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Background Paper

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Intergenerational Solidarity and Conflict

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Abstract

In this paper we attempt to define the sociological parameters of intergenerational solidarity. We argue that social cohesion between generations is influenced by affectual, associational, consensual, functional, normative, and structural factors that operate at both the macro social level of society and groups—what we call “macrogens”—and at the micro social level of families and individuals—our term is “microgens.” Similarly we argue that it is impossible to discuss intergenerational solidarity without considering its opposite, conflict, and vice versa. On the basis of the evidence reviewed, it does *not* appear that there will be marked generational conflict in the future, and it is likely that intergenerational solidarity and altruism will remain present at high levels.

Keywords: aged, cohort, conflict, family, intergenerational, solidarity

The purpose of this paper is to describe some of the sociological parameters of intergenerational solidarity. We argue that there are two levels to analyse, the macro social and micro social, one reflected at the level of society and groups—what might be called “macrogens”—and the other at the level of families and individuals—“microgens.” Similarly we argue that it is impossible to discuss solidarity without considering its opposite, conflict, and vice versa. Sociologists have generally focused more on conflict

than on solidarity, and with the coming age boom many observers have warned about a “war between generations” as the young begin to protest what they see as an inequitable distribution of public resources favoring the old. Will there be generational conflict in the future? What about intergenerational solidarity? To what extent will transmission be blocked across the macrogens and the microgens, so the best from the past cannot continue to flow to future generations?

What is intergenerational solidarity?

Perhaps the simplest definition of intergenerational solidarity is “social cohesion between generations” (Bengtson, Olander and Haddad, 1975; Katz, Lowenstein, Phillips, & Daatland, 2005; Roberts, Richards and Bengtson, 1991). But what kind of cohesion? And between which, or what kind, of generations? These are crucial questions. In common language, the term generation can be used to describe a group of youth as well as the relationship between a father and a son, or “the Baby Boom Generation,” but the three obviously are not the same.

Macrogens and microgens

We begin by noting there are two levels of analysis, two levels of society, involved in the problem of generational solidarity. The first is the macrosocial level of populations and societies with age groups such as “youth” and “the elderly.” These are, as demographers (Ryder, 1965) point out, properly called “age cohorts” since they are groups that share one common characteristic, that of year of birth. Usually they are grouped by demographers into 10-year intervals, a somewhat artificial and arbitrary grouping which nevertheless provides useful comparisons between age groups. In common, popular usage, they are grouped according to major events, such as “Baby Boomers” (sharing a dramatic rise in the birth rate compared to cohorts before and after them) or the “Depression Generation” (note the use here of the term generation instead of cohort).

The second social level of age groups is the microsocal, that of small groups, most notably the family. Here generation refers to ranked descent within a lineage, and here the term is least ambiguous: mothers and daughters, grandmothers and granddaughters, great-grandmothers, etc. In Biblical times such lineage descent was used to mark the passage of time rather than chronological years; this is still true in some premodern societies.

There is still a third use of the term, one suggested by Mannheim (1952) almost a century ago: generation as a social unit in the forefront of social change (Bengtson, Cutler, Mangan, & Marshall, 1985). Mannheim argued that youth, having “fresh contact” with status quo political and economic institutions, saw the deficiencies and hypocrisies of adult society and marshalled themselves to reform them. Thus youth were at the

forefront of revolutionary movements. The “generation unit” usage is beyond the scope of this paper and we will not comment on it further.

Thus, it is very important to be clear about what we mean when we use the term generation. Is it “macrogens,” cohorts of age groups in the broader society? Or is it “microgens,” age-ranked positions within a family with their implications of power and warmth?

Solidarity and conflict

Another distinction that should be noted is more obvious: that between solidarity and conflict. Solidarity has sadly received very little attention from social scientists—in contrast to conflict, which some would say is the foundation of sociology. Indeed, this conference may be a first in focusing on intergenerational solidarity rather than conflict, and the organizers are to be congratulated for this.

But the most fundamental questions in sociology pertain to the nature of the social bond: ties that link individuals to groups and one group to another. Inquiry into substantive concerns as diverse as mate selection and interorganizational linkages have in common a concern for the bonds created and sustained between individuals. Issues of warmth, affection, attraction to and interaction with, and providing assistance when needed are part of this bonding. And this is what we mean by solidarity.

Conflict is more than simply the absence of solidarity; high conflict and high solidarity can coexist. For example, it is hard to escape conflict in intergenerational relations. At the macrosocial level there is conflict between youth and age, at the microsocial between fathers and sons; such are the themes of Western civilization’s oldest literature.

