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Understanding the Baby Boom Generation: Comparative Perspectives

BY CHRIS PHILLIPSON¹

The concept of the “baby boom” generation has emerged as a significant theme within social gerontology, notably so in the USA but increasingly in a European context. This collection of papers is designed to shed some preliminary light on the idea of the “baby boom” drawing on research undertaken in Finland, France and the United Kingdom. The notion of a “baby boom” is itself open to various interpretations. From a demographic perspective, attention is focused upon the rise in the birth rate across a range of industrialised countries immediately following the end of the Second World War. The trend here was, in reality, highly variable: some countries (e.g. Finland) had a relatively compressed surge in birth rates following demobilization, this coming to an end at the beginning of the 1950s. Others (e.g. Australia and the USA) experienced a longer period of increasing birth rates – typically from the mid-1940s through to the mid-1960s (McKay 1997; Whitbourne and Willis 2006). The UK had a distinctive pattern of two separate peaks in the birth rate – in 1947 and 1964. In comparison, Germany experienced no real baby boom and only a moderate increase in the birth rate in the early 1960s.

From a sociological perspective, boomers have been viewed as having distinctive experiences that set them apart from previous generations. Edmunds and Turner (2002), for example, suggest that in the UK the boomers were a “strategic generation in aesthetic, cultural and sexual terms”. They go on to argue that: “The post-war baby-boomers

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were the first generation to live through a time when a mass consumer revolution transformed popular taste and lifestyles" (2002). More negatively, boomers have also been targeted as bringing instability to pension arrangements and social security. This became a familiar theme in the USA in the late-1980s, where boomers were charged with creating inequalities between generations and saddling their own children with large debts (Longman 1987; Peterson and Howe 1988). It was subsequently to re-surface a decade later with concerns voiced about the economic and social costs arising from a large generation entering retirement (Koltikoff and Burns 2004; Islam 2007).

All the authors in this collection would, however, caution against sweeping judgements about the boomer generation. Certainly, the extent to which boomers are a meaningful social category - and themselves identify with the term - will vary greatly from country to country. In the UK, the evidence from the paper from Biggs et al. suggests rather limited identification. In comparison, the case of Finland indicates boomers having a stronger collective identity, reflecting a mix of demographic, social and cultural influences. Moreover, the boomer generation is likely to carry forward cumulative processes of advantage and disadvantage, with distinctive class, ethnic and gender divisions being maintained. On the other hand, a key issue developed in all four papers concerns the extent to which particular characteristics may be attached to the boomer generation, with those structured around consumption and lifestyle attributes reflecting a key distinction from preceding generations.

The following four papers are designed to illustrate different aspects of the study of the boomer generation, drawing out theoretical perspectives and empirical data drawn from three European countries.

The first paper, from Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs, *The third age and the baby boomers: two approaches to the social structuring of later life*, sets out a helpful theoretical framework within which the boomer generation can be located. The authors draw out a distinction between a cohort perspective on the boomers and a generational approach focusing upon the third age. The authors make the point that in terms of identity and self-image, the driving force for boomers is less about demographics, more about the role of consumption and the market-place. Moreover, they trace a connection between the individualised lifestyles of the 60s generation, and

the creation of a “third age” which decouples the traditional link between work and leisure. At the same time, traditional approaches to ageing are also being rejected by boomers, reflected in the emergence of new forms of marketing targeted at the reconstruction of middle age.

The second paper, by Simon Biggs, Rebecca Leach, Chris Phillipson and Anne-Marie Money, *The mature imagination and consumption strategies*, examines approaches to the maintenance of identity among the boomer generation. Essentially, the paper is concerned with the attitudes of boomers towards growing old, the strategies adopted in response to ageing, and potential links with generational and consumption issues. The paper is based upon interviews with 150 respondents in the 1945 to 1954 birth cohort, these carried out in a socially-mixed suburb of South Manchester in England. The authors note, in contrast to the Finnish research, relatively limited identification with the boomer label, but with stronger associations with the idea of a “60s generation”. There is though some evidence (as in Finland) of boomers representing a “bridging generation”, having consumer habits closer to succeeding generations but with approaches to some aspects of expenditure (notably in relation to personal credit) which link back to older generations. The authors indicate the importance of consumption for boomers, especially in areas such as clothing and bodily maintenance. Equally, there is a desire for new forms of ageing, and a rejection of traditional labels associated with “old age”.

The third paper, from Catherine Bonvalet and Jim Ogg, *Ageing in inner cities – the residential dilemmas of the baby boomer generation*, explores the interaction of boomers within the urban environments of Paris and London. The theoretical framework here concerns the importance of “gentrification” i.e. the transformation of city neighbourhoods through the immigration of (relatively) wealthy socio-economic groups. This process has been led in particular by the boomer generation, who has been in the forefront of the creation of lifestyles associated with urban localities. The paper examines the residential choices open to boomers as they move into a stage of the life course where children are leaving home and where retirement draws nearer. The authors examine this issue in the context of interviews carried out with 60 Londoners and Parisians born between 1945 and 1954. The significant research question is whether the reasons

that brought individuals to the city – jobs, resources, housing – remain relevant (and attractive) still in later life. The answers suggest that although for many people in midlife city life retains its allure, others are adversely affected by the rapid changes affecting global cities such as London and Paris. Given the likelihood that most boomers will remain in urban settings (even if a minority have second homes elsewhere), further research on the impact of city living on later life seems important to pursue.

The fourth paper, from Antti Karisto, *Finnish baby boomers and the emergence of the third age*, draws directly upon the perspective developed by Gilleard and Higgs but sets this within a context where there is a more developed boomer identity. The paper spells out a number of characteristics associated with Finnish boomers, these producing a sense of a generation distinctive in comparison with the one preceding and that following. The author grounds this development within the socio-economic context of Finland in the 1950s and 1960s, with the transfer from a rural to an industrial economy and associated opportunities for rapid upward social mobility. This movement of a relatively large social group into a new economic sector was combined with the social characteristic of those reaching maturity in the 60s – notably distinctive forms of self-expression and political radicalism. Following Gilleard and Higgs, the paper also makes the link between boomers and the emergence of new styles of consumption, especially in the period following the ending of full-time employment. However, the paper also develops the argument that it is more accurate to view boomers as a “crossroads generation”, with attributes drawn from the preceding generation as well as having novel attitudes and perspectives of its own.

In conclusion, these papers present a number of theoretical and empirical perspectives on the idea of the boomer generation. Despite the undoubted need for caution in extrapolations to the future, important sociological and policy issues about boomers do need to be tackled. Generalisations about this group are actually quite difficult given the differences across countries; and demography is certainly not destiny – least of all for the immensely varied boomer cohort. But boomers appear especially interesting in terms of what they might achieve in challenging traditional approaches to ageing, driven by the role of consumption, re-

sidual political radicalism, and a desire for new life styles. Boomers certainly raise challenging questions for research, and it is to be hoped that these papers will generate additional work exploring their likely impact on future patterns of growing old.

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The Third Age and the Baby Boomers

Two Approaches to the Social Structuring of Later Life

BY CHRIS GILLEARD¹ AND PAUL HIGGS²

Abstract

This paper outlines two contrasting positions in interpreting contemporary change in later life. These are summarily represented by a cohort approach that focuses upon the baby boomers and a generational approach that focuses upon the third age. We argue that understanding the role of the sixties' cultural revolution for the emergence of the third age offers a broader conceptual understanding of the transformation of later life than that provided by the more restrictive and restricting framework of a baby boom cohort. That many people, particularly in the USA, self identify with the term 'baby boomer' reflects not so much the power of cohorts as structuring influences on the 'conscience collective' as the role of the market and the media in shaping their social identities.

Keywords: Cohort, Generation, Midlife

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Introduction

With the notable exception of gerontology, the horizontal divisions within society such as cohort, age group and generation have had considerably less attention paid to them than the vertical divisions of class, gender and ethnicity. Arguably, the insights from social gerontology concerning the significance of age cohort and generation are becoming more important to the wider understanding of society. Part of this change in perspective is the 'cultural turn' that has influenced a wide range of disciplines in the behavioural, human and social sciences (Chaney 1994; Denning 2004; Jameson 1991; Ray and Sayer 1999). Key to the idea of the cultural turn is the perceived inadequacy of structurally determining explanations of social processes that are based upon class or economic interest in contrast to those emphasising diversity, differentiation and distinction. The emergence of age-based sub-cultures represents one aspect of this more general phenomenon. The purpose of the present paper is to explore the contemporary organisation and experience of later life drawing upon two contrasting approaches to studying the horizontal divisions in society, namely that of cohort and that of generation.

Peter Laslett's (1989) book, *A Fresh Map of Life*, is seminal in identifying "the third age" as a key development in the transformation of later life in contemporary society. By popularising the idea that a new stage of life was emerging after retirement, in post-war Western society, Laslett sought to integrate history and demography with individual development to define what he saw as a "new" personal and collective identity. This identity stood in direct contrast to the traditional social categorisation of later life as "old age". In the process, however, Laslett confounded individual development, cohort and period, making the third age seem a phenomenon of personal achievement as much as social transformation. Each of these ingredients is problematic. First, as Thane has pointed out, delineating the various stages of life has a long history and the distinction between a "green" old age and a "frail" old age goes back at least to medieval times (Thane 2003). Secondly, Laslett's emphasis upon demographic indicators leads him to seek to "date" the emergence of the third age at the point when the majority of a particular birth cohort can expect

to reach the age of seventy (Laslett 1989). This “fact” defines the historical period that determines the emergence of a third age. Taken together, this amalgam of individual development, history and demography, though superficially seductive, fails to provide a convincing analysis of the cultural and social transformation of later life that situates it more firmly within post-war consumer culture. This failure of social and cultural analysis leads Laslett to become preoccupied with the moral imperative for older people to become “true” third agers (Laslett 1989).

Whilst recognising the importance of Laslett’s work in highlighting change within later life, we have argued that a more adequate analysis of the third age is required (Gilleard and Higgs 2002). In this paper we wish to contrast two alternative perspectives: a *cohort based approach* to the third age that is framed around the ageing of a “baby boomer” cohort with a *generational approach* that is concerned with the evolution of “mass consumer culture” across the life course. Common to both approaches is a concern with historical change in the experience of later life. What differentiates them is the former’s focus upon a distinct cohort identity (i.e. as a baby boomer) as against the latter’s focus upon generational lifestyle (i.e. as participants in the third age). Before addressing these differences, we need to look more closely at the specific period in question, namely the decades after the 1950s, a time which Laslett suggests saw the first emergence of the third age (Laslett 1989). This period is important not just for social gerontologists but for social science as a whole as it is the crux of debates over the transformation of modernity itself (Beck et al. 2003; Giddens 1990; Jameson 1991; Lash and Urry 1987).

Periodising the “Sixties”

Birth cohort and generational approaches share a common interest in periodisation, particularly the significance of the decades after the Second World War, in transforming the experiences of adulthood during and after working life. Key elements in those changes are the rise in affluence and the concomitant expansion of consumption and communication; the growth of occupational and educational opportunities for women; the shift from manufacturing to service industry; transformations in urban and rural communities; the rise in secularism; the expan-

sion of leisure and entertainment; and the diversification of sources of income sustaining later life (Gallie 2000; Hakim 2000; Ransome 2005; Sandbrook 2005; 2006).

Locating a starting point for these changes raises a number of problems. Different countries had different starting points and trajectories, but throughout the Western World the 1960s marked a pivotal moment, crystallised by the events of 1968, from the “summer of love” to student rebellion to political crisis and military defeat (Kurlansky 2005; Marwick 1998; Sandbrook 2006). Parallel with the cultural revolution of that decade was an unparalleled period of economic growth, relatively full employment and expanding opportunities for domestic expenditure (Atkinson 2000; Ransome 2005; Rosen 2003; Therborn 1995). Such affluence fostered and supported increasing social differentiation and the growth of subcultures based on “different lifestyles, ways of purchasing” (Denning 2004). Those most exposed to the challenge of affluence were youth, a term that extended from the mid-teens up to the mid-twenties, constituted by those born in the 1940s and early 1950s (Marwick 1998).

Accompanying these changes in the material circumstances of society were changes in social attitude. Central to the growth of subculture was a privileging of agency (Jenks 2005) and ideas of “liberation” (Denning 2004). Choice, autonomy, and self-expression were valorised along with a growth in everyday hedonism. As the British poet Philip Larkin noted somewhat wryly, sex emerged as a major public good in the 1960s, somewhere between the Lady Chatterley trial and the Beatles first LP. Expanding leisure meant expanding pleasure. It was no longer the case of shocking the bourgeoisie – the target had shifted to shocking the older generation (Mackay 1997). If the inter-war years had been a time when class based revolutions seemed imminent, the 1960s were a time when a generational revolution appeared to be in the offing. Generational rather than class or gender based differences became more salient and the earlier cultural divisions of class and gender became less determining. Elvis Presley, James Dean and Marlon Brando presented themselves as role model “rebels” to working class and middle class kids alike (Cross 2000). In Britain there was a widespread belief conveyed by the media that a new class was emerging, defined by different parameters based upon outlook, style and, particularly, youth (Sandbrook 2006).

The "revolution" on the streets, in the clubs and coffee bars, in the dance halls and on the college campuses was a revolt as much against the restrictions associated with the standards and styles of life of an older generation as it was against the oppression of classes or nations. It was a disdain and a dislike for all those who had maintained and managed existing society, not just its ruling elites (Judt 2007). The cultural divide that members of this post-Second World War cohort were fashioning was intended quite deliberately to exclude the preceding generation. Where once they had served as an apprenticeship for lifelong labour, the teenage years became a training ground for lifestyle consumption. As "youth culture" was shaped by the market, youth in turn created new spaces in which the market could expand and in the process counter culture became consumer culture (Binkley 2007; Heath and Potter 2005).

The Trajectory of a Generation

If youth acquired a new, crisis laden identity during the fifties and sixties, the later loss of "youth" facing those approaching middle age in the 1980s led to new concerns with the dilemmas of midlife and the need to resist the encroachments of age (Grossberg 1992). The development of lifestyle that had emerged out of the post-war youth subcultures continued into midlife. For those who had grown up in the youth privileging mass culture of the "long" sixties, who had been told that people over thirty had nothing to say that was worth listening to, who had listened eagerly to the once young Roger Daltrey singing "I hope I die before I get old", middlesence presented a serious dilemma. The issue was not so much about losing the attributes of youth as an aversion to becoming what had earlier been resisted i.e. old.

The resolution to this potential loss of identity was expressed by denying or actively resisting ageing, or better still doing both. In a slightly different formulation, Christopher Lasch spoke of the "culture of narcissism" founded by the youth culture of the sixties that, in his view, fostered "the denial" and "dread of age" that "originates not in a cult of youth but in a cult of the self" (Lasch 1980). The new individualism of the sixties set the scene for a new popular, self-help literature focused upon a youth-oriented middle age, offering reassurance to this new cohort of

ageing youths that, providing certain guidelines are followed, middle age can be as exciting and challenging as youth. Middle age could become a rejuvenating experience.

By the 1980s, lifestyle had become a dominant theme within US society, raising questions about what it is to be "an adult" in a world where "youthful" rebellion had become institutionalised as an unending process of individualisation and personal differentiation (Grossberg 1992). Citizen consumers seemed to exist in infinitely divisible groupings, holding in common the desire to improve their lives, but lacking, and seeming not desiring any shared ideal of what such improvements should look like. Earlier counter-cultural movements from the 1960s and 1970s had become incorporated and effectively "commodified" into mainstream consumer culture (Lau 2000). Social change in the status of women, black and Hispanic Americans, gay men and women and other minority groups resulted in expanding opportunities and widening life choices but shorn of the political edge that they possessed when they emerged in the 1960s (Halter 2000; Michaels 2005). Continuing market segmentation saw new life stage, lifestyle opportunities emerging, offering a proliferation of consumer niches for a widening age range of citizen-participants united through a desire to achieve a continuing sense of personal distinction.

The submergence of cultural distinctions based on social class and the rise of "consumption cleavages" based upon "life stage" accelerated during the 1980s. Although structured by income, education, ethnicity and gender, a mature market started to reconstruct middle age. A growing number of self help books and an expanding array of anti-ageing products, nutraceuticals and cosmeceuticals "designed" to ward off the signs of old age began appearing in bookshops, healthfood stores and pharmacies (Gilleard and Higgs 2000). Life stage emerged as an increasingly significant source of market segmentation at the time when the participants of post war youth culture were reaching midlife and some members of its advance vanguard already retiring. Making visible this "invisible consumer market", the market was starting to target the over forties/over fifties with a variety of lifestyle products that promised "looking and feeling healthier happier and more beautiful than ever before" (quotation from the September 1982 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*, cited by Friedan 1994). Although not without earlier precedents, what was

distinctive about the 1980s marketing of middle age was its presentation of middle age as the start of something new – a new [not old] stage of life, a life “beginning at 40” (*Weekend* magazine article, 5th November 1988 cited in Benson 1997).

From the late-1980s onwards a further twist was added by the introduction of “generational marketing”, epitomised in such books as *Rocking the Ages* (Smith and Clurman 1997), *Boom, Bust & Echo* (Foot 1997) and *The Age Wave* (Dytchwald and Flower 1990). This idea has spread from North America to other developed countries and a number of organisations have been set up to capitalise on this latest phase in the market segmentation of a generation whose adult life has been marked by the restless pursuit of consumption mediated distinction. The maturing of those who had been young in the 1960s has been accompanied by continuing differentiation and the fading of the image of middle age as a time of settled sameness. The rejection of conformity had become not so much a sign of youth as the mindset of a generation that is refusing to conform and grow old.

One consequence is that, by the turn of the twenty first century, old age has lost much of its definition. The terms “later life” and “the third age” have become common currency, even if their meaning is subject to multiple interpretations. The birth cohort at the centre of this change is arguably that made up of people born in the 1940s, who reached adulthood at any point from the late 1950s to the late 1960s. The period during which they have lived through their adult years is certainly distinct, as an era of mass consumption, mass communication and mass culture, in which liberation, lifestyle and leisure have played such important parts. The question that must be raised is whether it is the time of their lives, or the life of their times that is most central to understanding the fragmentation and dissolution of the social category of old age that is now evident. This leads us to the central point of this paper, namely the difference between a cohort and a generation in explaining the emergence and significance of the third age.

Baby Boomers: Cohort or Generational Identity?

In Britain and the US, baby boomers are framed as a demographic; a particularly large birth cohort whose passage through the second half of the twentieth century is seen as creating a particularly significant cultural wave. What makes this wave iconic is the degree to which the sheer number of "boomers" dwarfs those born either side of it. The habits attitudes and dispositions of this cohort are seen to dominate the cultural sphere because of their numerical supremacy and because they are catering to their own particular interests. What has been remarkable is the extent to which a boomer iconography has taken off since the late 1980s. Whereas the term baby boomer was originally confined to economic and demographic analyses of a particularly large twenty year US birth cohort (e.g. Russell 1982; Light 1988), it has more recently become a lodestone of US society, signifying a new age for age as growing numbers of people are predicted to start retiring in the second decade of the twenty first century (Dytchwald and Flower 1990; Dytchwald 1999).

