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Essays on Age Integration

The Forum is pleased to publish the following essays on age integration, which are adapted from a working paper issued in May 1999 by the National Institute on Aging. The working paper, one component of NIA's Program on Age and Structural Change (PASC), was edited by Matilda White Riley and Peter Uhlenberg from contributions to conferences at the International Sociological Association (in Montreal) and the American Sociological Association (in San Francisco). Our purpose is to introduce to a broader readership this important area of inquiry, as well as to provide specialists with a summary of the current state of the field.

Introduction: Why Study Age Integration?

Peter Uhlenberg, PhD¹

Department of Sociology, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

One cannot imagine as a practical matter a completely age-differentiated society in which individuals exclusively live with and interact with others who are similar in age. The dependency of infants and children on more mature persons for care and nurture makes extreme segregation by age impossible, and kinship ties generally operate to link persons of different ages. By contrast, it is equally unlikely that any society would be completely age integrated, with the ages of those who live together and interact with each other being randomly distributed. Observing the age composition of members of schools, work organizations, sports teams, and nursing homes convinces one that pervasive age segregation occurs in at least some segments of contemporary society. Rather than thinking of age integration as a dichotomy (integrated vs differentiated), it is more useful to think of age integration as a continuum. Some societies may be more age integrated than others. Degree of age integration may increase or decrease in a society over time. Some structures within a society may be more age integrated than others. And some individuals may experience more age-integrated lives than others.

Before proceeding to discuss how we might delineate the study of age integration, two preliminary

questions must be addressed. First, what is meant by "age integration"? Although "integration" and "differentiation" (or "segregation") are common terms, it is important to make clear what we have in mind when we use these terms. Second, why is age integration an interesting and important area for study? To be sure, the consequences of age integration are not well understood at this time, suggesting that this is a priority area for research. Nevertheless, we do know enough to indicate reasons why this topic merits attention. After considering these two questions, this introduction explores some of the issues that arise when one begins to study special aspects of age integration and differentiation, thus setting the stage for the widely varied essays that follow.

Meaning of Age Integration

An age-integrated structure may be defined as one that does not use chronological age as a criterion for entrance, exit, or participation. Conversely, when a structure makes use of age criteria as barriers, it is, to some extent, age segregated. Barriers to age integration may, in many ways, be similar to those that produced racial segregation. Because of racial classification, Afri-

can Americans have been prevented from living in some neighborhoods; from attending some schools, clubs, and churches; from using some public facilities; and from working in some occupations and at some work sites. Not only explicit laws and policies, but also informal norms and prejudices, have promoted these types of racial segregation. When studying age integration, it will be useful to consider the extent to which formal and informal barriers similarly restrict opportunities for individuals of different ages to live together, work together, learn together, recreate together, worship together, and socialize together.

As emphasized by Matilda and John Riley in the next essay, "Conceptual and Historical Background," however, the absence of structural age barriers is only one component of age integration. The other component concerns interactions among persons of different ages. Again, an analogy to racial integration is useful in clarifying what is meant by this aspect of age integration. Removing or reducing racial barriers to entering neighborhoods, schools, and other structures may have provided opportunities for increased integration, although in fact many individuals have little or no interaction with members of other races. When an individual's interactions largely occur within one racial group, it is clear that he/she is not fully integrated. And when most individuals have limited interactions with members of differing racial groups, the society remains divided along racial lines. In thinking about age integration, therefore, questions should be asked about the distribution of interactions across age strata. A strong propensity for individuals to interact exclusively with age peers would indicate age segregation. It is only when they interact with others who differ in age that age integration occurs.

The two components of age integration, absence of structural age barriers and presence of cross-age interactions, are often related. For example, one can imagine that age barriers would limit opportunities for cross-age interaction, and that significant interactions across age strata would reduce support for age barriers. Nevertheless, it is useful to make a distinction between these two aspects of age integration and to consider how each functions from the perspective of individuals, social organizations, and societies. Individuals may differ in the extent to which they encounter structural age barriers, and may differ in frequency of interacting with persons of different ages. Organizations may differ in the extent to which they use age as a criterion for membership or participation, and may differ in the extent to which their memberships are age heterogeneous. Societies may differ in how prevalent various types of age barriers are, and may differ in how frequently persons of different ages interact with each other.

Significance of Age Integration

Compared to race and sex segregation, age segregation has not yet become a very salient social or political issue. In many ways we are not yet aware of the implications of the unprecedented addition of new strata of older people that are reshaping the pop-

ulation and the society. Much current conventional wisdom no doubt holds that age segregation is either "natural" or simply reflects individual preferences. If age segregation were indeed unproblematic and had no significant consequences for individuals or the society, then there would be no compelling reason why social researchers should give it serious attention. Not surprisingly, however, we think that age segregation is neither natural nor benign. We expect that careful study will uncover a range of significant social forces that influence how much age segregation or age integration occurs. Further, it is likely that age segregation significantly shapes the ways in which people grow up and grow old, and that changes toward greater age integration may be both feasible and consequential.

Potentially significant ways in which age integration may affect individuals or society include the following:

Life Course Flexibility.—Martin Kohli (1988) has called attention to increases over the past century in the "chronologization" of life—the use of age to determine what activities individuals will engage in. In a variety of ways the state, work organizations, and schools seized upon age as a criterion for determining who was entitled to and who was disqualified from participating in particular activities or programs. Age barriers thus produced a standard life course that is separated into three boxes: education for young people, work for adults who are not old, and leisure for the old. A number of researchers have called attention to negative consequences of this rigid life course organization, which identifies particular activities with particular life stages. Matilda White Riley and others (Riley, Foner, & Riley, 1999), have proposed an alternative model that would allow learning and work and leisure to be integrated in the lives of individuals throughout the entire life course. A crucial requirement for developing this more flexible approach to life course organization is age integration—removing or reducing age barriers that restrict access to various structures.

Extent of Ageism.—Most persons find it easy to produce a substantial list of word associations for the terms "adolescent" or "old person." These associations tend to be negative and reflect widespread age stereotypes. Ageism might be expected to flourish in an environment where significant cross-age interactions are uncommon. In contrast, we might expect that when individuals of diverse ages interact and work together (age integration), age stereotypes and prejudices are reduced.

Productive Aging.—Although the general theory of social "disengagement" is flawed and has been abandoned by social gerontologists, concerns over the issue of productive aging persist. In fact, there is widespread disengagement from productive activities (work, volunteering, and caregiving) by older persons in contemporary society. Removing age barriers that

limit the participation of older persons in work and volunteer organizations could increase the contributions to societal welfare by those in later life (Uhlenberg, 1996). But the potential of age integration to increase productive engagement in the society need not apply only to older persons. Increasing the integration between adolescents and younger children and older persons might increase opportunities for adolescents to be productive members of the society.

Civility.—Many important discussions of intergenerational equity raise the prospect that the population could be divided into competing groups based on age. On the one hand, conflict across age groups could develop if age is perceived as unfairly used by the government as a criterion for the redistribution of resources. One example of an age group that might possibly abuse its power is the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), among the largest voluntary organizations in the country. Further, the absence of friendships and collaboration among persons of different ages tends to reduce the feelings of common purpose and unity among members of the society. On the other hand, reducing age barriers and increasing cross-age interactions—age integration—may be an effective way of reducing fragmentation and thus promoting a more civil society. A remarkable effort to reduce age barriers is Generations United, which began in 1986 when the National Council on Aging joined forces with the Child Welfare League of America. This overarching movement now includes more than 100 national organizations seeking mutually supportive agendas (*Generations*, Winter 1998–99, p. 14).

Social Settings for Age Integration

There is value in general discussions of age integration in society, but progress in understanding this topic will require a great deal of empirical research focused on specific aspects of age integration. An approach that has proven useful in the study of racial integration is to focus on specific structures or social settings in which racial segregation or integration seems especially consequential. For example, racial segregation in housing, work, and education has far-reaching implications for perpetuating inequality across races. Similarly, detailed studies of age segregation and integration in the following areas promise to provide insights related to differences and inequalities across age strata:

Households and Neighborhoods.—The environment within which individuals live shapes how they develop and influences the resources and opportunities available to them. These living conditions can be examined at two levels. First, who are the others, if any, who share the living space? For example, do older persons live with children or older persons in the household? Are young children growing up with adolescent siblings or grandparents living in their families? For those outside of households, how age homo-

geneous is the living space (dormitory, nursing home, prison, etc.)?

Second, what is the age composition of the population in the neighborhood? The importance of neighborhood age composition is, of course, something to be examined rather than assumed. But the range of possibilities is large. Some neighborhoods are highly age segregated, either intentionally (as in retirement communities or college housing), or because other forces lead to indirect differentiation (e.g., apartment complexes designed to attract young professionals without children, rural communities where most young people have moved out, or public housing intended for families with children). Other neighborhoods may have fairly equal representation of all ages, or may have more or less skewed age distributions.

Work.—A great deal has been written on age barriers affecting work opportunities. Work options for young people obviously are restricted by child labor laws, and apprenticeships as a mechanism for integrating younger and older workers are no longer common in the United States. Although generally illegal, age discrimination also operates to limit the work options of older persons. Equally important, pension incentives and normative pressures encourage older persons to exit the workforce. Thus, issues of age integration in work structures are especially relevant for persons at both ends of the age spectrum. One important debate that needs to be informed by research concerns employment of adolescents. What are the implications of young people being involved in work, and how do consequences of employment differ by type of work and supervisory experience? For older persons, research needs to continue to examine the forces that influence labor force participation and to explore ways to expand opportunities and incentives for working.

In addition to age discrimination, research on age integration might examine work as an opportunity for cross-age interactions. How and why does age composition differ across various occupations and work sites? Does working in an age-integrated environment tend to reduce stereotypes and prejudices based on age and promote cross-age friendships? In what situations does conflict develop between older and younger workers (e.g., over questions of seniority and privilege)? How common are mentoring relationships where older workers help younger colleagues to develop skills and confidence?

Education.—Probably nowhere in the society is age grading so obvious as in many current school systems in the United States. Starting around age 5, children are grouped together with others of the same age, and those who are “normal” are expected to march through grades together. Research is needed to examine the forces that maintain this system and whether there is merit in more age-integrated approaches to educating children. For example, what opportunities for learning are created by having chil-

dren of different ages help each other? Increasing age integration in recent decades has been reported for colleges and universities, including graduate schools and professional schools. But we need to know more about age barriers that still exist and the experiences of nontraditional students, both when they are in school and after they leave.

If the division of the life course into three boxes is to be replaced with a less age-restrictive model, education must become increasingly accessible to middle-aged and older persons. Without lifelong learning, it is inevitable that persons in a rapidly changing society will become increasingly obsolete as they age through the adult years. Expanding age integration for traditional education in classroom settings may play some role in promoting learning among the non-young. More important, however, is research and experimentation in alternative ways of motivating and enabling adults to pursue learning throughout life.

Politics.—Beyond the minimum age for voting and for holding some political offices, there are no formal age barriers to political participation. Nevertheless, age integration in politics is a potentially interesting area for research. One important topic involves political activities that cut across age strata and foster cross-age interaction. A primary issue here concerns the use of age in special interest politics. Much has been written regarding the role of the “gray lobby” and age politics in preserving, or expanding, government programs for older citizens. It is likely that interest in this issue will expand as the population rapidly ages after the year 2010. Discussions of age integration also bring into question the use of chronological age as a basis for special entitlements, which are a prominent feature of the welfare state. One could argue that using an age criterion becomes an age barrier that keeps non-old persons from enjoying benefits of income maintenance and health care access programs.

Health Care.—As health care has become a dominant structure in modern society, access to health care and quality of health care have become increasingly important social issues. In the United States, for example, attention has been given to the large number (40 million) of persons without health insurance and the large social class differences in quality of care received. Research on the relationship between age integration and delivery of health care could explore several issues. First, what are the implications of the age grading produced by Medicare, which guarantees health insurance only for older persons? Second, what are the consequences of ageism in the medical profession, where numerous reports suggest that younger people are preferred over older people as patients? Third, should age be used as a criterion in rationing medical resources? (Is it cost effective to use resources on the very old? How much should be spent trying to keep very premature babies alive?)

Other Social Settings.—Age integration and age

segregation occur in a variety of social settings and structures beyond those mentioned above. Recent studies of religion suggest that church involvement is an important social activity for many persons of all ages. Church meetings offer an opportunity for persons of different ages to interact in worship and ministry, but it is possible that churches often promote age segregation. Research is needed on the extent to which churches use age to group individuals into different classes and activities (youth group, young adult singles, senior citizens, etc.).

More generally, how important are family reunions as a mechanism encouraging meaningful cross-age interaction? Does the age segregation associated with publicly sponsored senior centers and youth centers hinder cross-age interactions? How important is the mixing of ages that occurs at street fairs and sporting events?

Types of Interactions

While interaction among persons of different ages is a central aspect of age integration, the meaning and significance of cross-age interaction can vary widely depending on the nature of the interaction. For example, an interaction between a 20-year-old and a 70-year-old does not mean the same thing when it involves one serving the other a hamburger in a fast food establishment as when it is part of an enduring, intimate relationship. To advance the study of age integration, therefore, it will be necessary to examine implications of various types of interaction.

Among the relevant dimensions along which cross-age interactions may be classified are the following:

- *Duration.* Interactions may range from brief, one-time exchanges to frequent prolonged encounters over a long time period.
- *Equality.* Interactions may range from those between persons of equal status to those involving a high degree of subordination and superordination.
- *Intimacy.* Interactions may range from impersonal, task-oriented encounters to intimate relations.
- *Complexity.* Interactions may range from those with a single-task focus to those that encompass many aspects of life.
- *Cooperation.* Interactions may range from positive, mutually beneficial relationships to antagonistic, conflictual exchanges.

The importance of making such distinctions as these becomes apparent when specific questions are formulated. For example, one might hypothesize that age integration would tend to reduce ageist stereotypes that adolescents have of old people, and vice versa. To examine this hypothesis, however, it is important to consider different possible types of interaction. For example, one can imagine negative interactions that would, in fact, drive a wedge between older and younger persons. Bringing adolescents into a nursing home to

interact with the residents may reinforce all of the negative views that young people have of aging. Similarly, old people's preexisting negative views of teenagers may be reinforced when teenagers wait on them at a fast food restaurant. On the other hand, bringing together old and young people with similar interests to work on a long-term project might help break down age barriers to friendship and lead to substantial changes in negative ageist stereotypes. In general, one might anticipate that the types of interactions leading to more positive outcomes would involve sustained relationships that involve a good deal of equality, intimacy, and cooperation.

Essays

In 1998, Matilda and John Riley organized sessions on age integration at both the International Sociological Association meeting in Montreal and the American Sociological Association meeting in San Francisco. After their discussion of age integration's conceptual and historical background, most of the essays that follow are adapted from presentations at these two sessions and illustrate current directions of research and thinking on this topic. Each author develops a facet of age integration that is related to his/her research interests. The result is a diverse set of essays representing a range of perspectives and focusing on a variety of issues. Further, because the authors are from five different countries, they represent work going on in a number of societies.

One theme in these essays concerns mechanisms that mediate between age strata. Based on research in three-generation families in France, Attias-Donfut explores ways in which exchanges between generations, both economic and social, work to reduce inequality and differences across age strata. Of special interest is the potential diffusion of social change (values and lifestyles) to older persons through their interactions with younger family members. She writes, "The confrontation between generations that have different values creates zones of family influence." In this way the family brings people of different ages together and thereby facilitates age integration. Foner also identifies mechanisms within the family (related to bonds based on affection and exchanges) that promote age integration in the larger society. She argues that these microlevel processes are the reason why "age wars" have not erupted over the growing economic burden on young people, who pay taxes to support the social welfare programs benefiting the older generations.

Uhlenberg extends the discussion of the importance of kin ties to the link between older people and children (grandparents and grandchildren), and the valuable contribution made by some older people in rearing their grandchildren. In addition, he calls attention to programs in the United States that explicitly promote interaction between older people and children. These programs demonstrate how age integration can enhance the lives of both older and younger persons. Kohli broadens further our understanding of how organizations might mediate be-

tween age strata by looking at labor unions and political parties. A related issue is raised in Dannefer's discussion of how changes in education and work are encouraging greater age integration. Comparing recent developments in Germany and the United States, Dannefer argues that changes in both societies are encouraging increased flexibility in the organization of the life course. How work organizations, educational institutions, and government policies respond to the challenges of global change, however, will affect whether, and to what extent, age integration may be beneficial for individuals.

Attention to the relationship between the organization of work and age integration is found in many of these essays and is the primary focus of two of them. Over most of the 20th century the prevalence of retirement among the older population has been increasing, resulting in the growth of age differentiation in the workplace. Henretta asks whether this trend may have run its course, and whether we can expect increasing employment of older people in the future. He examines the preferences of those approaching old age, and finds that most say they would prefer to continue doing some paid work after they retire. In addition, he sees a number of changes occurring that will expand the number of flexible jobs available for older workers in coming years. Consequently, he suggests that it is likely that employment age segregation will decrease over the next several decades. Increasing job flexibility also is of interest to Loscocco, who makes a case for distributing work more evenly over the life course. In particular, she focuses on problems created by the dominance of work over family and leisure in the middle years and the lack of work options in the later years of life. She suggests ways in which a more age-integrated life course could strengthen families and enrich lives of people of all ages.

The complexities and contradictions of moving toward fuller age integration cannot be ignored. It is unlikely that a fully age-integrated approach to social policy, with no distinctions based on age, would generally be favored by older persons. Ignoring age would threaten the special benefits based on age that older persons have gained in recent years. Guillemard, who speaks of European societies as "schizophrenic" regarding age integration, notes other complications. On one hand, concern over social welfare expenses has led to calls for postponing retirement age. In line with this, flexible and gradual retirement plans are developing, and training and education programs are increasingly open to people of all ages. On the other hand, discrimination against older workers is widely practiced and justified because of high unemployment and the employment needs of younger persons. In this context, workers in their forties are deemed too old to be retrained. Writing on current conditions in The Netherlands, Baars also is struck by the contradictory evidence regarding trends toward age integration. Increasingly, older people are found taking courses at the university, working alongside younger people in the "gray sector" of unofficial jobs where paying taxes is avoided,

and volunteering in age-integrated settings. But in the central economic sector of official work, people may be defined as “old” by age 45, and mandatory retirement by age 65 is the norm.

The concluding essay, by Walker, discusses ways in which public policy has encouraged age segregation over much of the 20th century, and the potential for public policy to facilitate greater age integration in the future. In other words, current public policy choices will have significant implications for the level of age integration experienced by cohorts aging in coming years. This recognition of both the importance of and the uncertainty of the future course of age integration is an appropriate note with which to conclude these essays. Our hope is that many aging professionals will recognize the value of giving more

attention to this stimulating and significant issue in their work.

Acknowledgment

Address correspondence to Peter Uhlenberg, University of North Carolina, CB#3210, Department of Sociology, Chapel Hill, NC 27599. E-mail: peter_uhlenberg@unc.edu

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Age Integration: Conceptual and Historical Background

Matilda White Riley, ScD,¹ and John W. Riley, Jr., PhD²

¹National Institute on Aging, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland.

²Consulting Sociologist, Chevy Chase, Maryland.

Age integration has many faces, involving complex issues related to the absence of structural age barriers and the interactions among persons of different ages. This complexity is illustrated in the introduction by Peter Uhlenberg and in the varied essays in this working paper. Underlying the complexity, however, is a common conceptual development, to which past research has contributed and on which future research can build. Understanding this commonality is basic to the central questions raised in this working paper: Are tendencies toward age integration currently increasing? And, if so, what are possible consequences for the future?

These questions were already familiar in the 1970s, when we were alerted to pressures for structural change by the steadily increasing numbers of people in the older age strata, coincident with the many baby boomers in the younger age strata. Today, these pressures are strengthened by still further dramatic additions to the oldest strata, as studies now predict that increasingly the oldest old may survive to age 100 or more (e.g., Vaupel & Jeune, 1994). Faced with this prospect, we expect a growing number of older people to resist age constraints on paid work and ageist biases against active participation in the society. Pressures to relax age barriers may also come from other strata. Very young people may want earlier and earlier access to “adult” roles in work, family, and entertainment. Pressures may come also from middle-aged people, who are caught between seniority-graded work requirements and the age-related de-

mands of kin and household. Peter Uhlenberg has discussed the potentials of studying these pressures in a range of settings: households, neighborhoods, work, education, politics, and health care.

Are such pressures the forerunners of age integration? Have they been serving to reduce the lag of social structures behind the skyrocketing numbers of competent people of every age (Riley, Kahn, & Foner, 1994)? And what of the future, as the lag now sometimes tends in the opposite direction, with people lagging behind structural change? Will an emerging age integration help people to catch up with the global metamorphoses in communication, trade, and conflict? Powerful discussions of these questions are presented in the following essays, discussions aimed to stimulate awareness of age integration throughout the world.

As background for these essays, we shall review three aspects of age integration as potential contributions to its common understanding: (1) continuing conceptual development, (2) the relevance of past research, and (3) some implications for the future.

Conceptualization

Ideal Types of Structures.—The developing conceptualization of age integration, as now widely accepted, has been aided by the two “ideal types” of social structure schematized in Figure 1 (Riley, M. W., Foner, & Riley, J. W., 1999; Riley, M. W., & Riley, J. W., 1994). For contrast, at the left of the figure are

"age-differentiated structures," those which are divided by age into the familiar "three boxes" of education for the young, work and family responsibilities for the middle-aged, and leisure in retirement for the old. The "age-integrated structures" of special concern, at the right, are those in which the age boundaries have been removed or made flexible. While these are "ideal types" in the Weberian sense that they never exist in reality, tendencies toward both types occur in all societies, but to markedly differing degrees. In the recent past, tendencies toward age-graded structures had in fact approximated the age differentiated model: they had been so widespread as to be largely taken for granted as "normal." Today, by contrast, numerous tendencies toward age integration can be detected in educational institutions, work organizations, families, and other structures.

