

## CHAPTER 1

# Structural Lag: Past and Future

*Matilda White Riley and John W. Riley, Jr.*

Sixty years ago, when we were first married, we began writing a book about leisure. We were impressed with the challenge of finding a new societal ethos by redefining leisure—not as rest or recreation—but in the Aristotelian sense of the serious pursuit of universal values. As the counterpart of the philosophers of ancient Athens, we saw middle-aged women as a new "leisure class" who could take up this challenge. (In 1930, only 20% of American women<sup>1</sup> were in the paid labor force and, beyond imposing the tasks of early child rearing, society made few demands on those not working.) After two years of effort, however, we put that book away, deciding that we "needed far more experience" to finish it.

Now, in the ninth decade of our lives, we still have had little firsthand experience with leisure or the search for new societal values (unlike most people in the industrialized world, we are not retired). During the intervening 60 years, middle-aged women have filled their time, not with leisure, but with paid work. (In the United States today, some 68% of women aged 35 and over are now in the labor

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Census report of women 35 and over who were "gainfully employed."

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force.<sup>2</sup>) With the unprecedented increases in longevity, which mean that people spend one-third of their adult lives in retirement, it is now the older women and men who might form a new "leisure class." Yet older people's retirement, far from being devoted to any search for a new ethos, consists largely of "unstructured time" (see Chapter 5, in this book), devoid of clear institutionalized expectations and rewards, and often devoted to a leisure focused more on passive amusement and the consumption of material goods than on any type of active philosophical endeavor. While young and middle-aged adults, especially women, are deprived of free time by the doubly demanding roles of work and family, many older people tend to be surfeited with it. Yet there are few normative expectations to give meaning to this time or to their lives, and few employment or other opportunities to participate with younger people in the mainstream activities of society. Nor are the earlier years of the life course exempt from such problems: Except for the too often unrewarding tasks of schoolwork, children and young adults (especially minority youths) are offered few clear role opportunities for being, or feeling, useful.

## THE PROBLEM OF STRUCTURAL LAG

Thus today, instead of returning to our aborted book on leisure, we confront a larger and more immediate dilemma: the problem of "cultural lag," as changes in age structures lag behind changes in lives (Riley, 1988). In society at large, lives have been drastically altered over this century—as a consequence of increased longevity, advances in science and education, the gender revolution, improvements in public health, and other historical trends and events—but numerous in- flexible social structures, roles, and norms have lagged behind. There is a mismatch or imbalance between the transformation of the aging process from birth to death and the role opportunities, or places in the social structure, that could foster and reward people at the various stages of their lives. While the 20th century has experienced a revolution in human development and aging, there has been no comparable revolution in the role structures of society to keep pace with the changes in the ways people grow up and grow old. The lag involves not

only institutional and organizational arrangements but also the many aspects of culture that, in addition to being internalized by people, are built into role expectations and societal mores and laws.<sup>3</sup> For the future, then, structural changes will be needed if people are to find opportunities to spread leisure and work, as well as education, more evenly over the life course, and to make room for family affairs.

To understand these changes and to explore the possibilities for reducing structural lag, we have been working during the past three decades with a network of colleagues, beginning with the "aging and society" approach,<sup>4</sup> and culminating in the newly developing Program on Age and Structural Change (PASC), of which this volume is a major component. Our aging and society approach rested on a massive inventory of social science findings on the middle and later years (Riley, Foner, Moore, Hess, & Roth, 1968), and drew on an accumulating body of social theory that included—to cite only three of the many early examples—essays by Parsons (1942) and Linton (1942) on age and sex as fundamental to the social system, and an overview by Tibbitts (1960; see, e.g., p. 13) of studies of old age. Our own first theoretical volume (Riley, Johnson, & Foner, 1972)<sup>5</sup> elaborated the interdependence between changes in people's lives and changes in the age structuring—the interdependence from which the concept of structural lag derives.