Solidarity and conflict are both difficult to measure in social science research, and this may be one reason that solidarity at least has been ignored by many researchers. But at the macrogenerational level, solidarity can be measured by public opinion items such as “Members of my age group have been deprived of the opportunities that are available to other age groups” (Garstka, Hummert, & Branscombe, 2005). At the microgenerational level, intergenerational family solidarity can be measured by items that ask, for example, “How close do you feel to your father,” and “how often do you see your father?” (Mangen, Bengtson, and Landry, 1988).

The Problem of generations

When discussing generational/age group relations and its implications for intergenerational solidarity, it is also important to conceptualize the *problem of generations*—the renegotiation of the balance between continuity and innovation over time through the succession of one generation by another. The recurring problem of

generations and age groups in human society involves the challenge of ensuring group continuity over time as well as adaptability and innovation in the face of time-related changes (Mannheim, 1952). Products of unique sociohistorical influences, younger generations are the carriers of new perspectives and commitments which represent the potential for change as they encounter the existing social order (Elder, 1978; Ryder, 1965). However, despite change in both participants and social environment, the inertia of tradition does persist through the decades. This is seen in historical comparisons, which suggest more stability through time in groups and societies (Allen, 1952).

Intergenerational solidarity is best understood within the context of shared expectations and obligations regarding the ageing of individuals and the succession of generations. This contract across generations and age groups represents the norms operating at the micro- and macro-levels of social structure in a given socio-historical context. Three sets of normative expectations and obligations characterize the traditional contract across generations: (1) *biosocial generation and socialization* norms reflect the involvement of families and public education in the socialization of each successive generation; (2) norms of *gerosocial succession* are associated with the availability of resources in the form of financial and emotional support provided to the younger generation by older generations in families and in public transfers involving the passing of older generations in death or retirement; (3) there are also norms regarding *geriatric dependencies*, which reflect the expectation that family caregiving and public support from welfare programs will be provided for the old.

Three concepts have been used to examine change and continuity in intergenerational comparisons: cohort effects, lineage effects, and period effects (see Bengtson et al., 1985, for a more comprehensive discussion). Although these three effects are interrelated, each provides a slightly different perspective for viewing the succession of generations and subsequent social change, while also taking into account change and development occurring at the individual, family, and historical levels (Aldous, 1978; Elder, 1984; Hagestad, 1984).

One explanation for contrasts between individuals who differ in chronological age focuses on factors related to cohort experiences. *Cohort effects* refer to particular sociopolitical events that occur to a group born during a certain time period, and are therefore experienced at a common level of their biosocial development, usually childhood or youth. Members of successive cohorts grow up at different points in historical time and are products of different sets of personal or sociopolitical concerns as well as life experiences that are encountered at different stages of life-span development. Population trends, economic indicators, and relationships among demographic groups and social positions are relevant variables (Riley, 1985) for studying the birth rate, dependency ratio, economic conditions, and political trends that influence the sociohistorical experiences of cohorts across the life course. Other social structural variables, such as social class, race, and geographic location influence intracohort differences.

Lineage effects represent the bidirectional nature of intergenerational socialization, which can lead to continuities despite cohort and maturation differences. The face-to-face negotiation of generational turnover and its social manifestations at the microstructural level are reflected within the context of the family, where the paradox of continuity and change is most immediate among individuals, who differ in chronological age and occupy different positions in the unfolding succession of generations. The family is a prototypical structure of social organization in which there is a series of statuses defined by ranked descent that form successive links in the flow of biological and social generations.

Period effects are seen in the impact of sociopolitical events, such as wars, economic shifts, and political causes, which affect all groups within a society. The analysis of period effects involves comparisons of perceptions, events, or attitudes at a given point in time to those of another time. Both change and continuity are exhibited by social groups composed of different generations at contrasting points of historical time.