But despite being talked about more and more by demographers, economists, gerontologists and political scientists in the USA, it is not clear if being a baby boomer is an identity that people outside the USA ascribe to themselves or others their age and what significance should be attached to this type of social identity. Several problems arise when the term is used both as a source of distinction and as a particular social category demarcated by year of birth. In the first place, there is the problem of delineation. As with any cohort, there is an inevitable arbitrariness in determining its boundaries. When those boundaries are based upon relative numbers born in any one year, clearly there will be both temporal and national variations that will result in some countries having quite different groups of people labelled as baby boomers, with some countries having no baby boom cohorts at all (see below).

A self-ascribed baby boomer status clearly has more meaning for North Americans than it does for most Europeans. Whether this meaning is conferred as a creation of the market and the media rather than by the weight of demographics is probably impossible to answer definitively but it seems likely that the appropriation of this term by people working in marketing and the media has played the major role in establishing this identity in Canada and the USA. Given the twenty year span covered by

the term in the USA, baby boomers will include people whose experiences will at any one point in time differ quite substantively – from the young adult watching and reading about the tumultuous events of 1968 to those who were pre-schoolers at the time; or equally the difference, in 2006, between a sixty year old person taking early retirement in Arizona and a forty year old raising a new baby in Arkansas.

Peter Laslett accused Ken Dytchwald, in his book on the ageing of the baby boomers, of “tak[ing] from demography the concept of cohort and ...misusing it in a bizarre fashion” (Laslett 2000). Laslett criticised Dytchwald for his lack of knowledge of demography. Perhaps the point is that while demography is no basis for creating a model of sociology, the incorporation of demographic terminology into popular culture is itself not without interest or significance, and particularly the links that have been established between the cultural creation of a baby boomer identity and ageing.

Rather than seeking, let alone conferring any explanatory power on the term “baby boomers” as a social identity structured by demographics, it is better to explore how the generational schism that set those who were young apart from those who were old in the sixties has been reconfigured. The post-war US baby boom first appeared as a concern of policy makers and economists in the 1970s, for whom it was the numerical size of the cohort that was of primary significance (Bean 1983; Butz and Ward 1979; Easterlin 1968; Sweezy 1971). The transformation of this demographic into a self-inscribed identity was achieved through its elaboration by the market as noted earlier. What links the baby boomers with the youth culture of the 1960s is their appropriation by the market. Where once concerns were expressed about the financial difficulties facing this large birth cohort – in terms of their earnings (Berger 1985; Easterlin Schaeffer and Macunovich 1993; Levy and Michel 1986) and their future retirement income (Levy and Michel 1991; Welch 1979) – by the 1990s, their status had been transformed into that of a particularly favoured group, whose forthcoming retirement would establish a new age for old age (cf. Dytchwald 1999; Owsram 1996). Just as the counter culture of youth became incorporated within the mass consumer society of the 1960s, so in the 1990s, baby boomers have become the motif of a new mature market. It is no longer the weight of their demographic numbers that

marks them out as a significant social structure. Instead, it is their *generational habitus* (Gilleard and Higgs 2005) that is celebrated by the advocates of generational marketing such as Dychtwald (1999), Moschis (1994), Walker Smith and Clurman (1997) and Wallace (1999).

Outside North America less emphasis has been paid to this demographic structure, partly because the post war circumstances of European nations were highly diverse. In Finland, the post war baby boom lasted for about three years (Suokannas 2005; see Karisto this issue); in Eastern Europe, there were few signs of any post war baby boom, rather the opposite, a decline in fertility throughout the 1950s (Therborn 1995); in Italy there had been a steady decline in fertility that only came to a halt in the 1950s (Livi Bacci 1967); while in Germany there was no post war baby boom until the 1960s. In France and in Britain, there were two quite separate booms, the first occurring between 1945 and 1950 and the second between 1960 and 1965 (Chauvel 2005; Evandrou and Falkingham 2000) whilst fertility patterns in Eastern Europe developed in quite divergent directions from those in the West, dropping steadily in the post war decades (Coleman 1993).

It is only relatively recently that the North American preoccupation with the ageing of the baby boomers has been transferred into the discourse of European gerontology. This "Americanisation" of later life mirrors the earlier process of transatlantic cultural transformation that occurred after the Second World War (Kroen 2006; Kuisel 1993). Using the concept of the baby boomers outside its historical and geographical context turns a particular instance into a general phenomenon. The question that arises is whether the idea of the third age as a generational field commits the same over-generalising error.

That demographics are not the primary origin of generational identity can be gleaned from the experience of post First World War America. A generational divide emerged then, but it was largely confined to the middle classes who possessed the discretionary spending power to participate in the new cultures of modernity (Dumenil 1995; Hirshbein 2001). Faced with the mass hardship of the Depression and the drawing together of ranks following America's entry into the Second World War, the issue of a generational division subsided. But the idea had not been destroyed and it soon re-emerged after the Second World War in the

shape of a new social phenomenon – the American teenager. The parents of this new cohort of teenagers had themselves grown up in the inter-war years, at a time when American consumer society was establishing itself. The proto “youth culture” of the 1920s had already touched their lives and the idea of young people choosing their own wardrobe, using make up, fashioning hairstyles and owning motor bikes and motor cars was no longer so surprising or shocking as it once had been.

The post-war teenager affluence was mediated more by their parents’ rising income, than by any increase in teenagers’ own earned income (Hine 2000). Still it was disposable income. Teenagers bought cars, radios, records, and clothes, and spent time hanging out in coffee bars and drug stores, drinking, smoking and listening to music on the newly installed juke boxes that spread across America. Once the grown-ups had seated themselves comfortably in front of their television sets, the owners of commercial radio and the cinema industry soon realised that they would only survive by appealing to this new teenage audience. From this combination of post-war affluence, increasing market segmentation and the unifying experience provided by high school culture, a generational divide was instituted that stretched across ever-wider sections of American society. As this new “youth culture” began to help shape and, in its turn, was shaped by the market, a new social rupture emerged generating an even wider cultural divide. This was the emergence of new social movements that established a new politics around youth, freedom and identity, breaking with the previous politics of class and community that had dominated much of America’s political life throughout the first half of the 20th century (Denning 2004).

New layers of disaffection and alienation were exposed beneath the veneer of America’s affluent society while an old division within the nation that had been kept under wraps for much of the first half of the century re-emerged with the added vengeance of youth. Race and gender moved to the forefront of American politics; and with these issues there arose new questions of identity (Fraser 1995). After the 1973 oil crisis, many of the reforms of the 1960s were slowed down or halted. Much of the cultural revolution and its identity politics were gradually assimilated within what was now a more variegated, pervasive but passive consumer culture (Cohen 2004; Heath and Potter 2005). Real wages con-

tinued to grow, but more slowly than before, and American confidence in its consumer society began to suffer a series of temporary setbacks. The prospect of maintaining social integration through consumption had been severely challenged. Those excluded from mainstream society were excluded not so much by their inability to consume but by the fact that what they were forced to consume was an America with which they no longer wished to identify (Spigel and Curtin 1997). Sub-cultural styles seemed to be harbingers of new forms of social distinction, creating a vision of a more tolerant, rainbow nation.

But many of the above distinctions were inherently unstable. The "counter cultural" movements of the sixties and early seventies were, as Gary Cross has noted, "premised on the revolutionary potential of youth status... [and] had so little to say to people farther on in life" (Cross 2000). Instead, those moving further along in life developed individualised approaches toward consumption, focusing upon diffuse ideas of "values and lifestyle". The more solid consequences of the cultural revolution of the sixties seemed to be the expansion of consumption, through increasing market segmentation and personal differentiation, marking a transition from "popular" to "mass" culture. Cross cutting markets and segmented audiences provided the basis for an ever-growing commodification of the life world.

Conclusion

In this paper we have explored two different approaches to the horizontal stratification of society and the particular social significance of the baby boom cohorts. The approach that takes as its starting point the importance of the birth cohort as a demographically bounded mechanism for social identity is one that we feel suffers from two serious flaws. The first problem we would identify is that the boundaries are neither fixed nor firm, with the North American experience being taken as paradigmatic rather than historically exceptional. The second difficulty is that cohort even if used in a stable and consistent manner fails to capture the dynamic nature of cultural and social change, serving merely as a "black box" from which a variety of meanings are drawn. There is little prece-

dent for any birth cohort establishing an identity for itself, defined seemingly by its relative size.

Our position is that the core of the cultural transformation in later life, already highlighted by Laslett in the late 1980s, derives from a key generational divide that has emerged and evolved during the second half of the twentieth century. While much has been written about the development of mass consumer society and the growth of mass communication during this period, these, though necessary preconditions, are insufficient to explain the phenomenon that is the third age. Closely allied to the rise of affluence across the life course, has been the expansion of market segmentation, characterised as much by the horizontal divisions of generation and life stage as by class education and gender. One major consequence has been the relative submergence of class and communal identities by those based upon consumer oriented lifestyle.

From such a perspective, the third age can be considered as an example of a generationally defined cultural field, where particular logics of power and influence operate that determine both the nature of the participants and the frameworks governing these practices. The underlying logic of the field is structured by consumption, a post-scarcity consumption that supports the search for distinction and that implicitly or explicitly rejects, denies or marginalises "old age". The practices that define this field are the routines of individualised consumption, routines whose function can be defined by or which help support what Foucault has referred to as "technologies of the self" (Foucault 1988). The logic that operates within the third age is the logic of consumption and the individualisation of society's material surplus.

The cultural capital of the third age derives from the effective use of leisure – engaging in what Ekerdt (1986) has referred to as the "busy ethic", with its emphasis upon activity, exercise, travel, eating out, self maintenance and self-care. Distinction lies less in the area of work, in one's past or present contribution to the social product and more in the arenas outside work – the creation of symbolically valued lifestyles. Work and leisure have become disconnected. Cultural capital flows more powerfully from the use and quality of individual leisure-time than from what work is done or how money is earned. The symbolic forms of capi-

tal that are legitimated within this field are those that support an active agentic consumerism.

The growing opportunities for personal choice that mass consumer society enables, indeed requires, helps maintain the continuing expansion of material and cultural capital and its overflow from use value into proliferating systems of distinction. Arenas of choice have expanded well beyond the traditional boundaries of the market, and now incorporate aspects of the life world previously held to be the preserve of either the family or the state. Within this post-sixties mentality, it is not youth per se that is bought and sold so much as the ideologies of youthfulness, symbolised by the consumerist quartet of virtues – choice, autonomy, self-expression and pleasure.

Old age – the attributed community of “the old” – forms a key boundary marking the limits of third age culture. The third age is defined both by the continuities of choice and the discontinuity of old age. Within the field is a conscious absence of an individualised old age. Old age is rejected as a collective choice because it seems to represent a return to the past. Communal representations of old age threaten to dissolve the lifestyles of autonomous individuals, turning them into an amorphous collective mass grave, the burial ground of individuality and choice. Old age is culturally marginalised because those who were old and out of date was the other that helped a generation define itself. As the signifier of material and symbolic bankruptcy, old age is simply not a choice.

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The Mature Imagination and Consumption Strategies

Age and Generation in the Development of a United Kingdom Baby Boomer Identity

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Abstract

Baby boomers have been credited with an essentially 'youthful' approach to themselves, to consumption and to life-style. As they enter midlife and older age they are also faced with the challenges of a mature identity. This paper critically examines the strategies that baby boomers in the United Kingdom use to manage identity as they grow older. Specifically, questions concerning attitudes to cohort labels, personal ageing and other generations are compared to the consumption choices that are made in areas considered to be key to an ageing identity, including: appearance, clothing and bodily maintenance. Boomers identify with succeeding rather than preceding generations. While they claim not to be concerned with bodily ageing as such, their strategies are aimed at maintaining a

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balance between youthful and mature identities. Priority was given to blurring the boundaries between themselves and younger adult generations. The implications for the relationship between adult ageing and patterns of consumption are explored.

Keywords: Baby boomer, sixties generation, mature identity, youthful identity, consumption, mid-life, appearance, fitness and exercise

Introduction

Baby boomers (defined as those born in the late 1940s and early 1950s) have become a focus of interest for at least two reasons. First, they have been credited as the harbingers of a characteristically 'youthful' approach to culture and as being the 20th century's 'first teenagers' (Huber & Skidmore 2003). They were children in a period of post-war austerity, but with adulthood coinciding with the rise of consumer society (Kynaston 2007; Sandbrook 2005) and carried with them hopes for a new and better society. It has been argued that, as a consequence, boomers grew up at a time of cultural shift, with traditional values being questioned and new opportunities for self-expression becoming available. Edmunds and Turner (2002) suggest, for example, that boomers were a 'strategic generation in aesthetic, cultural and sexual terms'. As such, the baby boomer cohort came of age, developed an adult identity and lifestyle habits, in circumstances that Mannheim (1952) has described as most likely to provoke a sense of a self-conscious generational identity among its members. They experienced, at a period of adult identity formation, historical and social shifts that had the potential to turn a cohort of people who happen to be born at the same time into a group with a particular sense of collective awareness that is then carried with them as they travel through the life course. The boomer cohort thereby achieved an iconic cultural status as a radical, liberal and above all 'youthful' generation. Whether or not this is true in practice, it has become an assumption on which contemporary boomers may have to take a stand, a viewpoint that affects their sense of who they are.

Second, baby boomers have become a focus of interest at the beginning of the 21st century because such a large cohort has not survived into

later life in contemporary memory, and may be historically unprecedented. Spending the adult years in a period marked by rapid change in social attitudes toward gender roles, race and sexual orientation, has raised the question of whether boomers will also provoke changes in the social construction of later life. The majority of this cohort is presented as both fitter and richer (Metz & Underwood 2005) than preceding ones, giving them the opportunity to use an expanded consumer culture to build lifestyles and identities that challenge traditional attitudes toward adult ageing. Gilleard & Higgs (2002) view them as a mid-century generation that 'broke the mould of the modern life course' coinciding with a wider cultural drift away from self definition in terms of production (what one does at work) to the perceived freedoms of consumer activity (how one creates a personal lifestyle). Individual members of such a large cohort are driven, according to Stewart and Torges (2006), to social and psychological expressions of individuality: desires feed back into the economy to provide greater consumer choice around adult ageing. Consumption supplies a multiplicity of props that can be used to create desired identities, and the question arises whether boomers will take advantage of these opportunities to re-define what it means to grow old. Specifically, what strategies might they use to balance the management of a mature identity, while maintaining an essentially youthful outlook on life?

Research Questions for a Mature Identity

The interaction between adult ageing, cohort labels and consumption is the focus of the rest of this paper. It will draw on research undertaken for the Economic and Social Research Council/Arts and Humanities Research Council's Cultures of Consumption Programme, with the project title '*Boomers and Beyond: intergenerational consumption and the mature imagination*'. Here, four areas were identified that linked questions of consumption, age-identity and the baby boomer cohort: their attitudes to personal ageing, attitudes to younger and older generational groups, whether or not respondents identified with 'boomer' as a cohort label, and the strategies adopted to maintain an ageing identity.

First, a youthful self has been identified with theories linking consumption and identity (Featherstone & Hepworth 1989) and a mature self with a life course-based approach to ageing (Biggs 1999). The former position suggests growing uniformity between older and younger age groups, whereas the latter proposes a growing distinctiveness of identity with age and an increased focus on existential issues associated with growing older (Biggs 2005). One aim of the research was thus to explore these two models and their consequences for patterns of consumption in later life.

Secondly, baby boomers have been associated with a dis-identification with previous generations and identification with younger generations (Harkin & Huber 2004; Gilleard & Higgs 2005). This conception of identity draws on the early work of Mannheim (1952), arguing that a generationally self-aware cohort would experience certain formative youthful events that create a rift between themselves and preceding generations. These positions suggest that identity is focused on youthful experience and a rejection of the old.

Thirdly, a number of writers (Woodward 1991; Biggs 1999; Grenier 2007) have argued that rather than passively responding to age expectations, adults engage in active strategies that serve to position themselves in relation to inter-generational encounters. It is quite possible that baby boomers use consumption as part of their wider strategies in coping with the challenge of growing older. Discovering the ways that boomers deploy consumption practices in the service of an ageing identity was a final research objective.

The demographic patterning of UK baby boomers consists of two waves, which peak in 1947 and 1964, respectively. For the purposes of the ESRC/AHRC project, research was based upon so-called 'first wave' baby boomers, defined as those born between 1945 and 1954. The core of the research comprised primary data collection with 150 baby boomers together with 30 follow-up, in-depth, biographical interviews. The sample consists of people born between 1945 and 1954, living in South Manchester, England. The characteristics of the sample did not differ significantly from the same age group in the wider UK population. Analysis of these interviews has provided unique insights into consumption patterns and lifestyles among the boomer generation. In each case trends in the

quantitative data from the first phase of interviews were expanded through qualitative responses and the in depth follow-up interviews. In view of the small sample size, quantitative data is largely descriptive and is interpreted by using the richer, qualitative material. Qualitative citations have been selected to reflect typical patterns of responding.

Operationalising Youthful and Mature Selves

It is clear from the introduction that baby boomers constitute a cultural as well as a demographic phenomenon. In order to investigate the relationship between changing attitudes to ageing and patterns of consumption, the previously conceptual distinction between the youthful and mature self required an operational definition. The project could then generate empirical evidence on the basis of which either of those identity positions could be identified or a new formulation could emerge. An operational definition emerged from a close reading of the theoretical base and isolating components of the two positions. Questions were then created for the first series of interviews and in subsequent in-depth interviews that either reflected these components directly or allowed certain identity positions to be inferred:

- The '*Youthful Self*' position would be inferred from a looking back to youth and childhood, references to and continuities with one's own youth, identification with the younger generation and feeling young inside.
- The '*Mature Self*' was made operational through looking forward to the time one had left in life course terms, a focus on current issues, identification with a peer generation and feelings of satisfaction with actual chronological age. These components were then turned into open-ended questions that were used to generate qualitative narrative material.

Material was collected through a number of methods. First, a series of discrete questions was asked as part of a semi-structured interview questionnaire, administered face-to-face, including the 'age discrepancy' items described below. Secondly, an in depth interview was subse-

quently undertaken, using probe questions aimed at generating free-flowing narrative content around topics identified by the original research questions (consumption practices, personal, social and societal attitudes to ageing, attitudes to other generational groups). The material was analysed in two ways, according to thematic content that had been coded as addressing the research questions, and, by the use of a modified grounded theory approach that allowed themes to emerge from the data without reference to the core themes. Codes were generated by two researchers working independently from each other; they were then cross checked by each member of the research team. Agreement by three researchers was needed before data was given a final thematic location.