The Program on Age and Structural Change thus provides a relevant focus for this chapter because matching the structural lag in society is a recent lag in research on age-related social change. There have been great advances in research on how patterns of development and aging change—approaching a "life-course reductionism"; and some attention has been paid to how these life-course patterns can be changed

<sup>2</sup> It is noteworthy that we use "structural lag" as a shorthand term to include cultural elements. Our concept is in some ways reminiscent of William Fielding Ogburn's (1922) classic concept of "cultural lag," in which the various elements of culture are interdependent so that a change in one element produces changes in others. In contrast, however, our emphasis is on interdependence between people and *roles* or social structures—including their cultural elements. We also use widely the term "opportunity structure" introduced into the sociological literature by Robert Merton (1957). Merton is currently preparing a monograph showing the "emergence, diffusion, and differentiation" of the concept, which he used as early as 1938 in connection with *anomie* (personal communication).

<sup>3</sup> In the interim, much of the wealth of research—a good deal of it supported by the National Institute on Aging—was focused more on lives than on structures (see Riley & Abeles, 1990). Though originally called an "age stratification" approach, the implications of this designation proved to be inappropriate, as both too static and too easily confused with class stratification.

through appropriate structural interventions. Yet there is little theory or method to guide research on structural changes that can enhance the quality of aging from birth to death (as one exception, see Kertzer & Schait, 1989).

As evidenced by the chapters in this book, structural lag and the need for change are currently most conspicuous for older people because of their protracted longevity, their increasing numbers in the population, and—save for the disadvantaged minority—their remarkably good health and effective functioning (Manton, Stallard, & Singer, 1992).<sup>6</sup> But analysis of older people has heightened awareness of the population as a whole. Roles performed by older people are integral parts of the structure of the total society, and enhancing role opportunities for people of one age has repercussions for people of every age. For example, providing free time for middle-aged women can open work roles for interested older people, and increasing the economic independence of the elderly can reduce the responsibilities of their middle-aged offspring. There are myriad examples of the systematic nature of changes in age structuring. As a consequence, in this chapter we deal with structural lag in general, as it impinges on people of every age.

In the following sections, we present a brief overview of our own explorations of age-related structural changes in social roles and normative expectations. We postulate that such changes could help to mitigate the problems of structural lag and could perhaps ultimately lead to new meanings for both leisure and work. We begin with an analysis—abstract, but designed to be thought provoking—of the sources of structural lag. Here we draw on general principles from the aging and society approach that define two “dynamisms” (or processes) and the interplay between them: the dynamism of *structural change* and the dynamism of *changing lives* (Riley, 1979). Then, focusing more concretely on work and family as examples, we consider some possible directions of future structural change. In exploring one set of changes that might reduce structural lag, we postulate an ideal type of “age-integrated” structure that could replace the currently familiar “age-segregated” type. We then consider some implications of such age-integrated structures for people’s lives, for additional forms

of structural integration, and for the basic values involved. Finally, we identify a few straws in the wind suggesting that age-integrated structures are not entirely visionary. We conclude by asking whether such tendencies toward age integration portend a 21st-century revolution in social structures, in which age constraints may become more flexible and wider opportunities may be open for people of every age.

#### SOURCES OF STRUCTURAL LAG

The problem of structural lag occurs because changes in human lives have been occurring with dramatic rapidity over the past century, whereas social structures, norms, and institutions have failed to adapt to this metamorphosis in lives. As we illustrate, the dynamism of changing human lives has been outrunning the dynamism of structural change. In analyzing the problem and the potential for reducing the lag, we make use of the conceptual framework schematized in Figure 1-1 (well-known to many students of age), which identifies these two dynamisms and the dialectical interplay between them. Here we build on three general principles and a corollary, taken from the aging