Components of Age-Integrated Structures.— As pointed out in Uhlenberg's introduction, age integration has been defined loosely as having two components:

- (A) Breaking down structural age barriers (as role opportunities in work, education, and other structures are more and more open to people of every age); and
- (B) Bringing together people who differ in age (e.g., lifelong education could mean that old and young are students together).

However, widespread experience in using the

Ideal Types of Social Structures

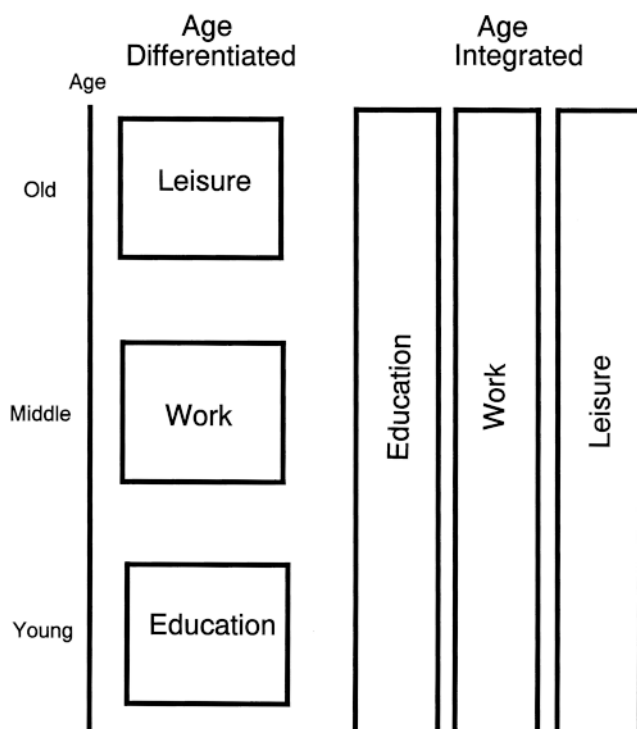


Figure 1. Ideal types of social structures.

concept of age integration over the years now points to the need for a fuller specification of both components. Clearly, if not yet explicitly, A and B are quite distinct components of structures, and each has associated implications for the lives of individuals. Thus, a fuller formulation of age integration would be:

Components of Age-Integrated Structures

- A. Flexible age criteria
For individuals—"flexible lives"
- B. Age heterogeneity
For individuals—"cross-age interaction"

Component A (breaking down age barriers) has long been widely familiar:

- For particular *structures*, "flexible age criteria" means that entry, exit, and performance are not constrained by age. That is, age is no longer a rigid barrier to access.
- For *individuals*, the implication of these flexible criteria is that "flexible lives" are possible. That is, individuals have opportunities over their long lives to intersperse periods of education, work, family time, leisure, and other options.

Less familiar is Component B (bringing people of all ages together):

- For *structures*, "age heterogeneity" means that the aggregate (or cross-section) of people within particular structures differ in age, cohort membership, and the accompaniments.
- For *individuals*, the implication of age heterogeneity is "cross-age interaction." That is, individuals have increased opportunities to interact with others who differ in age.

Of course, these two components, although distinct, are interdependent. For example, starting with A, whenever particular structures (such as work organizations or educational systems) open their doors to people regardless of age, the likely consequence (B) is that people of diverse ages will be included in each structure. Or conversely, starting with B, when old and young confront each other in the same work organization or educational system, then the age boundaries of these structures are likely to become institutionalized as more flexible (A).

The important point here is that *both* components, with their distinctive implications, are essential for understanding age integration.

Past Research

Strange as it seems, however, past research has tended to separate the two components. Of the two, the familiar Component A has received far greater attention than has the equally important Component B.

Component A. Flexibility of Criteria and Lives

Impressive scholarship has been devoted to exploring the breakdown of structural age barriers and the

consequent flexibility of the individual life course. We ourselves have worked on this component together with many contributors to this working paper at international meetings in Acapulco (1989), Madrid (1990), Stockholm (1992), and Budapest (1993) (see Riley, J. W., & Riley, M. W., 1994; Riley, M. W., & Riley, J. W., 1999). In the 1970s, splendid treatments of this topic were published by Gusta Rehn, Fred Best, Anne-Marie Guillemard, Martin Kohli, Jack Habib, Charlotte Nusberg, and others. So widespread was the interest that, in 1977, a conference on “the three boxes” attracted hundreds of attendees.

Social Changes.—Along with these conceptual developments have come numerous actual tendencies toward flexibility of boundaries and lives. Perhaps most apparent are changes in education. Thirty years ago Lowell Eklund (1969) had stressed the special salience for human development of educational restructuring, from kindergarten through programs for the aged. Today, in the United States, education has indeed become increasingly age-integrated and is widely defined as “lifelong.” Moreover, there are scattered tendencies for age barriers to become relaxed in other structures: for example, in work (where, in the United States, a large minority of high school students have jobs), and in the family (where kinship boundaries now embrace great-grandparents, even great-great-grandparents). Of course, there are also countertendencies in the United States and elsewhere, as in age-defined programs in medicine and welfare.

Costs and Benefits.—Both negative and positive features of relaxed age barriers have been explored in numerous studies. Among the perceived disadvantages is fear of change: change in everyday lives, in vested interests, and in the sense of economic security provided by the “three boxes.” Studies have also pointed to failures of the new age-related opportunities in education or work to overcome class and ethnic inequalities or the struggle of many isolated older people in the United States to pay for both rent and food. At the same time, however, flexibility affords benefits: It enhances opportunities and freedom of choice for a great many individuals of all ages, and it may facilitate structural adaptation to global trends in technology, trade, or health.

Component B. Age Heterogeneity and Cross-age Interactions

Far less conceptual and research attention has been paid to Component B, the increasing age heterogeneity of people alive at any one time, and the consequent opportunities for cross-age interactions. Despite the long-standing prevalence of such cross-age interactions as parenting, teaching, or research collaboration, they have not been a major focus of theories of age. Among the exceptions is Robert Merton’s remark, in relating science to age, that: “Some basic functions are served through institutional ar-

rangements involving interactions *between* age strata rather than separation of them.” (Zuckerman & Merton, 1972, p. 338).

Implications of Age Heterogeneity.—While theorists have been looking elsewhere, most social structures, and developed societies as a whole, are being increasingly pervaded by age heterogeneity and its consequences. Consider the fact that, for the first time in history, the people alive at any one time now include remarkably large numbers in the strata aged 65 to 100 or more. Consider also the unprecedented heterogeneity of these many age strata—heterogeneity not only in number and size (cf. Waring, 1975), but heterogeneity also in biological functioning; in accumulated experiences; in variety of ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds; and in cohort exposure to the changing events and cultures of successive historical eras.

While the full effects of this mounting age heterogeneity are not yet known, its meaning is gradually becoming clearer. It means increasing opportunities for “cross-age interaction”—as in the United States new forms of mentorship and apprenticeship have been gradually crystallizing. We see college students teaching fifth-graders or isolated old folks; people in nursing homes teaching kindergartners; younger workers learning *from* experienced elders or, in turn, teaching high-tech skills *to* their elders; grandparents and grandchildren socializing each other; or “inter-generational partnerships” in which school children and older people interact in institutional settings.

Costs and Benefits.—Such interactions across age and generation have well-known disadvantages as well as benefits. Some people prefer the company of age peers, with whom they are likely to share beliefs and interests, as Irving Rosow showed in 1967 for older people and Beth Hess in 1972 for adolescents. At the same time, relationships with others who differ in age have such benefits as: stimulating wider participation, encouraging the sharing of responsibilities, and preserving the heritage of the past (see Riley, 1998). Perhaps the most significant benefit accrues from reciprocal education and training which, again in Merton’s 1972 analysis of age (p. 338), refers both to “the narrow sense of transmission of knowledge and skills and [to] the broader sense of socialization involving the transmission of values, attitudes, interests, and role-defined behaviors.”

Contributions of Separate Strands

What does this past history tell us? One striking finding stands out: Ironically, with increasing integration, age in itself becomes *less* significant in Component A, but *more* significant in Component B. Age becomes less important in Component A because it is no longer a rigid criterion for entry, exit, and performance in structures, whereas in Component B it becomes highly important because the mounting numbers of coexisting age strata emphasize the many

age- and cohort-related differences among them. When Bernice Neugarten spoke of “age irrelevance,” she clearly was thinking of Component A.

More generally, the past history shows that the strands of research on Components A and B, even though separated, have made complementary contributions to our common understanding of age integration.

The Future

Looking toward the future, it seems likely that research toward a fuller understanding of age integration will no longer separate the two components of “flexibility” and “age heterogeneity,” but will examine them together. As early as 1974 one little-known study of education foreshadowed the heuristic value of combining the two components. For both youth and old people, as the rigid boundaries of schooling, work, and leisure were already relaxing, the resultant relationships between young and old were seen to foster reciprocal socialization, and to encourage sharing the high energy of youth with the accumulated experience of old age (Riley, 1974). Today it is clear that the mounting numbers of older people would place an intolerable burden on younger people, unless age integration gives older people the opportunity to carry a share of the burden.

Incipient Changes.—For future investigation of the complementary components of age integration, a spate of social changes is already emerging. For example, the boundaries between childhood and adulthood are becoming blurred in labor laws and the justice system. Research on the malleability of infant brains is calling for new types of communication between mother and baby, just as the gerontological community is calling for more active relationships between adults and their aged parents. Baby-boom parents are reported to take greater interest in their adolescent children than did the preceding cohorts. Communities are being designed with the express purpose of integrating the generations; and colleges are affiliating with nearby retirement communities. Thousands of retired executives are providing advice to small businesses. Even the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is urging employees to spend one lunch hour a week reading a book one-on-one with a first- to sixth-grade student. And so on.

Tracing such developments into the future will yield new insights into the nature of age integration.

Constraints on Prediction.—In contemplating the future, of course we cannot simply make projections from the past. Changes in age flexibility (A) and age heterogeneity (B) are unpredictable, and each of the two will influence the other in unknown ways. Most importantly, we cannot foresee the consequences of global changes in technology, economics, migration, or health. If in the past social structures have lagged behind the improvements in people’s lives, the

world-wide metamorphoses today suggest, by contrast, that we are now facing a “people lag,” and age integration appears central to the reversal. For, if structural lag led to age integration in the past, in the future the flexibilities of age integration in turn may well facilitate adaptation of both people and structures to the overarching world changes.

Future Contingencies.—As one possible future scenario, suppose that the tendencies toward age integration increase, along with deeper understanding of the combined components. Would not this outcome call attention to some of the most basic issues of the future?

To what extent might flexible age criteria provide more equitable opportunities to people of all backgrounds and creeds?

Might cross-age interaction lead to group solidarity and a sense of community across all age strata, thus reducing the threats of misunderstanding, tension, and intergenerational conflict? As one small example, if old people read to children from Mother Goose or stories from the Bible or Shakespeare, this transmission of the heritage from their generation could provide images and figures of speech to aid communication among generations.

Might the experience with age integration affect the image of a “good society” and, as Peter Uhlenberg suggests, lead to a more productive and a more civil society? Might societal values gradually shift, if the old become accustomed to sharing with the middle-aged some of their responsibilities for work and family, in exchange for leisure time for cultural pursuits, adventure, and recreation? Might today’s emphases on consumerism and material rewards give way to strengthened emphases on “connectedness” among all ages?

Predictably, as future studies delve more deeply into the complementarity between “flexibility” and “age heterogeneity,” they will amplify the common understandings of the power of age.

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This essay is in the public domain.

Address correspondence to Matilda White Riley, ScD, National Institutes of Health, Scientist Emeritus, National Institute on Aging, Gateway Bldg 2C227, 7201 Wisconsin Ave., Bethesda, MD 20892.

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Cultural and Economic Transfers Between Generations: One Aspect of Age Integration

Claudine Attias-Donfut, PhD

Research Department, National Pensions Fund for Social Security, Paris, France.

Following Durkheim (1975), the family can be defined as an institution that articulates gender and generational differences (Thery, 1996). The profound transformation that took place within the family between 1965 and 1975 has affected gender and generational relations in every domain—economic, social, biological, and demographic. It is particularly interesting to analyze these transformations from the general perspective of age integration, which is at the center of this program. All research on the family appearing at the end of the 20th century emphasizes the changing family calendar that is linked to new types of conjugal relationships. There is a steady and continual decline in the number of marriages, an increase in divorces, a delay in procreation, and a fall in fertility rates. The parental role is changing, and educational models are becoming less rigid. The child becomes a mirror of “us,” an expression of love between couples. The “moral family” is now finished, and in its place we have the “relational family” (de Singly, 1996). The new qualities of parent/child relationships are characterized by autonomy of the generations, giving rise to a later departure of young people from the parental home (Galland, 1997). These trends apply to all modern societies, as research undertaken in different European countries (Gullestad & Segalen, 1997) and the United States clearly shows.

In analyzing these structural changes, Riley and Riley (1993) foresee the emergence of a new kinship form, a “latent matrix of relationships?” This new form is characterized by less pronounced cleavages between ages and generations. “Instead, the boundaries of kin networks have widened to encompass many diverse relationships, including several degrees of step-kin and in-laws, and also adopted and other surrogate ‘relatives’ chosen from outside the family” (Riley & Riley, 1996, p. 259).

In this contribution, I will examine the process of age integration in the context of a more classic kin-

ship structure, that of the “expanded” three-generational family type of kinship. This analysis relies upon original research of intergenerational solidarity between three generations of the same family. This research began in 1992 with a survey of families, which included at least three adult members of different generations not living in the same household. The anchor for this survey was a “pivotal” generation person, born between 1939 and 1943, who had at least one adult child and one parent alive (not living necessarily in the same household). This methodology allowed the same comprehensive set of questions to be put to a pivotal generation member and to his/her parent and adult child (Attias-Donfut, 1995).

Each of the three generations in this research represents a relatively homogenous age grouping, clearly differentiated in respect to historical background and current stage of the life course. Young people have entered the world of work (jobs for some, further education for others); most of the pivotal generation are active in the labor force, and members of the eldest generation have been in retirement for some time and are at risk of experiencing disability. Because these family generations are at the same time “historical” and “welfare” generations (cohorts), they are particularly suited to an analysis of the interface between private and public spheres, and of social change interacting with family relations.

Empirical results demonstrate the importance of financial gifts made by the pivotal and older generations. Analyzing responses from three generations of the same family makes possible a more precise measurement of different forms of support. The data show that 33% of the grandparents (the older generation) give money to their adult children, and 30% give money to their grandchildren (the younger generation). In total, almost one in two older people (49%) give money to either their adult children or grandchildren. As far as the pivotal generation is concerned, 64% of the households provide financial help

to their children, and 9% give financial help to their parents. In contrast to these downward financial transfers, services are widely exchanged between generations, both downward and upward. For example, 89% of pivots provide at least one domestic service to their parents, and 49% of the older generation members offer time assistance to their children (Attias-Donfut, 1995). Home sharing is another way to redistribute resources. In addition to financial transfers, individuals can also provide support by having either their children or their parents live with them. Home sharing sometimes expresses the desire of both generations to live in the same household (where there are close ties and good relationships). But this pattern has become less frequent as the norm for "intimacy at a distance" has prevailed (Rosenmayr & Kockeis, 1963). Because home sharing occurs at the expense of privacy of both coresident generations, it seems to most often be a result of economic necessity. Economic links across generations through help with housing is highly important, because this type of support can be of great benefit to poorer households who can not afford to redistribute money.

Private transfers, whether financial or in kind, as well as shared living arrangements, result in an overall reduction of intergenerational inequalities because the different kinds of support are mainly given to needy family members. Private transfers have redistributive effects and therefore contribute to reduce inequalities that are age-related (Attias-Donfut & Wolff, 2000).

In the area of lifestyles and values, there is also a reduction of generational differences through social and cultural exchanges within families, as shown by the following results from the three-generational study. From one generation to another, as can be expected, we observe marked differences in values and behavior. As we move from the oldest to the youngest generation, relations between couples become more egalitarian, there is a more equitable division of household tasks, the practice of religion diminishes, and education patterns are less authoritarian. These examples, among others, confirm well-known trends. Comparing answers of different generations in the same family reveals a strong intergenerational transmission of behavior and values. Modern attitudes are transmitted, but so also (to a much lesser degree) are traditional attitudes. Because changes across generations only occur for some lineages, we can identify through whom and by what means changes are introduced. Among the complexity of factors and influences at play, one factor appears especially significant: the influence of intergenerational social mobility. A change in behavior from one generation to the next is more marked in families where there is ascending social mobility. This phenomenon is certainly not limited to the domain of education, but also can be found using other indicators of social mobility. A change in social status facilitates or brings about the adoption of new values and new behavior. This shows how the capacity of societies to change and the speed of this change are linked to the degree of openness of social classes. Another phenomenon has to be taken into account: the influence of children upon their parents, or "re-

versed socialization" (Allerbeck, Jennings, & Rosenmayr, 1979). This takes place today all the more so because the colongevity of generations prolongs the length of time in which exchanges and influences take place, and increases proximity between generations. The age difference between parents and children symbolically contracts when the life span increases.

We are especially interested here in the diffusion of social change from the youngest adults to the oldest, and the factors associated with these influences. Social mobility does not only benefit those who climb the social ladder, but also their parents. Several mechanisms can be seen to be at work. Social mobility is often the result of parental investment, which implies an initial good relationship between parents and children. The upward mobility of children increases the distance from their parents, not only in relation to standards of living but also in lifestyles and outlook upon the world (Gaulejac, 1987). From this process, two scenarios can be drawn. There is either a weakening of the generational ties or, on the contrary, the debt toward their parents is strongly felt and children repay it by sharing the gains of their upward social mobility. They are able to do so through economic help. But they can also exert a cultural influence upon their parents, leading them to change their values and behavior. This can be brought about by the prestige that accompanies the children's elevated social position and the pride that this inspires in the parents.

The results of our research support these hypotheses. The "rebound" effects of upward social mobility by children to their parents can be clearly seen for the most part in a rise in the standard of living and social capital of the latter. In order to examine the effect of this upon value systems and behavior, the pivotal generation was asked to identify domains in which their children had influenced them. A minority of parents reported a strong influence was exerted upon them in the area of fundamental issues such as religion, politics, social problems, or education. This group of parents had children who experienced a higher degree of social mobility than the average. Among them, mothers are overrepresented. Among other parents, a majority reported some form of influence, although it was weaker than for the former group of parents and more linked to such formal aspects of lifestyle as dress appearance, house decoration, food, leisure activities, and style of education. Mothers in this category are again more receptive than fathers to their children's influence (women appear as the main actors of social change).

Social mobility is certainly not the only factor affecting ascending transfers, even though its influence is important. Affective proximity and the quality of relationships facilitate these reciprocal transmissions. The confrontation between generations that have different values creates zones of influence in family life. New ideas are tested and there is a move toward their relative acceptance. This confrontation mediates change. Thus, the changes introduced by the young slowly win over the other generations and extend outward socially through the mediation of the family.

The increase in life expectancy and its effect of prolonging the duration of exchanges between the generations brings about the increasing probability of reciprocal influences between the generations. The new models of relations that are more egalitarian allow these exchanges of influences to occur. In this way, the different types of exchange between the generations, whether they be economic or cultural, can contribute to a reduction (without actually eradicating) the differences between the generations, thereby adding to the process of age integration in society.

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Address correspondence to Dr. Claudine Attias-Donfut, Directeur des recherches sur le vieillissement, 49 rue Mirabeau, 75016 Paris, France. E-mail: claudine.attias-donfut@cnav.fr

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Age Integration or Age Conflict as Society Ages?

Anne Foner, PhD

Department of Sociology, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

A major concern about population aging—the increase in the numbers, proportions, and capacities of older people in the society—is that it will produce conflicts between working-age and older people. For example, in a widely quoted article, the economist Lester Thurow (1996) asserted that “in the years ahead, class warfare is apt to be redefined as the young against the old, rather than the poor against the rich.” Why? Because, he argues, the increasing size of the older population will cause an explosion in public pension costs and health-care spending for older people. Yet, while the political influence of the elderly population will assure the maintenance of old age entitlements, it is not the old who will bear the major burden of paying for them. Rather, according to Thurow, financing the rising costs of programs benefiting the old will come at the expense of nonelderly people, who tend to be less affluent than their elders. Under this scenario of age conflict, there could well be obstacles to age integration as the working-age population resists opening up important social roles to their elders and shuns cross-age interactions.

In this essay I argue that although age conflicts, if they were to emerge, could counteract trends toward age integration, there is an opposite outcome: that

age integration will offset tendencies to age conflicts. In fact, past history supports such an eventuality.

Predictions of age-based conflict are not new. For years we have been warned about coming age wars as the working-age population rebels against the direct and indirect burdens of supporting public programs favoring older people, but yielding few clear benefits to younger adults. However, despite these dire predictions, young and the middle-aged adults have not risen up against the old or against policies that benefit the old. Indeed, there has been, and still is, widespread support among all age strata for keeping the Social Security program in the United States healthy and making sure that older people get adequate medical care (e.g., Bengtson & Harootyan, 1994; Cook, Marshall, Marshall, & Kaufman, 1994).