An 'age discrepancy' score was also developed from the work of Kaufman and Elder (2002) to create a numerical score for different forms of age as experienced. This consisted of taking scores given on three dimensions: the age respondents felt inside (*subjective*), thought others saw them (*social*) and would like to be (*ideal*), from their chronological age. A positive score indicated that the respondent felt 'younger' and a negative score 'older' on each dimension. Pilot interviews (n=4) indicated that respondents did not experience difficulty in performing this task; it allowed numerical access to specific experiences of adult ageing that could then be compared to other scores.

Ageing & Generation

Attitudes to Personal and Social Ageing

A series of direct questions was asked about how important respondents thought age was to their personal and social identities. It appeared that far fewer boomers thought age was important to their sense of who they were 30% (n= 45) than felt that this was not very important 70% (n= 105). Similarly, only 37% (n= 55) reported that other people's perception of their age was important to them; 62% (n= 93) claiming that this was not important. This finding was supported by qualitative interview data where respondents reported to be less concerned with age as a marker of identity than they had been when they were younger:

I've spent my whole life up to 25 wanting to be older, because I saw those people in the positions that I wanted to be... but then when I reached it I was no better off, so it was a total waste of time.
(Male: 52 yrs)

A typical response can be found from this fifty three year old woman: "Certain things become less important. It doesn't really matter quite as much what people think about you".

As such these results reflect a mature identity in so far as a reduced dependence on the opinion of others and salience of age as a factor in support of one's identity, suggest a coming to terms with current age-circumstances. Awareness of personal ageing was most often associated with peripheral physical signs - such as wrinkles - rather than serious physical disability, which was seen to mark the advent of old age itself. A common response was that this was an age marked by relative financial security, good health and being at ease with oneself, for example:

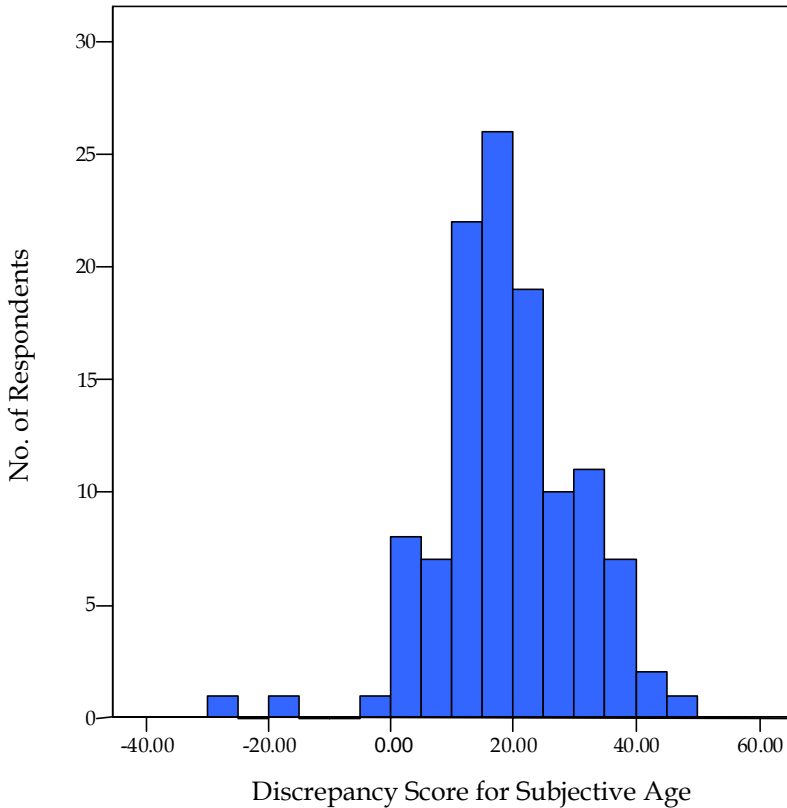
Well, at the moment we have no money worries... Like I'm in a settled relationship, there's no big traumas in my life. I'm more at ease with myself and I don't bother what people think about me as much as I used to when I was younger... I've got more freedom now. (Female: 55 yrs)

Age discrepancy scores for the baby boomer cohort indicated some interesting trends in the way that boomers thought about their identity and its relation to adult ageing (although not all of the possible 150 respondents answered the discrepancy questions, with drop outs averaging at 4%). In terms of *subjective age*, it appeared that almost all respondents (barring 2%, n=3) felt younger inside than their actual age, supporting the 'youthful' position (see Figure One). This would appear to be a larger percentage than that identified in a study of people 60 and over (Bernard et al. 2004).

The trend toward feeling youthful inside is also reflected in respondents' self reports across the boomer age-span:

When I look in the mirror I don't see myself, if you understand what I mean. I feel... I don't feel my age. (Female: 58 yrs)

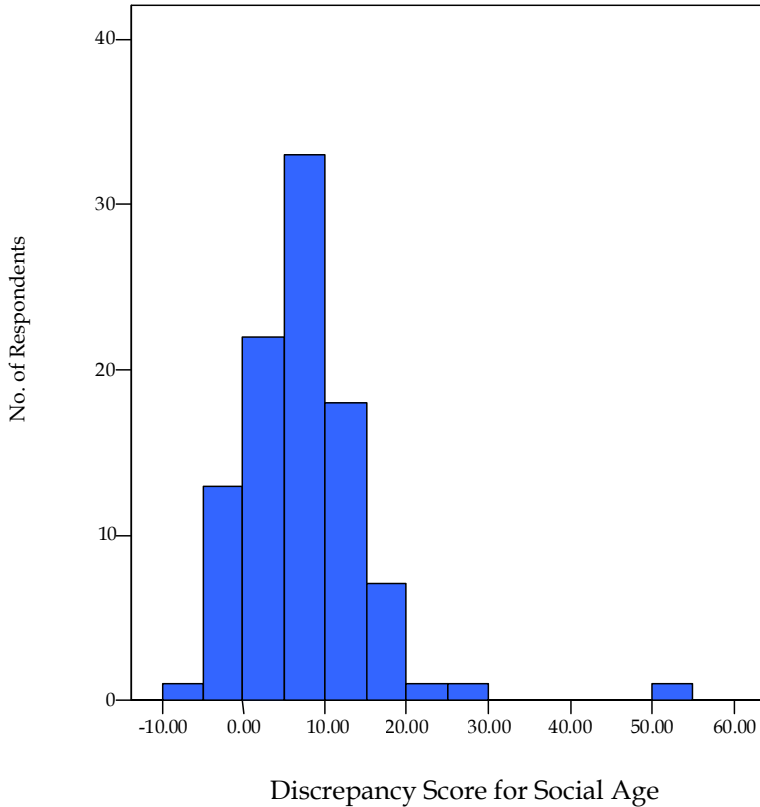
Figure 1. Age Discrepancy Scores for Subjective Age: Actual Age minus Age 'Feel inside'.



I think part of the problem is that I don't feel 51. Sometimes I see people and I think "God, they're younger than me". (Female: 51 yrs)

Attitudes toward ageing? I kind of still think we won't grow old attitude. Fifty isn't old. People are now saying sixty isn't old and I have friends who are in their sixties. But I don't consider sixty is old these days. (Male: 57 yrs).

Figure 2. Age Discrepancy Scores for Social Age: Actual Age minus 'How others see me'.



The modal age discrepancy score was plus 20, meaning that the most commonly cited difference between actual and felt ages was a difference of twenty years. This gives some validity to the popular dictum that '60 is the new 40', which may really be the case, at least in terms of what many baby boomers consider their subjective age to be.

Social age discrepancies, or the age respondents thought they appeared to others, peaked at 10 years younger than actual age, with all individuals who responded to this question, seeing themselves as looking younger than their actual age (n= 144) (see figure 2).

This again supports the 'youthful' position. Boomers thought that they appeared younger than they considered people of their age should generally look:

Some people have expressed surprise and they've known that I've been, you know 53. I think there's some people that perhaps think I'm maybe 45 or something. (Female: 53 yrs.)

'I don't know whether its flattery, most people see me as a bit younger than fifty-eight. So, um, turning fifty probably' (Female: 58 yrs).

Interviewer:

And how important is age a factor in how other people think about you?

Respondent:

I don't think it is very important actually. (Female: 59 yrs).

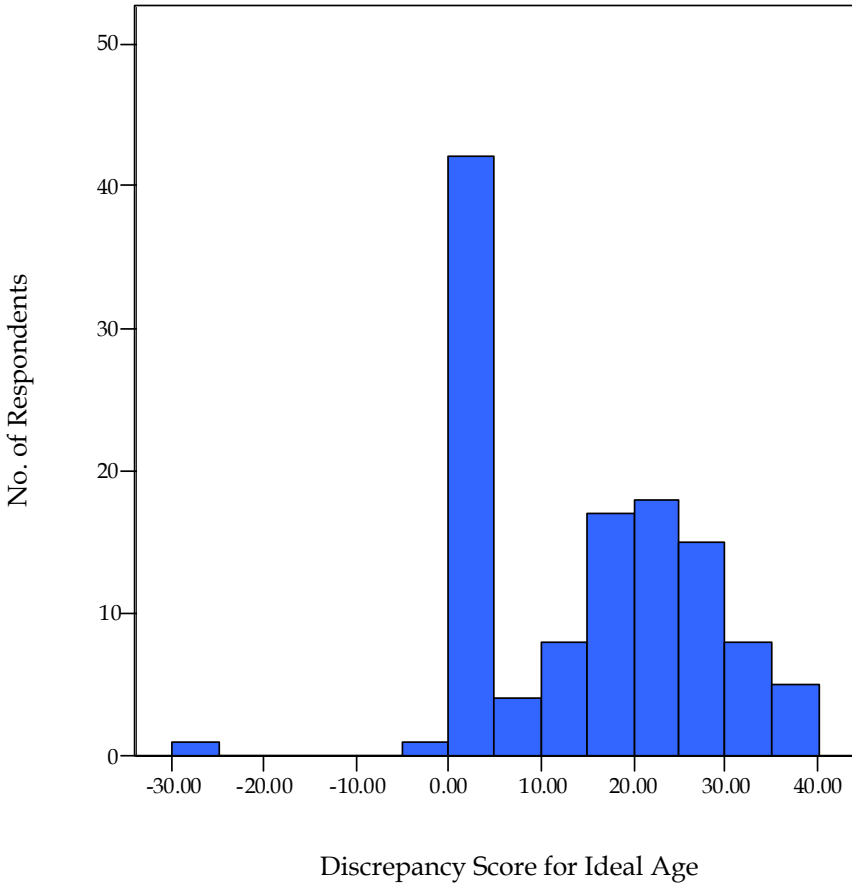
However, the *ideal* age that boomers would like to be indicated a modal majority at actual, chronological age (38% n= 43), with a small aspirational hump peaking at twenty years younger (see figure three). This supports the view that Boomers experience a general satisfaction and coming to terms with the age they are, plus a sense that they are less concerned by age than they had been during earlier phases of the life course.

This perception is reflected in the qualitative data and supports the 'mature identity' position:

No I actually like the age I am, I am actually really enjoying my life at the moment. I get a very big challenging day at work and when I come here and it's an oasis of calm. I'm not driven by my hormones. (Female: 60 yrs)

No need to be older or younger. (Male: 55 yrs)

Figure 3. Age Discrepancy Scores for Ideal Age: Actual Age minus 'Would like to be'.



I don't see myself as old, but neither do I see myself in a way as being young or in my, as if I was still in my early thirties. Because I think I've learned a lot since then. (Female: 55 yrs)

Difficult really. I don't want to grow old but I want to be... you know, I am what I am. (Male: 59 yrs)

The majority of our cohort considered themselves to be comfortable with the age they found themselves to be, for example:

Um, I think you feel comfortable in yourself. I feel more confident, I think, probably, because you know what your capabilities are. (Female: 58 yrs).

The advantages of being my age are...Experience and not having to think about how other people think of you. (Male: 57 yrs)

Respondent:

I don't like the limited life, the amount of time I might have left, but.

Interviewer:

But you're quite happy being 58?

Respondent:

I'm quite happy being it, yes, yes, very relaxed about it. (Female: 58 yrs)

While 42% (n=56) of respondents reported that they thought of their lives in terms of time since childhood or youth, 51% (n=69) indicated that they thought of it in terms of the time they had left. This indicates a relatively even split between those who calibrated their life course by looking back and those who looked forward and were primarily thinking about the future. As such it shows a mixture of youthful and mature identity markers:

When you get to a certain age you want to start mapping your life out but you don't want to give anything up do you? (Male: 58 yrs)

I don't look back but I look forward to the time I've got left... For me it's very much with what I've got left to do with the time I've got left. (Female: 57 yrs)

It is tempting to speculate that boomers have a sense, sometimes articulated in the qualitative data, of what someone their age would otherwise be like, a socially constructed idea of what a person in their mid- to late-fifties should be, to which they are an exception:

If you thought the idea of middle age being a period when you became – started to become slightly staid and boring – I would say, hopefully I haven't got there yet, but on the other hand if you sort of said, is middle age a phase of life as opposed to an attitude... because you had the idea at one time if you were a middle-aged man in a sort of tweed jacket and pipe and walking dogs. (Male: 53 yrs)

I was sixty last month and when my dad was sixty and my mum was sixty they were old people, and I really only think of myself as forty. They were thinking of coming to the end of their life but I've got no intention [*of thinking in this way*]. (Male: 60 yrs)

Attitudes to personal ageing can, however, shade into a state of denial about the ageing process itself:

I kind of think we won't grow old, fifty isn't old. (Male: 57 yrs)

You're as young as you feel. I don't think it's very important to be honest with you. (Female: 61 yrs)

It's all psychological I think. It's all in the mind. (Male: 55 yrs)

An unexpected outcome of this research was that there were remarkably few gender differences arising from the data. Women and men, at least in terms of their attitudes to youthful and mature identities, appeared to have very similar patterns of responding to the issues raised. These patterns included a reduced concern about the opinion of others and a sense of being at ease with their current age, buoyed up by a perception that they looked younger than they thought they would and an emphasis on the importance of maintaining a youthful identity adapted, by degrees, to mature circumstances.

Attitudes to Other Generations

The use of generational identity emerges as a complex set of markers of distinctiveness, with identification between generations depending upon the type of association being described. There was some evidence that, as suggested by Featherstone and Hepworth (1989), a blurring of age-identities was taking place, at least with respect to younger generations,

but also indications that boomers saw themselves as a distinctive generational group with particular maturational demands. Social attitudes were seen as the main marker of similarity between boomer and succeeding generations and of distinction from preceding ones. The most salient marker of generational attitudes to the older generation was one of difference, based on historical circumstances, social attitudes and expectations:

I think outlook and attitude is very different now. My generation and the up and coming generation are more accepting of people and the way that people live and there's no stigma now. (Female: 52 yrs)

I find, I mean, my parents, I'm in a generation way further apart from them than my children are from me. (Male: 54 yrs)

I think my generation were a lot younger than my dad's generation at the same age. (Male: 58 yrs)

The evidence, then, suggests that boomers tend to see themselves as different from the preceding generation. This was almost exclusively conceived in terms of their parental generation as a family generation, rather than in terms of popular cultural markers. But there were also continuities, for example in terms of attitudes to spending and credit, which were also put down to early personal experience:

I remember my parents not wanting to get into debt. (Female: 55 yrs)

I'm a bit careful with what I spend... and I don't like to waste anything, but, I think it's the way we were brought up. (Female: 53 yrs)

Occasionally this was seen as a distinctive marker between themselves and younger age groups, and sometimes as a continuum reflecting availability and affluence following the austere lives of their parents:

I think my parents didn't have half the life that I had, they just, I think they sacrificed everything for their kids whereas these days anything I want I'll go and buy. (Male: 60 yrs)

Generally speaking the boomers in our study identified similarities between themselves and younger generational groups, both in terms of their own children and more widely as an age group, indicating, perhaps, a cultural shift as well as a perceived change in attitudes within families. This was particularly evident in areas of style, taste and social attitudes:

Oh I think I'm closer to my kid's generation. (Male: 52 yrs)

Well, generally speaking... the younger generation... they're much more throw-away, but then I think sometimes a lot of the values are the same as ours... they're more tolerant...I'm more tolerant than I would have been years ago. (Female: 57 yrs)

Boomers characteristically saw the 'blurring' of generations as something that had taken place between themselves and these younger groups:

I've got daughters in their thirties. I have to say and I think they'd probably agree with this, the way we think about life is very similar. (Female: 55 yrs)

To put it bluntly I see no difference. You see the plethora of people under sixty and around thirty as being in my cohort. I see everybody in that age band as clever as me, as well paid as me or as prejudiced about new technology or not as I am. (Male: 59 yrs).

Rather than simply reflecting a desire to 'stay young', attitudes to middle and later life interact with generational identification to produce a middle way for a more mature imagination. The way that respondents cope with these multiple influences is reflected in an attempt to balance them in ways typically expressed by the following examples:

Our generation, you've got a little bit of the past and a little bit of the future. (Male: 55 yrs)

I don't see myself as old, but neither do I see myself in a way as being young, or in my, as if I was still in my thirties. Because I think I've learned a lot since then. But I like to think I have something in common with people in their thirties which I feel I do have. (Female: 52 yrs)

The more, you know, experience you've got, the longer you've lived and maturity and whatever and you look at things that are going on in the world, your attitude kind of modifies. (Male: 57 yrs)

Occasionally, perceived affinities with preceding generations also evidenced a maturational component, for example:

The older you get, the more you appreciate the values of the previous generation. (Female: 55 yrs)

The hesitancy of some of these quotes, perhaps reflects the novelty, both personally and culturally of this phenomenon. Maturity, then, as a personal discontinuity with younger parts of the life-course, which is also linked to one's current life circumstance and accrued experience. This co-exists with a desire to maintain a youthful lifestyle and preserve certain forms of familial continuity.

Finally, in this section, a striking aspect of the qualitative interviews, as the quote below indicates, was that while respondents often had not explicitly considered their attitudes to ageing, the majority appeared to have little difficulty articulating a coherent viewpoint when asked. This in itself evidences a capacity for mature reflection on both ageing and life course processes:

I think we accept that we've got to grow older, but I think we want to put off that old age for as long as we can. I don't think that we necessarily feel the age we are. We might look it - especially to younger people, but I think inside we don't feel that much different. I think growing up in the time that we did has contributed to that. (Female: 55 yrs).

Strategising Ageing through Consumption Patterns

How, then, are these attitudes to ageing, a tendency to feel youthful tempered by a mature imagination, plus a desire to be close to younger rather than older generations, reflected in particular consumption practices? Boomers appear to hold particular views about the process of personal ageing, the importance of other's perceptions and the similarities and differences between generations. It is important to see whether pat-

terms of consumption are used to support the positions taken and how they develop strategies to enhance their identities in desired directions.