Macrogens: Solidarity and conflict between age cohorts

Four global trends suggest that the contract across generations is changing around the world: (a) the extension of the life course; (b) changes in the age structures of nations; (c) changes in family structures and relationships; and (d) changes in governmental responsibilities (Bengtson, Lowenstein, Putney, & Gans, 2003). These demographic and sociopolitical trends have contributed to growing policy debates over “generational equity” in macrolevel public policy discussions in the U.S. (Achenbaum, 1989; Bengtson, Marti, & Roberts, 1991; Kingson, Hirshorn, & Cornman, 1986; Quadagno, 1990; Thomson, 1993; Walker, 1993). At the microsocial level of families, the provision of care for the elderly and changing intergenerational reciprocity norms are concerns facing families in both developed and developing countries. Gender role differences and ethnic differences in socioeconomic status and cultural norms also influence the intergenerational contract and reveal inequalities in social structures. Changes in living arrangements reflect shifting values and norms and also affect opportunities for intergenerational exchanges of affection and instrumental support. In addition, migration from rural to urban areas and across national borders involves renegotiations of intergenerational expectations and obligations across geographic space. These changes suggest two competing possible consequences: (1) Greater conflicts between age groups; and (2) greater solidarity between adult generations within the family and across age groups in the broader society.

The changing contract across generations and equity across macrogens

In the mid-1980s, a political issue emerged in several Western industrialized nations that illustrate the new debate regarding the “contract across generations.” The issue concerns potential inequities between age groups in the distribution of economic advantage, and the desirability of redrafting public policy legislation to produce more

“equity” among age groups. The issue has arisen out of profound demographic changes, which involve the ageing of societies and concerns that younger age cohorts will not receive the same level of benefits when they retire that today’s aged receive. The basic argument made by “generational equity” advocates can be summarized as follows: (a) In recent years, there has been a growth of public resources directed toward elderly members of the population resulting from legislation to counter previous levels of poverty among the aged, and because of effective political lobbying. (b) This has led to substantial improvement in the economic status of the elderly and in their access to health care. (c) The elderly are becoming better off as a group than the nonaged population, especially children; and the proportion of federal funds directed to the oldest age group is increasing every year. (d) At the same time, the flow of resources to children and other dependent populations has decreased, proportionally. (e) Thus, to continue the flow of federal resources to the elderly is inequitable, and will be the source of intergenerational conflict.

A major critique of the generational conflict hypothesis is that this perspective relies largely upon projected demographic trends and theoretical conceptualizations, which have not been empirically demonstrated by public opinion polls and other research (Cook, 2003). Instead, critics argue that the generational conflict debate is merely a “symbolic battle” created and disseminated by the mass media and political interests (Binstock, 2005; Williamson, McNamara, & Howling, 2003).

Critics of the generational equity perspective proposed an alternative frame, the generational interdependence perspective, which argues that the gains of one generation are not necessarily achieved at the expense of others, and that different age groups have common rather than competing interests (Williamson, McNamara, & Howling, 2003). For example, age-based policies benefit the multigenerational family since they reduce the financial burden of families to provide economic support for their ageing parents. In addition, there is a bidirectional exchange of social support between the generations, in which adult children function as caregivers for their elderly parents and grandparents serve as primary caregivers of their grandchildren. However, the generational interdependence perspective has not gained popularity in the American mass media since its focus on community obligation for vulnerable populations resonates less strongly with dominant American cultural values upholding individualism (Williamson, McNamara, & Howling, 2003).

Research on macrogens solidarity and conflict

Nationwide survey data suggest that no age group is perceived as receiving an inequitable amount of government benefits and that most people do not feel that programs that provide benefits are too costly (Bengtson & Murray, 1993). In a study conducted by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the potential for intergenerational conflict was found in a small proportion of the public (5-10%), and perceptions of intergenerational tensions were found in only 15-20% of the public (Schlesinger & Kronebusch, 1994).

Garstka, Hummert, and Branscombe (2005) found that the framing of intergenerational comparisons in the news media influenced public support for age-based social programs. However, contrary to the generational conflict perspective, it was found that media portrayals of the “greedy geezer” approach were more likely to elicit support for increased federal spending for age-based programs rather than drastic cuts to federally funded programs that tend to unequally favor younger and older adults. Dowd (1980) suggests that intergenerational support for the continued funding of age-based programs across members of all age groups may occur when the advantages and disadvantages held by certain generations are portrayed in the media, which further legitimates the inequality between age groups.

Macrogens solidarity and conflict around the world

Further evidence against the intergenerational conflict hypothesis has been found in European countries. In a comparative study of the United States, France, Italy, and Germany, Wisensale (2005) describes how intergenerational equity in terms of economic support and caregiving for the elderly is becoming a global issue, and how intergenerational conflict (or lack thereof) differs in these countries due to the socio-historical context and existing social policies of each nation. In France, there is more of a conflict between public and private pensioners. In both Germany and Italy, there is more opposition to the cessation of early retirement and dissatisfaction over sluggish economies. In Norway, Gulbrandsen and Langsether (1999) suggest that intergenerational transfer patterns are not the basis for conflict. Instead, they suggest that the intergenerational conflict hypothesis is based on financial inequalities between the generations at the macro level rather than the voluntary support transfers from parent to child at the family level.