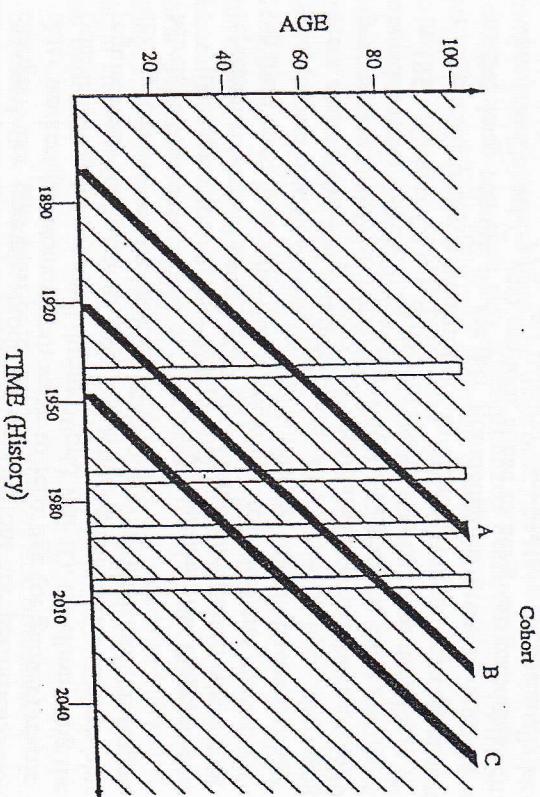


Figure 1-1 *Changing Lives and Structural Change*

<sup>6</sup> As early as 1960, Talcott Parsons spoke of our “lag” in “defining positive opportunities for persons of advanced age.”

and society approach (Riley, Foner, & Waring, 1988; Riley, Huber, & Hess, 1988), and described in further detail later in this chapter:

1. Each dynamism is a distinct and separate process that responds in its own way to broad social, economic, scientific, and other historical trends and events.
2. Though distinct, the two dynamisms are interdependent; that is, each influences the other.
3. The two dynamisms differ in timing: that is, they tend to be asynchronous.
4. Today, as a corollary, their interdependence and lack of synchrony produce a structural lag that creates pressures for new structural changes.

### Two Dynamisms

These dynamisms are schematized very roughly in Figure 1-1, which is a social space bounded on its vertical axis by years of age; and on its horizontal axis by dates that index the course of history, past and future. Within this space, two sets of bars, vertical and diagonal, are continually crisscrossing each other. These bars refer respectively to our dual focus on changes in age-related social structures and in people's lives. (Here we ask the reader to think along with us.)

In respect to the *dynamism of structural change*, we start with a single moment of time, such as the year 1970, where the vertical bar indicates how social institutions and role structures are organized roughly by age, from roles open to the youngest at the bottom (as in the family or in kindergarten) to roles open to the oldest at the top (as in the "roleless role" of retirement). Age, or some surrogate for age, is built directly or indirectly into social and cultural institutions as a criterion for entering and performing in certain roles, and for relinquishing others. Sometimes these age criteria are explicit; at other times they operate subtly and indirectly. Of course, the age structuring observed at any given time is far from static. Over time, as society moves through historical events and changes, we can imagine this vertical bar moving—across the space from one date to the next. Over time, the age structures of role opportunities and norms may (or may not) be shifting, as they are subjected to the internal pressures from

role occupants of every age and to external social and cultural changes.<sup>7</sup> For example, modified expectations for performance by older workers (or women) can serve to relax age (or gender) restrictions in hiring (as occurred during World War II). Or eliminating the requirements for "passing" from one school grade to the next can blur the age criteria and prolong the years of staying in school (cf. Angus, Mirel, & Vinovskis, 1988).

With respect to the *dynamism of changing lives*, the diagonal bars represent cohorts of people born in the same time period who are aging from birth to death—that is, moving across time and upward with age, through the successive roles in family life, school grades, work careers, retirement, and ultimate death. As society changes, the aging process also changes. In Cohort A, for example, a man born in 1890 could scarcely have looked ahead to retirement at all, but a man born in 1950 (Cohort C) can expect to spend two or three decades in retirement. Similarly, a woman born in Cohort A could scarcely expect to live long enough to see her grandchildren grow up—unlike a woman in Cohort C, who can look ahead to her great-grandchildren. Thus, as history unfolds, the shape of people's lives is continually being altered from one cohort to the next.

### Interdependence

Although the two dynamisms are separate and distinct processes—each with its own response to external trends and events, its special antecedents and consequences, and its unique timing—the two are nevertheless interdependent. Within the larger age system schematized in Figure 1-1, the crisscrossing of the two sets of bars calls attention to the continuing interplay between the two dynamisms. (This interplay can only be imagined with the aid of an oversimplified diagram.) At any particular time, people of different ages in all the coexisting cohorts (the full set of diagonal bars), confronting the age-related structures (one of the vertical bars), confronting the role opportunities and norms available in the family, the school, the workplace, or the community. These people are influenced by, but at the same time they are also influencing, these structures. They are

<sup>7</sup>This is the distinction between sources of role change that are endogenous and those that are exogenous to the age system, as developed in the aging and society approach (and examined in PASC; also see Foner, 1982).

continually shaping each role as they collectively act and think in their everyday lives, or as public policy or professional practice dictate. This dialectical principle that each dynamism influences the other derives its power from the fact that aging and cohort succession, and their interplay with social structures, are universal processes—persisting as long as the society persists. The principle, though general, subsumes a complex of scientific views, some that are by now widely accepted, but others that are truly radical in their implications.