Strategies for Appearance and Clothing

When our 150 respondents were asked how important it was to maintain appearance, 83% (n= 125) said it was important or very important. In terms of consumption, this appears to be a pattern that was learned as part of teenage experience, subsequently modified to fit norms associated with mid to later life. Dress codes, and a certain degree of 'following trends' when they were younger (e.g. wearing flares/mini-skirts in the 60s), had been a feature of teenage consumption for boomers. Several of the respondents reported that the way they dressed was a means through which they could express changing attitudes at that time:

You still wanted to try and keep up with the fashion and the music and there was still a sense of excitement that we were part of a world that was changing...I suppose I was a bit of a rebel. I was the one that went to school not in the school uniform...the school uniform was royal blue and I went in pale green, in white tights with white lipstick which was not allowed...I suppose that was my way of saying "I'm going to be different". (Female: 52 yrs)

By the time boomers have reached midlife, the consumption of clothing is more closely associated with the erasure of differences based on age:

I think its becoming more difficult (to distinguish between the generations) to be quite honest. ... Yes its definitely the way that they present themselves, the things they're wearing now, people in their 50's and 60's are wearing things that you think, well, people in their 30's and 40's are wearing the same thing, but they look fine, its not a problem.... So there's a bridge between generations where they still look OK and I think when I was growing up, old ladies dressed like old ladies didn't they and you don't see that so much now. (Female: 52 yrs)

Rather than being simply a change in what is considered fashionable, however, the apparent difficulty that this respondent has in distinguishing age by dress code may be the accumulation of a series of individual choices to minimize age as a social category. As boomers reach mid and later life, a reported lack of concern with adult ageing is tempered by a

clear sense of ‘appropriateness’ of dress and behaviour, with strong age-related associations:

You don’t do anything stupid in your mid fifties. (Male: 56 yrs)

Yes, people expect you should behave in a certain way when you’re 57. And I think there’s a very fine line to tread....I mean I would hate to be mutton dressed as lamb. (Female: 57 yrs)

Strategies that incorporated dress codes that were considered age-appropriate and age-neutral were an important means by which generational relations and associations influence the presentation of self. The way in which those with a continued interest in fashion accounted for their consumption practices suggests that one of the main underlying factors was the desire to wear clothing that ‘suited’. For example, many women reported that they liked to follow the trends, but that they were conscious of the fact that ‘young’ clothes did not always suit them. They reported a sense of being ‘realistic’ in what they can and cannot wear, and reported avoiding items they consider to be too young for them, or clothes that were not suited to their figure:

I wouldn’t wear my daughter’s clothes because I might look ridiculous. (Female: 52 yrs)

The desire to wear clothes that ‘suited their age’ worked in both directions. Two women, for example, reported that they were not at the “twin set and pearl” stage they associated with the older generation, and there was a real sense of hope that they’d got it ‘right’. One man remarked that for him, getting it ‘right’ involves achieving a balance between buying clothes that do not make him look old, but that are still appropriate for a man of his age. These were seen as an important element in maintaining positive intergenerational relations.

Hopefully you buy...stuff that is nice and appropriate and flattering, but is appropriate for the age group, but wouldn’t be such that your daughter wouldn’t be seen dead...they’re quite happy to be with you wearing those sort of things, they don’t feel as if you’re an old fuddy duddy who they associate it with. (Male: 55 yrs)

Many of the respondents recognised that certain shops were aimed at different generations, and again, their use (or avoidance) of such shops similarly worked in both directions, as the following quote suggests:

If I wanted to go and buy some new clothes, there are shops I wouldn't think of going into, I wouldn't even walk in, because I know I would say, "That's not for me". If I was 20 years younger I might go there. Then there are shops that I would not go into but my parents would have bought in. Those sort of shops are disappearing in a way. (Male: 55 yrs)

Respondents recognised that some shops were more suited to 'younger generations', and many reported that they would not even go into these shops. However, some of the female respondents reported liking and buying clothes in similar shops to their daughters. They also reported sharing clothes with their daughters in a way that they had not done with their mothers:

I think of my mother at my age, I think that she was old and I would never borrow her clothes for instance...and yet, my daughter would borrow my clothes. (Female: 57 yrs)

My daughter will wear my clothes and I don't often wear hers, but we like similar things and there's not that distinct difference in where I would shop and where she would shop. There is some difference, but it's not as marked as it would have been with my mother where she hated going into some of the shops I wanted to go into. (Female: 51 yrs)

Whether or not particular boomers consider common or different dress codes to be shared between themselves and their children probably depends on the age and fashion sense of the child in question. The main point here is that what at first glance appears to be purely personal consumption decisions about style and taste, are, on closer inspection, heavily influenced by considerations of generational association. Strategies that neutralise associations with older 'fuddy-duddy' generational themes and enhance smooth relations with younger generational groups, are at a premium. Consumption decisions about dress, used in the boomer teenage years to express individuality or rebelliousness, may also

be deployed on the very different ground of midlife to mark the rejection of traditional age-expectations.

The importance of clothing as a generational strategy, a youthful practice, modified to reflect mature consumption patterns, indicates one way in which boomers manage an ageing identity in midlife. This consists primarily of a toning down of age signifiers, a preference for simplicity and elegance, which if not exactly ageless aspires to being age-neutral. Key to the successful management of identity appears to be an understanding of 'appropriateness'. Appropriateness, in this generationally charged context involves, then, a de-emphasising of age signification plus sensitivity to tacit boundaries that if crossed are subject to internalised and potentially external sanction. Clothing as a principal site of consumer activity is used as a prop to stay within age-appropriate boundaries for appearance that if not explicitly enforced, are tacitly understood. This form of masquerade both displays and disguises age through the maintenance of 'appropriate' consumption decisions.

Strategies for bodily maintenance

When asked about patterns of consumption that could be interpreted as maintaining bodily functioning and appearance, only 27% (n= 38) reported exercising less than once per week; 40% (n= 59) used vitamins or minerals to supplement their diet. In general, baby boomers felt as if they are a generation that is conscious of being active and who will take up new consumption pursuits, particularly as they concern fitness and health:

I think we're a lot more active generation. I think we expect more out of life and I think we're willing to take on more. I don't think we're willing to settle into thinking I'm too old to do that now. I think our generation is more likely to give something a go, have a go at it...for instance, this year I've started having tennis lessons and for somebody who used to avoid PE at all costs at school, so at 53 you start saying "Oh I think I'll start playing tennis now". (Female: 53 yrs)

Boomers felt that health-related issues are increasingly emphasised in wider society, with magazines, booklets and adverts aimed at raising

awareness about diet, exercise and health checks. Many report taking such advice:

I think that as we've got older and you get older, the newspaper articles about what you are what you eat and you have to exercise and things like that, more so I think than any other generation that has gone before us, we're kind of taking all this in all the time aren't we? You get your blood pressure checked and you get your cholesterol checked and we are more sort of body conscious, more into I suppose trying to prolong our lives, but being healthier while we do it. We don't want to... I don't see the sense in living for a long, long time, if you're ill all of that time. (Female: 52 yrs)

Respondents mainly talked about their awareness of health in relation to preventative measures (in the form of routine checks at doctors, dentists). If they thought there was problem, they report visiting a professional quickly, whether a pharmacist, dentist or doctor, in order to check their concerns. Healthy diet appeared as one of the main ways in which respondents reported maintaining their health. They report that as they get older, they are increasingly aware of what a healthy diet consists of, and the positive effects of eating well:

I think in society generally we have become aware of needing to look after ourselves much more in terms of diet and exercise... I certainly think we are thinking quite carefully about diet. (Male: 55 yrs)

It was very common for the respondents to say that they *used* to exercise a lot, had a long period when they did not exercise, and then as they got older, they took it up once more. On the whole, the ideal was to stay healthy and active for as long as possible and certain consumption habits were seen to be important means of maintaining existing good health:

I go to the gym, I swim, I try and keep fit and healthy. Because I think yeah your body deteriorates and as you get older you lose bone density and things like that. So the more you can do in advance and preparation I suppose for getting older. Keep more flexible, supple, yeah has got to be better for you. So long as you don't overdo it, I mean I think some people can get very fanatical about exercise. (Female: 53 yrs)

Occasionally these 'maintenance' narratives are supplemented by deeper, more existential concerns:

It's all to do with, I suppose, the fear of dying I suppose, if that's, that's what it is with me. It's not, it's nice to be fit and healthy and be able to walk up the road and not, not being out of breath and all that kind of thing. But now I've got a bit of high blood pressure but it's to do with the fear of dying it really is about what the children are going to do. (Male: 52 yrs)

This man's own father had died at the age of 51, which left him with a heightened sense of mortality. However, reference to family history does not necessarily result in healthy consumption. One man was relatively unconcerned about his drinking habits and diet because his mother had lived until she was 93 yrs old even though she drank a lot of alcohol. The sentiment is clear - 'she got away with it, and so will I'. His parents were not particularly health conscious and lived to an old age, so why should he worry when he could: *'just enjoy life really, that's the bottom of it'*. (Male: 51yrs).

While lessons can be learned from the health patterns of preceding generations, a core motivation behind strategies for exercise and diet reflect social choices being made about retirement plans. For boomers in long-term relationships, both maintenance in the here and now and future plans reflect shared decisions and the notion that retirement and midlife is a time for companionship and leisure relationships, expressed as 'things done together' and a joint attitude to staying healthy, the better to enjoy retirement and later life. It is an active and conscious commitment to these ideas, and an extensive array of consumer products and services such as gyms, classes, vitamins and healthy food that mark this out as a key generational activity, at least in comparison to older cohorts.

For a number of respondents, the choice to consume certain sporting activities was clearly taken to enhance generational bonds with adult children, for example:

I love tennis, I'm not particularly good at it yet...it's a sport you can play at any age... my son is very much into tennis so its an interest I can share with him which has spurred me on to really have lessons because then I can go on the tennis courts and have a game with him. Its something else we can share. (Male: 61 yrs)

So while the consumption of sport and healthy foods may be most commonly associated with the personal, or partnership tasks of maintaining the ageing body and the prudent avoidance old age, the choice of activity can also provide a source of common bonds between generational groups.

On being a boomer

Balancing Mature and Youthful Identities

The extent to which boomers define themselves as a distinctive group of consumers emerges as having as much to do with their attitudes to youthfulness, maturity and to other generations as it does the function of the product at hand. There are common themes which may have their origins in the attitudes of the 'sixties generation' adapted to mature lifestyles. Personal ageing is, for example, seen as something that, culturally speaking, requires managing if it is to be successfully avoided but is not seen as overly problematic. Taken together, these findings indicate a complex relationship between youthful and mature selves. Maturity is evidenced in terms of comfort with current age and looking forward in terms of time left; youth in terms of feeling more youthful than their actual age implied and a blurring of differences with younger generations. It appears that baby boomers share certain characteristics and think about personal ageing and generational characteristics in ways they perceive to be different to traditional patterns, and that these are expressed in particular consumption choices. The ageing boomer, then, draws on a series of mature strategies to balance cultural and life-stage issues and while boomers deny concerns about ageing and age-differences with younger groups, they do it in a particularly 'boomerish' way.

'Staying young' was maintained in the here and now by associating with younger generations, an expressed lack of concern with one's own age, and enthusiasm for a cultural blurring between generational groups. Work, however, was a particular area in which age-discrimination had been experienced and where maintaining a balance between youthful and mature identities became viewed as problematic.

The strategies adopted were neither exclusively 'youthful' (Featherstone & Hepworth 1989), nor 'mature' (Biggs 1999). Rather, boomers attempt to find a balance between the two, which serves to sustain youthful lifestyles adapted to the requirements of a mature identity.

Strategies for Intergenerational Connection

A clear theme emerging from our research is a 'boomerish' desire to erase differences with younger generations, thereby reducing negative associations arising from boomer's own experience of their own parents. This extends to a rejection of associations with old age in general and ambivalence toward adult ageing and late life experience. Here, the manipulation of age and appearance is a powerful guiding principle for consumption activity during the middle years, indicating that the active strategising of consumer choices is not purely the domain of the young. While boomers may have learned some of these practices during earlier parts of the life course, they adapt them to their current situation, an influence of process rather than content. It is in this context that tacit norms of 'appropriateness' come into their own. These appear *sotto voce* as indicators of what it means to be a successful midlife boomer and while boomers appear to experience a relaxation of the power of other people's opinions, they are careful not to cross a tacit boundary of how age-neutrality in later midlife should be presented, especially in the presence of younger people. Successfully managing this boundary, through the deployment of consumption choices, is the badge of a successful mature identity.

The strategising of age-related consumption among this group does not appear to be an exclusively protective masquerade that some authors (Woodward 1991; Biggs 1997) have envisaged in late life, where it serves to protect an embattled 'inner self' from the slights of ageism. In addition to the protective function, strategies for identity management can also have a connective role (Biggs 1999), whereby appearances are managed in the service of an outward-going link to younger generational groups. These boomers do not perceive themselves to be 'old' in attitude or overly concerned with the age they feel themselves to be. They are generally comfortable with their age and want to keep things that way and consumption is not so much used to deny age, as to enhance the maintenance of existing age-neutral identities. Connection here is directed pri-

marily at appearances and activities that bring boomers closer to younger generations, centred on an attempt to erode specific age differences while recognising the advantages of maturity in the here and now.

Strategies for Intergenerational 'Downward Blurring'

The tendency toward strategies of connection noted above is not then marked by a general erosion of difference between generations, as suggested by Featherstone & Hepworth (1989). Rather, 'blurring' as perceived by boomers in the United Kingdom is unidirectional, referring only to themselves and the succeeding generation. A cultural tendency to valorise youth has been modified, through consumption, to a strategy of 'downward blurring' that emphasises intergenerational solidarity with succeeding adult generational groups. It became the subject of deliberate interpersonal strategies to foster and maintain younger friendships within and outside the family.

This tendency toward 'downward blurring' raises some interesting questions for contemporary theories of intergenerational relations. A focus on a single, downward generational bond, to the exclusion of continuities with preceding generations would mean that boomers lose an important source of resistance toward the pressures of cultural conformity – namely the oral history and practical wisdom transmitted from older to younger generations (Attias-Donfut 2003; Attias-Donfut & Wolff 2005) and also the degree of solidarity expressed between generations (Bengtson, Elder & Putney 2005). As such their strategies might severely underestimate the connective role played by intergenerational bonds of kinship: upwards as well as downwards. The UK Boomer cohort would appear to mark a significant difference in these intergenerational strategies if they are seeking continuity through the younger generation alone. A rift with older generational groups may result in a loss of oral memories and resistance to dominant cultural patterns of consumption that lead to an avoidance or denial of the ageing process. The implications of downward blurring are by no means clear. A blurring of generational differences may prove to have mixed blessings for intergenerational solidarity, with increased similarity, but possibly increased conflict if different generational groups are driven to compete on the same ground.

In the USA, Stewart and Torges (2006) characterise the American boomers as being: 'Narcissists who became individuals with well developed collective identities' (2006: 34). These collective identities, however do not, in the UK context, appear to reflect a peer-cohort approach as identified by Antonucci, Akiyama & Merline (2001) and there was little evidence of a same-age culture based on common historical experiences. Rather, UK boomers rely on identification with the succeeding generation to protect themselves from the narcissistic slights of ageing bodies and passing of generational dominance, with consequences that have yet to fully work themselves out.

Conclusion: Consumption, Ageing and Cohort

Consumption that is used to influence appearance, through clothing and bodily maintenance to diet and exercise, emerges in this study as part of a wider strategy to manipulate age-identity and relations with younger generations. The preferred strategy was to use consumption practices as props to a mature identity, one that balanced a desire to remain 'youthful' in outlook, but 'mature' in attitude. While social ageism was rarely mentioned, other than in certain cautionary narratives about work, it was the clear and widely acknowledged intention to develop appropriate links with the immediate succeeding generation. This desire, however, was not extended upward to preceding generations, who while they may share similar characteristics in intimate and family relations, were not a source of identification, or guides to consumption practices.

In their attitudes to personal ageing, boomers thought of themselves as not concerned with age, feeling more comfortable with their age than they had in previous parts of the life course. They felt younger than their actual age and thought in terms of 'time left' as well as time since childhood. They tended to draw upon both past experience and future expectations in evaluating their life experience.

In their attitudes to younger and older generational groups, boomers tended not to identify with their parents' generation, excepting in very specific areas, often using characteristics associated with older generations in contrast to themselves. They saw few differences between themselves and younger age groups, believing that in this context generational

differences were becoming less marked. Older, parental generations are used as a point of contrast, as the subjective location of a cultural rift around consumption choices, social attitudes and tastes. A dominant strategic aim would be to develop social relationships with younger generations and to maintain ones current body and health in the face of increasing signs of ageing.

While support for the idea that boomers may be a self-aware group appears limited, there are common attitudes and strategies for addressing adult ageing, which indicate that boomers may think in similar ways about these issues. The accumulation of these individual choices, do appear to evidence a significant shift in cultural attitudes to mid and later life. And while it is difficult to say whether baby boomers are the active protagonists of this process or simply caught up in a wider historical phenomenon, they do desire new forms of ageing and of growing old.

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Ageing in Inner Cities

The Residential Dilemmas of the Baby Boomer Generation

BY CATHERINE BONVALET¹ & JIM OGG²

Abstract

Although residential mobility decreases with age, rates rise around the age of retirement, especially for people living in cities. The post-war birth cohort of 1945–1954 differs in many respects from previous generations, and these differences are currently influencing residential choices made around the age of retirement. Using data from 60 semi-structured interviews in four areas of London and Paris that have undergone gentrification, this paper examines the residential trajectories and choices facing members of the 1945–1954 birth cohort. The analysis reveals three types of residential trajectories – ‘pioneers of gentrification’, ‘city movers’ and ‘local inhabitants’. These trajectories are intertwined with contextual factors such as life course events, family situation, housing market conditions, and the institutions of Britain and France. The analysis shows that pioneers of gentrification have more opportunities for choice in future residential locations, and are tending to adopt complex residential patterns that often involve a combination of extended stays throughout the year in different locations. Whilst they still favour a city life, their current

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neighbourhood location is not a priority in any future residential choice. City movers have lived in diverse locations over the life course and although they too express a continued preference for the city, ties to the local neighbourhood remain relatively weak. Among the 'local' inhabitants, differentiation from the gentrifiers is strong, and attachment to the local neighbourhood depends upon the context of the urban setting. The British and French contexts of housing policy and markets play an important role in determining residential mobility. Collectively, the analysis shows that there is little 'stability' in the choices for current cohorts of people in cities approaching retirement, with few interviewees having formed a definitive plan for a future residential location.