In short, the expected “age wars” have not erupted. The working-age population has not challenged public policies that favor older people, policies that appear to operate against the self-interests of young and middle-aged adults. This, despite the increase in the numbers of old people, particularly old-old people (aged 85+). Alternatively, there are signs of increasing age integration as age barriers to social roles are loosening (Riley & Riley, 1994). How can we account for this apparent anomaly?

Forestalling Age Wars

Two basic points have been put forward to account for people of working age favoring programs that support old people: (1) Young and middle-aged adults have a stake in protecting public programs for older adults because these programs relieve them of financial responsibility for elders in their own families. (2) Younger adults want to protect these programs for their own later years. Thus, there is something in old-age programs for both old and young.

These arguments are fairly straightforward—indeed have been incorporated into public discussions. In addition to considering these points, I will discuss several related conceptual themes and explore more fully the complexity of the underlying issues.

The Nature of Age Systems in Society.—As described elsewhere (Foner, A., 1974, 1984, 1995), the mechanisms noted above for offsetting age conflicts are related to essential characteristics of age structuring in society.

First, fundamental microlevel social structures to which people are attached, such as the family, are age heterogeneous. They fit the age-integrated model. In these structures people of different ages are linked together, interact, and forge intergenerational bonds. The significance of such heterogeneity is highlighted by a contrast with the class situation. Microlevel social structures—again, the family being a prominent example—are typically class homogeneous. These class-homogeneous structures provide a solid basis for class identity and allegiance and serve to insulate members from intimate contact with people from other classes. In short, they promote solidarity within classes, but not necessarily bonds across class lines.

Second, the inevitability of aging encourages young and middle-aged adults to look to the future and to concern themselves with their status when they themselves will become old. Hence, people of working age may support publicly maintained old-age pension systems and other publicly subsidized programs for the old because they stand to benefit from them in their later years.

These two features of age structuring help to explain why potential age conflicts have not materialized. But, in addition, other more complex issues are involved.

What Do We Mean by Age Conflicts?—The terms “age wars” or “generation wars” typically refer to societal-wide cleavages between young and old—not to disagreements between young and old that crop up in structures within the society: the family, the workplace, or community organizations. The situation in the 1960s and early 1970s may be a paradigmatic case. Then, the issues confronting society—questions of ideals and morality—were not diffused by mechanisms that operate to avert age conflicts. At that time, many young people were concerned about such moral questions as just and unjust wars and the rights of all people, not just the young. These were issues that the young (typically those at college age)

perceived required immediate resolution and could not be put off in the hope of possible future improvement. Rather than finding common ground with older adults, they tended to see older adults as obstacles to forging a peaceful and just society. As young people called into question both foreign policy and domestic policy regarding equal rights, they proclaimed that basic changes were needed in the society, precisely the kinds of changes that dismayed mature and older adults. And the young activists went on marches, held mass rallies, organized sit-ins, and engaged in civil disobedience to promote their causes.

In light of these past age conflicts, the term “age wars” may seem overdrawn as a description of age relations in society today, or even what has been predicted for the future—barring any resurgence of the “all or nothing” issues that aroused many young people in the 1960s. In the 1980s and 1990s, whenever disagreements among age strata emerged, they typically involved age-related economic policies and hardly constituted a form of warfare. Rather, they have been of the same order as many economic issues that come before political bodies and around which compromises are crafted.

Age Inequalities as a Basis of Age Conflicts.—It is the apparent unequal costs and benefits of public programs for the old borne by younger working adults that some expect to trigger age conflicts in the society. We know, however, that social inequalities often do not lead to conflicts between the advantaged and the disadvantaged. One reason is that inequalities are legitimated.

Consider publicly supported benefits for retired workers. These benefits are legitimated on the basis of their past contributions. Opinion polls indicate, for example, that there is widespread agreement among the public that old people have paid their dues, paid their taxes, and they are owed. In other words, they are deserving of public support.

In the case of age inequalities, another mechanism may also be operating. Some aspects of age inequalities are not easily observable because they are constructed by macrolevel institutions. For example, congressional and executive branch budget decisions in the United States have produced federal expenditures for older adults that are greater than outlays for children. According to some commentators (e.g., Thurow, 1996), these expenditures on the elderly population are squeezing government investments in infrastructure, education, and research development. Although such disparities in spending differentially affect the young, middle-aged and old populations, it is an open question whether people of different ages perceive these policies as representing well-defined age inequalities and how much attention they pay to developments in these national policies.

Given the legitimization of public health benefits favoring the elderly population and the obscuring of some mechanisms leading to age inequalities at the societal level, the motivation of the young and the middle-aged to challenge the old and policies favor-

ing the old is likely to be attenuated. Such a situation provides a favorable environment for increasing age integration.

The Macro/Micro Connection

An underlying assumption of predictions of age conflicts is that public policies concerning the elderly population involve an inherent conflict of interest between young and old. This notion of inherent conflicts of interest between groups can be found in early writers. Marx, for one, argued concerning class that capitalist profits derive from exploitation of workers, and thus improvements for workers could come only at the expense of profits for capitalists. In a somewhat similar vein concerning age, Thurow (1996) speaks of "making parent rich at the cost of making children poor," a zero/sum situation where benefits for one age category come at the expense of another age category.

I argue to the contrary. There is a connection between macrolevel and microlevel social structures that serves to avert age conflicts. Thus, while entitlements for older adults are financed and dispensed at the macrolevel, a different process is at work in the age-integrated family at the microlevel. At the microlevel, there are intrafamily exchanges that often result in a circulation of benefits from older to younger family members. The relative financial security afforded the old by public programs permits them to contribute to their offspring and grandchildren. Thus, rather than parents becoming rich at the expense of the young, the young benefit both directly and indirectly from public funds received by older adults.

The contributions that parents make to offspring take several forms. There are outright gifts and loans. Unlike some images of the old as recipients of aid from children, reports from national surveys indicate that elders give more than they receive (Bengtson & Harootyan, 1994; Spreitzer, Schoeni, & Rao, 1996). One study found that almost half of parents with adult children (parents both under and over age 65) report having given their children large sums of money at some time. The average value of these gifts was \$5,000; among parents who were 65 and over, the average value was \$8,000 (Bengtson & Harootyan, 1994).

Bequests constitute another form of contribution from older family members. Rossi and Rossi (1990) found in their Boston area sample that one half of the respondents either are or were beneficiaries of their parents' estates, and about 14% of their grandparents' estates. Over two thirds were beneficiaries in their parents' insurance policies.

It is not only in the United States that such patterns of giving are found. Attias-Donfut (1995) reports similar processes in France. She shows that money circulates from the old (average age 77, ranging from 66–92 in her national sample) to the middle generation (average age 51, ranging from 49–53) and sometimes skipping a generation, going directly to the young (average age 28, ranging from 19–36). As in the United States, such gifts and loans made by the old

within families are facilitated by public pensions and other benefits that elders receive.

To be sure, there are differences among families in intergenerational help patterns. For example, in the United States, members of White households were more likely than those in Black and Hispanic households to report having given a gift or loan of over \$200 to family members outside their households (Spreitzer et al., 1996). However, other families may be more likely to provide assistance across generations *within* the household. For example, Black children are more likely than White children to have lived with a grandparent some time before they were age 18 (Szinovacz, 1996). Clearly, these grandparents were providing intergenerational material support in the form of food and shelter.

In some poor communities, pensions to the older residents play a related role. Nancy Foner (1984) notes that in some poor Native American communities, where families are hard pressed for cash, old age pensioners provide a steady income source for households. Sometimes this income is even the mainstay of the domestic economy.

Quite apart from direct financial help from older family members, pension payments to older people may help younger family members indirectly. Not having to provide financial support for older people in the family means that more funds are available for spending on children (Bengtson & Harootyan, 1994).

In sum, I suggest that redistribution from young to old at the societal level is transformed into redistribution from old to young at the family level through gifts, loans, and ultimately inheritance provided by the older family members. Rather than an inherent conflict of interest between the old and the young, there are mutual interests among the several generations within the age-integrated family. And these mutual interests have macrolevel consequences as they help shore up, rather than undermine, public support for old age entitlements (but see Bengtson & Harootyan, 1994, for a somewhat different interpretation).

The Role of the Family.—The foregoing discussion speaks of the relevance for societal level policies of family structures and relations within the family. The emphasis has been on commonalities in material interests between young and old family members. But the age integration of the family is not merely a matter of mutual economic interests. Family members are linked by affective ties as well, and these too have implications beyond the family.

We know that it is family members who provide most of the care for older people who are dependent. We know also that older people and younger family members are in frequent contact with each other. This is not to say that interactions among family members always run smoothly. Often there are longstanding dissatisfactions, lifestyle differences, and divergent beliefs that divide young and old in the family. But in the crunch, family members typically come through to help and support other family members when there are personal crises. In Matilda Ri-

ley's terms (1983), the "latent matrix" of kin relationships is activated. There can be ups and downs in kin relationships, but in the end it tends to be family members who aid their kin in times of need.

Regarding the broad implications of such family solidarity, I would argue that just as family members pull together when there are family crises, having to cope with such family problems carries over to supportive attitudes about societal level policies benefiting the old. It is not only such pooled efforts to deal with family problems that contribute to intergenerational cohesion; family members generally have built bonds to each other over many years. These ties help counteract any tendencies among younger family members to work for or support societal policies that might hurt the older members.

In short, age relationships within the family and kin network are multifaceted. With its strong material and affective base, the family has an impact not only on individuals and relations within the family, but influences the way family members view public issues related to age.

The Intersection of Age and Class

While there has been relatively little dissension among age strata over entitlements for the old in the United States, there have been consistent class-based disagreements about these programs. In the 1980s, for example, such groups as the National Association of Manufacturers and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce favored restraining the growth of Social Security, whereas labor unions were part of a coalition to "save" the program (Foner, A., 1984). Nationwide surveys from the early 1980s to the early 1990s found that the well-off population was least likely to view the existing system favorably (Bengtson & Harootyan, 1994; Harris, 1981).

In my view, focusing on the threat of age conflicts masks underlying class differences and class interests concerning age-related public programs. On the one hand, entitlement programs for the old have strong support in the middle class and the working class. On the other hand, profit-making organizations and high-income classes see potential tax and other hoped-for financial benefits in curtailing Social Security and other social welfare programs for the old. But efforts to justify curtailing Social Security are never made explicitly in terms of these narrow economic interests. Rather, the rationale is stated in seemingly more public-spirited terms—in the name of "our children's future."

So far, class forces working for basic restructuring of public programs for the older population have not prevailed. One might argue that these forces have been eclipsed by a united front among people of all ages to support the preservation of these programs, particularly in middle-income and working-class groups. While the presumably persuasive slogan, "Save our children," may have resonance across age groups and across classes, weakening Social Security does not appear to be a generally acceptable option as a way to safeguard the future of today's children.

But the past is not necessarily an adequate barometer of the future. The problems of an aging society might become serious enough to drive a wedge throughout the society between young and old. In such an eventuality, the relationship between social divisions based on age and those based on class, as these bear on age-related policies, could change. If age conflicts over these issues were to erupt, these age cleavages could strengthen class forces in favor of curtailing public entitlements for the older population. The preceding analysis, however, suggests an opposite interpretation. Despite the undoubted problems to come as we confront an aging society, age conflict over societal resources is just one possible outcome.

Concluding Thoughts

Those who predict increasing age conflict seem to assume that this is the only way in which social programs benefiting older people can be altered to fit their changed and extended lives (see Riley, Kahn, & Foner, 1994, for a general discussion of structural lag or a mismatch between structures and lives and the resulting pressures for structural change). But this implicitly assumes that there will be a rebellion among the working-age population against social welfare structures for the old (and thus indirectly against the old themselves). Throughout this essay I have suggested that there are social forces related to age in society that operate to stave off age conflicts. Among the factors that have helped to ward off age conflict over public programs benefiting older people, I have emphasized two integrative mechanisms: (1) the mutual economic interests in these programs of family members of all ages, and (2) affective intergenerational bonds that unite families around the needs of all the members. And I have argued that these microlevel phenomena have affected macrolevel policies. These same mechanisms may continue to function in the future as the number of old people continues to mount. It is possible that strong intergenerational bonds within the family will be extended to other social structures and to the society as a whole to work for solutions to the broader societal problems we face and to preserve viable components of present programs.

Finally, on a broader, theoretical level, let me suggest one answer to the question implicit in the title of this essay: What is the linkage between age conflict and age integration? As I have argued, societal-wide age conflicts can be muted by a number of mechanisms, even as the number of old people rises. To the extent that age conflicts are dampened, conditions are favorable for increased age integration in the society. If age integration proceeds further, it is possible, of course, that there will be age-related flare-ups in particular institutions. But, as age barriers to a wide range of social roles are loosened, as people of all ages mingle and develop common interests at the workplace, in community organizations, and in schools and colleges, it will be difficult to mount broad age conflicts in the society.

Acknowledgments

Dr. Foner is now retired from Rutgers University. Address correspondence to Dr. Anne Foner, 200 West 86th Street 9J, New York, NY 10024. E-mail: foneram@aol.com

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Integration of Old and Young

Peter Uhlenberg, PhD

Department of Sociology, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

The ratio of children to old people in the population has changed dramatically over the 20th century. In 1900 the ratio of children under age 18 to adults over age 65 was 10:1; by the end of the century the ratio was 2:1. Around 2030, when baby boom cohorts have entered old age, it is expected that the number of children will about equal the number of old people (a ratio of 1.2:1). This convergence of the size of the two most disparate age groups in the population greatly increases the potential volume of contact that children have with old people as they age from birth to adulthood. If the social structures that connect old people and children did not change over the century, we would expect the amount of time that individuals spend during childhood interacting with old people to increase many-fold.

Unfortunately, we know almost nothing about actual changes over time in the involvement of children with older persons. Information that would permit even rough estimates of the volume of interaction is available neither for the beginning nor the end of this century. It is not surprising that no one collected survey data on relationships between young and old persons in 1900. It is more surprising, however, that none of the large surveys of older persons conducted in recent years has asked questions related to the involvement that they have with children. Extensive statistics are now available on sources of income and health

status of the elderly population, but not on their relationship with young people. Despite a paucity of relevant data, these are reasons why the integration of old and young in America is a topic worth exploring.

A Case for Integration of Young and Old

It is not difficult to make a case for why this would be a good time to investigate linkages between old and young people in society and to examine the factors that encourage or discourage connections between them. Most simply, there are significant benefits to old and young that might come from greater age integration, and there are social policies that might facilitate increased integration.

First, changes in both childhood and old age have created an unprecedented opportunity for old people to meet the needs of children. In general, children depend upon adults for care, training, supervision, and transfer of material resources. There is general agreement that children do better when they receive large amounts of these things, but changes in American families in recent decades have reduced the ability of parents to provide them for their children. High rates of out-of-wedlock childbearing and divorce mean that many children live with only one parent. By 1995, over 30% of all children (and 67% of Black children) were living in households without two par-

ents present, and more than half are expected to live at least part of their childhood with a single parent. The availability of parents to provide care and supervision of children has been further reduced in recent decades as an increasing proportion of mothers have entered the labor force. In 1995, over 60% of mothers with children under age 6 were working outside the home. In short, the well-being of children depends more than ever upon adults other than parents being engaged with children.

Several changes in the older population in recent decades have increased the potential of this age group to make productive contributions in the area of child care, supervision, and training. As retirement has become more commonplace, few older persons have significant time obligations to paid work (only 12% of those over age 65 are involved in the labor force). This retired population tends to be healthy (70% of those over 65 rate their health as "good" or "excellent" and only 20% have serious functional limitations) and economically secure (60% have incomes at least 200% above the poverty level). Furthermore, a majority of those over age 65 have at least a high school education and have acquired valuable skills over their lifetime. Without minimizing the diversity within the older population and the serious limitations that restrict the ability of some older persons to engage in demanding activities, it seems obvious that large resources for meeting the needs of children reside in the population of older persons.

A second benefit of integrating older and younger persons involves the potential for children to meet the needs of older persons. To be sure, many adults, old and young, will be involved in meeting the needs of the growing number of elders in the population. But there also are special opportunities for young people to be involved in this task. Young people and children have skills and energy that could be channeled toward helping old people. For example, children growing up in the information age could assist in educating old people about using computer and communication technology. Even more important, perhaps, would be the gains to children of being involved in meeting the needs of others. A growing number of educators recognize that community service plays an important role in training for citizenship. Service to older persons could be one of the most meaningful ways of teaching children that they can be productive and useful members of the community.

A third benefit of integrating the disparate age groups is the potential for increased mutual understanding that results from the interaction of young and old. Ageist stereotypes, like other stereotypes, are nurtured in an environment of high segregation. Development of cross-age friendships could dissipate the fears that children have of old people and challenge biases that old people have toward contemporary children and adolescents.

Perspectives on Old-Young Relationships

Two competing perspectives on the relationship between old and young people in contemporary society have received a good deal of attention in recent

years. One perspective views the old (those over age 65) and young (those under age 18) as competitors for the resources that the productive population transfers to the dependent population. The title of Samuel Preston's (1984) provocative article that ignited the debate over intergenerational equity was "Children and the Elderly: Divergent Paths for America's Dependents." If, as suggested by this title, the old and the young are dependent upon the middle generation, then one might assume that there is little that they can do for each other. Indeed, they become rivals separated not only by life stages, but also by economic interests.

This image of the young and old separated into categories with no significant interaction fits well with the familiar model of age stratification that sees life divided into three boxes. Children are involved with education (job training), whereas the old are in the trivial (but costly) box of leisure. Both are largely excluded from the labor force and therefore are viewed as unproductive and dependent. The old are not involved in the primary task confronting the young (getting an education), and the young can best aid the leisure pursuits of the old by staying out of their way. Nothing in this model suggests a connection between the old and young that leads to meaningful exchanges with each other.

The other perspective on linkages between the old and young in American society starts with the family, rather than the economy, and focuses on relationships between grandparents and grandchildren. In contrast to the intergenerational equity literature, the grandparent literature tends to see an important linkage between older and younger persons based on affection and caring arising from kinship ties. Although the literature on grandparenthood is growing, much of the research is based on small, nonrepresentative samples, and it tends to avoid the most interesting questions. Thus, we know the most about one of the least important aspects of the relationship—frequency of contact. Knowing that most grandparents have frequent contact with at least some of their grandchildren is not irrelevant, but it does not provide insight into the content and significance of these relationships for either party. A search for rigorous studies examining the importance of grandparents in the lives of children, or the importance of grandchildren in the lives of older people, is disappointing. Existing studies indicate that the old and young may be connected in significant ways through kinship bonds, but important work remains to be done in assessing how much older people contribute to the development of human capital in children and how much social capital they provide for children. Further, exploring meaningful linkages between older and younger persons should not begin with an exclusive focus on grandparent–grandchild connections. Other potentially important links between older and younger persons who are not biologically related also need to be explored.

Evidence of Benefits

Although relatively little aging research has focused on consequences of integration of older and

younger persons, there is some evidence that it can produce positive outcomes. One area involves extensive interaction; the situation where grandparents live in the same home (coreside) with their adolescent grandchildren. The other area involves intergenerational programs explicitly designed to bring unrelated older and younger persons together.

Coresiding grandparents and grandchildren.—Statistics from the U.S. Bureau of the Census indicate that, since the 1980s, both the number and proportion of children living with one or more of their grandparents have increased (Saluter, 1992). Several studies have examined possible effects of being a custodial grandparent on the grandparent involved (Hayslip, Shore, Henderson, & Lambert, 1998; Jendreck, 1994; Minkler & Roe, 1993). Several adverse consequences, such as social isolation, poor health, and depression, have been reported for these grandparents. A complete picture of the effects on grandparents is not provided in these studies, however, because little attention is given to possible benefits (such as increased meaning in life or satisfaction of helping children with needs). Furthermore, these studies have not been able to examine consequences for the children who have grandparents involved in their lives.

Using a large, nationally representative sample of adolescents, Kirby and Uhlenberg (1998) have compared outcomes for adolescents living with a grandparent to those not living with a grandparent. In this study we were able to assess four aspects of adolescent well-being: quality of relationship reported with mother, involvement in delinquent activities, academic performance, and evidence of depression. In no comparison was there evidence of a negative consequence associated with grandparents coresiding with their grandchildren. Further, in several areas there was evidence that presence of a grandparent had beneficial effects on adolescent well-being. First, presence of a grandparent in single-mother families was associated with lower rates of adolescent delinquent behavior. Second, in both single-mother families and no-parent families, adolescent girls had a lower rate of depression when a grandparent was living in the family. Third, adolescents in families without either parent present reported much higher quality relationships with their surrogate mother if the surrogate mother was a grandparent, rather than a foster mother.

Grandparents who engage in the demanding work of rearing or helping to rear their grandchildren who lack two parents no doubt experience stress (as do parents of adolescents). However, these findings suggest that this involvement tends to improve their grandchildren's lives. Researchers interested in intergenerational relationships need to be reminded that relationships should be viewed from the perspective of both generations and that relationships are multifaceted. A relationship that is stressful to one person may at the same time be rewarding and beneficial for the other persons involved in it. Additional research needs to examine more broadly ways in which older

persons can positively affect the lives of their grandchildren.