**Influence on Lives.** In one direction of the interplay, as social structures change, the people in successive cohorts who are moving through these structures grow up and grow old in different ways. It is a sociological truism that people's lives tend to be molded by the enduring social structures. And much empirical research on human development and aging has specified this theory and the mechanisms through which it operates. A mosaic of studies has demonstrated how people's lives have been altered over the past century by the shifting character of work and the family, and by wars, depressions, energy shortages, and the like.

Studies of interventions that alter the social environment have shown the potentiality of other changes, not yet realized (see Riley & Abeles, 1990; and Chapter 2). Even in very old age, people's functioning—already at levels far higher than commonly recognized—can be improved (cf. Kaplan & Haan, 1989). For example:

- Among elderly patients in nursing homes, social activity, immune functioning, and perhaps even survival can be enhanced—provided that the social environment is altered to increase the sense of personal control and independence (Rodin & Langer, 1977).
- Among older workers, intellectual functioning improves with age, provided that the work situation is challenging and calls for self direction (Gribbin, Schaie, & Parham, 1980; Schooler, 1987).
- Very old people, whose performance on intelligence tests has deteriorated, can be brought back to their performance levels of 20 years earlier, provided that the social environment affords incentives and opportunities for practicing and learning new strategies (Willis, 1990).

• Memory can be improved, provided that the impoverished context often characterizing retirement is altered to include stimulation of a rich and complex environment (Park, 1991; Sharps & Gollin, 1987).

• Among very old nursing home residents (average age 90), speed and distance of walking ability can be improved, leg-muscle strength doubled, and muscle size increased, provided that length-strength training is included in the regimen (Fiatarone, Marks, Meredith, Lipsitz, & Evans, 1990).

**Influence on Structures.** In the other direction of the interplay, differences in the life-course patterns of people in successive cohorts create collective pressures toward changes in social structures and roles. This is a radical postulate. There is still little understanding of the reciprocal ways in which changes in lives can, in their turn, cause structural change.

Yet there are significant conceptual beginnings. Sociologists of age (Waring, 1975) have analyzed the effects of cohort differences in size, as the "baby boom" cohorts in the United States first strained the school system and the labor force, and soon will become the "senior boom" exacerbating the inadequacy of roles for the elderly. Sociologists of age have also conceptualized "cohort norm formation" (Riley, 1978, 1986): As members of the same cohort respond to shared historical experiences, they gradually and subtly develop common patterns of response, common definitions, and common beliefs that crystallize into common norms and become institutionalized in revised social structures and roles. By contrasting modern with African age-set societies, Foner and Kertzer (1979) have dramatized "intrinsic" pressures for change engendered in any society by the strains and conflicts between the younger people in oncoming cohorts and the older people whom they are displacing. Using the social-psychological concept of "goodness of fit," Robert Kahn (in Chapter 2) examines the abilities, aspirations, and needs of individuals, as they mesh (or fail to mesh) with the structural requirements and opportunities of the work situation (see Kahn, 1979; 1981).

**Asynchrony.** The most noteworthy characteristic of this interplay between changes in people and in roles is that it flies in the face of any notion that social change proceeds smoothly. For the two dynamisms

contain a paradox of *timing*. Each is marching to a different drummer. Aging individuals are moving along with axis of the life course (the diagonal bars in Figure 1-1). But change in social structures (as we imagine the vertical bar moving across time) proceeds along its own axis of historical time, which—as Pitirim Sorokin (1941, p. 505) demonstrated long ago—has little rhythm or periodicity. Since these two sets of bars are continually crisscrossing each other in different directions, only rarely can they be perfectly synchronized. And it is this *asynchrony* that produces a recurring mismatch between them—a lag of one dynamism behind the other.