Keywords: Baby boom generation, residential mobility, residential choice, gentrification, Britain and France

Introduction

Members of the baby boomer generation (defined here as the birth cohort of 1945–1954) that live in inner cities generally fall into two groups: 'newcomers' – those who made the move to the city in early adulthood or later and have since stayed, and 'local' inhabitants who have remained in, or near the neighbourhood where they grew up.¹ Among the former, some individuals were part of the vanguard of the gentrification process

¹ It is difficult to obtain statistically representative information on residential histories. For the UK, several surveys (for example the English Housing Survey, the English Longitudinal Survey of Ageing, and the Census) record information about recent changes of address and the number of years lived at a particular address. However, information on the length of time spent in a particular neighbourhood and residential trajectories made within neighbourhoods is mostly absent. Even when such information does exist, it is usually to be found in modules (for example the British Attitudes Survey, 2004) which do not have enough cases once the analysis descends to particular localities and specific age groups. The same methodological problem applies for France. Throughout the paper we use the terms 'newcomers' and 'locals' to refer respectively to people who moved to London or Paris after growing up elsewhere and people who grew up in London or Paris.

that was common to certain areas of large cities in the 1970s and 1980s, notably in London and Paris. Having moved to previously working class areas, many of these mostly middle class young professionals gradually became embedded in networks created by the schooling of their children and other activities. As they moved through the life course, some left the city whilst at the peak of their working careers, but others stayed, often setting down firm roots and developing social capital within their neighbourhoods (Butler & Robson 2001). As for the 'local' inhabitants of the baby boomer generation, many are from traditional working class communities and unlike the 'newcomers' they are less likely to be homeowners. They also tend to have been less residentially mobile than newcomers, and by definition are more likely to have lived a longer time within the neighbourhood.² Nevertheless, as for newcomers, family formations and dissolution and employment histories have contributed towards determining particular residential trajectories throughout the life course.

Today as both the 'newcomers' and the 'locals' approach retirement and with the schooling of their children for the most part completed, many are faced with a new set of residential choices. These choices are motivated by diverse factors, including financial resources (future anticipated income in retirement and housing equity), family situations, perceptions of the local neighbourhood, and importantly, the prospect of growing old in the city. Although residential mobility tends to decrease with age, cities tend to have higher rates of out-migration among adults of retirement age than the general population. The baby boomer generation is also associated with new forms or 'cultures' of mobility (Urry 2001) which can involve complex residential strategies. Important questions are therefore raised concerning the intentions of the baby boomer generation living in inner cities. Does the city still hold all the positive features that made it so attractive to the 'newcomers'? How do the 'local' inhabitants

² Data from the 2004 British Social Attitudes Survey show that only about one in ten members of the 1945-1954 birth cohort have lived in the same neighbourhood all their lives. These rates were respectively 14% among respondents from lower class groups compared to 7% among higher-class groups (authors' analysis).

perceive the transformations within their neighbourhood?

These questions are examined through the narratives of 60 Londoners and Parisians born between 1945 and 1954 who were living in inner city neighbourhoods in 2006. Although London and Paris share many of the characteristics associated with large cities, there are important differences. The centre of the Paris conurbation, '*la ville de Paris*', is an area of only 87km² compared to the 321km² of Inner London (Pinçon & Pinçon-Charlot 2004). At the same time, the population of Paris is much more dense (22,500 inhabitants per square kilometre in Paris compared to 9,300 in Inner London) and urban space is at a premium. Unlike London, Paris has a housing stock that comprises almost universally apartment blocks. The concentration of shops and local services is greater in Paris than in London, and the history of in-migration, as well as policies concerning social housing and the local housing market, differ strongly between the two cities. These disparities influence residential strategies and a comparison of inner cities that differ substantially allows hypotheses and tentative conclusions to be drawn concerning ageing in inner cities.

Migrants to the City

Cities have always been associated with a high in-migration of young people (Rothenberg Pack 1973). For much of the twentieth century, as rural communities declined and urbanisation spread, young adults moved to the city primarily to seek work. But during the 1960s they also came to escape the confines of provincial life. These new arrivals were part of the baby boom of the immediate post-war period, young adults with ideals and values different from their parents. Many rejected the lifestyles associated with rural or even suburban communities and they eagerly sought new experiences offered by the city. For some, the city was the perfect setting to promote the ideals of the 1960s counter-culture.

Arriving in London and Paris during the 1960s and 1970s, young people on the whole experienced less difficulty in finding accommodation when compared to previous generations or young people today. Cheap, mostly run-down bed-sits were available to rent. In London, some of these mainly middle-class young people, entered the squatting scene, either ideologically motivated or as a temporary staging post on

the route to finding more permanent accommodation (Dench et al. 2006). In Paris, where squatting was much less common than in London, the '*chambre de bonne*', a small studio flat at the top of 19th century Hausmann apartment blocks, was a common first time accommodation for young arrivals to the city. London in particular offered a range of professional opportunities to which young middle class individuals of the baby boomer generation could aspire. A strong local government sector coupled with emerging voluntary groups and independent charities attracted teachers, social and community workers, and other public sector workers. The traditional middle class occupations of lawyers and professions associated with the arts were also expanding, and the young baby boomers new to the city began to enter them in numbers. In France, the influx of the baby boomer generation to Paris during the 1960s and 1970s still had many features common with early patterns of in-migration to cities, since France at this time retained a fast declining rural base from which young people were more or less compelled to leave to find work (Bonvalet & Merlin 1988; Cribier 1988). Nevertheless, the events surrounding May 1968 and the zeitgeist of the 1960s also attracted young French people to the city in quest of new experiences.

Having arrived and lived out their student years, most of these young baby boomers embarked on careers and began to form families. Some remained in rented accommodation, in London mainly through housing associations or the local council, in Paris mostly in the private sector. Others began to buy property, particularly in run-down areas where house prices were affordable. These young, predominately middle class individuals, were among the vanguard of the accelerating process of gentrification, first identified in the 1960s (Glass 1964). Gentrification has been defined as "a process involving a change in the population of land-users such that the new users are of a higher socio-economic status than the previous users, together with an associated change in the built environment through a reinvestment in fixed capital." (Clark 2005). This process has been the subject of much research, debate and recently critical appraisal (Ley 1996; Smith 1996; Butler 1997; Hamnett 2003). In its original formulation, gentrification signified changes brought about by deindustrialization whereby the new middle-class incomers displaced the working class inhabitants. However, these changes went further than simple

population flows. They represented fundamental transformations to the class dimensions of localities and neighbourhoods.

Gentrification was thus seen as important theoretical concept to explain social mobility. More recently, gentrification has taken on other meanings, in particular the relationship between people and place. As Butler (2006) notes 'the great strength of gentrification research has been its ability to throw light on how changes in the external economy have affected the relations between people and the places that they live in'. Areas of inner cities that have been gentrified are now recognised to contain subtle differences relating to the 'differential deployment of cultural, social and economic capital by their middle-class residents' (Butler & Robson 2001). Areas where the process of gentrification took place on a large scale include parts of Hackney, Islington, Tower Hamlets and Lewisham in London and several areas (*arrondissements*) towards the east of Paris as well as the immediate suburbs towards the south. Although the timing of the process of gentrification is difficult to measure, in Paris it appears to have taken place at a slightly later date than in London – around the 1980s – and in more confined geographical spaces (Pinçon & Pinçon-Charlot 2004).³

During the 1980s, some of the baby boomers who had migrated to London and Paris several years previously became rooted in their localities through contact with other, predominately middle class parents sharing similar backgrounds. Links to the local community were forged, though as some commentators have suggested, the incomers associated with gentrification often created 'communities in the mind' which were essentially middle class perceptions of inner city life (Butler 1997). Unlike previous generations of middle class incomers to cities who moved to the suburbs as their careers developed, some of the baby boomer generation preferred to stay in the inner city, although a move to the suburbs remained an important trend. In Paris, a survey of the 1930–1950 cohort undertaken in 2000 found that being single, separated, and middle class –

³ Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot, using data on changes in the social class composition of Paris between 1962 and 1999, have shown how increased rates of higher social class groups in the capital have mostly occurred in previously working class areas (*quartiers populaires*).

characteristics frequently associated with the baby boom generation – were associated with having moved to the city from the provinces when a young adult (Bonvalet et al. 2007). In London, as Savage et al. (2005) have argued, many of those who did not move away and chose to stay ‘indefinitely’ in these areas gradually built up a sense of ‘elective belonging’ to their localities and a developing community attachment.

As they approach retirement age, some of the original incentives that drove the newcomers to the city in their youth may no longer be present or as compelling. Middle age baby boomers are not (or less so) tied to the area by professional or career concerns. For most, the schooling of children is over, although mid-lifers have not been untouched by the trend of children delaying the age at which they permanently leave the parental home. Some have divorced or separated, the rise in divorce being a phenomena strongly associated with this age cohort, and families have become geographically dispersed. The areas have also changed in many ways. Second or third waves of ‘super-gentrification’, led by high income city workers have occurred in many places and pockets of white working class areas have been replaced by new generations of immigrants from abroad. These trends are part of a larger process of globalization which is generating new forms of mobility in later life characterised by ‘an expanding mix of spaces, communities and lifestyle settings’ (Phillipson 2007). Conscious of these transformations, many middle-age baby boomers are facing new dilemmas and contemplating new horizons as they approach retirement. Does the city still offer the opportunities that it had some thirty years previously and importantly, is it an appropriate environment for old age?

Local Inhabitants

In contrast to the newcomers, members of the baby boom generation who grew up in or near the neighbourhood where they currently live have a longer perspective from which to gauge the changes to their local environment. In gentrified areas, these local inhabitants are mainly from working class backgrounds. Several British studies have commented on the disenchantment that older members of these working class communities feel about the social transformation of their neighbourhoods (Phil-

lipson *et al.*. 2001; Scharf *et al.* 2001; Dench *et al.* 2006). One striking feature of the expression of this discontentment is the reconstruction of a 'golden era' when crime was less rife, family ties stronger, and a sense of civic pride in the neighbourhood existed which bound together the community. Local members of a neighbourhood, perhaps especially as they age, tend to look back with affection on bygone times and happier days. Unlike the newcomers whose 'communities in the mind' relate to their everyday experience, those of the 'locals' tend to be rooted in the past. Additionally, as Dench *et al.* (2006) have shown in a recent study of an inner-city district in London, difficulties in achieving multi-cultural ideals have been acute in areas of high immigration with traditional working class communities. These difficulties are often expressed by people who have lived most of their lives in the same neighbourhood.

As young adults, the city did not necessarily hold the same allure for the 'local' inhabitants as it did for the 'newcomers'. This was, of course, mainly a question of social class. But perceptions of the city were also determined by childhood experience and reference points. The stark contrast of the city to the province could not exist for the 'locals' and therefore the exoticism which is so much a part of the newcomers' experience was mainly absent. As far as housing was concerned, many of these 'local' inhabitants were young enough to benefit from housing policies and practices that promoted the transfer of rented property between family members. Council flats in London and housing belonging to the town hall of Paris were 'inherited' by younger family members, and today some of the baby boom generation remain in these local authority flats. In Paris, the 1948 housing legislation which facilitated the intergenerational transfer of rental property has 'enabled populations which would otherwise, for reasons of cost, be forced to move out to the suburbs, to continue living in the city centre' (Loiseau & Bonvalet 2005). Others became property owners and climbed the housing ladder in the same way as the newcomers, though perhaps at a slightly slower pace.

As the 'local inhabitants' approach retirement age, they too are facing dilemmas about where to live out their old age. For many, the life course determinants are the same as for the migrant baby boomers to London. And although some 'locals' do not have the resources that facilitate and widen the scope of residential choices, others have experienced

the property boom at first hand. For some, traditional patterns of retirement migration, such as Essex for East Londoners, Kent for south Londoners, and the departments around the Paris region for Parisians, remain desired locations. For others, and especially in the British context, retirement migration abroad has been one solution adopted by working class retirees, with one objective being to regain a sense of lost of community.

Retirement Migration

The residential choices of ageing baby boomers in inner cities needs to be set in the context of the considerable literature on retirement migration. Longino (2001) has suggested three conceptual models to understand retirement migration. The first is the *'life course model'*, where the focus of study is the mechanisms associated with life events triggering major changes. Residential mobility and changing housing needs are seen as consequences of major life events such as marriage, children reaching school age, divorce, a change in job, and eventually, retirement. In this model, the choice of destination is contingent on the life event and often planned long in advance, as for example a return to one's place of birth or a permanent move to a second home. The second model centres on *'migration decisions'*, where the decision to move is made prior to the choice of destination. For retirement migration, examples include the decision to move to a warmer climate or to escape what is perceived to be a deterioration in the local area. In contrast to the life course model, one of the main motives behind this residential choice can be discontentment with the local area. A third model is the *'housing disequilibrium model'*, whereby 'economic incentives due to housing assets may be assessed within the context of the migration decision model'. Residential mobility in this model is fuelled by changes in house price markets, which in recent years has mostly meant using the equity in a current home to move to a different area where housing is cheaper. These three models serve as heuristic devices to understand retirement migration and often elements of all three are present in residential choices.

Empirically, although previous studies have shown that the passage to retirement is associated with a house move (Wiseman 1980; Warnes

1992; Ermisch & Jenkins 1999; Tatsiramos 2006), residential mobility is known to decrease significantly with age. In France, the 2002 housing survey recorded only a slight upward trend in mobility around the age of retirement. Between 1990 and 1999, only one in five persons aged 60 and above moved home compared to approximately half of the population under sixty (Christel 2006). However, this mobility was much more common in the greater Paris region, where older households tended to move larger distances compared to retirees in other regions (Christel 2006). For Britain, using data from the 2001 census, Champion (2005) has shown that London remains the foremost city in the UK for outward migration, and moreover that 45–59 year olds are, after the 30–44 year old age group, the age group most likely to be associated with this outward migration.

It is still too early to evaluate current and future patterns of retirement migration in cities, but preliminary evidence suggests that out-migration patterns may be slowing. French research for example, has shown that the baby boomer generation approaching retirement is much more reluctant to make a permanent move from the city to the village – previously a strong feature of retirement migration in France (Cribier 1988) – than previous generations (Bonvalet 2007). Many members of the baby boomer generation enjoy the qualities of both city and rural life, and where possible divide their time between the two locations. Frequent mobility between the city and country in retirement may therefore be a future trend. Louchart (2007) has shown that for the Paris conurbation, among the most recent retirees, the trend of moving away towards destinations is continuing for the first cohorts of the baby boomer generation. A move away from inner cities on retirement remains common, as can be seen in figures from home sales in the Paris region in 2003 – more than one in five sales (21.5 per cent) were made by retired households, who in turn represented only 6 per cent of purchases (Bonvalet et al. 2007).

In London, Butler and Robson (2003) have suggested that some of the London gentrifiers they interviewed in the 1990s whilst at the peak of their careers, still planned to move away from London to rural settings on or near their retirement, but as previously discussed, many in-comers have forged identities and a sense of belonging in their localities which may act as strong disincentives to moving home. Data from the English Longitudinal Survey of Ageing show a relatively high rate of second

home ownership among the 1945–54 birth cohort (15%) and although no data are available for the middle class gentrifiers living in the inner city, this figure is likely to be higher. It is possible that that ‘circular’ patterns of residential mobility between a main home and a second home are common (Lelièvre & Bonvalet 1994; Bonnin & Villanova 1999; Gotman 1989; Warnes 2007). As Urry (2001) has noted, the contemporary middle classes are driven by a ‘compulsion to mobility’ and this trend towards a ‘mobile culture’ may be particularly present around retirement. Many of the newcomers may thus have multiple attachments to different areas, creating dilemmas about where to pass their retirement and what type of environment is suitable for growing old.

These questions about the residential choices of mid-lifers are examined in detail through empirical data of mid-lifers in the 1945–1954 birth cohort, the first of the baby boomer generation that is now approaching retirement. Using narratives that relate to their neighbourhood and residential decisions for the future, we explore how members of this generation construct images of their local environment and articulate future residential options.

Data and Method

The data comprise the results of a series of 60 semi-structured interviews with men and women born between 1945 and 1954 undertaken in London and Paris between April and September, 2006.⁴ Four localities were chosen to reflect inner city areas that had undergone (and are still undergoing) major transformations, among which included gentrification. In Paris, the sample selection was made by telephone, whereas in London it was a mixture of street recruitment and snowballing. Both of these methods contain elements of bias which need to be taken into account when interpreting the results. The major difficulty encountered was that in the early stages of the sample selection, a bias towards unemployed or economically inactive respondents occurred, which we subsequently had to

⁴ The research was funded by the PUCA (*plan urbanisme construction architecture*) of the French Ministry of Housing and Town Planning and supported by the Young Foundation, London.

address. In addition, the snowball method of sampling in London may have introduced unadjusted elements of bias. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the final sample was stratified to include an equal number of men and women, and household tenure representative of the local areas. The interview schedule contained questions retracing the residential mobility of respondents since childhood, family formation, attitudes to the local environment and retirement mobility decisions. In London, 17 of the 30 interviewees arrived as young adults, and in Paris the figure was 12. The areas represented different types of gentrification, reflecting the degree to which the middle classes had embedded themselves in the local neighbourhood.

All of the 60 interviews were transcribed and analysed using two different software packages (Alceste and Nvivo). The conceptual framework for the analysis is based on previous work undertaken on the residential trajectories of Parisians in 1992 and 2000 (Bonvalet et al. 2007). This approach takes as axiomatic the proposition that people and places are inextricably linked in networks that evolve over time. Residential choices are not simply contingent on current conditions such as the housing market or other financial considerations, important though these are, but also on the convergence of many antecedent factors. Among these factors, extended family life as witnessed by the existence of multiple households dispersed in geographical space, is crucial to understanding the residential trajectories, both past and potential, of individuals and households. Understanding the past gives important clues about future residential choices. Respondents were therefore asked to detail sequences of events (in this case residential histories) and the motives for their behaviour. The chain of residential moves since childhood was then linked to wider social network configurations, and through this process a series of residential trajectories was constructed into which respondents were grouped.

A key feature of the method is the comparison between the English and French contexts of ageing in inner cities, and the different types of gentrification. As outlined above, all of the areas selected have experienced major social transformations and gentrification. Both capitals have experienced a high level of housing inflation and in 2006 property prices in these areas were among the highest in each respective country. At the same time, there are many differences. Space in Paris is at a premium,

with most of the housing stock existing as apartment blocks or flats. Historical antecedents, such as the 1948 French legislation which facilitated the transfer of rented property between family members and guarantees artificially low rents, have created the conditions for 'atypical' residential trajectories. Differences in credit facilities and attitudes to borrowing result in divergent contexts of the housing economy. This comparative dimension and its impact on the residential trajectories of the baby boom generation are discussed following a presentation of the findings.