Intergenerational programs.—One can also find evidence of benefits of age integration in situations not involving kinship ties. Professionals in human service fields report rapid growth in recent years in the number of intergenerational programs in the United States. These programs are "designed to engage non-biologically linked older and younger persons in interactions that encourage cross-generational bonding, promote cultural exchange, and provide positive support systems that help to maintain the well-being and security of the older and younger generations" (Newman, Ward, Smith, Wilson, & McCrea, 1997, p. 56). Some of the national programs that are included in this area are: Adopt a Grandparent Program, which arranges for young people to make regular visits to older persons; Foster Grandparent Program, which matches lower income older persons with children who have special needs; Across Ages, which involves older volunteers as mentors to especially vulnerable youth; and "Retired Senior Volunteers Program, which, among other things, places older volunteers in schools, hospitals, and other settings where they can assist children. In 1986 the National Council on Aging, AARP, the Child Welfare League of America, and the Children's Defense Fund came together to create Generations United, a national advocacy organization to promote age integration. To the extent that these programs have been evaluated, they have been found to benefit both the older and younger persons involved in them.

In addition to programs that are national in scope, there are numerous local programs that match older persons with resources to children with needs. Older persons in these programs serve as mentors, tutors, caregivers, nurturers, friends, and coaches. An example of this is the Senior Citizen School Volunteer Program, developed by Generations Together at the University of Pittsburgh in 1978, which works with both teachers and older volunteers to train, place, and support older persons working with children in schools. Other programs facilitate the service of older volunteers and workers in day care centers and community centers. Still other programs bring old people and children together to work on projects that will improve the community. For descriptions of a wide range of these types of programs see *Intergenerational Programs: Past, Present and Future* (Newman et al., 1997).

The proliferation of intergenerational programs suggests that concern for age integration may be increasing, and efforts to bring it about are developing. Nevertheless, one should not exaggerate the level of involvement of older persons in the lives of children at this time. A recent national survey of respondents who were able and willing to participate in telephone interviews found that persons over age 65 are only about one third as likely as persons aged 35–44 to engage in volunteer work that benefits children

and teens (16.8% vs 48.1%) (Bengtson & Harootyan, 1994). In addition, intergenerational programs are not generally viewed as significant efforts to solve social problems or to change the structure of the life course. Moody and Disch (1989) argue that public support for intergenerational programs is superficial ("a mile wide and an inch deep"), and others (Newman et. al., 1997) suggest that these programs are seen as "cute" rather than genuinely significant. Compared to the "big" issues of health and income (Medicare and Social Security), intergenerational programs are a very small item on the political agenda. Age integration may have profound implications for the quality of life over the life course, but it is not yet generally recognized as something that merits serious attention.

Conclusion

When social institutions are structured to encourage age segregation, the status quo may seem natural and comfortable to many of those involved. It is quite possible that a survey would find that a majority of children do not want to be around old people more than they are already, and that a majority of old people do not desire greater contact with children. This finding would no more justify continuing current age segregation patterns than a survey of attitudes of southern Whites in 1950 would have justified continuing racial segregation. It is social scientists who should lead the way in explaining how social forces produce age segregation and in evaluating the costs and benefits of maintaining the status quo. Ways of restructuring society to bring about greater age integration could be proposed. There already is clear ev-

idence that increasing age integration of older and younger people in our society could produce beneficial outcomes. Children would receive more care and supervision from mature adults. More older people would be engaged in socially significant activities, and young people would be an important resource helping to meet the needs of an aging population.

Acknowledgment

Address correspondence to Dr. Peter Uhlenberg, University of North Carolina, CB#3210, Department of Sociology, Chapel Hill, NC 27599. E-mail: peter_uhlenberg@unc.edu

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Age Integration Through Interest Mediation: Political Parties and Unions

Martin Kohli

Institute for Sociology, Free University of Berlin, Germany.

The point of departure of this essay is the by now well-established fact (Riley, Kahn, & Foner, 1994) that contemporary Western societies are marked by a massive structural lag: Their degree of age integration is low and seems to be increasingly at odds with their social and demographic resources. Age criteria are still highly inflexible, and structural age barriers remain important. Structures such as those of education, work, or leisure thus tend to be age homogeneous, that is, they do not offer individuals the opportunity to interact with others who differ in age.

This state of affairs in Western societies is a result of modernization; it has been produced and deepened over the past two centuries by a process that I have termed the "institutionalization of the life course" (Kohli, 1986), and which reached its culmination in the 1960s. While there are now some indications that this process has come to a halt and has even started to partly reverse itself, the general pattern has not changed: In their basic contexts of living outside their families, individuals are still predominantly confronted with their own age peers. If this is

so, how then do these societies assure their age integration? How do they achieve the level of cross-age interaction that is necessary for their survival?

Where cross-age interaction in the structures of everyday life is deficient, it needs to be institutionalized in other domains. In this essay, I discuss cross-age interaction in the domain of interest mediation. This concerns, on the one hand, the political system in its more narrow sense, where the interests of individual citizens are mediated through parties and social movements, and, on the other hand, the economic system where the workers have traditionally organized their interests through unions.

For cross-age interaction in the domain of interest mediation, there are two basic alternatives. The large organizations of interest mediation such as parties or unions can either be age homogeneous, that is, restricted to specific age groups such as those of "working age," or age encompassing. In the first case, interest mediation among age groups is externalized to the political "market"—to the conflict between organizations. The political market (e.g., competition in elections and in parliament) is then structured along age lines (such as between wage earners and clients of the welfare state, or between workers and pensioners). In the second case, age-encompassing organizations, interest mediation among age groups is internalized, and the political market is likely to be structured along political camps such as traditional classes (or religions, or ethnic/linguistic cleavages).

As to political parties, it seems obvious that they are usually age encompassing. In Germany, this is indeed (more or less) true for their membership. But it is less clear for political activity and leadership (Kohli, Neckel, & Wolf, 1999).

The nonusual cases are the "gray" parties, which orient themselves exclusively to the interests of the elderly population (e.g., toward improving public pensions). There are two countries—The Netherlands and the Czech Republic—where "gray" parties have at times succeeded in capturing some seats in the national parliament. In Germany, the Grays have during a few years formed an election alliance with the Greens, which has allowed them to send their leader into the Federal parliament even though their share of votes remained much below the required quorum of 5%. But, similar to other one-issue parties, gray parties have been vulnerable to the political ups and downs of their issue—or to the appropriation of their issue by the larger parties—and therefore have not been able to attract a stable proportion of voters. In Germany, as in other countries, they have for the time being slipped back into insignificance.

With the larger parties, membership is indeed spread out over the whole adult life span. But the distribution is far from even: The parties are much stronger among the elderly population than the young. Thus, among the Social Democrats (SPD), 30% of the members (in 1995) were above age 60, and only 6% below 30. For the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), the figures were 33% and 5%, respectively. The first rank is taken by the East German ex-Communists

(PDS), where the share of the elderly members is 40%. And even the Greens—who "in the interest of data protection" refuse to publish data on the social composition of their members—seem to face a situation where their core cohorts are advancing along the age spectrum.

The parties are aging rapidly, and of course they see this as a very mixed blessing. They have been successful in retaining their elderly members in the organization, and the old have remained an important organizational resource for them. But they have had much less success in integrating the young people. This creates a difficult organizational dilemma. On the one hand, the elderly members are increasingly asking for more than passive membership—they want to participate actively and to be heard. They are still less influenced by individualization, and thus less prone to political volatility, but even they are no longer the rock-sure lifelong members. In the back lurks the threat to the parties of losing the elderly members and voters to those who offer them more—for example, the Grays. On the other hand, this is likely to turn off the young people even more. The parties try to cope with this dilemma by creating special suborganizations for their elderly members that engage them as activists and help to mobilize the elderly voters—who with their growing population share and higher turnout increasingly determine the election outcomes—while at the same time limiting their say in general party matters.

Political activity and leadership are still heavily concentrated in the middle years of the life course. An especially drastic indicator is the age structure of the Federal parliament. Both the younger and the elderly population are underrepresented. Until the end of the 1960s, the share of young members (up to age 35) had remained below 5%. In the election of 1972, it doubled to 9.1%—a consequence of the rebellion of the "68" generation. In 1990, there was again an increase—this time as a consequence of German unification, which brought a sizable group of young members from the East into parliament. Both "rejuvenations," however, were short-lived. The share of elderly members (aged 65 and older) declined from 9.6% (elections of 1961) to 1.4 in 1976, and then increased again somewhat; but with 3.3% in 1994, it has remained considerably below the level of 1961, and now represents only about one fifth of the population share over age 65.

We thus find a similarly paradoxical evolution as in employment: Political leadership is also marked by a trend toward early retirement. It seems to be an unwritten law that members of parliament who have reached retirement age no longer run for reelection. Possible reasons are external pressure as well as individual preference. Perhaps the party leadership exerts pressure to create vacancies for younger people. But equally possibly, the stresses of life in politics are high enough and the pensions generous enough to make members quit by their own choice.

As to trade unions, it seems obvious that they are *not* age encompassing—they are focused on the la-

bor force. This is indeed true for their main clientele. But it is less clear with regard to overall membership (Kohli, Kunemund, & Wolf, 1997).

In the German case, quite unintentionally, the unions have become one of the largest old-age organizations. At the end of 1994, the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) had 1.7 million retired members, corresponding to roughly 10% of the population above 60 and 13% of the pensioners. This was less than for the population of active working age (18–60), where membership in the DGB corresponded to roughly 17% (or 30% of the employed labor force). But given the usual perception of unions as organizations of active workers, the degree of “unionization” of retirees, and, conversely, of the “graying” of the unions, comes as a surprise.

The dilemma here is evident, even more so than with political parties. On the one hand, unions have an interest in keeping their retirees as members because their strength in the collective bargaining process depends on the number of their members—whether active or not. Even in the case of industrial conflict, elderly people may be of help. In strike campaigns, for example, retirees are in a better position than workers because they virtually have nothing to lose—they cannot be fired. Moreover, the union retirees are multipliers of union politics and, as such, a potential of great importance in recruitment. They are useful not only in terms of a head count, or as volunteers and supporters in the bargaining process, but may help in gaining new members. A unionist tradition in families or communities is hardly imaginable where elderly retirees are crowded out of the organization. In other words, if the unions stopped organizing retirees, they might undermine one of their own organizational resources.

On the other hand, with a growing proportion of retirees, unions face the problem of goal conflicts. Their main field must remain that of industrial conflict and negotiation, but they experience lower revenues from membership dues that remain fixed (given that retirees usually are charged only a fraction of what applies to the active members), and rising benefits to be paid. Moreover, some of the elderly members (especially the former union activists) are increasingly self-confident and desire more active participation in union politics for their own agenda. As do the political parties, unions try to cope with this dilemma by creating special organizational forms for their older members—to satisfy them and enlist them in mobilizing more general support among elders, while at the same time limiting their influence on overall decision making. There is a range of organizational options available, all with their advantages and disadvantages, that have been variously experimented with in different European countries.

What are the consequences of these patterns of interest mediation? Political parties as well as unions try to remain age encompassing, and thereby to internalize interest mediation across all ages while at the same time keeping their focus of activity and leader-

ship in the middle years. How they will solve this organizational dilemma will be crucial not only for their own strength but also for societal age integration more generally.

For the economic well-being of elders, the results of their being integrated into age-encompassing organizations of interest mediation seem to have been rather positive. So far, Germany (unlike, e.g., the United States) has not developed much in terms of age-based organizations and lobbies for the elderly population—not because German elders are less able to organize but because, given the age-encompassing policy framework, it has been less necessary for them. The political parties and—this being a corporatist system—the unions have been quite effective in first expanding and now maintaining a high level of public old-age social security. Based on these results, it would appear that the elderly population stands to gain from taking the age-relevant issues out of the arena of direct conflict between age-based organizations, and internalizing them into the large organizations of interest mediation themselves, thereby making them more age encompassing.

On the level of activity and participation, the results are more mixed. It may well be that age-homogeneous organizations would offer elderly people more direct opportunities for participation and self-direction, and have a greater potential for mobilization.

On the level of immediate cross-age interaction, the results are again predominantly positive. In age-encompassing organizations, elders can serve as models and living memory of past experiences (e.g., political or industrial conflicts), and they are in turn confronted with change and innovations. Age-encompassing organizations thus reinforce the daily interaction and mutual learning among generations, which is an important part of social cohesion; by this, they also contribute to reasonable ways of resolving the generational conflicts of interests and of cultural perspectives that typically occur in aging societies.

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Address correspondence to Prof. Dr. Martin Kohli, Freie Universität Berlin, Institut für Soziologie, Babelsberger Str. 14-16, D-10715 Berlin, Germany. E-mail: kohli@zedat.fu-berlin.de

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Paradox of Opportunity: Education, Work, and Age Integration in the United States and Germany

Dale Dannefer, PhD

Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development, University of Rochester, New York.

For quite some time, the idea of an institutionalized “three-box” life course has been sharply criticized for the narrow definitions of normality and “normal aging” that it implied, and the restrictions it seemed to place on the options and developmental opportunities of many midlife adults (e.g., Dannefer, 1991; Riley & Riley, 1994). The norms of the single career and the three boxes of life now seem largely to have evaporated, but—ironically—as a result of forces entirely unrelated to emancipatory notions about the possibilities for successful aging and development. The forces have been technological innovation and corporate concerns about competitiveness and profit margins, which have led to corporate downsizing, restructuring, and the exporting of work from advanced capitalist societies to lower-cost labor markets. Far from utopian, the result is “. . . a concept of ‘work’ and ‘life’ which might be termed ‘short-termism’” (Bernstein, 1996, p. 72). Perhaps predictably, some have celebrated these changes as heralding a new era of choice and lifestyle options (Featherstone, 1991). These changes represent, for many, a reduction in economic security in the United States and an obfuscation of traditionally recognized mechanisms of stratification in Europe (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997).

In the United States, the organizational dismantling of the “one-career life course” has left many mature, mid-career adults economically and psychologically stranded, experiencing downward mobility at a point in their lives at which they might have hoped to see their earnings continue to grow. Job security has become the top issue in labor negotiations (Sleemi, 1995). But the age categories most directly hit by this evaporation have probably been young and young middle-aged adults. Entry-level jobs that lead to long-term, primary sector employment are being replaced by a growing number of low-paying, dead-end jobs that result in sporadic earnings patterns (Gittleman & Joyce, 1995). Department of Labor analyses indicate that 20% to 30% of college graduates do not find positions for which they have been trained within the first year after graduating from college (Greenwald, 1993).

All advanced societies now confront similar technological and economic issues as they intersect with age and the life course (Antikainen, Houtsonen, Kauppila, & Huotelin, 1996; Taylor & Walker, 1996). However, societies appear to vary both at the collective level—in the governmental and corporate responses to the challenges posed by these strains—

and at the individual level in the behavioral and subjective responses of individual workers, who may be increasingly impacted by them as they age. These differences are relevant both to issues of age integration and to structure of the life course. A consideration of how commonly experienced forces of social change produce contrasting responses in different societies can be a fruitful way of understanding social dynamics that are less visible under conditions of stability. Following this strategy, this essay considers some contrasting aspects of how the United States and Germany are responding to these pressures.

In the United States, responses to these forces have fallen heavily upon individuals. Accounts of job erosion often emphasize that some such workers have become successful entrepreneurs with relatively high earnings. On the other hand, others have resorted to “moonlighting”—taking a second job, working part time, working at temporary or other marginal jobs or, paradoxically, working more overtime. This is especially the case for midlife (age 35–54) men and women who have heavy family responsibilities and whose prior work experiences accustomed them to a higher income than one or even two low-paying jobs can support (Stinson, 1990, 1997). Some workers are working increasingly long hours through the entire year (Rones, Ilg, & Gardner, 1997). Full-time employees, both young and middle-aged, work more overtime than ever; it is estimated that this growing trend has succeeded in the elimination of 3 million jobs with their accompanying costly benefits (Schor, 1991).

These general trends have also been felt across Europe, where the term “risk society” (Beck, 1992; Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1995) has come to prominence. Despite these trends, the situation remains quite different. In Germany, almost all of these individual-level practices have been structurally blocked because union-backed legislation kept many enterprises from being open evenings, weekends, or holidays. Compared to the United States, this will remain true even with recent legislative changes that have relaxed some of these restrictions. The German response has included governmental support for job-sharing (through providing unemployment benefits to part-time workers) as well as more corporate-sponsored retraining programs. In short, the German response has reflected more institutionalized protections in response to collectively articulated needs and worker interests, while the U.S. response reflects

more individual-level efforts at adaptation and survival.

These behavioral contrasts obviously cannot be understood apart from social policy and must be seen in the context of the more general posture of work organizations, unions, and the state in relation to workers. In general, European unions appear more likely to press for skill upgrading or retraining as integral parts of the job (Worndl, 1992), and unions themselves also provide some retraining. Additionally, unions, businesses, and government jointly have supported strong government subsidies for early retirement. Some German unions also have pressed aggressively for further reductions in the work week (Swenson, 1989).

In considering these contrasts, the location of workers—both structurally and culturally—must also be noted. As in the United States, skepticism toward unions has been growing in Germany. Nevertheless, German union membership (which by law must be voluntary) has continued to run between 30% and 40%; more significantly, union-negotiated wage agreements cover about 90% of workers (Markovits & Silvia, 1992; Worndl, 1992). And one year after unification, 50% of East German workers were recruited into the West German unions. By contrast, union membership has declined sharply in the United States and has shifted into less skilled occupations. As a mode of response to adverse change in the occupational structure, collective mobilization in the form of union activity appears to be increasingly weak in the United States but remains a formidable force in Germany.

Comparable data on subjective orientations remain sketchy. Although precisely equivalent survey questions are unavailable, there are some limited indications that Germans' levels of optimism and hopefulness have been less adversely affected than have Americans' by these economic challenges. In recent years about 60% of U.S. respondents agreed with the statement, "In spite of what some people say, the lot of the average man is getting worse, not better." By contrast, in 1989 more than two thirds of Germans responded "with hope" when asked, "Is it with hope or fears that you enter the coming year?" Moreover, there are clear differences between the two societies in the strength of unions and in the degree of support for union positions and union activities (e.g., Worndl, 1992). For young people, cross-national surveys have shown repeatedly that American youth worry more than German youth about getting a job. Thus, although individual-level economic turbulence has been experienced in both countries, it appears that Germans' levels of optimism and hopefulness have been less adversely affected than have Americans' (Glatzer, 1992; Niemi, Mueller, & Smith, 1989).

Thus, despite a shared sense of heightened risk (Beck, 1992), significant differences exist in the way that workers in the two societies are responding to job erosion. These patterns of response appear to reflect a difference in the underlying sense of collective fate and collective responsibility. In the United

States, worker displacement was described by a recent Secretary of Labor as a "secession" of those whose skills remain useful for corporate profitability, and who have experienced considerable prosperity; a secession from the social contract of the larger society (Reich, 1991). Hardly less remarkable than the secession is the response to it of U.S. workers: That response has entailed a sense of powerlessness, confusion, fear and self-blame, and, at best, of efforts to survive as a lone individual or family (Newman, 1993). This response, which renders the structural forces at work largely invisible, is argued to presage what lies ahead for other advanced capitalist societies. However, in the German case the "dynamics of secession" are likely to be quite different, due to the greater sense of solidarity among workers and the primacy given to the rights of workers. Although German unions engage in fewer strikes than do those of the United States, the strikes that do occur are generally popular and effective. In the tensions following reunification, this solidarity was dramatically reflected in the priority given to equalizing wage rates between East and West (Markovits & Silvia, 1992), a practice that clearly produced at least short-run strains on the former West Germany.

In sum, I hypothesize that the sense of collective well-being among age peers and between age groups will produce differences in the structure and meaning of age integration, and the sense of the location of one's own life course in a convoy of others of varying ages will produce a different construction of the life course in these two societies. These differences will, of course, interact with other forces, such as general economic conditions. For example, during times of economic contraction, the collective orientation may provide a strong base for collective mobilization within and across cohorts, while the individualist orientation of the United States may invite intergenerational conflict, (see Hecllo, 1988). During periods of rapid expansion, a collective orientation may discourage entrepreneurship when it could be widely advantageous. As noted, sweeping changes in the calculus of individual risk could alter these trends, one way or the other (Beck, 1992).

Two Hypotheses: Socialization vs Social Structure

Although these contrasts reflect broad and deep differences in culture and in social practice between the United States and Germany, it is yet possible to identify likely mechanisms through which they are reproduced and sustained. Two analytically distinct types of forces can be hypothesized to be important in their reproduction: (a) internalized differences in a sense of collective fate and collective empowerment, and (b) differences in the structure and culture of the adult social networks—especially as regards the importance of networks among workmates. Although these two sources of difference are probably causally related and may both make a significant contribution, they are analytically distinct and imply two fundamentally different explanatory principles: a life-

course socialization principle in the first case, and a structural principle in the second.

The Socialization Hypothesis: Educational Ideology in the United States and Germany.—One version of the socialization hypothesis focuses on differences in education. Schools embody the differing conceptions of the life course assumed by the structure of the respective systems. German schools have historically been stratified into three levels (Gymnasium, Realschule, and Hauptschule), oriented toward developing differentiated competencies that provide labor for a stratified occupational structure. Although there has been a steady trend toward increasing flexibility in recent decades, this system has traditionally set parameters that gave individuals a limited range of occupational possibilities after their early teen years. The apprenticeship system was a key mechanism that structured the aspirations and expectations of youth within those parameters, eased the transition to adulthood (Gitter & Scheuer, 1997; Hamilton, 1990), and helped to provide a sense of collective solidarity and entitlement.

In the United States, education has been guided by the “contest norm” of equal opportunity and open competition in which those with talent can excel. And it has been suffused with the individual hope of upward mobility (Turner, 1960). “Rise out of your class, not with it,” is Martin Trow’s inversion of Eugene Debs’ famous challenge, and this ideology remains prominent in education. Of course, the U.S. system is itself highly stratified in ways that serve the needs of the existing occupational structure, its egalitarian pretenses notwithstanding. Thus, the crucial difference between the two is not in stratification per se, but in the visibility of the stratification: In the United States, education as an agent of stratification has been largely invisible, creating a contradiction that has involved massive denial on the part of schools, and confusion and unrealistic expectations for graduating students and young adults (Oakes, 1985; Rosenbaum, 1978).