Under some conditions, people's lives lag behind structural change (as when unemployed workers cannot cope with the technologically advanced jobs available, or older people with the bureaucratized health care system). More critical in modern society than this "people lag," however, is the converse problem of the lag of structures behind lives addressed in this book. Changes in people's lives are ahead of the structural changes, because many structures (such as summer vacations for schoolchildren to work on the farm, or 65 as the expected age of retirement) tend to retain their earlier form. When the two dynamics are far out of synchrony, as they are today, critical strains can eventuate—both for individuals and for society as a whole—and such strains continually press for still further changes.

#### Pressures for Structural Change

Implicit in these societal dynamics then, as the conceptual framework helps us to discern, are currently insistent pressures toward structural change. These pressures operate not only through the decisions made by legislators, public officials, employers, educators, and people in the practicing professions, but also through the millions of everyday thoughts and acts of men and women who are growing up and growing old. At every age, changing attitudes and styles of living are generating new norms and altering social institutions. Within the cohorts of those who are young today, many are dissatisfied with the traditional norms of the schools they attend; many of those now reaching the middle years are protesting the multiple stresses of combined work and family roles; and many in cohorts now in old age are restive in the prolonged "roleless role" of retirement. Older individuals differ widely; not all wish to remain in the labor force, but none wish to be

disregarded, denigrated, dependent, or categorized as useless. They wish to be seen as responsible participants in society rather than as burdens to be borne by younger members of oncoming cohorts. Even among the terminally ill, increasing numbers of older patients seem determined to participate in controlling the timing and conditions of their own death. Such pressures for structural change as the "living will," informed consent, and greater symmetry in doctor-patient relationships all foreshadow new norms and institutional arrangements (such as the hospice) for dying. The issue of structural lag thus forces consideration of the only experience on which individuals can never directly report (cf. J. Riley, 1991).

To summarize: Tremendous numbers of capable and potentially productive older people cannot long coexist with empty role structures, nor can younger adults continue to struggle under excessive role demands, while children have little part in serious affairs. For individuals, as Robert Kahn demonstrates in this book, there is a problem of person-environment fit. For society and its institutions and groups, economic and instrumental responsibilities are unevenly distributed by age. Something will have to give. As social scientists, we seek a deeper understanding of future structural changes that might improve the fit and reduce the lag.<sup>4</sup>

#### POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS OF STRUCTURAL CHANGE

If, then, it is the neglected dynamism of changing structures that must be modified to offset the lag, what will the structural changes of the future be like? How can they occur? How might we specify the detailed structures characterizing one of the vertical bars in Figure 1-1 as at the year 2000? or 2040? In this chapter, we consider just two of the many areas of possible structural changes—work and family. As a heuristic aid, we describe alternate extreme scenarios or "ideal types" of social structures. We postulate, in contrast to age-differentiated types, which are characterized by significant structural lag, age-integrated types, which theoretically have the potential to reduce it. (In Max Weber's sense, such ideal types are precisely that: They are

<sup>4</sup>For extended examples of interventions to improve both lives and structures, see Riley and Riley (1989).

hypothetical and artificially simplistic. They may never exist in real life but are an idealized selection from it.)

### Work

As schematized in Figure 1-2, we begin with work, with its close association with both education and leisure, and its indirect impact on the family. At the left of the chart, *age-differentiated* structures at one extreme divide societal roles and their occupants into the three familiar rigid "boxes": retirement or leisure for older people; work roles (paid or unpaid) for the middle-aged; educational roles for the young. This type of structure is commonplace today (cf. Kohli, Rein, Guilleminard, & van Gunsteren, 1991). It is convenient, providing orderliness of entry and exit from roles. It is bolstered by "ageism"—the view that children are of little societal use, and the erroneous but stubborn belief in universal and inevitable decline because of growing old. That was accepted almost without question in societies where paid employment was the predominant role, achievement (or material success) the province of men (thus predating the current era in which most women