Analysis

The analysis of the interviews confirmed the general pattern of two groups of inhabitants – newcomers and local inhabitants. However, we found a further sub-division of the newcomers category was necessary to distinguish those residents whose housing strategies resembled closely the process of gentrification from other newcomers. Although this distinction followed closely different social class divisions, the timing of arrival in London and Paris between these two groups of newcomers was also different. We have used the label '**pioneers of gentrification**' to categorise the mainly middle class members of the baby boom generation who moved to the city in their youth and bought property when in their thirties. These residents had lived at their current address on average longer than other newcomers. They had benefited from the successive London property booms and their residential choices had been carefully designed to capitalise on the benefits of urban regeneration. They had reached the 'peak' of their housing career, in so far as their housing met most of their needs in terms of space and quality. These pioneers of gentrification in London often lived in semi-detached four-bedroom homes with gardens.

The second type was the 'city movers'. This includes men and women who had also migrated to Paris or London, although not necessarily in their youth. Although city movers can be considered to be part of a larger process of gentrification, their role in this process was more blurred than the pioneers and they cannot be seen as being key actors. The analysis of their residential strategies did not reveal the classic pattern of gentrification – the infiltration of those parts of the inner city that

had been abandoned and where there was great potential for renovation and home improvements. Many of these residents expressed their feeling of being 'caught up' in the gentrification process rather than being the cause. The city movers had more constraints upon their residential choices than the pioneers. This was partly due to social class and lower incomes, but we also found that the city movers often came to the area following a separation or divorce. In Paris, many rented their accommodation, either in the private or social sector.

The third trajectory concerns the '**local inhabitants**' - individuals who had lived all their lives in the inner city, mostly in the same local area. In contrast to the newcomers, many had close family members living nearby. This group of residents had witnessed the enormous changes to their areas at first-hand. Most had benefited and spoke positively about the general improvements to the local environment. However, these residents were less positive about perceived changes in the composition of the local population, along both social class and ethnic dimensions.

Using this tripartite classification of the baby boomer generation of residents in Paris and London, we now turn to present case studies that illustrate these trends and the dilemmas facing the ageing residents of inner cities.

Pioneers of Gentrification

'Pioneers' of gentrification concern those middle class individuals who moved into the inner city at the height of the gentrification process during the early 1980s or earlier. Our London example is Cathy, born in Manchester to middle class parents in 1950 (56 at the time of interview). At 19, she left to study at one of the new universities because

this was the university of its time..., people were breaking out of the confines of various sorts of behaviour. So going to this university was an expression for me of getting away from a confined sort of environment.

Following university, Cathy travelled for a few months and after a couple of years of moving around England, during which time she studied to become a social worker, moved to London. Cathy had no difficulty find-

ing a squat, where she stayed for two years. Towards the end of her time in the squat, life '*became unbearable*' and she managed to get a council flat and subsequently a housing association flat. By now a parent, she bought her first small house in the 1980s in a gentrifying area of north London. From there, she moved quickly up the housing ladder, moving in 1986 a little further north in the borough. The rationale for this move was a classic feature of gentrification – to acquire larger and cheaper housing in a more run-down part of the borough but within easy access of the 'hub' and appropriate schooling for her children. In the mid 1990s she moved into her current home with her partner and two children, a large four bedroom house situated within a stone's throw of the numerous restaurants, cinemas, and antique shops that form the heart of this gentrified area of London. In 2006 the property had a market value of around 1 million euros.

For Cathy, the city had lost none of its original appeal:

I really like the diversity of it. I like this very mixed feel that the area has.

In the prime of her professional career, Cathy took regular advantage of the facilities that her local neighbourhood, and perhaps more importantly, central London had to offer. She was a regular cinema goer, sometimes going alone at other times with a friend. But social capital was mainly confined to a circle of friends and colleagues and her two daughters, with no involvement in the local neighbourhood. Cathy was not completely settled in her current home, having a few years earlier separated from her partner and finding her current house too large for herself and her daughter, who was increasingly spending time away from home. Cathy did not have a second home, but this does not mean that she was immobile:

I travel a lot. If I've got to speak at a conference or something of that sort, I might add on a couple of days, so I have quite a lot of frequent trips in Europe. And last year I went to America three times because my daughter was at an American college. And also my family has got a place in Thailand, so I want to Thailand last year on a long trip.

Cathy still had an 'interest-only' mortgage on her house which she

believed would be difficult to keep up when she retires.⁵ So she envisaged moving home and downsizing, using a conventional way of releasing capital to provide income in retirement:

I don't think I'd be interested in an equity release scheme because I've heard that they are not great value.⁶ And you don't know where they are going, because if you live a long time, and all that. If you are sitting on a heap of equity and if you can discharge your mortgage and you have still got more than you need, well then, that seems to me reasonable if you buy a smaller place, and then whatever is left over, you invest to keep you going.

But the choice of destination was uncertain. Although moving outside London was possible, because

it's better value for money and in terms of things I now like doing, things like walking and less of the action.

Cathy was clear that she

...wouldn't ever want to be too far from London because that's very important.

The example of Cathy was not atypical of other pioneers of gentrification in London. With children no longer at school in the local area and unlikely to settle in the local neighbourhood because of high accommodation costs, attachments to the local area were not strong. City life, in particular cultural diversity and easy access to a wide-range of facilities, remained important features in any future residential choices, but these cosmopolitan attributes outweighed any advantages of the immediate

⁵ A mortgage is 'interest only' if the scheduled monthly repayment consists of interest only and not the repayment of the principal loan. Because the principal loan is not repaid until the sale of the house, the borrower relies on the market appreciation of the value of the home (equity) for repayment. In gentrified areas where house prices rise quicker than the average, this type of mortgage has become more common in recent years.

⁶ Equity release schemes are financial products offered to older people (generally 60+). The schemes consist of selling a home (or part of it) to a plan provider in return for a cash sum or monthly income.

neighbourhoods. The inflated house prices and the housing equity which had been accumulated opened up many potential avenues of future residential locations, and downsizing by moving out of the neighbourhood was a commonly cited strategy. However, on the whole, staying in London, although not necessarily in the neighbourhood, was a desired future residential choice. Even in the few cases where pioneers of gentrification were planning on leaving London 'for good', this decision was recognised as '*a leap in the dark*' which may have to be reversed in the future.

In Paris, the pioneer of gentrification is represented by Brigitte, born in 1951 (55 at the time of interview) in a provincial town in northern France to lower middle class parents. Brigitte trained in northern France in the late 1960s as a mid-wife, and after meeting her future husband, both decided to move to the capital in 1973 to escape from a region where they felt '*hemmed in*' and where '*everyone knew each other*'. The couple managed to find a small, privately rented flat relatively easily in the 14th arrondissement, but mindful of the future, they decided to buy in 1979. With their budget, the 14th arrondissement was too expensive, so they moved slightly to the east. Here they found a three bedroom flat in what was then a predominately working class area that was quickly becoming gentrified - '*it was the flat that attracted us, not the neighbourhood*'. Like many of their contemporaries, the couple took out a 15 year mortgage. Four years later, in 1983, after Brigitte's husband's business began to take off, the couple bought a second home in northern France, close to their family members, where they often stayed at week-ends. In 1992, after having paid off their first mortgage, the couple borrowed again and bought a studio flat in the block where they currently live, a strategy with investment motives as well as providing free accommodation for their teenage son. More recently, they also acquired a time-share in a ski-resort region of the Alps. Here is how Brigitte explained the changes to her area:

Many of the apartment blocks around here have been renovated. Some of the very small streets used to be practically no-go areas, but all that has since changed. I think that that things have definitely got better, and that as a result, the area has become fashionable.

Brigitte had two sons, one still practically at home, the other renting a flat a few kilometres away and planning to buy a property in Paris. With the likelihood that her other son would also stay in Paris, and contrary to the pattern of London pioneers of gentrification, Brigitte had no intention of moving home:

I like the area where I live very much, I don't see reasons why I should move away. Our flat is neither too big nor too small. Should we automatically change home for something smaller just because the children have left home? I don't think so.

Although Brigitte had no formal links with neighbourhood voluntary associations, club membership or other activities, the diversity of the local neighbourhood and the accessibility of facilities still retained a lot of attraction. Moreover, Brigitte found that one could achieve the right balance between anonymity and neighbourliness, a balance that was difficulty to find in many other settings. Nevertheless, Brigitte and her husband had a retirement project of buying a second home in Morocco, following a growing trend of French retirees:

I like Morocco a lot. My husband says that we ought to buy a second home in the north of Spain if we want to see the children more often. But they could still come by plane and property is a lot cheaper in Morocco than Spain.

These pioneers of gentrification, as the cases of Cathy and Brigitte clearly show, still felt an attachment to the city, although this attachment manifested itself in different ways according to the context, London or Paris. In London, Cathy was not the only pioneer of gentrification that expressed a desire to remain in the city whilst not ruling out a change of neighbourhood. Where one of the principle motives for remaining in the area – the schooling of the children – was no longer present, horizons broadened and the attractions of the immediate neighbourhood became somewhat diluted. A further factor precipitating a potential home move for the London gentrifiers was the prospect of a significant drop in income during the transition to retirement. Large houses acquired in gentrified areas require upkeep and this was a cause of anxiety to several of the pioneers of gentrification. In Paris, pioneers appeared to have remained more attached to their local neighbourhood, or at least seeing no

obvious advantages from moving around within the city. The housing disequilibrium context of making residential choices was much less an issue than for London pioneers of gentrification, where housing wealth was a prime motivator for making decisions about residential location.

Thus the pioneers of gentrification, whether in London or Paris, retained a sense of attachment to city lifestyles and many envisaged growing old in the city. For Londoners, the possibility of future moves in the city and downsizing was a more recurrent theme than for the Parisians. The probability of a future move seemed greater for the London pioneers, and the motives behind residential choices more complex, relating to the housing market and future income from pensions. In Paris, the pioneers appeared to operate more within a life course model of retirement decisions, often set in the context of practices linked to French institutional and cultural life – such as the transmission of second homes within the family, secure pensions, less housing equity than in London, and more heterogeneity in the type of housing available. However, in both cities, the pioneers of gentrification had been transformed into pioneers of a mobile culture. In both cases, residential strategies were complex, with individuals and couples generally ‘on the move’, planning over the year to be in different locations according to work and family commitments and aspiring to maintain this mobile lifestyle through into old age. Residential choices involving second homes, time-shares and for some, extended periods of time spent away from the inner city were conceived and articulated in geographical spaces that were intertwined with family considerations.

City Movers

‘City movers’ were individuals who were not prime gentrifiers or who had been at their current address for shorter periods than the pioneers of gentrification. They tended to see themselves as passive actors in the process of social transformation that was characteristic of their neighbourhood, especially concerning gentrification. In their narratives, it was the area that had undergone the process of gentrification and they had been witness to this change, not actors within it. Perceptions of the area, whilst still positive, were mainly framed around physical improve-

ments in housing, buildings and amenities, whereas disapproval was expressed for the overt signs of gentrification such as trendy cafés and restaurants. Our Paris example is Jean-François, born in southern France to lower middle class parents in 1947. Although Jean-François moved to Paris as a young adult, he had only been in his current neighbourhood since 1997. Together with his second wife, Jean-François had made several moves during his adult life within Paris and the suburbs and his residential history displayed features particular to the Paris context – a move from the inner city to the suburbs and back again to the inner city. In 2006, the couple were renting their two bedroom flat which had been found through Jean Francois’ wife’s employer under a scheme which keeps rents below the market value. Nevertheless, they were owners of a small flat in the Paris suburbs, which they had bought for their son and kept on as an investment once he married and left, renting it to students.

Jean-François liked the area where he lived, but showed no great attachment to it:

this is a very mixed area, but I must admit that I don’t go out and make much use of it, because I don’t have the time and to tell the truth, I don’t know it very well. But the area has improved a lot, even in the ten years since we have been here.

Jean-François preferred the ambiance of a neighbouring arrondissement where he had lived in the 1980s. But his real plan was to live six months in Paris and six months of the year elsewhere in France, although he had no firm destination in mind. For Jean-François, it was inconceivable that he should definitely leave the city, because

I have always lived in the city, and after three weeks away, I miss the noise of the streets, the métro, the buses and all the humdrum of city life.

Another important factor in Jean-François’ future residential choice was being close to his grandchildren, who also lived in Paris.

Jean-François’ residential trajectory was typical of many Parisians for whom the proximity of family members and the historical context of housing policy played a large role in determining future residential strategies. Jean-François and his wife had no firm plans to move, knowing that they could obtain little in the way of similar accommodation for

the same rent and that it was not possible on their budget and at this stage in the life course to buy property in their current neighbourhood. The security of tenure coupled with a rent lower than the market value of the property were important factors for any future residential choices. The local neighbourhood was a secondary factor, with positive attributes being expressed in simple terms such as its good link with the metro and the cleanliness of the apartment block. Social capital consisted predominantly of immediate family living close by and this was a further important motive influencing any future residential choice.

In London, Chris is an example of a city dweller with similarities to Jean-François in so far as his attachment to the area was relatively weak. Chris was born in Yorkshire in 1948. He moved to London in 1969, originally north of the river. In 1994, he and his partner decided to buy their current home in south London, where prices were cheaper and travel time to work for his partner was shorter. Chris was coming to the end of his teaching career and liked the area where he lived, but did not feel that he had been a pioneer of gentrification. He and his partner had practically no links with the local community, either formal or through using the local amenities of clubs, pubs, restaurants and cafés. Chris observed the changes to his local environment with the detachment of an outsider:

I would say that this area was originally a very working class area but there is a huge influx of middle class people coming into the area... it's a friendly area and the people are all quite middle class.

When asked about his future residential plans, Chris was uncertain:

I don't know, I have no great affection for this area as such. I would prefer to live a few miles up the road, which is a very nice part of London...here it's handy for the station if you're commuting.

Like Jean-François in Paris, it was London as a whole that was an important location for Chris, rather than his current locality. Indeed, Chris' identification was such that despite having been born in Yorkshire, he considered himself to be a Londoner:

I have always lived in London and I think when you go and visit these places they are nice to go and visit but I really don't think I would sort of go and live there.

Within the city movers, the interviews also revealed the existence of residential trajectories that exemplified stereotypes of the 'eternal youth' image that is often associated with the baby boomer generation (Harkin & Huber 2004). In Paris, these were past activists of the 1968 movement and in London the student scene of the late 1960s. These individuals had often lived in many different locations, sometimes spending many years abroad. Family relationships were complex and several of the individuals with this profile were not living permanently with a partner. The residential trajectories of these individuals, including their current and future locations thus had a 'drift' feel to them, in keeping with their life styles.

Local inhabitants

The 'local' baby boomer inhabitants were those who either grew up in or very close to their current address. For our London example, we have not chosen a residential trajectory that has been static (mostly local authority renters), but one that reflects how local inhabitants 'compete' with newcomers in residential strategies within gentrified areas. Julie was born in north London in 1953 to working class parents. After leaving school and working as a secretary, she met her future husband in 1976, and together they rented a small flat in the private sector, close to Julie's parents. In 1980, the couple was offered a local authority flat on a council estate, towards the west of the borough where there was little gentrification taking place. In 1987, Julie's husband received some compensation from a work-related accident, and the couple decided to buy a home to the east of the borough, in an area that was quickly becoming gentrified. In 1999, needing more space for the family but not being able to afford a large enough house in the immediate local area, the couple bought a four bedroom property that needed renovation towards the north of the borough and this was the home she lived in when interviewed in 2006. This area is less gentrified, and Julie had very mixed feelings about her local environment. Ideally, she would have liked to move back to the more gentrified area of the borough where she grew up, but realised that on their budget this was not possible. Julie explains:

Well, we are doing up the house, and I mean, the house is lovely and the neighbours, I know most of them, but the area is really

dangerous. There are a lot of social cafes and heroin dealing and massage parlours where they are bringing in girls from Eastern Europe...

Julie's case was typical of other London 'local' baby-boomers interviewed who whilst managing to have become home-owners, lagged behind the pioneers and city movers in terms of having achieved their desired choice of location. Whilst local links had been made with neighbours and through activities linked to the schooling of their children, Julie's narrative about her area revealed a certain degree of alienation and discontentment. Still very much engaged in the project of renovating the house, Julie had no immediate plans for moving home, although she felt that some day she would leave the area. Yet she was aware that there was little likelihood of her returning to the area where she grew up or nearby areas that had since become too expensive. Julie's rationale for a future move fitted clearly in the housing disequilibrium category of residential choice, since her future move would be '*to get a better house in an area that was cheaper*'. For Julie, and other 'local' interviewees, the quality of the home often took precedent over the quality of the area.

Our Paris example of a local baby-boomer inhabitant is Sylvie, 58 at the time of interview and a bank employee. Sylvie was born in Paris in the same arrondissement as her current home in 2006. She was immensely proud of her '*Parisienne*' status, and at numerous points throughout the interview the importance of locality for her sense of identity was clearly demonstrated. The daughter of a carpenter, she grew up in the flat above her father's workshop and lived there until she married in 1975. Encouraged by her father to buy property, she and her husband obtained a low-cost mortgage in 1980 and bought a one-bedroom flat. A few years later and with a second (15 year) mortgage the couple bought a two-bedroom flat which remained their home in 2006. Two of her sons had left home, one married and living about 2km away, the other living with his fiancé in the same apartment block as Sylvie, having been helped on the housing ladder by his parents. The couple had no other property other than a country caravan, but as an only son, her husband will inherit his mother's house in the country some 250km from Paris. Sylvie had definitively no plans to move home and will stay where she is '*until the end*'.

Both Sylvie and her partner were engaged in voluntary activities with their local neighbourhood and retain a strong attachment to the local area. They had, of course, seen many changes including the gentrification of the area, which they generally considered to be negative. Sylvie expressed a feeling of being 'drowned out' by the influx of middle class newcomers to the area. She talked about bygone times when the neighbourhood was more homogenous and cohesive. The apartment block where she currently lived was a mixture of private and rented property, which according to Sylvie reflected more generally the social divisions of the neighbourhood – the pretensions and snobbishness of the mainly middle class home-owners in contrast to the 'simplicity' of the renters. The transformation of the craftsman (*artisan*) workshops into high fashion shops and trendy cafés was not at all to Sylvie's taste. Nevertheless, Sylvie had in a sense survived the onslaught of gentrification to her neighbourhood, a process which she believed was nearing completion. She herself had moved through different social strata, from the daughter of a tradesman to a bank employee, reflecting the wider social transformations of the second half of the twentieth century. Generally at ease in her neighbourhood and engaged in local activities, she and her husband represented a commonplace trajectory of 'original' local inhabitants in Paris for whom growing old in the city was not a source of anxiety.

