

c. Centre for Policy on Ageing, review and recommended reading:

[http://www.cpa.org.uk/information/readings/attitudes\\_to\\_ageing.pdf](http://www.cpa.org.uk/information/readings/attitudes_to_ageing.pdf)

d. Local Government Chronicle:

<http://www.lgcplus.com/briefings/services/adult-services/elderly-fear-ageism-more-than-crime/5028325.article>

e. Link Trafford Partnership Policy Bulletin April 2011:

<http://www.traffordpartnership.org/publications/policybulletin-may.asp>

f. UCL School of Pharmacy Report:

[https://www.ucl.ac.uk/pharmacy/documents/news\\_docs/ageing](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/pharmacy/documents/news_docs/ageing)

g. Interview with canvas8:

<http://www.canvas8.com/public/2013/10/03/coming-of-age-senior-citizens.html>