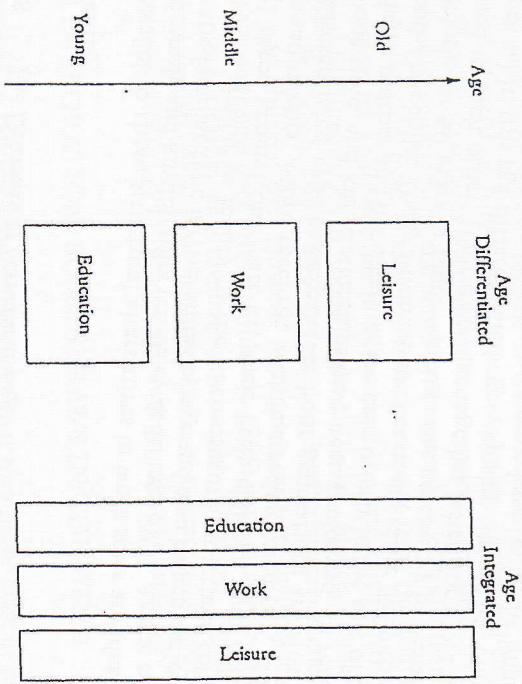


Figure 1-2 Ideal Types of Social Structures

carry the double load of work outside as well as inside the home). Nevertheless, these age-based structures and cultural norms can be seen as outdated vestigial remains of an earlier era when most people had died before their work was finished or their last child had left home.

At the opposite extreme, at the right of the chart, is the ideal type of *age-integrated* structures (cf. the classic pieces by Rehn, 1977; Best, 1981; also Habib & Nusberg, 1990). Here we can imagine that the age barriers are removed, so that role opportunities in all structures—education, work, and leisure—are open to people at every age. Throughout society, people of ages are brought together; that is, they are "integrated." Ideally, such flexible structures would open to older people the full range of role choices. For the middle-aged, there would be reductions in the strains imposed by multiple roles of work combined with family and homemaking. For young adults, there would be opportunities for the meaningful integration of work and school; and for children, opportunities to participate in responsibilities and decision making in family, school, and community.

A noteworthy feature of such ideal-typical age integration contributes to its feasibility: Spreading work more evenly across all ages does not depend on any necessary increase in the numbers of openings in the labor force, but merely reallocates the available openings more widely across the full age span. Thus, independent of fluctuations in the total demand for labor, age integration could lead quietly to re-placement of some full-time by part-time jobs, thereby freeing time for education, leisure, family, or other activities. To be sure, reducing the hours of paid work can entail reductions in income and loss of benefits (as emphasized in several chapters in this book). However, as one drastic structural change and partial solution to such losses, Robert Kahn (in Chapter 2) postulates a "4-hour work module" as an entirely new standard on which benefits could be based, to replace the conventional 40-hour per week standard. The whole notion of age integration is indeed revolutionary.

Apart from any pecuniary losses entailed, age integration has inherent drawbacks. If flexibility of age criteria for work were pushed too far, abuses could follow: Entitlements to support, relaxation, recreation, and self-fulfillment in retirement could be threatened (productivity cannot be required of everyone), or the well-known dangers of exploiting the labor of older people or children could rear their ugly heads.

## Family

Parallel to these structural alternatives in work roles are ideal types of family and kinship roles (cf. Riley & Riley, 1993). At one extreme is the familiar type differentiated by age and also by generation. This type is similar in reality to the 19th-century structures composed of three generations: parents, their little children, and occasional grandparents. More recently, with increasing longevity, this age-differentiated type has expanded: Four generations are alive at the same time, and kin relationships have been prolonged. In reality today, a mother and her daughter are only briefly in the role of parent and little child. Today a woman and her husband are likely to survive jointly for 40 years or more—though not necessarily to remain married to each other. (Our own marriage has lasted for more than 60 years.) In this age-differentiated type, kinship ties are not only affectual but also often rest on an economic base (as in the implicit intergenerational “contract” for material support between parents and their adult offspring; cf. Riley & Riley 1993).

At the opposite extreme is an *age-integrated* ideal type of kinship structure in which the constraints imposed by age and generation have been submerged. Here we imagine a boundless network of kin and kind-like relationships, in which people of any age—inside or outside the traditional family or household—are free to choose (or to earn the right) to support, love, or confide in one another. Or they may choose integrated type as a “latent matrix” (Riley, 1983), since many of these relationships may remain dormant until they are called on. This kinship type corresponds, not to structures that yet exist, but to many real elements in contemporary lives and behaviors. The pressures of changing lives have not yet crystallized into altered and accepted roles and norms. Institutionalized structures have not kept pace.