It is not possible to draw any firm conclusions from these two case studies concerning the link between having lived most of one's life in an inner city area and perceptions about the quality of life within inner cities. There are local inhabitants of the baby boomer generation in London, who also remain attached to their neighbourhood in the same way that our Paris case study reported. At the same time, the Parisian local inhabitants seemed in many ways more secure of their place in the city than the London local inhabitants, perhaps because many of them had not been 'overtaken' by the process of gentrification and social change. With generally affordable rents and the prospect of more generous pensions than their London counterparts, the Parisian local inhabitants seem to feel more at ease in their neighbourhoods and less mobile. We cannot be sure that this is a major or even a significant trend, and more work will need to be undertaken with the data to try and establish the complex links

between residential trajectories, cohorts and residential choices for retirement.

Conclusion

It has often been observed that the demographic connotation of the baby boom, with its emphasis on numerical strength, is reflected in the social diversity that is found within it. At the same time, the collective experience of belonging to a generation and the specificities of the baby boom generation are frequently portrayed as a being a watershed in wider social transformations. This paradox, of diversity in numbers versus commonalities, lies at the heart of current debates about the importance of the baby boom generation. In the example of residential trajectories and mobility that have been considered in this paper, the tension between similarity and difference is immediately apparent. All of the interviewees that participated in the research shared the common experience of belonging to the same age cohort and living in inner cities. Further commonalities existed in so far as some individuals had moved to the city whilst others were local inhabitants. But from there onwards, the residential trajectories, patterns of mobility and future residential choices displayed a range of diversity that reflected life course events, economic factors, and local and national variation. From this diversity, how far is it possible to establish the competing influences that determine a major life decision such as where to live?

The comparative research undertaken here can serve as a basis for answering this question. Returning to the types of residential trajectories that were developed through the 60 interviews undertaken in London and Paris, tentative conclusions can be drawn concerning possible future trends in residential mobility. The first is that for pioneers of gentrification who are now in mid-life, the city still retains the features that made it attractive in their youth. At the same time, there is a suggestion that the particular neighbourhood does not anchor mid-lifers to their locality and that the pioneers of gentrification are prepared to uproot in the near future. Returning to Longino's model of retirement migration decisions, we found that the London pioneers of gentrification were more likely to articulate their choices in the context of the '*housing disequilibrium model*',

whereas the Paris pioneers of gentrification were more associated with the *'life course model'*. These differences we attribute mainly to the economic contexts of the two locations. In Britain, current retirees have a high level of wealth in housing but uncertainties over the capacity of retirement incomes to sustain their quality of life. In France, the relative stability of pension income continues to fuel more long-term retirement decision planning that is a feature of the *life course model* of retirement migration.

A further influence on residential choices at the time of retirement is the independence of children and the geographical dispersion of family members which tend to act as disincentives to remaining indefinitely at their current address. For London pioneers of gentrification, high housing equity and an anticipated fall in income in retirement are push factors for residential mobility. In both London and Paris, the mid-life pioneers of gentrification are active participants in the 'mobile culture' that encapsulates second homes, extended travel, time-shares, and forms of 'double residence'. 'City movers' – mid-lifers who did not grow up in London or Paris but who are not gentrifiers- also continue to look positively on the prospect of ageing in the city, but like gentrifiers it is the cosmopolitan aspects of city life that take precedence over ties to the local neighbourhood. The retirement migration choices of 'city movers' are less well articulated than the 'pioneers of gentrification', and more in line with Longino's second model, where the desire to move is the main motivation and the location often unclear.

'Local inhabitants' are divided about the transformations to the area, acknowledging general improvements to buildings and the infrastructure but disapproving of changes in the population structure and the loss of a uniform social cohesion. Nevertheless, their attachment to the area remains strong, particularly in Paris, and retirement migration plans, where they do occur, are mainly focussed on extended periods of time spent outside the capital, either in second homes or as part of a more general mobility involving holidays and visits abroad.

Overall, the narratives of ageing mid-lifers suggest that the appeal of the city remains strong. This appeal is in keeping with the metaphor of 'eternal youth' frequently associated with baby boomers. The attractions that the city held in youth do not seem to have diminished dramatically.

Some baby boomers may be destined to grow old in cities, but the precise nature of future residential trajectories is unknown. For many mid-lifers of the baby boomer generation, the factors that determine residential choices – ‘where will the children live?’, ‘how much household income will there be in retirement?’, ‘how healthy will I be?’, ‘what future transformations will occur to the neighbourhood?’ – are unknown and rarely fall into place simultaneously. When these factors are positive, inner city baby boomers seem likely to move into old age combining a range of residential strategies. But if they are negative, will the city continue to be a favoured location and more importantly will it respond to the needs of those baby boomers whose residential horizons are limited?

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Finnish Baby Boomers and the Emergence of the Third Age

BY ANTTI KARISTO¹

Abstract

This paper examines the lives of baby boomers in Finland, and is based on several studies previously published in Finnish. The article considers the particular characteristics of Finnish baby boomers. It then discusses whether the baby boom cohorts can also be called a generation. Following this, the life course of the boomer generation is contrasted with various images that have appeared in the media and elsewhere about their lives. Boomers have been presented as a “radical” or “selfish” generation. This article proposes two new themes: boomers as a *crossroads* generation and boomers as a *bridging* generation. The paper also considers the emergence of the third age as approached from a generational perspective. The third age has been defined as a generational field underpinned by agency and consumption, with its roots in the youth culture of the post-war decades. This characterization is also highly relevant to the Finnish case, but needs to be elaborated by taking into account socio-historical knowledge of the distinctive life course of the boomer generation.

Keywords: baby boomers, generations, cohorts, third age

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Introduction

This paper examines the lives of baby boomers in Finland, and is based on several studies previously published in Finnish. The article considers first the particular characteristics of Finnish baby boomers. It then discusses whether the baby boom cohorts can also be called a generation. Following this, the life course of the boomer generation is contrasted with various images that have appeared in the media and elsewhere about their lives. Boomers have been presented, alternatively, as a “radical” or “selfish” generation. In this paper, two new themes are proposed: boomers as a *crossroads* generation and boomers as a *bridging* generation. The paper also considers the emergence of the third age as approached from a generational perspective. Gilleard and Higgs (2005; see further this issue) define third age as a generational field underpinned by agency and consumption. The authors emphasize how its roots can be traced back to the youth culture of the post-war decades. This characterization is also highly relevant to the Finnish case, but needs to be elaborated by taking into account socio-historical knowledge of the life course of the boomer generation.

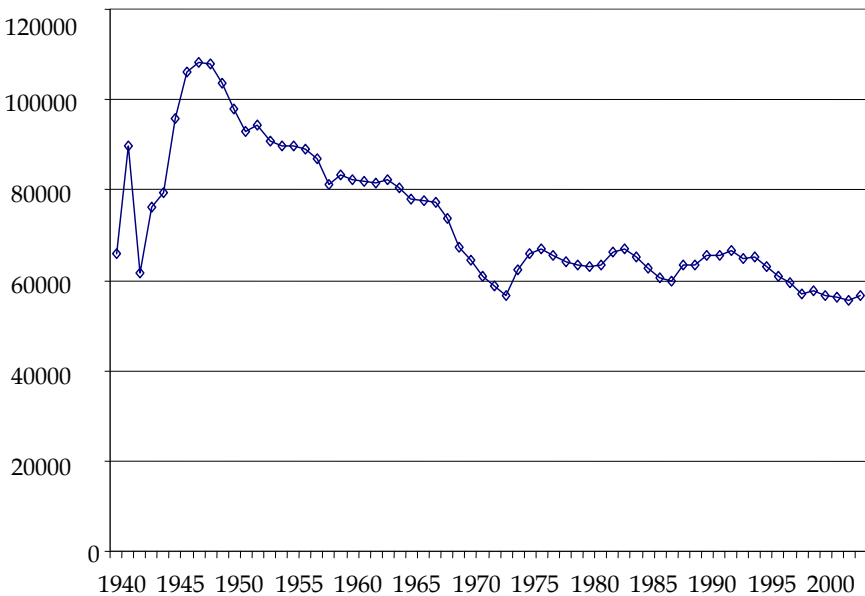
The Special Characteristics of Finnish Baby Boomers

The life course of the baby boomers relates closely to the social history of Finnish society, starting from their birth. The war against the Soviet Union ended in September 1944. The war against Germany in Lapland continued, however, until the following spring, but with the majority of soldiers demobilized by the end of 1944. It then took around ten months from their home-coming for the arrival of what came to be known as the “baby boom”-generation. In the first post-war summer the birth rate more than doubled compared with previous months. It had never been as high before nor has been since. The birth rate reached its peak just after mid-August 1945, with August 24 being the most common Finnish birthday of all time (Karisto 2005b).

The meteoric increase of the birth rate is extraordinary, even taking into account the ending of the war and demobilization. It is surprising in the light of the loss of married men during the war and in the way that war-time had impeded the mating of young people. In the Finnish case,

however, the recovery from war happened very quickly, at least from an economic, cultural and demographic perspective. By the time indemnities to the Soviet Union were paid in 1952, the country had already surpassed the pre-war gross national product (GNP). That same year was the culmination of mental reconstruction, symbolised by the Helsinki Olympic Games. The baby boom was though already over at this point, with the birth rate beginning to drop from the beginning of the 1950s (see Fig 1).

Figure 1. Number of births in Finland by the year 1940–2003.



An equivalent boom took place across a range of countries following World War II, but the Finnish baby boomers appear, for a number of reasons, to be somewhat exceptional. The short-term nature of the boom has already been highlighted, with the surge in birth rates coming for a brief period in the second half of the 1940s. A second aspect concerns the size of the cohorts. Nowhere else does the relative size of these birth co-

horts differ as much from the prior and succeeding age groups (Valkonen 1990 and 1994). In Great Britain, the annual birth rate curve of the baby boom generation climbed only about a quarter above the prior and succeeding level (Falkingham 1997); in the Finnish case it almost doubled. The third special characteristic in Finland is the lack of “an echo generation” i.e. the absence of new baby boomers. Examination of Figure 1 reveals a deep slump in the 1970s where one might have assumed that a new climb would have occurred. Moreover (in sharp contrast with many other European countries) there has been no corresponding increase in immigration to compensate for declining fertility. This has considerable significance for the labour market, where the size of the cohorts leaving employment already greatly exceeds that of those entering. Significant differences between cohorts also indicate fluctuations in service needs and in the funding of pensions.

The first two features – the size of the baby boom and its timing and span – relate to the fourth special characteristic, the generational significance of baby boomers, which is likely to differ from society to society. In Finland, the concept of baby boomers, as a sociological phenomenon, may have a greater explanatory power than for example in the United States, where the rise in the birth rate spanned the period from the mid-1940s to the mid 1960s. It could be argued that the Finnish baby boom was strong enough and long enough, but yet not too long a phenomenon, so that those birth cohorts can be considered a generation of their own.

From cohort to a generation

A generation is something more than a cohort. It is “a cohort, which constitutes itself a cultural identity and as a collective one has social significance” (Edmunds and Turner 2002). The decisive factor in the formation of the generation is what happens in society during the formative years of the group concerned – an idea first expressed by Karl Mannheim (1952/1928). Many things happened when the Finnish baby boomers were coming of age. The 1960s was a decade of significant economic and social change, reflected in rapid urbanisation, cultural radicalism, the rise of the consumer society and the emergence of youth culture. The articulation of generational experiences among baby boomers was built on these various

elements. Generational consciousness also has a tacit dimension, and a generational style appears on the level of everyday behaviour. People belonging to the same generation share all kind of everyday memories: they have read the same books, seen the same movies and television programmes, listened to the same music, and used similar clothes.

Rock music, for example, was of great importance when boomers were young. Since then it has proved to be a generational phenomenon, not simply age-related. A study of leisure activities shows how listening to rock music has now become prevalent among fifty- and sixty-year-olds (Ekholm 2005). Blue jeans are another generational icon, in which boomers have enveloped themselves ever since their days of youth. Youth in its present form was born while boomers were young, and as the first youth generation, they developed an emphatically youthful image of themselves (see, further, Biggs *et al.* in this issue). An equivalent “forever young” mentality, which can also prove important with the ageing of the generation, was completely unknown to the preceding generation whose youth was overshadowed by the experience of war.

Thus, the formation of the boomer generation was based upon both major social changes and minor everyday experiences. The generational consciousness or cultural identity was not born by itself but has to be produced. According to Semi Purhonen (2007), the birth of the generation requires “a discursive breakthrough”, and only afterwards when this has happened can people fit their own personal experiences and memories to this articulation.

The articulation of generational experiences was not a uniform process; instead, it involved a number of competing groups. In the 1960s, when the boomer generation was born, its elite (defined in Mannheim’s terms) had particular influence over generational experiences, and tried to make its own articulation generally accepted. But the elite itself (in common with most other countries) was far from homogenous. The cultural elite adopted a more or less left-wing orientation, and many of its members still identify with “the 60s generation”. But it also had its opponents, another generational unit, the members of which belonged to the socio-economic elite of the society but did not share the values of the sixties. They could be called “the anti-60s generation”, although they belonged to the same birth cohorts. The political turmoil did not neces-

sarily touch the ordinary members of the baby boom cohorts who most often identify just with the “the post-war generation” or “big birth cohorts/age groups” which is the term used to describe the boomers in the Finnish language (Roos 2005; Purhonen 2007).

In spite of these internal divisions, just about every baby boomer in Finland is aware of belonging to the baby boomer generation in one way or another. This is not a trivial fact, because in many other countries boomers are primarily a phenomenon recognized by demographers and statistical experts. Although not uniform, the generational consciousness of boomers is comparatively strong, much stronger than among younger Finnish birth cohorts, even though all kinds of generational symbols have been imposed on them in public (Purhonen 2007). If any post-war cohort can be called a generation, baby boomers deserve the definition.

The Mannheimian idea that the generational consciousness is produced by the key experiences in youth implies that it tends to weaken over the course of time when memories of youth begin to diminish, but consciousness can also intensify, if it is renewed and reproduced e.g. in the media, as appears to be the case with the baby boomers. The formation of generations is fixed on time and memory from two directions: the present is read from the perspective of the past, but the past is also told from the perspective of the present (Purhonen 2007).

Boomers as a Crossroads and as a Bridging Generation

Finnish baby boomers spent their childhood in an atmosphere of post-war optimism. It was optimism of their parents, which itself had its origins in the fact that boomers were children of the men who survived the war. After the ordeals of war, there was a sense of confidence to overcome smaller obstacles (Virtanen 2001).

The life course of boomers has been influenced by different opportunities and constraints. Over three-quarters were born in rural areas, where the number of farms was still increasing, contrary to elsewhere in Western Europe. However, in the 1960s there was a significant decline in agricultural employment, along with rapid depopulation of rural areas. Whether to stay in the country or to move to the city became a major

crossroad or divide for the members of the boomer generation (Karisto 2005b).

Over the period from 1950-1970, Finland shifted from an agricultural to an industrial and even into a post-industrial economy. In three decades, the proportion of the population employed in agriculture dropped from around 50 per cent to 15 per cent. This contrasted with Sweden where the process took five decades; in Norway where it took eight decades; and in France where it stretched over one hundred years (Karisto et al. 1998). While the previously industrialized countries had usually seen a development of the industrial labour force increasing first and the growth of the service sector following in the second phase, Finland made almost a direct transition from an agrarian pre-modern society to a "post-modern" service society (Alestalo 1986). This structural change was reflected in upward social mobility within the population. Not only industrial workers but also educated white-collar employees were needed in large numbers, and the old middle class was insufficient in size as a source of recruitment. Many baby boomers with working class or small estate farming backgrounds became secondary school graduates and in many cases proceeded to graduate from university, which was required for upper white-collar positions. Even so, elementary school remained the typical basic education in these cohorts, especially among men.

In a recent study the social and geographical mobility of baby boomers was analyzed using longitudinal data from the population census. Mobility was first examined from the inflow perspective by studying the likelihood of entering the occupational elite in the capital region (Martikainen et al. 2004). Then it was assessed from the outflow perspective by studying those who were born in the rural periphery with working class or peasant backgrounds (Karisto et al. 2005). The findings suggested that even in the context of heavy structural change, socio-economic status was a strong predictor of social mobility. Gender also played an influential role. The baby boomers were the first generation in which the level of education of women improved to a higher level in comparison with that of men. Women moved to towns more frequently compared with men, for whom staying on the rural periphery has often also meant remaining on the margins of the consumer society and also outside marriage (Karisto et al. 2005).

The educational and occupational stratification of baby boomers was not only influenced by the role of social class. Life courses also varied greatly within families. It was quite common that only one or some of the children were put in secondary school and as a result there are many siblings among boomers, of whom some have reached almost the top of society and others have remained in blue collar professions.

Since their youth, boomers have developed an image of themselves as an avant-garde generation of transition managing and developing new social experiences. They may be seen as living in a post-industrial consumer society with many of them working in positions associated with that of the information society. They still, however, have a life-historical connection to the more traditional ethos of rural society. "We see in them a secretary of the executive group (...) or a Nokia engineer. Raittila sees in them a perplexed country boy or girl", states the cover text of author Hannu Raittila's collection of short stories (Raittila 1999). In this respect, boomers are a kind of *bridging generation* with links both to the past and the present. They have experience of different living surroundings, both of small farms in the sparsely populated areas as well as centers and suburbs of the cities, where the majority now live. Traces of life-historical layers of identity were found in a questionnaire survey on boomers (and older birth cohorts), which was conducted in Southern Finland (the so-called GOAL study, Good Old Age in the Lahti Region). Respondents were asked to name their favourite places, and even in the case of those living in urban areas, these were often found close to nature, and especially with men they were life-historically charged. A summer cottage and a childhood home (sometimes the same place), a sauna, a lake shore and a forest were typical answers; shopping centres, cafeterias and other urban locations were rarely mentioned (Karisto and Konttinen 2004).

Baby boomers are used to making a distinction between themselves and older cohorts. Against this, however, their own behavioural patterns sometimes resemble older cohorts. A recent Finnish study (Zacheus 2008) demonstrated their preference for traditional sports, such as cross-country skiing, which younger cohorts have abandoned, but here again, boomers have also joined gyms and developed other new experiences in contrast to older birth cohorts.

From the Challengers of Authority to the Establishment

American demographer Richard Easterlin (1980) has developed the thesis of "the crowded generation", a theory that suggests that large generations will experience negative effects with respect to their welfare. Large cohorts, it might be argued, do suffer from a scarcity of possibilities and resources in areas such as education, the labour market and services. Boomers in Finland do in fact have some characteristics associated with the "crowded generation" hypothesis. At the same time, they have also attracted the label "lucky generation" because they lived during the post-war economic boom when standards of living rose rapidly. They were "lucky" because they bought their houses and apartments just before the years of high inflation and rising prices. They have had fairly steady and secure working careers, and they have also benefited from the fruits of the welfare state.