An obvious consequence of this difference for U.S. students is a lack of realistic understanding of real constraints on their own opportunities, which can lead to a sense of powerlessness and self-blame when expectations for a reasonably prosperous future go unmet. These are, of course, precisely the terms used to describe the response of many U.S. workers to job displacement and downgrading. “Aim for the stars, you can do it” is a familiar refrain of commencement addresses. For many young adults, the translation of this exhortation into past tense is, “It was up to you, and you blew it.” To the extent that this underlying sense of lost opportunity survives in adult consciousness, it may be the basis for continued self-blame that is carried over into adulthood and persists throughout the life course. If such feelings exist in non-college German youth, they are often ameliorated by a sense of normative appropriateness and convoy-like collegiality among age peers who are tracked together to vocational destinations.

The German counterpart features skill training and greater job stability, resulting in a less isolated and hence less powerless position. In this context, individual mobility and achievement have more subdued emphases.

The Structural Hypothesis: Mobility vs Solidarity in Adulthood.—The social-structural hypothesis embodies what is, analytically, a fundamentally different principle. It focuses on the impact of present social circumstances in explaining workers’ attitudes and behavior, in contrast to socialization experiences. These circumstances include longer stints in a single job (less job mobility), contributing to both the expectation and the reality of more enduring relations with coworkers, (Hastings & Hastings, 1993–1994; 1994–1995), and arguably a greater sense of common fate. These factors suggest the likelihood of differences between Germany and the United States in the amount of social support that adults experience from their workmates. German workers have more enduring relationships with coworkers and share more normative expectations of mutual support than their American counterparts, who idealize an entrepreneurial spirit.

The concept of the life-course convoy, defined as a network composed of the “. . . variety of interpersonal relationships that become the basis for social support . . .” over an extended span of time (Antonucci, 1985, p. 97), provides a framework for analyzing workplace networks. As articulated by Kahn (1979) and by Antonucci (1985), this concept provides a framework for characterizing support networks over time on a number of dimensions, including the settings in which convoys are situated. The convoy concept has been largely associated with family and extended family relationships. The question of how well this familistic focus is justified in cross-cultural perspective is one that deserves attention.

Placing the notion of “convoys of social support” in the context of work draws attention to a broader set of issues. As Bengtson, Mangen, and Landry (1984) note, social support is actually a specific subtype of solidarity, which they term “functional” solidarity. The broader concept of solidarity entails affective aspects of affiliation—aspects that are tacit but potentially quite intense—as well as the behavioral and material interdependencies indicated by the concept of social support. Solidarity has been used in the study of families and aging (e.g., Bengtson, 1993; Jerome, 1996), but has a more extensive history in the literature on work and worker attitudes. Although it sometimes connotes union and other forms of social and political activism, the basic definition of solidarity in the work literature entails “mutual protection, friendship, shared meanings, and shared norms,” as well as group boundaries (Hodson et al. 1993, p. 399). Based on the potential importance of workplace social relations sketched above, I propose that the sociology of the life course would do well to consider “convoys of solidarity” as well as “convoys of support.” (Interestingly, the existence of intergenera-

tional solidarity between workers, outside the family, has been identified recently in the European context [Taylor & Walker, 1996]).

At present, no comparative data are available to address the question of whether Germans experience more solidarity with and support from coworkers than do U.S. workers. (It appears clear that adults in the former East Germany do, as comparisons show that they experience much more support from coworkers than do West Germans [Diewald, n.d.].) However, some recent evidence suggests that the importance of support from coworkers in Germany is underestimated even by the conventional wisdom of German social science (Lothar, 1993). The fact that worker solidarity has, in at least one case, been blamed for impeding technical innovation may also serve as an indirect indication of its strength (Busskamp & Pankoke, 1990). It is difficult to imagine such a fear in the contemporary United States.

In sum, I am hypothesizing that the structure and ideology of education, and the structure and ideology of workplace relations, both influence the manner in which adult workers respond to the loss of work and career: In the case of the United States, where ideology celebrates individual mobility on the basis of individual merit, a behavioral response of working harder and faster is accompanied by a subjective tendency toward self-blame. In the German case, where ideology assumes a social contract among workers whose educational and work experience are explicitly stratified, individuals define the problem and appropriate responses in more social terms, and both individual actions and social policies reflect this emphasis.

The Norm of Egalitarianism and the Reality of Disempowerment: The Paradox of Opportunity

These hypotheses pose a paradox. An educational system that explicitly fosters and reproduces social stratification (the German system) may lead to more empowerment of its graduates than one that overtly values an open structure of equal opportunity (the U.S. system). If reality does not conform to the ideal, then the foregoing account argues for giving preference to a cultural script of how things work that fairly accurately matches the reality. But because an integral aspect of the operation of general processes of social legitimization is to provide casuistries that justify any strongly institutionalized state of affairs, this preference does at the same time entail a danger of abandoning the ideal of open opportunity.

Directly relevant to age integration, there is also an instantiation of this paradox beyond schooling, in adulthood. This paradox concerns the presumed oppressiveness of powerfully normative age-grading. Germany is a more explicitly and formally age-graded society than is the United States, where ideas of age irrelevance or a "flexible life course" get a better reception. But, if it is the case that there is a stronger base of support from coworkers, and if there are more institutionalized opportunities for education

and retraining through the middle years in Germany, Germans may have more resources and feel more empowered in the face of their own advancing age (at least until age 65)—in spite of what appears to be a less "progressive" sense of aging.

The contrasts sketched here are preliminary and inevitably oversimplified. However, to the extent that the general argument is credible, it advocates neither the German nor any other particular form of education or workplace relations. Rather, it argues for the importance of a self-understanding that goes beyond the distortions of ideologies whose promise has not been and cannot be fulfilled, such as those of the U.S. myths of open opportunity and the normality of upward mobility. Of course, in Germany no less than the United States, schooling has entailed a progressive view of the future that always includes hope for a better individual life. However, differences in idealized notions of the character of that life and how to achieve it are connected to different understandings of the importance of economic and political structures and their role in regulating opportunity.

This point returns us to the issue of structural lag, and of the potentials of education to reinvent itself in lifelong terms. In both societies, the exigencies of the labor market have led to an expansion of lifelong education, and thereby to a loosening of conventional roles and age norms. However, in neither society is this a one-dimensional matter. Despite Germany's relative emphasis on age as an exclusionary criterion, the expectation that German institutions will invest in retraining or field education, and innovations such as "educational vacations" (Bildungsurlaub), provide a set of institutional supports for constructing more flexible life-course patterns, quite apart from those suggested by the de-institutionalizing tendencies associated with the "risk society" (Beck, Giddance, & Lash, 1995). In the United States, more than half of those enrolled in higher education are "nontraditional" (post-25-year-old) students, and this has been true for more than a decade. Yet, many such students seem to enter the system with the feeling that their age makes them off-time "deviant cases" or "misfits." Despite increasingly public evidence to the contrary, the self-perception that each is a lone ranger, embarked on a dubious journey through terrain uncharted "by someone my age," remains surprisingly robust.

One can imagine a different midlife consciousness, were students confronted in their schooling with a critical review of nascent cultural assumptions regarding such things as aging and the life course, work and mobility, and were they given the conceptual tools for envisioning and demanding possibilities for the personal tailoring and intentional alteration of the life course, and for confronting the problem of simultaneously realizing such tailored life courses in the context of community life. Such a curriculum would need to include an analytical framework that educated workers to the possibilities and limits of individual versus collective actions. If society is to redress what Riley, Kahn, and Foner (1994) correctly identify as its failure to provide adequate life-course

opportunities for individuals, such a self-understanding will likely be a necessary step in creating the conditions in which the promise of genuine opportunity can be more nearly realized.

Acknowledgment

Address correspondence to Dr. Dale Dannefer, Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development, University of Rochester, Dewey Hall, Rochester, NY 14627. E-mail: dane@troi.cc.rochester.edu

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The Future of Age Integration in Employment

John C. Henretta, PhD

Department of Sociology, University of Florida, Gainesville.

Retirement is a relatively new institution. Although formal retirement programs have been traced to the

19th century (Graebner, 1988), most older workers remained in the labor force until the creation of So-

cial Security (Ransom & Sutch, 1986). Those who did retire before the development of public retirement systems depended primarily on family support or individual savings (Carter & Sutch, 1996; Costa, 1998; Gratton, 1996). Moreover, the low levels of retirement income available to most U.S. workers until the 1970s made retirement primarily a safety net for those older workers with declining health or unable to find a job. Among women, retirement from employment as a common life-course experience awaited the arrival at retirement of cohorts with extensive lifetime employment—a development that has only occurred in recent years. Hence, retirement for leisure is a new experience for the United States and other industrial societies and has existed in its current form for only about 25 years. Yet, this new pattern is now accepted as a “matter-of-course” aspect of modern society.

Declining labor force participation among older men and women (Gendell & Siegel, 1992) and the growth of leisure retirement have been produced by increases in Social Security benefits (Henretta & Lee, 1996; Ippolito, 1990), firm pensions (Hurd, 1990), disability benefits (Henretta & Lee, 1996), and a changing workplace (Henretta, 1994a). Earlier retirement has produced a more age-segregated workplace. Retirement institutions and other employment changes remove older workers from the labor force at relatively early ages more thoroughly than in the past.

In this essay, I discuss the direction and implications of current and possible future trends in workplace age integration. If current trends were to continue over the next 20 years, we would not expect much change in labor force participation patterns of older workers. Yet, there is good reason to expect that some of the trends supporting early retirement may shift in the near future in ways that favor greater labor force participation at older ages. I first discuss these trends—demographic change, revisions in Social Security retirement rules, and employment changes. I then discuss the ways that these changes may lead to a redefinition of the social significance of age and encourage employers to implement job redesign that will provide more attractive opportunities for older workers. Equally important is the interest of older workers in remaining in employment, and I discuss this issue as well.

Though I will not actually measure age integration quantitatively, the analysis will focus on the level of labor force participation among the older population. This focus ignores the proportion of the younger population in employment, although labor force participation rates of younger workers have changed over time, particularly among women. Yet, as a practical matter, labor force participation among older age groups is currently so low that age integration of the workplace may be examined by focusing on their participation rates alone.

A Review of Recent Labor Force Participation Trends

The trends in men’s and women’s labor force participation have diverged somewhat in recent years. After large decreases in employment after age 60 dur-

ing the 1970s and early 1980s, the rate of decline for men slowed noticeably during the late 1980s (Henretta, 1994b). In the 1990s there has been virtually no change in the percentage of men aged 60–64 in the labor force, but between 1992 and 1997 there was a slight increase from 55.3 to 55.6%. It is likely that the declining unemployment and tight labor markets of the 1990s played a part in stabilizing labor force participation levels. However, the reasons for the end of the early retirement trend are not well understood (Quinn, 1997, 1998; Ruhm, 1996).

The trend for women is somewhat different because of the higher level of midlife employment characteristic of more recent birth cohorts of women. During the 1970s and 1980s, the percentage of women aged 60–64 in the labor force increased very slightly, reflecting a balance between a trend toward earlier retirement and a trend toward higher midlife labor force participation rates among successive birth cohorts (Henretta, 1994b). These trends continued during the 1990s, resulting in an increase in labor force participation from 37.1% in 1992 to 40.2% in 1997.

These trends in labor force participation indicate virtually no change in employment age integration among persons 60–64 years old over the last 5 years. In the following sections, I review three factors that will be influential in determining the amount of employment age integration in the future: demographic trends, changes in public benefit systems, and the changing organization of work.

Demographic Context of the Early 21st Century Age Composition

During the second decade of the next century, the age composition of the U.S. population will be considerably different than it is today. The large postwar birth cohorts will be entering the age stratum that currently has high retirement rates. Because the cohorts that followed them were relatively small, the ratio of workers approaching retirement to those in younger age groups will be very different from today. Table 1 shows the birth years of the four cohorts that will be used to illustrate this process, and the ages of their members in 1996 and 2016. The postwar cohort, born between 1952 and 1956, ages from 40–44 years old in 1996 to 60–64 years in 2016. The preceding depression cohort (born 1932–1936) and the succeeding cohort (born 1972–1976) were both smaller than this one. In addition to the size of the cohort at birth, a cohort in later life is also affected by the mortality and immigration that occurred earlier.

Table 1. Birth Cohorts Used in the Analysis

Birth Cohort	Age in 1996	Age in 2016
1992–1996		20–24
1972–1976	20–24	40–44
1952–1956	40–44	60–64
1932–1936	60–64	

The changing projected age composition of the U.S. population between 1996 and 2015 is illustrated in Table 2 by using these cohorts (middle series projections from Bureau of the Census, 1998a, 1998b). In 1996, the size of the 60–64 year age category was about half (.48) that of the 40–44 age category and slightly more than half (.56) that of the 20–24 age category. Hence, the cohort entering the standard retirement years around 1996 is relatively small in relation to the remaining potential workforce. The birth cohort that was aged 40–44 in 1996 will be noticeably reduced by mortality 20 years later. But, in relative terms it will be approximately as large (.98) as the population aged 40–44 at that time, and about .84 the size of the population aged 20–24. Hence, the cohort entering the ages at which retirement occurs will be relatively large.

The implication of this cohort succession is not that cohort members literally replace each other in specific jobs. The constant disappearance of some jobs and the net creation of others in the economy is much too complex for such a model. Moreover, demography does not determine destiny. Population age composition is only one of many factors affecting employment patterns. But, given a particular level of demand for experienced workers (or workers overall) and holding other factors constant, the exit of the retirement age cohort in 2016 (or 2015) will affect employers much more than retirement does today. Similar data are often used to illustrate the increasing cost of retirement to the Social Security system or the implications for financial markets (as older workers sell their holdings to pay retirement expenses). A quite different implication is the possible effect on employers who will be losing large numbers of trained employees—a proportion that will be much more noticeable than the exit of retirees today. The implications of age composition for age integration will be discussed below.

Education Level

Throughout this century, members of more recent cohorts have been better educated than preceding ones. The postwar birth cohorts are the last ones for which this statement will be true. This change is illustrated by Table 3 (Bureau of the Census, 1996). Note that the data shown in Table 3 are only for 1996. By examining birth cohorts who had reached the age at

Table 2. Size (in millions) of the U.S. Population in Selected Age Categories, 1996 and 2015

Age	Population Size	
	1996	2015
20–24	17.6	21.9
40–44	20.8	18.7
60–64	10.0	18.4

Source: Middle series projections from Bureau of the Census, 1998a, 1998b.

Table 3. Percentage High School and College Graduates, Selected Ages in the U.S., 1996

Age	% High School Graduates	% College Graduates
25–29	88	28
40–44	89	28
60–64	76	20

Source: Bureau of the Census, 1996.

which almost all cohort members have completed formal schooling, it is possible to compare levels of attainment between cohorts. It can be seen that the depression birth cohort, aged 60–64 in 1996, has lower levels of schooling than younger cohorts. However, there is virtually no difference between the early 1950s and late 1960s birth cohorts. This comparison uses ages 25–29 (born in 1967–71) instead of ages 20–24 to capture those who have completed most of their schooling. While the retirement of the depression cohort will raise the educational level of the workforce, the same will not be true of the retirement of the 1950s cohort.

This comparison does not include all relevant factors affecting the relative educational level of cohorts. First, it is possible that there will be more midlife returns to school. If so, cohort levels of schooling might increase noticeably throughout life. These new patterns may not involve traditional degree programs, and it is unclear whether today's young or midlife cohort will be more affected over the next 20 years. Second, it is often asserted that older workers have outdated skills. While this statement usually refers to job-specific training, one aspect of outdated skills has probably been the lower general schooling level of older workers that makes constant updating more difficult.

In future years, this outdateding of skills (which can be modified by lifelong learning) may be outweighed by the decline in verbal ability. According to Alwin (1991), verbal scores (adjusted for changes in education levels) are lower in successive cohorts born since the early part of the 20th century. However, up until the birth cohort of approximately 1948, this decline in verbal scores (controlling for education) was outweighed by the positive effect of higher levels of schooling on verbal scores. Hence, overall verbal scores were stable or rising among successive cohorts. Without more education to compensate for their lower verbal ability, young cohorts in the future may be less desirable employees than older cohorts. The retiring cohort in 2016 will be the cohort born in the early 1950s, just after the peak in verbal abilities. Hence, one of the often-cited advantages of young workers over old may no longer be true.

Health and Disability

Although the evidence is complex and sometimes ambiguous (Crimmins, 1996), a growing number of studies report better health and less disability among members of successive cohorts in later life (Crim-

mins, Saito, & Reynolds, 1997; Manton, Corder, & Stallard, 1993; Manton, Stallard, & Corder, 1997). If the preliminary evidence suggesting improved health among elderly people also indicates a trend that will affect younger cohorts as they age, we would expect future elderly cohorts to enjoy better health and more vigor at later ages (e.g., Fogel & Costa, 1997). As with education, cohort change in health (as well as increasing longevity) may redefine the social meaning of age. Ages that today are considered "old" may be redefined as "middle-aged." Social and self-expectations for persons in their 60s and 70s may change with better health and vigor, as may the willingness of persons at these ages to engage in meaningful employment. Employers may change their attitudes in line with the change in social expectations and be more willing to create attractive opportunities for older workers. To the extent that employers create such opportunities, the willingness of older employees to continue working may depend, in part, on both their health and their health-driven perception of the significance of being a particular age.

The Changing Context of Government Regulation

The Social Security retirement system has already been modified to alter the age of benefit receipt. The birth cohort of 1952 falls about in the middle of the phase-in period for these changes. Their age for full Social Security benefit receipt will be 66 years (instead of the current 65 years). Those receiving benefits at age 62 will receive 75% of the full amount, compared to 80% today (Social Security Administration, 1995). While there is current discussion of proposals to move the age of Social Security benefit eligibility even later, further changes may not affect the 1952 birth cohort. A later eligibility age reduces the attractiveness of early labor force exit; hence, its likely qualitative effect is delayed retirement. It is difficult to predict the size of the effect because of the importance of employer pension benefits, which are projected to be more common and provide a higher proportion of income in the period after 2010 (Reno, 1993). Workers with good employer defined pension benefits may continue to retire early (Wise, 1997). Some employers who wish to shed older workers may supplement pensions to compensate for the Social Security changes; or, alternatively, employers may change pension plans to encourage later retirement if they become concerned about losing a large number of their trained workers to retirement. Workers in poor health may continue to leave the labor force with either Social Security disability benefits or reduced Social Security retirement benefits. Those workers with small or no pensions are likely to work longer (Wise, 1997). While all these factors make the quantitative effect of a change in the Social Security retirement age uncertain, the expected effect of later Social Security benefit receipt will clearly be increased age integration in the workplace as more older workers—especially those without company pensions—continue in the labor force.

Changing Employment

The nature of employment also has been changing in ways that are likely to encourage paid work at later ages than today. Henretta (1994a), published as a chapter in *Age and Structural Lag* (Riley, Kahn, & Foner, 1994), examined the ways that age structures employment careers through state and workplace rules and institutions that provide both increasing rewards with longer tenure as well as a defined exit point. Henretta argued that the long-term trend of increasing institutional support for age-structured employment careers had halted or perhaps reversed. This change has resulted from the combined effects of trends in pension provision, the distribution of employment across industries, and the organization of work within firms. The implication for younger workers is that they are less likely to spend their careers in jobs that provide increasing rewards and security for longer tenure with the firm. For older workers, the expectation is for more variable patterns of career endings plus the possibility that more noncareer jobs will be available to older workers. I summarize and illustrate the argument below; greater detail and references to the literature may be found in the original source.

Changing Pensions

An increasing proportion of pension coverage involves defined contribution pensions instead of the more traditional defined benefit plans. The key characteristic of defined contribution plans that reduces the age structuring of employment is that they lack the benefit "cliff" of defined benefit plans. That is, many defined benefit plans strongly encourage retirement relatively soon after first pension eligibility because the higher benefits accrued through further work are not equal to the pension payments forgone by working longer. By contrast, the growth in defined contribution plans, which lack incentives to retire at a specific age, reduces this strong incentive for early retirement, though defined benefit incentives will continue to affect many workers (Wise, 1997).

Changes in Industrial Structure

A second change in employment has been the growth of service industries at the relative expense of manufacturing. Firms in the service sector are more likely to have contingent and part-time employment arrangements. Service firms are smaller, tend to be in competitive sectors, and must often adjust the workforce to demand. Hence, they present more opportunities for older workers to obtain part-time or short-term employment contracts.

Within-Firm Changes in Employment

As a result of increasing competition and technological change, some employers keep a smaller proportion of their employees in long-term "career" employment and more in shorter-term positions whose continuation is contingent on demand. These trends

can be illustrated in academic employment, where there appears to be a growth in the use of adjunct faculty. Colleges and universities gain in two ways. First, adjunct faculty cost less because of lower per-course salary and lack of benefits. Second, use of adjunct faculty makes adjustments to changing student demand easier. Proposals to end tenure in universities are, in part, directed toward the same end. Fixed-term contracts would provide managers with greater flexibility in determining the mix of teaching staff. In the earlier article (Henretta, 1994a), I discuss evidence that suggests a modest increase in the use of these arrangements among employers generally. Osterman (1988) points to two limitations on use of these contingent labor arrangements. First, employers' use of contingent labor in the postwar era has been aided by the growing female labor force. As more women move into full-time employment, there may not be an adequate supply of contingent workers. Second, employers are likely to want a mix of long-term and short-term employees because there are certain tasks they will not wish to entrust to part-time employees.