The intergenerational equity debate has not been as significant in Canada compared with the U.S. (Marshall, Cook, & Marshall, 1993). In the U.S. this debate is found in the mass media, research, and policy groups in the U.S., but is largely absent from political agendas in Canada. In Canada, universal programs for incomes offer income security and medical care regardless of age. Together with the provision of family allowances, these contribute to a lesser sense of intergenerational inequity. In contrast, there is greater receptivity to interest group politics as seen in the rise of Americans for Generational Equity (AGE).

Microgens: Solidarity and conflict within family generations

The problem of generations at the microsocal level of families emerged in mass media accounts of the “decline of the family” and the inability of families to care for dependent elders. However, many studies have shown the strength of families as functioning social support units with frequent and regular intergenerational contact and assistance (see Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Far from being abandoned by family, the elderly in

industrialized societies are in close contact with kin, engage in warm relationships with them, and is both a giver and receiver of support and assistance (see Bengtson, Rosenthal, & Burton, 1990).

Intergenerational solidarity at the societal level may reflect the close interpersonal ties seen across the generations within families, which may be difficult to separate from outgroup perceptions of different age groups (Garstka, Hummert, & Branscombe, 2005). At the family level, intergenerational relations are often characterized by interdependence and mutual support (Mancini & Blieszner, 1989; Norris & Tindale, 1994) and are rarely observed to be in overt conflict (Aquilino, 1999).

The construct of intergenerational solidarity at the family level characterizes the behavioral and emotional dimensions of interaction, cohesion, sentiment, and support between parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, over the course of long-term relationships. Six conceptual dimensions have been used to measure intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson & Schrader, 1982; Roberts, Richards, & Bengtson, 1991):

1. Affectual solidarity: the sentiments and evaluations family members express about their relationship with other members
2. Associational solidarity: the type and frequency of contact between intergenerational family members.
3. Consensual solidarity: agreement in opinions, values, and orientations between generations.
4. Functional solidarity: the giving and receiving of support across generations.
5. Normative solidarity: expectations regarding filial obligations and parental obligations as well as norms about the importance of familistic values.
6. Structural solidarity: the “opportunity structure” for cross-generational interaction reflecting geographic proximity between family members.

It is important to point out that most of the economic research and writing about intergenerational relationships has focused on only one of these six dimensions of solidarity, that of functional exchange—the giving and receiving of support, usually financial, across generations. This considerably limits “intergenerational relations.” If other dimensions are considered, they are structure (how far apart parents and children live) and association (how often they have contact with one another).

The solidarity perspective represents one of ongoing development, which has adapted to include conflict and negative effects in family relationships to reflect empirical and theoretical developments in family studies (Bengtson, Giarrusso, Mabry, & Silverstein, 2002; Katz et al, 2005).

Marshall, Matthews, and Rosenthal (1993) found that the dynamic interplay of positive and negative affect and conflict and negotiation in intergenerational family relationships was largely overlooked in sociological family research. Luscher & Pillemer (1998) describe intergenerational ambivalence as irreconcilable contradictions that

operate at the socio-structural and individual level which influence the experience of mixed emotions in relationships between parents and adult children.

Along with the protracted nature of parent-child relationships, structural tensions between autonomy and independence along with dissimilarities in developmental life stage, status, cohort socialization, and gender roles give rise to intergenerational ambivalence in late-life families. Incorporating the life course perspective, ambivalence theorists take into account the historical and structural influences that shape intergenerational relations across time (Connidis & McMullen, 2002; Luscher & Pillemer, 1998). Unlike the solidarity and conflict perspectives, the ambivalence approach recognizes the interaction of both solidarity and conflict in intergenerational family relationships. Bengtson et al. (2002) argue that these models are not necessarily competing perspectives, asserting instead the complementary nature of the solidarity-conflict and ambivalence models. Along with solidarity, Katz et al. (2005) suggest that ambivalence and conflict are also aspects of strong, harmonious intergenerational relationships.

One of the concerns about generational relations that emerged in the early 1960s was the specter of “the decline of the family” and its corollary, “the abandonment of elder family members.” Mass media portrayals of the family focused on the disintegration of traditional family forms and the inability of families to provide care and support to dependent elders, who are placed in nursing homes.