## SOME IMPLICATIONS OF AGE INTEGRATION

Where, then, does this typology of age differentiation versus age-integration leave us? It alerts us to key elements of the age-differentiated types that reflect the reality of the past and to key elements of the age-integrated types that, as we hypothesize, may be prophetic of some real directions for the future. It alerts us to far-reaching

social and cultural consequences that might eventuate from any shift toward age integration. Here we mention just three: (1) the impact on lives, (2) related forms of integration, and (3) changes in underlying values and meanings.

### The Impact on Lives

Because of the principle of interdependence between the two dynamisms, structural changes would have a reciprocal effect on the ways people grow up and grow old. Age-integrated structures would predictably lead to a reconstruction of people's entire lives. The rigid life course, which was historically established by men, would be replaced with flexible life pathways, as these are already being introduced by many women. Beyond a floor of economic security for everyone, these flexible paths would allow people at all ages to move in and out of education, to change jobs or start new careers, and to intersperse leisure and family activities more evenly with other activities throughout life. People in their later years would find doors opening to the full range of role choices; and they could become popularly regarded as an asset, not a burden on society. People in their years of paid employment would have more freedom for family life, community service, self-actualization, traveling, educational advancement, cultural pursuits, development of second careers. Young people, even children, would become part of the “real world.” Ideally, too, these flexible life pathways would also be diverse—allowing for the wide heterogeneity of people's preferences and attitudes (cf. Dannefer, 1987).<sup>9</sup>

### Related Forms of Integration

In addition to its effect on lives, age integration also evokes other forms of *institutional integration* (cf. Riley & Riley, 1991). As roles in work or retirement intersect with roles in other social institutions, old structures give way to new hybrids. (Chapter 4 in this book provides

<sup>9</sup> Unless such pathways were completely optional, they could result in exploitation and abuse, reduction in needed entitlement, or denigration of those who differ from the predominant view. As Anne Foner reminds us, we certainly do not wish to revert to children in mines as in Zola's *Germinal* or in New England factories in the early 20th century; nor do we wish to emulate the lot of migrant labor families today, or high school dropouts who too often have to become drug pushers or worse.

relevant examples from former East Germany of a converse shift away from age integration.) For example, corporations become integrated with schools as they provide educational facilities for employees, and with families as they provide day care for employees' children and find parents, or as technological advances allow jobs to be performed in the home. *Gender integration* is already being produced by the extraordinary increases in labor force participation by young and middle-aged women, so that men and women interact directly with each other at work as well as in the family (cf. Chapter 7). Even a degree of *class integration* seems possible, if the "haves" in their middle years were to have established patterns of reduced hours of paid work over a long period of future time, bringing them closer to the "have-nots"; or if new economic policies were to "level the playing field" for all ages.

#### Changes in Underlying Values and Meanings

Finally, a shift toward age integration would give new meanings to both individual and social life and would challenge the basic values and norms inherent in the familiar rigid structures. For example, working part-time or starting over in new careers, since they typically mean accepting periods of reduced income or loss of benefits, now tend to be regarded as signs of failure—but not so under age-integrated conditions. Flexible structures place less value on economic competition and comparative achievement and more on responsibilities and other rewards—affection from family and friends, respect from the community, esteem for contributions to science and the arts, recognition for personal fulfillment. As in Robert Bellah's (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1991) view, a "good society" gives precedence to family and children over personal indulgence, and to environmental and civic concerns over private opulence. If life pathways were to become more flexible and diverse, how might individual rights be weighed against social responsibilities (as in the "responsive society" of Amitai Etzioni, 1991)? What new rewards might be attained?

#### AGE INTEGRATION: SOME STRAWS IN THE WIND

We have been talking about ideal types that may never exist in reality. Nevertheless there is already evidence that some forms of age

integration may be imminent. Beneath the surface of our contemporary age-differentiated society, people's altered lives are creating very real pressures toward new structures. Again we illustrate from roles in family and work.

#### Family

In the family, the age-integrated (or "latent matrix" type) illustrates the emerging reality of complex contemporary kinship roles that, though not yet institutionalized, nevertheless cry out to be structured. Already manifest in many contemporary lives are kin relationships, and other *kinlike* relationships, that include the profusion of step-kin and in-laws left in the wake of rising divorce and remarriage; adopted children<sup>10</sup> and older people adopted as foster parents; gay and lesbian families; single-mother and single-father families; cohabitating partners (in the United States nearly half of young people today have cohabited); "fictive" kin, common in ethnic communities; godchildren and countless types of elective relationships; even biological linkages to two mothers, one who donates the egg and a second who bears the child.