While most workers continue to have relatively long-term ties to their employers, the decrease in age structuring has implications that vary by age and, among older workers, by pension entitlement. This point can be illustrated with the earlier example of academic employment. While some young and midlife faculty choose adjunct status because of family or other responsibilities, the majority would probably prefer more traditional age-structured employment. For older faculty who have substantial accrued pension benefits, short-term teaching assignments do not have the same drawbacks and may be attractive opportunities because they allow income supplementation and continued access to the life of the university without the responsibilities of a full-time job. An older faculty member (or any older worker) without substantial pension entitlement would probably find a part-time job no more attractive than a younger employee.

The Significance of Demographic Changes

Demographic changes have several potential effects. First, the large relative number of older workers in the future and their relatively high educational level is likely to make them highly sought after in a number of fields. Conditional on the continued growth of employment, the shift in the ratio of older to younger workers implies that employers may be less likely to encourage early retirement and, instead, may take steps to retain older workers. Such steps might include the redesign of jobs so that older employees can take increased advantage of the leisure afforded by their pension accumulations while continuing involvement in employment. The ability of an increasing number of employers to offer such opportunities will be aided by the shifting trends in employment sectors and the changing within-firm organization of work. That is, the growth of work organization that focuses on shorter-term relationships

and increased subcontracting provides a natural area to create jobs that will need workers and may be attractive to older workers.

It is very likely that increased employment opportunities for older workers will be uneven. For example, employers may encourage early retirement by workers in declining employment areas while trying to retain workers in growing areas. The segment of the older working population without pension entitlement or with low pension entitlement will continue to seek full-time employment, whereas those with large pension entitlements may prefer shorter-term commitments. The key point in considering workforce age integration is the balance between these different trends. Shifting population characteristics will change the balance so that more workers will be retained in the labor force because of employers' efforts. The increased use of defined contribution pensions and the change in Social Security benefit ages will increase workers' willingness to continue work. The growing use of contingent employment may provide the vehicle through which employers' and employees' interests will be joined.

Demographic change may also have an important impact on institutions and culture. As large cohorts have passed through youthful phases of life they have spawned social and cultural revolutions (Braungart & Braungart, 1986). Why should a large cohort passing through later life not likewise change institutions? Social structures treat young and old as distinct categories, compared to a large undifferentiated category of adults between them. Both young and old people have been assigned nonwork roles, whereas those in the middle have been assigned work roles. Exclusion from the central institution of a "work society" (Kohli, 1986) devalues older persons because they are effectively excluded from the most important institution signifying adult status. A large cohort moving through later life may challenge such stereotypes. Improved health may push back the age at which members of this cohort define themselves as "old." High levels of education may lead many to be dissatisfied with the social roles commonly assigned to older people. And, the large size of the cohort will mean that older people will have a large effect on social attitudes through their involvement in consumption, politics, the workplace, and other spheres of life.

The redefinition of age and aging does not imply that everyone will want to work longer. Some will eagerly choose leisure or meaningful involvement outside of employment, aided by pensions and private saving. But, the key point is that a large older cohort in good health has the potential for a revolutionary redefinition of aging—both with respect to employment and social involvement generally. Such a change would support the attempts by employers to attract or retain older employees.

Will Older Employees Want To Work Longer?

The discussion to this point has focused primarily on the demand for older workers—changes in the

older population and the nature of employment that may lead some employers to hire or retain older workers. What will be the supply of older workers to fill this demand? Changes in Social Security will mean that those workers without pensions are likely to work longer. The shift to defined contribution plans reduces the number of persons affected by the incentive for early retirement found in many defined benefit plans. On the other hand, the higher proportion of workers projected to receive pension benefits may reduce the number of persons interested in continued work.

Another way to examine possible supply of older workers is to examine the attitudes of today's older workers toward retirement, focusing on questions that imply interest in the types of flexible employment that may be offered in the future. The Health and Retirement Study, conducted with respondents aged 51–61 in 1992, contains a number of questions about postretirement plans. Most useful for this analysis is a question asked of all respondents: "Some people want to stop paid work entirely when they retire, while others would like to continue doing some paid work. What about you?" Responses to this question indicate that an overwhelming majority of men and women say they would like to continue some paid work—over 77% for men and 71% for women.

Yet, other evidence from this survey suggests that there is only limited flexibility in the current jobs held by this cohort. Of those respondents who are currently working, a large majority are employees, with only 23% of men and 14% of women being self-employed. Self-employment may give greater flexibility in determining the amount one will work, though that is not always the case (Hurd, 1993). For example, self-employment in a job that requires a large capital investment may not be profitable unless it is pursued full time. Among current employees, 85% of men and 65% of women usually work 35 or more hours for 50 or more weeks per year. Of these full-time workers, relatively few say they could reduce their regular work hours on their current job. About three quarters of men and women say it would not be possible.

These data, taken together, allow some estimates about the amount of flexibility to reduce hours among the cohort now approaching retirement. This estimate of flexibility is likely to err on the high side because it is not necessarily the case that these indicators reflect the amount of flexibility that would actually exist at older ages. If we assume that those who are self-employed, who work less than full time, full year, or who say they could reduce hours on their current job have flexibility, half of currently employed men and 58% of women have some flexibility. The greater work flexibility of women is consistent with their higher probability of being in contingent employment. The percentage who have flexibility is far below the percentage who say they would like to continue some work after retirement. Moreover, in the modal case (the full-time, full-year employee), only about one quarter of respondents say they have

any flexibility in hours although most would like to continue some work. The evidence suggests, therefore, that either significant job changing from pre-retirement to postretirement jobs will be required, or significant job redesign must occur.

The Redesign of Jobs

Job changes at retirement are often not a particularly attractive option. Job skills may not be transferable, and intangible aspects of a relationship with an employer cannot be transferred. In many cases, continued work requires changing firms, entering low paid employment, and not utilizing accumulated skills. The absence of part-time opportunities integrated in career-type employment reflects a rigidity in employer behavior resulting from fixed costs in employment and the technology of production (Hurd, 1993) as well as employer attitudes. To the degree that demographic change leads future employers to see older workers as a large, desirable, and needed pool of potential employees, they may engage in creative job redesign and incur some costs in order to attract this source of employees. The analysis of retirement plans presented above suggests that older workers would be interested in increased employment opportunities.

Negative Aspects of Increased Age Integration of Employment

The costs and benefits of increased age integration fall unevenly. An increase in older full-time workers, drawn partly from those without firm pensions and motivated by reduced age-62 Social Security retirement benefits, will be a disadvantage to those in poor health. On the other hand, greater opportunities in full-time employment will benefit those who desire continued full-time work and those in good health who lack sufficient resources to retire. The growth of the contingent labor force, attractive to some younger workers, is unattractive to most because it often offers less secure jobs. These disadvantages may be less compelling for some older workers; yet, they are purchased at the cost of greater insecurity over the life course for all cohorts and, as discussed earlier, contingent work would not be the first choice of many older workers who lack significant pension accumulation.

Conclusion

Social trends are seldom the result of one factor. I have argued in this essay that a number of underlying trends will combine in the near future, with the likely result that more older persons will remain in the labor force longer. Some trends are likely to produce greater demand for older workers, assuming continued growth in employment. These trends include the shifting population age composition and the high education and ability levels of cohorts born around 1950. Other changes will contribute to the supply of older workers, including changes in Social Security

eligibility ages, the shift to defined contribution pension plans, and the improving health of successive cohorts. The result of these changes is likely to be an increase in the full-time employment of older workers for those without pensions as well as more part-time employment, particularly for those with significant pension entitlement. The model for the type of part-time or part-year employment that can join the likely employer demand and worker supply is the redefinition of jobs and the use of more short-term, contingent employment arrangements. This model, already used by employers for workers of all ages, is an example of a work organization that may retain or attract older workers. Data on workers nearing retirement today indicate substantial interest in postretirement part-time work. Hence, employer efforts to retain older workers will likely meet with success, leading toward greater age integration.

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Address correspondence to John C. Henretta, P.O. Box 117330, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-7330. E-mail: jch@soc.ufl.edu

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Age Integration as a Solution to Work–Family Conflict

Karyn Loscocco, PhD

Department of Sociology, State University of New York at Albany.

The work–family conflict faced by people in the middle stages of life, when role demands are at their

peak, is hardly news. In fact, work–family conflict has gone from a “side bar issue” to a “front page phenom-

enon" (Googins, 1991). While the private and public spheres offer mostly inadequate solutions, and individuals mostly muddle through, researchers and social analysts are sounding an alarm. It is time to discuss solutions as far-reaching and revolutionary as the changes that have brought us to this critical point. I propose that a more fully age-integrated society, in which people intersperse education, work, and leisure over the life course, could be such a solution. The age-integrated model of society (Riley, 1994) is an "ideal type" that provides a comprehensive framework for possible change; it is one that integrates current thinking from family and gender scholars, organizational scholars, corporate consultants, and analysts of work and the economy.

The Crux of Work–Family Conflict: Social Change and Structural Lag

The main source of work–family conflict is the erosion of the gender division of labor that was the foundation of the industrial era and the age-segregated life course. With women caring for children and running households, men had been able to focus their energies on work. By 1992, only 18% of families followed the traditional model of employed husband and homemaker wife (Reskin & Padavic, 1994). Even mothers of young children, that last bastion of female reserve, have a labor force participation rate of 63%, five times higher than it was in 1950 (Cherlin, 1998). Thus, the majority of working men have lost the advantages of having someone managing their personal lives, and they are losing that advantage sooner after their children arrive than in decades past.

Of course, women in the labor force have never enjoyed such an arrangement. Experts estimate that by the year 2000 there will be more women than men in the labor pool from which employers draw new entrants into the workforce (Stautberg, 1987). The vast majority of women currently in the labor force are in their childbearing years, and 80 to 90% of these women are expected to have children during their working lives (Galinsky, Friedman, & Hernandez, 1991; Stautberg, 1987). Increases in births outside of marriage and steady divorce rates of about 50% mean that there are far more single parents in the labor force than ever before. One recent study found that 23% of mothers in the workforce were single parents (Galinsky & Bond, 1996). Thus, a very small and ever shrinking percentage of the labor force benefits from the unpaid work of a full-time homemaker. At the same time, caregiving for elders is something that people are increasingly likely to take on at multiple times over the life course (Marks, 1996; Moen, Robinson, & Fields, 1994).

Yet, social institutions have not adapted to these tremendous changes in the ways that people live their work and family lives. There is a "structural lag" in the relationship between the two dynamisms that are played out in every society: the dynamism of changing lives has been outstripping the dynamism of structural change (Riley, 1987). More people from

all walks of life experience work–family conflict as they wait for social structures to recognize that they are not free to devote themselves to work for several consecutive decades. Now that the responsibilities for work and family are not divided neatly along gender lines in most families, workers increasingly experience role overload; they simply have too much to do. One study of working people found almost "universal exhaustion" (Googins, 1991, p. 302). Others document a sense of freneticism in the families that they studied "up close" (Helgesen, 1998; Hochschild, 1997). Working parents also experience role strain, because work and family compete and conflict (e.g., Greenhaus, 1988; Kanter, 1977).

Because work institutions have largely continued to operate without paying attention to employees' personal lives, individuals and families shoulder the burden of keeping their family lives from intruding too much upon work. Work, of course, continues to spill over into family lives. Yet, now most families do not have a wife at home to buffer work's impact. In an exhaustive review of research done in the 1980s, Menaghan and Parcel (1990) found well-documented evidence of role strain in dual earner households at all socioeconomic levels. Although some studies suggest that work–family conflict is experienced similarly by men and women (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Keith & Schafer, 1980), there is also evidence that women continue to bear primary responsibility for home and family and the brunt of work–family conflict (Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994; Pleck, 1985; Simon, 1992; Thoits, 1986).

Leisure is perhaps the greatest casualty of the work–family crunch, especially among women. People attend to the pressing, immediate needs of jobs and children, relegating their social and personal lives to the "back burner" (Barnett & Rivers, 1996, p. 93). With so many people weighed down by work–family conflict, communities suffer as well. People have more limited time and energy for volunteer work. Nor can they as easily nurture the friendships and neighborly relations that have often been key sources of social support (Googins, 1991).

Families are expected to solve the dilemmas of trying to raise children, have fulfilling personal lives, maintain their schools and communities, and devote themselves to work—while government and corporations mostly take a hands-off approach. Existing solutions are largely piecemeal, and do little to alter the dominance of work institutions over individual lives. Nor do they challenge the traditional model of the life course; instead, they assume a standard sequence of education, work and family, and then leisure. Finally, they do not acknowledge the kinds of fundamental changes in social structure that are needed if work–family balance is to go from a much-touted ideal to a much-needed reality. We are at a juncture that may be every bit as significant as the shift to the separate work and family spheres of industrial society (Googins, 1991; Rifkin, 1995; Siegel, 1990). Although, short-term solutions are vital, it is also time to consider the larger social changes that would be required

to provide lasting benefits to individuals and to society (Moen, 1992).

Age Integration as a Potential Solution

The age-integrated model of social structure provides the kind of template that is useful if society works toward a comprehensive solution to the urgent problem of work–family conflict. As scholars of aging and age stratification, Matilda White Riley and colleagues noted that changes in the ways that people “grow up and grow old” had not been matched by changes in how the life course was set up. The biological and social underpinnings of the typical education, work/family, and leisure sequence had been altered, leading to strains on institutions and individuals (Riley, 1987; Riley & Riley, 1994). The solution they proposed was to move toward greater age integration by diminishing age barriers and bringing people of different ages together. No longer would age determine what roles an individual holds; instead, opportunities in all structures—education, work, family, leisure—would be open to people of every age, within the limits of biology (Best, 1980; Riley & Riley, 1994). Though the impetus for the age-integration perspective came from the study of older people who were enjoying unprecedented long and healthy lives, Riley and colleagues have long emphasized the interconnections among different age strata (e.g., Riley, Foner, & Waring, 1988). Thus, they have argued that age integration would enhance the quality of life not just for older people but for people of all ages.

The Promise of Age Integration

Ideally, a society in which people intersperse education, work, and leisure over the course of their lives is one in which role strain and role overload at midlife can be dramatically lessened. With work spread out over the entire course of a lifetime, the most intense period of many jobs and careers would not have to come at the height of family responsibilities. People would be free to choose the optimal time for their intense periods of commitment to new employers or new careers. One group of researchers recently suggested that women would do best to have their children early and postpone their careers until their youngest child was about 13, because their analyses showed much less work–family conflict at that point (Higgins & Duxbury, 1994). Others contend that establishing oneself at work first, and having children much later in life, may be the best work–family strategy (Sekaran & Hall, 1989). As child rearing has become increasingly removed from biological capacity, the latter choice can be taken more seriously. In the next wave, young women will be able to freeze their eggs and fertilize them later in life. These and other patterns that de-couple work and family would be normative in a more age-integrated society.

Nor would education and training be crowded into the earliest stages of life, but instead be accepted as a possibility throughout life. In fact, continuous learning may be *required* by current and predicted

future turbulence in the labor market. As Kuttner (1997) argues, the labor market has become a product market where employers buy labor only for as long as they need it. To fit this new reality, future careers would be a series of mini-learning stages, and career stages would be measured by the nature of the job rather than the chronological age of the job’s incumbent (Hall & Mirvis, 1995). Hall (1989) suggests that organizations that do away with age-based promotion systems will be at an advantage, as people live longer and desire continued employment.

The age-integration model could also address the paradox that whereas women experience the most work–family conflict, they have benefited in noneconomic ways from their mass movement into the paid labor force. Researchers have shown that multiple roles are actually beneficial to well-being (Baruck, Barnett, & Rivers, 1983; Moen, McClain, & Williams, 1989; Thoits, 1986). Such findings support Marks’ (1977) contention that commitment and energy are not scarce resources, but expandable ones. Furthermore, studies have documented that paid work provides physical and mental health benefits for women (e.g., Baruch et al., 1983). Still, as Moen (1992) points out, employment is good for women only under certain social conditions; it leads to role strain and role overload particularly when children are young. Research suggests that spending moderate amounts of time on paid work, marital, and parental roles buffers the distress caused by caring for elderly parents, but too much time in these multiple roles exacerbates the distress (Voydanoff & Donnelly, 1999). In a society in which roles were spread out, and reduced work schedules were more normative, people could reduce work when their family demands were greatest. There is every reason to believe that people could have multifaceted lives in a more age-integrated society. In fact, the age integrated model frees people to add more roles to their lives once work plays a smaller part.

A widespread revamping of the life course could address the problems of all kinds of workers, rather than focusing on the relatively privileged, as is currently the case. As one example, in a society in which people were no longer expected to get their education and then “hit the career ground running,” poor teenage mothers might not be as quickly relegated to a life of trying to play “catch up.” With more people taking education, leisure or family breaks from full-time work, there would also be a more equitable distribution of work. Currently, fewer and fewer people are working, but they are working longer and longer hours (Bluestone and Rose, 1997; Schor, 1991). Books titled *The End of Work* (Rifkin, 1995), *The Jobless Economy* (Dunkerley, 1996), and *When Work Disappears* (Wilson, 1996) warn of a future in which there will be even less work available. An age integrated society could provide more societal balance in work hours and help alleviate the very real, but often overlooked, work–family conflict felt by those who cannot find enough work to make ends meet.

It could also help meet the demands of the growing numbers of older people who seek employment. People are living longer and healthier, and nearly one third of the average adult life is now spent in retirement. The concept of growing old in a context that does not include paid work is new (Googins, 1991). There has been an increase in self-employment and part-time work among older people (Fuchs, 1982; McKie, 1992) and a reversal of men's tendency to retire earlier and earlier (Burkhauser & Quinn, 1997), suggesting that many have rejected this concept.

The age-integration perspective can further public policy initiatives by urging employers and government to consider work-family issues as part of a larger set of life course issues, rather than an isolated phenomenon of relatively short duration. When we take into account people of all ages, our solutions will be less piecemeal, and they are apt to foster intergenerational cooperation instead of competition (Riley, 1994). For example, if programs to let people cut back when they have heavy family responsibilities were to free-up paid jobs for older people, this could simultaneously solve the work-family strain of midlife and help to ease the social security crisis. Also, if people in the middle stages of life were less consumed by work responsibilities, they would be able to help older relatives in need of assistance.

Finally, integration of education and leisure throughout longer work lives would address the dominance of work institutions over family ones. Integrating major role activities throughout the labor force requires scaling back on the time and energy given to work. Thus, unlike many popular work-family programs, the rephased life course would free people from the current demands of work, rather than simply help them to accommodate to those demands (Gonyea & Googins, 1996). This has become increasingly urgent. Hochschild's (1997) study of a family-friendly company she called Amerco showed that, as the workplace takes up more time, family time becomes increasingly rationalized, commodified, and compressed. A vicious cycle drains family life of its former "haven" qualities and perpetuates the imbalance, as people increasingly turn to work to escape the pressures and "nothingness" of their sped-up, commodified home lives. Hochschild argues that, in a curious twist, many now view work as more of a haven. A study of women in the heart of the suburban Midwest uncovered a similar disturbing hectic pace of home life (Helgesen, 1998). Goldscheider and Waite (1991) warn that interactions within families are vitally important, and unless more attention is given to the home, society will end up with "no families."

Making the Age-Integrated Model Work

To benefit from the new possibilities afforded by age integration, new policies would be needed that support these possibilities.

First, outmoded definitions and measures of commitment to work would have to change. "Face time," or hours worked, is an odd measure of loyalty or pro-

ductivity, yet companies continue to use it as a proxy, forcing many people to work far more hours than they would like (Clarkenberg, 1998). The whole concept of the current 9-to-5, 40 hours of work, conducted in a central location, is a vestige of an industrial economy with separate spheres for men and women. Once we recognize that centralized work places, fixed work schedules, and time-based definitions of work commitment are socially constructed products of an earlier era (Bailyn, 1993; Harriman, 1982; Hinrichs, Roche, & Sirianni, 1991), it pushes us to think about the benefits of flexplace, flextime, and shorter work schedules in this very different postindustrial period. Bailyn (1993) proposes that the concept of the "family wage," so integral to the gendered separate spheres model of industrial work, be replaced with the notion of the "family workweek." Such a change would facilitate the creation of flexible policies that let individuals and couples arrange a reasonable work-family arrangement. Harriman (1982) contends that companies could organize their work differently without compromising efficiency. While some consumers have surely experienced the inefficiencies of part-timers and job sharers, and the loss in quality that can result from tired employees on compressed work weeks, there is no a priori reason that more systematic and creative planning could not solve such problems.

Many of the most popular solutions to work-family conflict today offer snapshot fixes in keeping with the notion of discrete life stages. An age-integrated perspective suggests policies that recognize the diverse needs of people at all phases of their lives. With a more integrated approach to leisure, an employee might work for a year at 20% pay in trade for 10 weeks off (Harriman, 1982). Employees might be able to accumulate hours over the course of their work lives, which they could use to cut back on work or take a leave, without jeopardizing their job or their family's standard of living. Denmark and Belgium are already experimenting with such programs (Moss, 1996). Even workers on reduced time schedules could bank leave over the course of several fiscal years (Harriman, 1982).

Changes in the nature of work and advances in communication technologies could be used to move back toward a more home-based work center, in which work is a part of the natural rhythm of day-to-day life (Siegel, 1990). This might not be the ideal for all people all of the time. People certainly vary in how much separation between work and family they desire. Still, for many people, personal computers, the Internet, faxes, phone message systems, and conference calls provide enormous flexibility. These can be temporary or more permanent solutions to the dual desire to have a productive work career and to enjoy family life.