Both of these contradictory hypotheses get some support from the social history of Finnish society, but are crude generalizations about the life course of the boomer generation. The same holds with the next two characteristics attached to baby boomers. Boomers have a reputation of being "a radical generation". When young they challenged those in power, and still they are considered as strong supporters of the welfare state with prevailing attitudes of solidarity to the poor and oppressed. But they are also now viewed as a selfish and conservative power block or "a stopper generation" frozen in their own power positions.

It can certainly be argued that the student radicalism at the end of the 1960s was a movement of baby boomers as was the extreme pro-soviet leftism of the 1970s (Rentola 2003) – a Finnish peculiarity with no counterpart in other Western European countries. Still, the political nature of the generation has been exaggerated when the Mannheimian elite of the generation, or a part of it, has been seen as representing the entire generation. The end of the 1960s also saw the birth of the rural populist movement, which may be seen as a defensive reaction of those who stayed in the periphery and a protest against urbanization and modernisation. Besides, the politicization of the 1960s and 1970s should not be interpreted only from the viewpoint of party politics. People also learned new approaches to politicizing everyday issues, by emphasizing that many things, which may appear as self-evident, are in fact matters of

choice. Since then this has been characteristic of new social movements, but it started in the 1960s when the dominant culture was disintegrating. Boomers were pioneers in challenging the establishment, which did not see anything political in its own attitudes, values and actions. Skilfully, boomers advanced their issues and ideas, and in this they were almost certainly helped by their size. Contrary to the earlier argument by Easterlin (1980), large birth cohorts do not always and in every case suffer from their magnitude. In public, in culture and in politics size can also be beneficial (Edmunds and Turner 2002).

If baby boomers were once the challengers of authority, today they are considered a part of the establishment, as highlighted above. According to a study of the power elite in Finland (Borg and Ruostetsaari 2002), they had clearly more representatives in various elite groups at the beginning of the new century than their impressive demographic proportion would give reason to forecast: over 40 per cent of the top members of administration, media, and industry and commerce belonged to the baby boomers, and as many as half of the leaders in labour organizations and large civil organizations were born between 1945–1950 (see Table 1).

Table 1. The percentage of the baby boomers (born between 1945-50) belonging to various elite groups in 1991 and 2001

Group	1991 %	2001 %
Politics	29	26
Administration	10	41
Industry and commerce	15	41
Civil organizations	19	51
Media	26	45
Science	19	37
Culture	25	25
The entire power elite	18	38

(Borg and Ruostetsaari 2002, table 5).

The present strength of boomers' power position, however, is mainly

explained by their present age. The power elites of the Finnish society are the same age as boomers are now – or were a few years ago. Time will soon do the job and the hold of the baby boomers on their positions of power will loosen. However, there may also be a generational effect, in addition to an age effect, behind their strong position. This is suggested by the fact that the present over-representation of boomers in the power elites is relatively larger than that of those who were 10 years older when compared with 10 years before (Borg and Ruostetsaari 2002).

Recently boomers have been attacked by members of the younger cohorts, who claim that they are a “greedy generation” which only thinks of itself in spite of claiming solidarity with those in a less fortunate position. Finnish studies examining beliefs and values across generations have in fact found only limited signs of variations across cohorts e.g. personal success is not so much valued among boomers and values associated with the welfare state are perhaps a bit more important to them than to other cohorts (Räsänen 2004; Erola 2004). First results from a survey on intergenerational transmissions (the so-called GENTRANS - project) reveals that financial transmissions from baby boomers to their adult children are more common in Finland than in other European countries (Haavio-Mannila et al. 2007). This finding casts doubt on the validity of claims that boomers are “selfish” and focus only on maximising their own interests.

Attitudes, values, behaviours and life-styles of baby boomers are of particular interest now that this generation is entering retirement. By examining boomer life styles, predictions may be made as to how the role of pensioners might change in the near future. Gilleard and Higgs (2005) note that: “Past habits of consumption constrain future opportunities”. They go on to suggest that: “Those who grew up spending freely earlier in life are more likely to continue to spend freely later in life”. The Finnish baby boomers were not used to spending freely in their early life, but compared to older age-cohorts they are likely to be more active consumers in their retirement years. The GOAL data for example shows that people travel extensively during their retirement years. Half of those in their mid-sixties had travelled abroad during the last year, and faraway places are visited during the first retirement years more than before (Karisto and Konttinen 2004). New practices for retirement years emerged

grown, with seasonal migration on such example (Karisto 2005a and 2008). Lifestyles such as these may become even more common when boomers reach the age of retirement.

Not only incomes but also the average value of property owned by boomers appears greater when compared with other age groups. In most cases it is homeownership, which is not easily converted into consumption. Thanks to employee pensions, the income level of pensioners has improved, but childhood memories of poverty have made older age groups careful consumers (see, also, Biggs et al. this issue). The savings ratio increases and the consumption ratio declines after retirement, contrary to what would seem likely in a situation where there is unbound purchasing power after the housing loans have been paid and children have moved away from home. New cohorts of retired people may, however, bring changes to this particular aspect of economic behaviour.

Conclusion: Competing Interpretations of the Third Age

The discussion about population ageing culminates in many ways with baby boomers and is somewhat pessimistic in its interpretation. Despite the fact that Finland has developed a reasonably coherent policy as regards population ageing (Hyvä yhteiskunta kaikenikäisille 2005), the debate is dominated by "a burden interpretation": the focus is on the pension explosion and on the care burden, which is expected to become unbearable when boomers grow old. The care burden is affected by the changes occurring in people's health and capabilities. Studies show that boomers reach retirement age healthier than previous cohorts (Sihvonen et al. 2003; Martelin et al. 2004). The so-called compression theory, suggesting that illnesses compress to the last years of life irrespective of life expectancy, have some validity. This means that the prolongation of age itself does not dramatically increase care costs.

The Finnish pension reform, which was implemented in 2005, attempts to delay the beginning of retirement and to increase the employment rate with the help of incentives: the retirement pension improves significantly if the individual stays employed past 63 years of age. In recent years, the employment rate of older workers has risen faster in comparison with other European Union countries and it is on a fairly

high level internationally – especially bearing in mind that full-time jobs are typical of the Finnish model of employment. The retirement age will most likely still rise, because boomers are healthier than their predecessors were in the same age group.

However, the length of working careers matters as well. Because mere elementary school was the typical education of boomers, the working life for the majority began at the age of 16–17 and the working years can already now have reached over 40. Therefore the thought of continuing working is not necessarily attractive. Much depends on how working life treats older workers. Public policies and attitudes here have contradictory features. On the one hand, individuals are told that they should continue working and that it is not appropriate to step aside to retire too soon. On the other hand, they hear that they are blocking the way for their juniors and they get blamed for low productivity and lack of innovation in society. Antti Eskola, a retired Finnish professor of sociology, expresses the issue in the following way: “Ageing workers are treated like industrial raw materials. All the profit must be squeezed out, and the final preservation of the waste must be as cheap as possible” (Eskola 1997).

The vision of a third age represents an alternative view to the burden interpretation of population ageing. The idea that the years after retirement are devoted to personal fulfilment, that one can finally do all the things one has always wanted to, is an attractive vision. It offers an alternative model on what it is like to be a pensioner. In our cultural representations, old age is going to be divided into two parts. There is an old age proper, framed by restraints, necessities and disengagement, which is described as an inevitable decline of the body and there is a third age framed by consumption possibilities, choices and opportunities, second chances and new beginnings.

One argument can certainly be advanced. The future life style of baby boomers is affected both by life choices and by life chances. The coming life of boomers cannot be imagined merely in the framework of choices and consumption. There may be financial, medical, functional and other barriers, which can transform dreams of an energetic and eventful life in retirement. Although boomers on average are relatively prosperous and can expect more active years ahead in comparison with

earlier cohorts, socio-economic differences remain important in structuring life experiences and opportunities.

At the same time, it might be argued that third age is not only a mirage but a fact, at least demographically.¹ First, the estimated life expectancy in the beginning of the retirement age has significantly improved in the recent decades, more than a year in every ten years. The life span has been prolonged at this very juncture, and most of the new retirement years are healthy years. This can be concluded from the calculations of the "healthy life expectancy", where information on mortality statistics and morbidity surveys is combined (Sihvonen et al. 2003). Secondly, in the near future there will be a great number of people reaching retirement age because of the size of the boomer cohorts. These are indisputable facts constituting the demographic frames of the third age. The third component is the emergence of the cultural dimension and is thus more uncertain. It suggests that people reach retirement age with different expectations and orientations than before and the life style of young pensioners is dissimilar from before. In this respect, the emergence of the third age depends on the choices and opportunities available to baby boomers. The first youth generation in Finland may well be also the first generation to lead a new kind of life during the pension years. Even if there was no revolution in lifestyles on the way, the small qualitative

¹ There certainly is something between the middle age and old age, although I am not sure if third age is the term that captures it in the most satisfactory way. As a positive concept, it offers an alternative to "the burden interpretation", but it may even marginalize late old age, when this is seen as a negation of it. The more cheerful picture we draw on the life after the retirement, the gloomier we see the old age that does not fit into this construction. Third age is widely used in Great Britain, in France (*le troisième âge*) and in Spain (*la tercera edad*), but in Finland it is less familiar. The respondents of the GOAL survey were asked how adequate are alternative terms (third age, senior, elderly, aged, old etc.) when describing retired people and the respondents personally. None of the terms were considered really adequate (Karisto 2007).

changes can also have a big impact, because of the quantitative cohort effect. It's now or never – as Elvis Presley, one of the favourites of first wave baby boomers – expressed it. Researching the impact of boomers on re-shaping older age is set to become an important task for social researchers in Finland.

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Hans-Werner Wahl, Clemens Tesch-Romer and Andreas Hoff (eds.) (2007). *New Dynamics in Old Age: Individual, Environmental and Societal Perspectives*. New York: Baywood Publishing Co., 400 pp. ISBN 0-89503-322-4 (hpk)

REVIEWED BY SARA ARBER¹

New Dynamics in Old Age represents an outstanding edited collection of scholarship on aging for the twenty-first century. The key aim is to critically examine changes that have affected aging since the Second World War while looking ahead to the changes on the horizon in terms of older people's everyday lives and policies pertaining to older people. A key thesis is that the post-war consensus of welfare policies supporting older people has been broken down by profound societal changes, which through globalisation have affected all western societies to different degrees. The focus is on continuity and change related to aging both at an individual level and as a social process. This theoretically sophisticated set of essays provides evidence that the very concept of aging has taken on a completely new form over recent decades. A key thread is to examine the dynamics of societal discourses about aging, for example relating to older people as a "burden" and "successful aging", "new aging" and "new agers".

The editors have assembled 20 chapters by a galaxy of leading scholars and researchers within the field of aging from the US and north-west Europe. The focus is primarily western research on aging, drawing on disciplines from across social gerontology, including from sociology, social psychology, and social policy. The introductory section includes a notable chapter by Kenneth Manton and XiLuang Gu on changes in physical and mental functioning in old age, illustrating the major reduc-

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tions in cognitive decline and physical disability over the last 20 years, which have critical demographic and social implications, and a chapter by Christine Fry on the social construction of age. With so many outstanding authors, this review will only mention a selection of the chapters.

The term “environment” is used as an organising thread throughout the book, combining social and physical, as well as micro-level and macro-levels of analysis.

The book is organised around five areas, which in each case illustrate the dynamics of change. The first section on the social environment, focuses particularly on cohort effects in social relations, family relations and elders as care receivers. Andreas Hoff and Clemens Tesch-Romer explore changes in the nature of exchanges within networks of families and kin, particularly in terms of support and conflict, as well as the ways in which notions about the family have changed over time. Steven Zarit and Elizabeth Braungart focus on elderly people as care receivers emphasising the lack of voice given in gerontological research to care receivers, and examine ways of increasing their autonomy and control.

The second section examines the home environment with an emphasis on housing and quality of life, relocation, and urban aging issues. Frank Oswald and Graham Rowles review research on a range of types of decisions about relocation in later life, whether to sheltered housing or other caring contexts, and as migrants to the sunbelt of Florida or Spain. An insightful chapter is provided by Tom Scharf and colleagues who analyse “aging in a difficult place”, focusing on older people living in deprived urban areas.

The outdoor environment is the focus of the third section, providing a consideration of out-of-home activity patterns, car-driving behaviours and the leisure world of aging. Karlene Ball and colleagues remind us of the importance of continued mobility as critical for maintaining social contacts, independent functioning and quality of life. They examine the ways that new technologies have the potential to help older adults extend their safe driving years. Franz Kolland reviews existing literature on leisure research, providing an overview of concepts of leisure, and the position of leisure within different theoretical approaches to social geron-

tology, as well as leisure as a key aspect of self-actualisation and self-development.

The fourth section examines new and persistent dynamics regarding the technological environment, including chapters on the role of the Internet and the potential of technology for improving aging outcomes. Since age-related declines and chronic conditions have the potential to severely limit our ability to do everyday tasks, William Mann and Sumi Helal focus on a new generation of assistive devices labelled “smart technology”. A key issue is to what extent such assistive technologies have the potential to facilitate older people remaining independent for longer, and significantly reduce the burden of care giving for family members.

The section on the societal environment focuses on global aging and the new politics of old age, as well as older persons as market consumers. Chris Phillipson examines how globalization is a transformative force which has reshaped the boundaries through which old age is experienced. He provides an insightful review of historical developments in the social position of older people, outlines the emergence of critical gerontology, and examines new policy questions arising from the impact of globalization and the increasing privatisation of welfare on the lives of older people. Alan Walker addresses the political paradox of old age, namely that large and growing numbers of older people coexist with a lack of political influence of older people, arguing that “grey power is a myth”.

The final section of the book on “new challenges” includes a chapter by Svein Olav Daatland and Andreas Motel-Klingebiel, which argues for the importance of comparative cross-national research on aging. They clearly outline how cross-national studies can be used to disentangle the structuralist position, which assumes that similar macro-characteristics will produce similar outcomes for individuals in different societies, from the culturalist position, which assumes that social/cultural values may modify the effects of a given policy change and lead to different outcomes.

While the thematic organisation of *New Dynamics in Old Age* provides a coherent substantive division of research literatures on aging, the result is that little systematic attention is paid to diversity and inequality within older populations, particularly relating to gender, class and mate-

rial resources, as well as race, ethnicity and sexuality. A key issue should be to what extent these inequalities are increasing over time, and the policy implications of growing inequalities among the older population.

Overall, the book provides very comprehensive and up-to-date reviews of relevant literature and debates within a wide range of areas that are central to an understanding of older people in the twenty-first century. *New Dynamics in Old Age* will be an essential resource for researchers and a valuable teaching text for students of social gerontology.

Jan Baars and Henk Visser (eds.) (2007). *Aging and Time; Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. New York: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc. Published in the Society and Aging Series, 202 pp., ISBN 978-0-89503-367-3 (cloth)

REVIEWED BY MANJA BOMHOFF¹

Any research on aging is based on specific understandings of time and chronological (calendar) time is not always the best measure of time. Older people are defined as those who have lived a certain time and have less time left compared to other cohorts. Even at a more profound level, time figures. Older people are often asked to finish their professional careers and have more 'free time' and when certain measures such as dependency ratios are employed, the amount of chronological time lived is believed to indicate the assistance one requires or the burden one forms to society. Studying older persons as a separate category involves some time-risks for researchers. When the boundaries between 'the old' and the rest are made to seem static and stern, an artificial distance is created. Distancing devices are equally in place when, for the purpose of research, older persons are situated in an a-historical time and place.

The usage of time measurements in research on aging is not always explicitly conceptualised or questioned. In the interesting first chapters of *Aging and Time* Jan Baars explains that the scientific precision that is associated with chronological *time* has equally been attributed to constructions of chronological *age*. Chronological age has consequently been accorded great explanatory value. This has been at the expense of other more subjective time perspectives that can be measured through the recording of personal experiences and narrative articulations. Chronological time is indispensable, but a one-sided focus ignores the meaning of time and aging. The meanings of aging comprise among other things

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cultural variations in the ways time is organised in different societies, as well as the significance of individual processes of biological, social and emotional change. In my own research among older persons in Kerala (India) it was being a grandparent, getting grey hair or losing one's mobility that made people feel older. Chronological time was not considered very important and birthdays were rarely celebrated. Among Hindu's the 84th birthday was exceptionally important, but only because it meant having seen a 1000 full moons.

According to Baars it is because of gerontology's great involvement with organisational contexts that the processes of meaning giving have largely been ignored. What it means to become older may not matter much when population aging is primarily seen as posing bureaucratic and societal challenges. The authors of *Aging and Time* have taken up the challenge to think about time in relation to their own research interests. In chapters 3 to 5 they report on various psychological experiments. Elke van der Meer introduces the latest results from cognitive research and brain-based studies on psychological time. Freya Dittmann-Kohli investigates the temporal perspective of the self through tests that are designed to see whether the passage of time is indeed a more prominent element of self-experience in later life than in young adulthood. Warner Schaie consequently studies the concept of *event time* as a substitution for the over-rated calendar time. Appropriate designs for the study of event time that he suggests are based on the *Cattell Cube* and *O and P techniques*. Certain characteristics of data sets are highlighted that could be suitable for the identification of events and their dimensionality.

The last four chapters of *Aging and Time* contain an extended confrontation between biologist Eugene Yates and physicist Jos Uffink about their differing views on gerontology and time. The authors try to come to an understanding of aging processes that does not depend on a fixed external scale but is based on aging processes operating within the living organism. The point is to examine why people age differently when they share the same chronological age. In an interesting last chapter Henk Visser outlines the preconditions for interdisciplinary research on aging and points at the need for more data-oriented research.

For a *Society and Aging Series* book *Aging and Time* contains little on society. The focus of most chapters is on generalised and objectified bio-

logical and psychological processes as related to individuals rather than on cultural and social understandings of time and aging processes. The analyses are based more on materials obtained in a de-contextualised research laboratory than upon the recorded voices and experiences of older persons themselves. Yet, the authors of *Aging and Time* have made a multi-disciplinarian effort to write on this complex theme. The editors demonstrate clearly that studies on aging benefit from a further questioning of time, the defining factor – but how to define it?- of getting older.

I J A L

International Journal of Ageing and Later Life

The International Journal of Ageing and Later Life (IJAL) serves an audience interested in social and cultural aspects of ageing and later life development. The title of the journal reflects an attempt to broaden the field of ageing studies. In addition to studies on later life, IJAL also welcomes contributions focusing on adult ageing as well as relations among generations.

Being an international journal, IJAL acknowledges the need to understand the cultural diversity and context dependency of ageing and later life. IJAL publishes country- or cultural-specific studies as long as such contributions are interesting and understandable for an international audience.

In order to stimulate exchange of ideas on ageing across many parts of the world, IJAL is available free of charge to anyone with Internet access (www.ep.liu.se/ej/ijal).