For such confusing relationships, there are not yet any established social structures or norms. Theories of the "family" exclude them. Unlike some other languages, English does not have names for them. One personal example (using fictitious names) will illustrate the complexity of this age-integrated type. Our granddaughter Susan (a Harvard graduate) cohabits with Jim (a Harvard astrophysicist). They are not married, but their commitment runs deep: They have bought a home, and now have a baby (our first great-grandson). Jim has been twice divorced, and has a daughter nearly the same age as Susan. Yet, Susan has close bonds to this daughter and to both exwives. The question is: How is Susan related to all these people? (Even more intriguing: How are *we* related to Jim—or to his exwives?) What is the structure—the norms and expectations—for such relationships? How does age, or generation, enter in? This account may sound humorous, but it is nonetheless real as an illustration of changes in lives, and in people's behaviors and attitudes, for which no comparable structures

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Thomas Ericsson's (1990) account of Swedish spinsters who, having developed their own businesses, adopted young workers to be their heirs.

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or norms have yet been institutionalized. Lives and kinship attitudes and actions have been transformed. Yet, the lag persists.

What new norms and expectations for family roles then, what new theories and terminologies, can replace those previously defined by age and generation? Surely, current ideological calls, as in the United States for a "return to family values," must go beyond the outworn stereotype of two parents with their *little* children. How is the "family" to be handled legally? In public policy? In taking census counts? How will norms of intergenerational responsibility or "contract" come to be redefined? Pressures to correct the structural lag are imminent.

## Work

At work, evidences are emerging in the United States and elsewhere that, not only in lives but also in social structures, some elements of age integration are becoming a reality: that structures are changing, that the established age barriers are breaking down, and that deliberate interventions to offset structural lag are feasible (cf. Riley & Riley, 1989). Not only are educational roles no longer confined exclusively to the young, but work roles are no longer confined exclusively to the middle years. There has been—sometimes interrupted but sometimes fostered by periods of recession—increasing provision for older people of part-time work, flextime and flexplace arrangements, and programs of "unretirement," as well as opportunities to "moonlight" in work that is not officially reported (cf. Quinn, Burkhauser, & Myers, 1990). There are scattered signs of deliberate structural interventions that bring together people of all ages in all three domains of education, work, and leisure. For example, there are interventions to make it possible for people to move early from school to work, and later from work back again to school; to change careers, and (as workers and parents in the middle years) to include more leisure activities, rather than concentrating nearly all the "optional time" in retirement. In many countries, flexible working arrangements are challenging such established stereotypes as the rigid 40-hour week, the 8-hour day, and vacations of restricted length (cf. Henrichs, Roche, & Sirianni, 1991).

All such incipient changes can operate as pressures for still further changes toward age-integrated flexible roles. If such latent tendencies in fact coalesce toward a new societal integration, they could help to reduce structural lag and to unlock wider potentials for people's lives.

In some places, and under some conditions, then, strong pressures are already operating to alter societal structures in the age-integrated direction. For the future, it remains to be seen how the private sector will respond to such pressures, and how governments, policymakers, and practicing professionals will play their part (cf. Riley, Riley, & Johnson, 1969).

## ONR SCENARIO FOR THE FUTURE

*Age and Structural Lag* as a 1990s sequel to our 1930s attempt to study leisure, is quite a different book. In preparing it, we and our collaborators, after analyzing past and present changes, unabashedly propose future changes in domains far transcending leisure alone. Working with us, these collaborators attempt to probe the potentials for a new and more balanced relationship between social structures and human lives. They begin to ask whether, within the realm of possibility, we can discern a future society in which retirement as we know it today will be replaced by periods of leisure interspersed throughout the life course with periods of education and work; a society in which lifelong learning replaces the lockstep of traditional education; a society in which opportunities for paid work are spread more evenly across all ages; a society in which older people, as well as children, will be productive assets, not burdens; a society in which work is valued as much for its intrinsic satisfactions as for its economic returns; a society that can give new meanings not only to leisure but also to all of life—from birth to dying and death.

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