Organizations would have to become more comfortable with such arrangements, which seems to be the trend. In fact, a survey by Olsten Corp. Companies reported that almost one third of U.S. companies encourage their employees to telecommute. Among companies with telecommuting options, 86% experi-

enced increased productivity (Staffing Industry Report, 1995, cited in Celente, 1997). It would certainly be easier for people across the socioeconomic spectrum to do more of their work from home if companies and tax policies subsidized the expense. While most professionals can easily afford the equipment required, the clerical worker who is a single mother may not have that luxury. Still, she could fit in some crucial work from home to give her greater flexibility to balance work and parenting responsibilities.

Scheduling flexibility, or flextime, is the most widely adopted work–family policy in place today. Though variation in supervisor support, program specifics, and individual needs may account for the inconsistent reports on the benefits of flextime reported by Glass and Estes (1997), there is reason enough to expand such policies both within and across organizations. For example, one study of nurses uncovered many tangible benefits of flexibility, including less work–family conflict and fewer mental and physical health problems (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). A study of public sector employees found that those using flextime reported more work–family balance and higher job satisfaction (Ezra & Deckman, 1996). Among a sample of 178 employers with company-sponsored child care, 53% saw a decline in absenteeism and 39% reported lower rates of lateness (Burud, Aschbacher, & McCroskey, 1984).

It is also important for companies to extend options for flexible and reduced work schedules to lower level employees. Although upper level white-collar workers are the usual beneficiaries of such policies, the same benefits would likely accrue to lower level employees and their companies. In fact, when Steelcase manufacturing company extended part-time schedules and job-sharing benefits to hourly employees, they reaped a turnover rate of just 3% (Dynerman & Hayes, 1991). Of course, companies must go beyond putting “family friendly” policies in place; company culture must also recognize and support the work–family conflict faced by many employees. Supervisor support of employees’ nonwork demands has been associated with reduced work–family conflict, employee distress and absenteeism, and with greater job satisfaction and employee well-being (Frone et al., 1997; Kossek & Nichol, 1992; Thomas & Ganster, 1995).

Creative programs and policies based on different sets of values would also help realize the full potential of a more age-integrated society. As one example, Betty Friedan (1991) has suggested a voucher system in which every person who cares for children or elders at home would get compensation, perhaps in the form of a tax rebate. The person would get equal credit in the wage earning partner’s pension and Social Security benefits, which would be retained in the event of a divorce. If both parents worked and shared child or elder care, they could use the voucher to pay for help. This would certainly be a marked improvement over current law, which discriminates against families that take care of their own children (Siegel, 1990).

Rifkin’s (1995) notion of a revitalized third sector—a volunteer or social economy—could be a key component of an age-integrated society. Throughout their lives, people might receive a “social wage” in return for community service work. One possibility would be that people would receive a tax credit for every hour that they volunteer. People at all ages who are in periods of lesser time commitment to work—working part time or pursuing education, for example—could do more volunteering. Some might even take community service sabbaticals.

Individual change also plays a role in the ease with which we could move to a more age-integrated society. As others have argued (e.g., Kofodimos, 1993; Schwartz, 1992), people have to be willing to ask tough questions and implement the answers in their quest for more balanced lives. More of us have to realize that it is fairly impossible to “have it all”—at least not all at once. The message of the age-integrated model is that it may well be possible to “have it all” over the course of one’s life—and the “all” may be a lot more enjoyable when it is spread out. Although institutions continue to lag behind, individuals can continue to nudge society in the right direction by using the opportunities that they do have for reducing work–family conflict.

Ideally, jobs would be improved as part of a revision of the pattern of the life course. Many people want to retire because their jobs are too stressful, or not challenging enough, or require too much time. There is surely a segment of people who would be hard pressed to imagine giving up their justly deserved period of leisure at the end of years of productive labor (Riley, 1998). In fact, some people keep themselves going through the midlife crunch by focusing on the retirement light at the end of the work tunnel. The growing numbers of the working poor never have the chance to enjoy a leisurely retirement. Yet, better part-time jobs and enriched jobs, reasonable work demands, and supportive work environments would make it easier for people to continue working into the later decades of their life. The key to a viable rephased life course is a different notion of career. If the work career were no longer one long, uninterrupted obligation, then workers would have periods of leisure that might revitalize them and contribute to their greater work productivity.

Overcoming the Obstacles

Although the tremendous changes required to break down society’s age barriers are not easily accomplished, current trends and historical precedent provide cause for optimism. Overcoming three major “sticking points” could lead to the realization of a society in which people move in and out of education, work, and leisure over the course of their lives, thereby reducing work–family conflict.

Standard of Living

The first obstacle is the almost certain lowered average standard of living that would result in a society

that distributed work more evenly across the life span and therefore across the socioeconomic spectrum. To overcome it, the notion of standard of living would have to shift from its almost purely material definition to one that encompassed a broader range of less tangible "goods," such as time, well-being, and balance. No longer would work identity have preeminence as a measure of self-worth.

This may appear to be a daunting obstacle. Those who benefit from deeply embedded race, class, and gender inequalities are unlikely to "give up" some of their work so that others can have more. This trend toward bifurcation—people are either overworked or struggling to find enough work—has apparently been exacerbated by recent economic developments (Blue-stone & Rose, 1997; Schor, 1991). Still, Rifkin (1995) suggests that continued loss of jobs across industrial sectors and at all levels of the prestige hierarchy may force a shift in thinking about the importance of paid work. In addition, there is some evidence that people are beginning to think more carefully about how much money (and therefore work) they need.

For instance, recent analyses of data from the National Study of Families and Households show that 34% of women and 44% of men would prefer to work fewer hours than they do. Furthermore, while both husband and wife have some type of part-time schedule in only 1 in 50 couples, a much greater number (1 in 6) would like such a situation (Clarken-berg, 1998). The untapped potential for widespread change in how much we work is revealed in two additional findings. First, Clarkenberg finds only modest effects of life stage on work preferences. While having young children does lead women to feel they are working too much, there are no preference differences between those with older children and those with no children. Second, men who work long hours are highly likely to say that they would like to work less, and this finding holds irrespective of the amount of time their wives work. Even when their wives are full-time homemakers or work part time, and are therefore free to take care of household responsibilities, these men want to do less paid work.

Hochschild (1997, pp. 253–254) reports a particularly interesting example of changing work values from ELI, a computer company in Portland, Oregon, where employees voted to "spread the pain" when the company hit hard times, reducing their hours (and pay) so that no one would be laid off. Much to the CEO's surprise, employees did not want to go back to the full-time schedules they were offered when the company recovered.

The "voluntary simplicity" movement touts just such a shift to reducing standard of living and thereby improving quality of life. The movement has certainly been receiving a lot of media attention, and though there are not a lot of hard data, trend-trackers predict that a return to simplicity will be widespread in the next century (e.g., Celente, 1997). Schor (1991) reports the results of a Merck Family Fund national poll that lends support to this prediction. Close to 60% of respondents said that they would like to

simplify their lives, and two thirds said they want more balance in their lives. Schor argues that "down shifters"—those who are working and spending less—are in the vanguard of what could become a major social trend. Schor's national survey of 800 adults showed that nearly one fifth had made a voluntary lifestyle change that lowered their income, and 85% of them were happy about the change they made. Interestingly, another 12% had made such a change involuntarily, but even 25% of them reported that the change was a "blessing in disguise."

The Dominance of Work Institutions

The second, closely related sticking point is the long-standing dominance of work institutions over all others in our society. To realize the potential of an age-integrated society, current structures and supporting norms that allow the dominance of work institutions would have to be altered. Companies would have to accept that many peoples lives have changed, making traditional work arrangements obsolete. The United States has been notoriously slow to address this, as the long journey to a minimal Family and Medical Leave Act demonstrates.

Still, there are many promising developments. The current and projected surge in small business growth may help to move society in the direction of greater balance. Small business owners are probably more eager to join their employees in a partnership that places as much value on flexibility as it does on income. One survey showed that whereas only half of small businesses provide paid sick leave, they are more flexible about unpaid, informal leaves (USSBA, 1987).

Perhaps, fledgling firms or organizations faced with difficult times will help serve as the catalyst that opens some employees' eyes to alternative ways of defining standard of living. If they cannot match the salaries that highly qualified applicants are offered elsewhere, they might counter with a reduced work schedule using the other offers as base pay.

Furthermore, management and organizational analysts argue that companies make the kinds of changes that help employees when they see a direct benefit to the company. As Ferber and O'Farrell (1991) point out, the really innovative programs to reduce work–family conflict come from industries that have the greatest difficulty recruiting labor. Company leaders may well be motivated by the mounting evidence that employees think carefully about companies' work–family policies as they choose their jobs (Gonyea & Googins, 1996; Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997; Ransom, Aschbacher, & Burud, 1989). Research also shows that people who are dissatisfied with workplace flexibility (Rothausen, 1994) or desirous of greater work schedule autonomy (Coakley and Karren, cited in Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999) are more apt to plan to leave their companies.

In addition, executives may respond to pressure from groups working for greater work–family balance. For example, *Working Mother* magazine keeps a list of the "100 best companies" for their readers.

Warner-Lambert made the list in 1999, after an absence of 6 years. When the editor-in-chief of the magazine asked the CEO of Warner-Lambert if he had made a conscious effort to get his company back on their list, he replied, "We are very cognizant of surveys like this. As a company you want to position yourself as being an ideal employer so that you can attract the best people. That clearly makes you a leader." He went on to suggest that the old attitude that employers can simply replace the people who don't conform to their stringent work norms is a costly one. "Turnover is incredibly expensive. Not just in terms of hiring costs, either. . . . What about the mistakes that happen because of the loss of experience? What about customers—they like to relate to the same person. And experienced workers are just more productive." (Culbreth, 1999).

If carefully designed future studies document the likely economic benefits of a work institution that is fully integrated with other social institutions, companies will make the necessary shifts. In the short term, employers simply need to hear more about the growing body of research evidence that work-family policies have economic benefits for employers.

Gender Norms

The third obstacle is the persistence of gender norms that define work-family conflict as a "women's issue" and emphasize men's good provider role. Research continues to confirm that women are more likely to trade off income and prestige for part-time work, job sharing, home-based and less lucrative businesses, and jobs with "family friendly" work hours (Henson, 1996; Loscocco, 1997; McKie, 1992; Rosenfeld & Birkelund, 1995), which perpetuates a modified separate spheres model and, therefore, gender inequality. Of course, women at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, who are disproportionately women of color, bear the greatest brunt of inequitable gender norms. According to Ferber and O'Farrell (1991), when low-income mothers leave work to care for dependents it has long-term negative consequences for income.

Until men share equally in the work and enjoyment of family life, the similar life paths for men and women proposed by the age integrated model will not materialize. As Cherlin (1998) put it, "mothers can't win unless fathers change too" (p. 41). Yet even in those sectors of Western Europe where liberal pro-family policies are motivated partly by a strong commitment to gender equality (Moen & Firebaugh, 1994), men have yet to commit themselves equally to work-family balance (Haas, 1992; Moen, 1989). As long as power and prestige continue to accrue to those who follow the traditional career paths, many men will, quite reasonably, see little incentive for change. Moreover, until men receive company and social support for scaling back work, they will have little realistic opportunity for change.

Forced by their circumstances, and with less to lose in terms of gender identity, women have been in

the vanguard, charting alternative life patterns that integrate and recycle their major social roles (Helgesen, 1998; Lopata, Barnewolt, & Miller, 1985). Yet, if women are the ones choosing flexible and reduced work schedules, getting reeducated, and trading time for money, they will have less power in society and in their relationships (Avioli & Kaplan, 1992; England & Kilbourne, 1990). This concern surely underlies the protest launched at Schwartz's (1989) proposal that corporate women be offered the option of slower, more flexible careers (the media-dubbed "Mommy track"). Without extending the flexible track to men, and more importantly, without changing the ways we evaluate careers and career requirements, women would be disadvantaged by a system that asked them to make such a choice.

Similarly, while an age-integrated life course provides more freedom for the timing of child rearing, women will be hurt if they are the ones who postpone their careers or their child rearing in an attempt to reduce work-family conflict. In fact, the notion of a nonsequential life course raises the specter of women moving from one period of reduced work to another, as they are channeled, and channel themselves, into caring for children, communities, and elders.

Yet, as more men are forced off the lockstep education-work-leisure pathway by downsizing and continued technological change, alternative career paths and nonmaterial values may well become more normative for everybody. The movement to voluntary simplicity might also lead to greater gender equality, as men join women in questioning the relative role of work in their lives. There is also evidence that men are taking on a greater share of family responsibility (Presser, 1989), which ultimately may lead them to search with women for more accommodating workplaces. In fact, there is growing concern about work-family balance among men (Thomas & Ganster, 1995), and recent studies document men's higher levels of work-to-family and strain-based family-to-work conflict (Eagle et al., 1998) and their substantial trade-offs between work and family (Milkie and Peltola, 1999). One study showed that even among a sample of male executives, who might be expected to subscribe fully to traditional gender norms, family-friendly work policies were associated with lower work-family conflict (Judge, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1994).

In addition, we have only to look back a few decades to see the potential for fundamental change in gender norms. There has been a "gender revolution" in women's work roles, as more and more work roles have opened up for women and social norms as well as structures have changed in response. If women and men join in a social movement that pushes for the changes in gender norms that would promote greater work-family balance, social structures are apt to respond to the collective pressure (Riley and Loscocco, 1994). The rapid changes in student norms and lifestyles in the 1960s demonstrated vividly how quickly basic social values can be altered through collective action (Foner, 1994).

In the short term, social policy should shift away

from a primary focus on the care of children, which is still seen as a women's issue by so many people, including those in a position to effect change. In fact, increased longevity means that the time during which people are raising young children is now a small proportion of the entire life course (Riley, 1992). Also, more people are choosing not to raise children at all. Instead, the issues could be framed in terms of "caring responsibilities that could extend to a whole range of relationships and even to oneself" (Moss, 1996, p. 31). If discussion turns to employee-friendly policies that promote self-enrichment or allow more vacation time for a reduced salary, perhaps more men will listen carefully (Harriman, 1982) and begin to press for change.

Conclusion

If the age integration "ideal type" were approximated in reality, we could address the work-family conflict of midlife, the failure of our retirement system to deal with the current realities of old age, and children's needs to live in relaxed families and spend time with their parents. If society makes the changes needed to support a new social system in which education, work, family, and leisure are not confined to certain phases of the life course, there is potential for greater social equality, as well. While age integration may seem like a radical solution, in many ways it is also a very conservative one (Moen, 1992). The family could take on its child care responsibilities with renewed vigor if education, work and leisure were interspersed over the life course.

The next step, would be to move from the abstract promise of greater age integration to concrete proposals. There is tremendous need for carefully designed research that can answer questions about the promise and pitfalls of the kinds of solutions to work-family conflict consistent with the age-integrated model of society. Tough, creative policy work would have to be done, and specific policies should take into account the gender, race, and class inequalities of the current U.S. society. The changes needed are so profound that the whole proposition of moving toward greater age integration may seem too daunting. The multifaceted changes required of movement to an age-integrated society lend themselves to criticism. It is easy to zero in on a particular facet and show why it would not work or what other challenges it might pose.

The more difficult, but ultimately more fruitful, tack is to see specific sticking points as problems to be solved, rather than as reasons to preserve the status quo. There are already forces moving us toward age integration (Moen, 1992; Riley, 1998). Foner (1994) points out that even when there are obstacles to change, it happens when the interests of those pushing for change override the forces of resistance. Analysts from a wide range of disciplines and with diverse credentials and concerns have offered up a wealth of ideas to minimize the work-family "crunch." As Weick (1994) has argued, social change is slow; yet, when

we set our sights on "small wins," there is every reason to be optimistic. Because the obstacles to an age-integrated society are interrelated, a small change that addresses any one of them is apt to exert pressure on another. In the final analysis, the challenge of moving toward fuller age integration seems to pale in comparison with the possibility of stronger families, a more balanced distribution of work, and fuller, more enriched lives.

Acknowledgment

Address correspondence to Dr. Karyn Loscocco, Department of Sociology, Social Science 340, SUNY-Albany, Albany, NY 12222. E-mail: Kal74@csc.albany.edu

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Age Integration in Europe: Increasing or Decreasing?

Anne-Marie Guillemard, PhD

Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Paris V, Sorbonne, France.

I am grateful to John and Matilda Riley for inviting me to take part in this panel on Age Integration which is, in my opinion, a very burning issue. I am interested in whether we are moving toward more age integration or toward more age discrimination. Are we entering a society for all ages, where age is no longer used as a basis for barriers and discrimination among people? Or is the future of society going to bring war between age groups? My response to this question is based on my current research activity which deals with employment throughout the life course. My focus is on the way in which European societies deal with this issue: how they distribute work and nonwork across age strata and across the life course.

I have to answer “both” to my earlier question on whether the trend is toward more age integration *or* discrimination. I see European societies as being schizophrenic regarding age integration—they are developing contradictory behaviors within differing contexts of employment or social welfare.

1. When European societies contemplate employment, they view age discrimination as the only solution to the problem of high unemployment. Substituting younger people for aging wage earners at the workplace is the new norm in employment. Early labor force exit and negative discrimination against aging workers in employment has become a common feature of European labor markets. Thus workers, even in their forties, may be deemed too old to be promoted or to be retrained. They are seen as wage earners without any future at the workplace, although their life expectancy continues to increase and roughly half of their life course still lies ahead of them.

But there is a paradox here, because age discrimination in employment tends to break down earlier chronological markers and age barriers. As a result, distinctions between ages become blurred; the life course is less predictable and more uncertain. Moreover, there is a poor fit between individual expectations and structural opportunities. Some aging workers complain about the few structural opportunities that remain for them to maintain their social usefulness. In response, more and more of them engage in nonprofit activities in many places throughout Europe. Most of these nonprofit activities involve intergenerational relations cutting across age barriers. This means that these aging workers are denying the relevance of age barriers and age segregation in their daily lives.

2. When European societies contemplate social expenditures within the welfare state, particularly for retirement pensions, they would like to postpone the retirement age. Therefore, in an effort to rebalance the financial equilibrium of pensions, all pension reforms implemented in Europe have tried to increase the length of the work life and postpone retirement age. For example, the expansion of flexible retirement (in the case of the British project of “a retirement decade”) may be seen as an attempt to delay the exit from the labor market for aging wage earners. The mushrooming of flexible or gradual retirement schemes all over Europe is another example of efforts to retain aging workers in the labor market, even as part-time workers.

3. Meanwhile, one can observe a few new developments in age-integrated structures. Transitions from education to work as well as from work to retirement are becoming increasingly unclear. A new flexible and destandardized life course is appearing as chronological age loses ground as a marker. Some new public employment policies implemented in Europe tend in this direction and address all ages.

A good example is training programs for all ages. For a long time, continuing education programs targeted wage earners under 40 years old. Now, a special effort has been made to include aging wage earners beyond their forties and to stop age discrimination in training altogether.

In France, an employment policy implemented in 1994 aims at increasing work flexibility and reducing the time that wage-earners of all ages spend working.

The “Time Savings Account” is a major innovation. Through agreements worked out inside firms, it provides for turning the right to paid leaves of absence into a type of capital for employees, regardless of age. It has three objectives. It satisfies an employee demand for being able to save such leaves so that, during certain periods, the time thus saved can serve to finance long absences for sabbaticals, parental leave, etc. It can also serve to distribute productivity gains in the form of remunerated free time. Furthermore, it enables firms to manage leaves taken at the end of careers by employees nearing retirement. Under this scheme, employees are paid, as a function of their wages, for leaves at least six months long. This new “Time Savings Account” has inspired a recent report for the European Commission: A. Supiot’s *Audela de l’emploi. Transformations du travail et deve-*

nir du droit du travail en Europe (Supiot, 1999). To cope with the evolving labor market and the new flexible life course as it emerges, this report proposes developing more pliant welfare arrangements around the principle of "drawing social entitlements." Such entitlements tend to be age-neutral and cut across the bounds of the threefold organization of the life-course. They would generalize the Time Savings Account principle to all welfare programs, thus enabling a new, voluntary and flexible, distribution of paid periods of work and of nonwork over the life-course. Time would no longer be distributed owing to one's age-group or position in the life-course, but access to these entitlements would be open to all ages. Time would no longer be remunerated by specific programs depending on whether it was spent on a leave

of absence for raising children (parental leave), furthering one's education or training, or taking early retirement or gradual retirement. A single welfare policy would meet all these needs in a society where age would become irrelevant as the central criterion for allocating "social rights" and welfare benefits.

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Address correspondence to Anne-Marie Guillemard, Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, Ecole des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 54 Boulevard Raspail, 75006 Paris, France.

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Conflicting Trends in The Netherlands

Jan Baars, PhD

Department of Philosophy, Tilburg University, The Netherlands.

The Netherlands, at first sight, may seem to be a very age-integrated society. Retirees study together with younger students at the universities, and their instructors are often much younger than they are. This phenomenon of age integration in the domain of education has appeared only in the past decade. When I was a student in the 1970s, the few older students at the university tended to be ex-priests who wanted to become social workers or psychotherapists. At that time I never encountered pensioners who were studying at a regular university, but now this has become quite common. Further, both younger students and pensioners often engage in work in addition to their other activities. Students work part time to earn extra income, and pensioners are economically active in such ways as redecorating or painting houses, bookkeeping, or gardening.

Below the surface, however, one can see important age-related dividing lines. For students, these dividing lines are dictated by the entrance and exit codes operating in the central economic domain of official labor. Young students must move quickly through university programs (which are much shorter now than they were 10 years ago) in order to keep their grants and to be "young enough" to start careers in such areas as science, economics, or advocacy. In contrast, older students are able to study at a more leisurely pace, either at the university if they have good pensions, or in inexpensive courses specifically organized for older people.

Gray Work: An Area of Age Integration

The unofficial jobs that students often work at are referred to as "gray jobs." For example, students may

work in a bar, where they avoid paying taxes and do not receive proper insurance. Students prefer this type of secretive work because if they were officially paid, some amount of their pay would be deducted from their grants. Retired people often engage in the same kinds of gray work, because official payment would be heavily taxed or deducted from their pensions. There is, in fact, a huge area of gray work that is age integrated, where we find not only students and retirees, but adults of all ages who are either unemployed or working for extra income. It is worth noting that the gray economy reflects social inequality: Retirees who study at the university are typically not the retirees who have gray jobs. It is difficult to estimate the extent of this gray economy; some specialists have set it at 3% of gross national product, which for a small country like The Netherlands would be around 10 billion U.S. dollars. In other countries (e.g., those in Eastern Europe) the importance of this age-integrated area of gray work is certainly much larger.

Volunteer Activities: Another Area of Age Integration

Many older people join women of all ages in volunteer activities. In the past, individuals often were not allowed to remain in official leadership positions of volunteer organizations after they reached age 65 or 70. But this type of age discrimination is declining. The Netherlands has a government-sponsored National Bureau Against Age Discrimination (of which I am a member of the advisory board), which has helped to set this topic on the national agenda. As a result, age restrictions on roles of volunteers have become less

common. But results of the battle against age discrimination stop at the borders of the central economic domain. In other words, age integration is an aspect of social integration, not of system integration (Baars & Thomese, 1994; Habermas, 1984/1987).

Official Work: An Area of Continuing Age Segregation

In the central sector of the economy, however, there is a partial reversal of the structural lag which, according to the Rileys, (see pp. 266–270, this issue) presses for age integration. Here the “dynamism of structural change,” rather than lagging behind the “dynamism of human aging,” is now outpacing it, as the economy no longer needs the same input of labor as before. As shown in the excellent comparative study, *Time for Retirement*, by my copanelists Martin Kohli and Anne Marie Guillemard (Kohli, Rein, Guillemard, & Van Gunsteren, 1991), over a long period of time the large number of exiting older workers was not compensated for by employment of young people. A form of economic growth that was not translated into a need for more workers (“jobless growth”) had followed the shrinking economy of the recession years. More recently, however, although some concern has been expressed over labor shortages, this has not meant a general shortage of workers. Rather, the labor shortage involves only workers with specific qualifications. The demand for workers with specific qualifications may, nevertheless, undermine age segregation in the central economic sector in some limited ways. There was a very minor, but interesting, indication of this when older computer programmers were invited back to service because they knew how to change the computer programs responsible for the Millennium problem.

Official Work: An Area of Age Discrimination

Although the extreme exit of older workers from the labor force was not regulated by the pension systems, these early retirees were nevertheless regarded as having become “old.” It is astonishing to see how the definition of becoming “old,” in much gerontological research, in social policy reports, and in many organizations of the aged, has dropped in a short time from age 65 to 55 or even 50 years. A cultural pattern, originating in the early phases of the retirement systems, defined people as old when they no longer worked (which usually meant that they could not do heavy physical work anymore). But this pattern has continued to the present so that people who are amazingly fit and quite young, especially in light of increasing life expectancy, are referred to as “old” because they have retired. People are now likely to be defined as “older workers” when they have reached the age of 45 years. Here the separation of “normal” adults from “older” adults takes on ironic proportions: 20 years growing up, 25 years as a normal adult, and from age 45 until 100 or more as “old.”

From these examples we conclude that “becoming old” appears to be defined by a changing relationship to

the labor market. The cultural tradition has emphasized the importance (“youthful normalcy”) of formal work, with age as a dependent variable. But chronological age then is often used as an “independent” variable to legitimate the process that gave it its meaning. The paradoxical result is that as people live longer and are healthier, they are defined as “old” at younger ages than before because they are not working anymore. I have called this the “paradox of the younger elderly.” Victims of this paradox are, for instance, women in their forties who want to reenter the labor market after educating their children, but who are regarded as “too old.”

Recently we have seen a slight increase in labor force participation rates for those aged 55–59. Between 1994 and 1997, the participation rate for men in this age category rose from 55% to 60%, and for women the increase was from 20% to 24%. These small increases in labor force participation may be partly due to recently developed flexible retirement schemes, but they do not reflect any extension of the working life beyond the traditional retirement age of 65. It is theoretically possible to continue working until 65, but then all flexibility ends. In The Netherlands, retirement is compulsory in all public sectors (civil servants, etc.) and in all formally organized and collectively negotiated work situations.

In sum, we are confronted with a central economic domain that still patterns the life course because, in it, age is highly relevant. A new dynamic of age integration is evident, however, in more peripheral areas. Seen in the context of rising longevity, official work is taking on a less important place in life. Official working hours and years of working are gradually being reduced. But these changes affect people differently. There is one segment of people who, after obtaining a higher education and working for 30 years in interesting jobs (which absorb much more than the officially stated amount of time during this period) have acquired good pensions and other cultural assets that prepare them for a long period of interesting retirement. In contrast, there is another large group of people who arrive at old age with only a minimum state pension because they never had regular jobs over their work lives. These less privileged people are forced to continue to work in gray jobs in later life. It appears that important social problems are (and will be) created through the complex configurations of changing economic conditions that shape the form and content of work vis-à-vis the changing dynamics of the life course.

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Address correspondence to Professor Jan Baars, PhD, Department of Philosophy, Tilburg University, PO Box 90153, 5000 LE Tilburg, The Netherlands. E-mail: jbaars@kub.nl

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Public Policy and the Construction of Old Age in Europe

Alan Walker, DLitt

Department of Sociological Studies, The University of Sheffield, England.

The central theme of this brief contribution is that public policy has played (and continues to do so) a major role in determining the meaning of old age and, therefore, the extent of age integration and segregation. Old age has been constructed and reconstructed by social and economic policies and, for their part, older people have been expected to adjust to the reification of age into convenient social categories for the purpose of resource distribution and rationing; to the institutions of the welfare state set up to “manage” aging (the “aging enterprise”); and to the changing prescriptions of policy makers and professionals charged with their care. This is not to suggest that older people are the simple creatures of policy but, rather, that policy is a key component of an age structuration that leaves scope for active agency in the interpretation and reproduction of social reality. Older people interact with their environment in a reflexive way to create their own social reality. Furthermore, this policy context is set not only at the local and national levels but also by global agencies.

I will draw on European experience, specifically, the 15 Member States of the European Union (EU), to illustrate the key role of policy in determining the changing meaning and significance of age barriers and, therefore, the scope for age integration.

Constructing and Reconstructing the Meaning of Old Age

It is possible to distinguish three distinct phases in the postwar European evolution of social policy with regard to older people (Guillemard, 1983).

Old Age as a Social Problem: 1940s–Early 1970s

In the years following World War II, aging became identified as a social problem. National pension systems were put in place and/or consolidated during this period, and social expenditure rose rapidly in what proved to be the heyday of the welfare state. Of course, the origins of social policy in the field of pensions predate this period by more than 50 years: Bismarck’s system of worker insurance in Germany in 1889 and the first old-age pensions in the United Kingdom (UK) in 1908 and in France in 1910. However, universal coverage was achieved in this period, and there is no mistaking the proliferation of social policy measures. In the period 1960–1975 the increase in pension expenditure in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

countries accounted for one quarter of the rise in the share of public expenditure in total expenditure. In France it was more than one third, in Germany just under one fifth, and, in the UK, around one seventh (OECD, 1988). This reinforces the conclusion of Pampel, Williamson, and Stryker (1990, p. 547) that there are “multiple paths to higher pension spending.” Incidentally, in the period 1960–1975, pension spending in the United States contributed just over one third of the growth in the size of the public sector.

The main goals of public policy in this period were to provide for income security in old age and, in doing so, to ensure the efficient transition of older workers from employment to retirement. The early postwar period was one of full employment; indeed, in the early 1950s in the UK a National Advisory Committee on the Employment of Older Men and Women was formed to encourage older people to remain in the labor market (Phillipson, 1982). While full employment lasted, there was some resistance to the assumptions of neoclassical economics and scientific management theories concerning declining productivity in older age (Taylor, 1947). Thus, the main focus of public policy was on those who had left the labor market. This focus was determined largely by economic management and policy because this group was, in effect, defined as “externalities” by the macro-economic policy system. Public pensions were regarded as an appropriate way of socializing the costs of retirement as well as assisting industry to rejuvenate the workforce (Graebner, 1980). This was an important element of the postwar settlement between Keynesian economics and Beveridge-style (i.e., liberal) social policy: It was intended that economic growth would generate sufficient resources for universal pension provision.

The establishment of public pension systems and, more importantly, their accompanying retirement conditions encouraged the rapid spread of fixed age retirement. Thus, in policy terms, old age came to be uniquely associated with retirement ages. In other words, old age was objectified as retirement age (Graebner, 1980; Townsend, 1981; Walker, 1980). What are the consequences of the institutionalization of age-related retirement? There are five key points.

In the first place, the economic dependency of older people has been enlarged substantially. One hundred years ago in the UK, some two thirds of the male population aged 65 and over were economically active (in employment or seeking it); today it is only 7%. Older people were not helpless pawns in

this social definition of old age. On the contrary, individually and collectively, workers called for retirement and public pensions. But the creation of a fixed age barrier in European pension systems has led to widespread economic dependency.

Second, age-barrier retirement has been the main wellspring of age discrimination in employment, social security, and in wider social relations (Bytheway, 1995; McEwan, 1990). It has not been the sole cause of age discrimination, but it has encouraged the view that, past a certain age, an individual's economic and social worth is diminished.

Third, as a corollary to retirement, it has been accepted that the income needs of older people are lower than those of the "economically active." Typically, public pensions are set at rates below and sometimes considerably below average earnings and, even when occupational pensions are included and idealized projections made, some leading EU countries still have quite low replacement ratios: 69% in Germany and 64% in the UK, for example (Walker, Guillemard, & Alber, 1993).

Fourth, age-barrier retirement and these foregoing factors have encouraged the view that older people are not just a social problem but an economic burden as well. Thus, in this early postwar phase there were occasional warnings—for example, from the United Nations in 1954—about the "burden" of population aging (Walker, 1990). This approach to aging is best exemplified in the old age dependency ratio, which crudely expresses a ratio between those over pension age and younger adults and, thereby, objectifies the assumption that economic dependency must be associated with aging. Such calculations are used frequently in European policy discourse in this field, despite their many flaws.

Fifth, with regard to health and social services policy and practice, it was this first phase that saw the major expansion of these services and their professionalization. Because policy makers had come to regard older people as largely dependent and passive objects, it is not surprising that the professional and institutional structures of the health and social services also tended to reflect this view: For example, some forms of education and training encouraged professionals to regard themselves as experts operating autonomously. Thus, the expansion of health and social services in this period was a two-sided coin: It enhanced the welfare of older people but it was delivered often in ways that reinforced their dependency and powerlessness. The professionalization of old age in the health and social services, therefore, is an important component of age segregation.

Old Age as the Solution to One Economic Problem and the Cause of Another: Mid 1970s–Late 1980s

This was actually a transitional phase, stretching from the origins of the fiscal crises in the mid-1970s to the late 1980s. During this relatively short space of time the social meaning of aging was reconstructed along two dimensions.

First, there was a massive fall in economic activity in later life throughout the EU and, indeed, all industrial countries with the exceptions of Sweden and Japan (Kohli, Rein, Guillemard, & Van Gunsteren, 1991). The decline in activity is most marked among those aged 65 and over and those aged 60–64, but is also clear in the age group 55–59. In most EU countries, working after the age of 65 has been eradicated. The position of older women is harder to disentangle from the cohort effect of rising rates of participation among younger women, but it does appear that a similar decline has taken place (Walker et al., 1993).

The main factors explaining this decline in Europe are demand related, particularly the collapse of employment in the mid-1970s and early 1980s. My own research on early retirement following redundancy in the Sheffield steel industry shows two distinct paths being followed: (a) there were those who, faced with redundancy, chose early retirement as a preferable option to unemployment; (b) on the other hand, there were those who were effectively coerced into it by a hostile labor market. Thus, early retirement was, for the first group, a welcome release from employment and, for the second group, a refuge from an inhospitable labor market. The key explanatory factors in this social division were age (proximity to pension age) and income level (Westergaard, Noble, & Walker, 1989).

Demand-related factors were the main causes of the rise of early retirement, and one of these main factors was public policy. During this period there was a proliferation of employment and pension measures designed to encourage early retirement. Examples include the Job Release Scheme in the UK and preretirement benefits in Denmark and Germany (Walker et al., 1993).

During this transitional phase, the growth of early retirement has reconstructed old age from a simple age-related status with a single lower entry point into a much broader category that stretches from age 50 to death. This has necessitated the widespread functional separation of the third (50–74) and fourth (75+) ages, the young-old and old-old, a distinction that first appeared in France in the 1960s. It has also meant, as Guillemard (1993) has shown, that public pension systems are no longer the key regulators of retirement. The traditional pattern of labor force exit at pension age has become a minority one; for example, in Germany (former FDR) and the UK, only about one third of entrants to the public pension system come directly from employment.

Another important consequence of the unchecked growth of early retirement from the labor force is that it has reinforced the devaluation of older people in the labor market. The downward redefinition of aging has had consequences for the ways that employers perceive older workers and, in turn, the chances they offer them for reemployment. Indeed, there is a growing body of evidence in different EU countries to show that older adults are frequently discriminated against with regard to job recruitment, promotions, and training (Drury, 1993, 1997; Walker, 1997). This is despite the fact that age is not a good proxy for the

ability to work and learn; therefore, discrimination is not only unjust but wasteful of economic capacity and potential.

The only EU-wide survey evidence on this topic comes from 1992 (Walker, 1993). We asked the general public in each country whether or not older workers are discriminated against with regard to job recruitment and other aspects of employment. A remarkably high proportion—four out of five for the EU as a whole—said that such discrimination *does* exist with regard to recruitment. Moreover, there was hardly any difference based on the age of respondents: All age groups believed that discrimination takes place against older workers (Walker, 1993).

During this second phase the social meaning of aging was transformed from its long association with pension ages to labor market criteria such as employability. Public policy, particularly in the employment sphere, was one of the main engines driving this change. But while encouraging early retirement was seen as a solution to unemployment (although the policy does not seem to have been very effective), aging also came to be seen as an economic problem in its own right. From the late 1970s onward, there has been mounting concern on the part of national governments about the economic consequences of population aging. Forward projections of dependency ratios have been used to paint a pessimistic picture of the socioeconomic implications of aging. Sometimes these border on the alarmist, as these quotations show.

Under existing regulations the evolution of public pension schemes is likely to put a heavy and increasing burden on the working population in coming decades. Such a financial strain may put intergenerational solidarity—a concept on which all public retirement provisions are based—at risk. (OECD, 1988)

If no action is taken to deal with the incipient crisis of population aging, then it seems certain that western societies will experience major social and economic dislocation, and they may experience this relatively soon. (Johnson, Conrad, & Thomson, 1989)

The question as to why international agencies and European governments should adopt an avowedly pessimistic stance toward the societal implications of population aging takes us beyond the scope of this discussion. What it illustrates is that neoclassical assumptions about the “burden” of aging held sway in national and international policy arenas (Walker, 1990). In other words, the theory of old age that dominated public policy in this period was extremely pessimistic, economically.

The Late 1980s Onward—Integration or Segregation of Older People?

The transition from the second to the third phase of aging policy development was marked by the termination, in the late 1980s, of some of the main mechanisms for early retirement. One of the first EU

countries to act was France, in 1986, when early retirement contracts were abolished. Soon after, similar actions were taken in Belgium, Germany, and the UK. However, the early retirement trend has developed its own momentum and has become institutionalized in the labor market for the reasons outlined above. Although the transition has happened, European societies are only just on the threshold of this third phase and, therefore, the future of aging and public policy is a matter of speculation. The future appears to offer two separate scenarios.

The first possibility is that aging will be regarded as a growing “burden” to society. In other words, ageing would be constituted, in policy terms, as an economic burden, and national governments would attempt to reduce its economic cost in the form of pensions and health and social services. There is no doubt that in several leading EU countries the cost of pensions and long-term care is a major political issue. Most of them have already taken action to limit costs. In the pensions field the most favored policy is an increase in retirement ages. For example, both Germany and the UK are increasing their retirement ages over the next decade.

This “public burden of aging” scenario would reinforce the continuous thread in postwar policy discourse that associates aging with inevitable decline, decreescence, and unproductiveness. According to this account, the future of old age would be a bleak one—particularly for those heavily reliant on the welfare state. In addition, the future of aging societies would be equally bleak because, if intergenerational solidarity is undermined by the policies that flow from the public burden orientation (such as the privatization of pensions and health and social care), this would have ramifications far beyond welfare policies.

The alternative path leads to active aging and age integration. Looking toward this future, there are three interlinked sets of developments suggesting that age may be reconstructed, or perhaps deconstructed, in a new post-modern form (Walker, 1996).

First, in the labor market, there are clear signs of change in the perceptions of aging on the part of some European employers. There are a growing number of private companies in France, Germany, Sweden, and the UK that are adopting different employment practices to those followed by the majority. Examples include the introduction of more flexible employment and retirement policies, special recruitment campaigns targeted on older workers and, perhaps most importantly, new holistic approaches to employment and lifelong training, in which aging is a key factor built into considerations of job planning and design. Although these policies have been adopted by only a small minority of employers so far, there are indications to suggest the start of a trend. Moreover, some EU governments have been attempting to encourage flexibility in the form of partial retirement—although with little success so far.

Second, in the field of health and social services there are signs, in some EU countries, of a swing away from the traditional paternalism of service pro-

viders toward more active conceptions of old age. Over the last decade there has been a wide range of service innovations in the EU countries, despite funding shortages. Although traditional forms of service provision remain dominant and pluralistic service innovation has been haphazard, there are sufficient indications of change to suggest that practitioners are beginning to face up to the challenges of involving older users of services in key decisions about the provision of their care. Some are developing new strategies designed to empower older people to some extent, and professional attitudes and values are beginning to encourage cooperation and partnership with older service users. In short, what appears to be a gradual revolution is underway in the approach to aging taken by some social service agencies. If this change is successful on a large scale, it may transform the meaning of aging in this sphere from its association with passivity and dependency to one concerned with activity and interdependence. This sort of development would represent a profound shift in the social status of older people.

Third, older Europeans themselves are beginning to seize the initiative and may not be prepared to wait for the pronouncements of experts on how the aging process should be interpreted. A growing number are actively demonstrating the potential for a new meaning to be applied to aging. Thus, in recent years, new political groupings composed of older people have been formed, or existing ones have gained in strength, including the creation of pensioners' political parties. In Germany a "gray party" was formed in 1989 to champion senior citizens' interests. Belgium saw the founding of a pensioners' party in 1990; Italy has one and so does Portugal. There is a radical grassroots movement of older people in Denmark, an organization called Ageing Differently in The Netherlands (designed to campaign for alternative perceptions of old age) and, in the UK, the National Pensioners' Convention—a grassroots organization with up to 2 million members. The growth of self-advocacy movements among older people has been echoed in some countries by the creation of local or national advisory councils comprising older people (Walker & Naegele, 1999). These developments are finding support among the general public: More than four out of five EU citizens think that older people should stand up more actively for their rights (Walker, 1993). There are indications in such evidence that the public thinks that aging should not be a simple matter of adjustment and peaceful retirement but that older people should be fully integrated citizens.

Together, these three developments suggest that, in the next century, the meaning of old age may be reconstructed into a more active form—where "activity" includes not only economic activity in the form of paid employment, but also a wide range of formal, quasiformal, and informal activities that are productive in social, political, and economic terms. To the extent that such activities are economically productive they would also assist in quelling the fears of pol-

iticians concerning the costs of aging societies. On the negative side, however, it is likely that the deconstruction of the later life course, in the absence of supportive social policies, would leave older people vulnerable, without rights to social protection and with access only to minimum social assistance level benefits and services.

Policy Is Personal

This periodization of postwar Europe indicates the contribution of both macropolicies and those concerned with service provision in encouraging the social integration or segregation of older people. For the most part this analysis has been concerned with integration in the major formal or material structures of society such as the labor market and welfare institutions. What about the issue of integration in the informal relationships of family, friends, and neighbors?

Here the European evidence shows continuing high levels of social integration between age groups, for example, with regard to social contact or intergenerational solidarity. Within families women can be demonstrated to be the main facilitators of age integration. But here too policy plays a critical role: For example, by rationing social care the state ensures the continuing primacy of family care (in all but the Scandinavian countries). However, while this policy successfully maintained age integration (if not gender integration) in the modern era, the combination of changes in family structure and increased longevity implies that it will no longer suffice. Indeed, if additional social support is not provided, particularly in the southern states of Europe, this policy is likely to increase age segregation. In other words, policy may enhance the integration of older people in informal relationships or it may jeopardize it.

Conclusion

This essay has concentrated on the role of social policies, at both macro and micro levels, in the construction of age in postwar Europe. Thus, the increased age structuration and the segregation of old age experienced in the EU (especially in the northern countries) was a function of social policy. However, the outcomes of these policies were not always foreseen by their sponsors. The future offers possibilities for either greater age segregation or integration.

Acknowledgment

Address correspondence to Dr. Alan Walker, Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, Sheffield S10 2TU, United Kingdom. E-mail: a.c.walker@sheffield.ac.uk

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