The “task-specific theory of organizational effectiveness” (Litwak, Silverstein, Bengtson, & Hirst, 2003; Messeri, Silverstein, & Litwak, 1993) describes the interaction between families and formal organizations and bridges macro and micro perspectives of intergenerational solidarity. According to this perspective, multigenerational families and larger formal organizations are engaged in a public-private partnership. Although formal organizations have taken on certain traditional family functions, the family continues to play an important role in facilitating and managing this joint partnership. From this perspective, the “generational contract” within families has changed to cope with contemporary socio-economic realities, but nevertheless remains a salient structural construct that is suggestive of the enduring nature of intergenerational bonds in families today.

Research on microgens solidarity and conflict

Using longitudinal data from the Longitudinal Study of Generations (LSOG), we have been able to chart the course of intergenerational solidarity dimensions over time. One consistent result concerns the high levels of affectual solidarity (reflecting the emotional bonds between the generations) that have been found over six times of measurement, from 1971 to 1997 (Bengtson et al., 2000; Bengtson, Giarrusso, Silverstein, and Wang, 2000). We find that average solidarity scores between grandparents and parents, parents and youth, grandparents and grandchildren are high, considerably above the expected midpoint of the scale. These scores are remarkably

stable over the 26 years of measurement. There is a systematic “generational bias” in these reports: parents consistently report higher affect than their children do over time, as do grandparents compared with grandchildren. This supports the “intergenerational stake” hypothesis first proposed 30 years ago (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971; Giarrusso, Feng, & Bengtson, 2004; Giarrusso, Stallings, & Bengtson, 1995). The older generation has a greater psychological social investment, or “stake,” in their joint relationship than does their younger generation, and this influences their perceptions and evaluations of their common intergenerational relationships.

At the same time, it should be noted that not all intergenerational relationships display such high levels of emotional closeness. We find that about one in five relationships are characterized by either significant conflict (Clarke, Preston, Raksin, & Bengtson, 1999) or detachment. Diversity and complexity are inherent features of family networks across generations.

Microgens level solidarity around the world

Intergenerational family relationships are also influenced by sub-group membership, i.e. racial/ethnic, cultural, and historical contexts (Antonucci & Jackson, 2003). The cross-national OASIS study (Old Age and Autonomy: The Role of Service Systems and Intergenerational Family Solidarity) compared data from Germany, Norway, Spain, Israel, and the UK and found cross-cultural support for the intergenerational cohesion of the extended family despite social change (Katz et al., 2005). Katz et al. (2005) found that differences between countries were larger than differences between age groups within each country in terms of the underlying beliefs and preferences that influence intergenerational family solidarity. The balance between governmental (formal) and family (informal) networks for the care and support of the elderly in light of changing cultural norms is occurring in South Korea (Eun, 2003) and Japan (Antonucci, Akiyama, & Birditt, 2004), and in developing countries like Ghana (Aboderin, 2003).

Intergenerational solidarity between family generations is also seen in the contemporary context of transnationalism, in which intergenerational ties are maintained across national borders. The endurance of generational ties across geographic space in transnational families shows the ability of the family to adapt to the challenges associated with geographic separation due to migration. Transnational expressions of intergenerational solidarity take the form of associational contact with family members abroad and functional exchanges in the form of remittances and financial aid. South Asian immigrant elders in the UK continue to fulfill their intercontinental obligations by sending remittances to their families and community in their country of origin, and family members maintain intergenerational ties by visiting relatives abroad (Burholt & Wenger, 2004).

Ethnographic accounts from anthropologic studies suggest that there is much evidence of intergenerational solidarity in non-industrial societies. Sentiments of affection and obligation as well as expectations of economic benefits are reinforced by

cultural values, religious beliefs, and negative sanctions at the macro-level. When the informal contract between the generations fails, it is not due to a decline in intergenerational solidarity. Instead, Foner (1993) argues that the neglect of incapacitated elders may be seen as a “fulfillment” of the contract and a tacit understanding between the generations as elders themselves may also request death-hastening treatment.

From this perspective, the harsh conditions faced by the elderly in developing nations are related to five factors. Childlessness is considered a terrible misfortune in nonindustrial societies. Childless elders are left to rely on distant kin, with whom weaker bonds are shared due to the provision of fewer resources and exchanges from the older generation to elicit a strong sense of obligation from the younger generation. Even among those with children, “defacto childlessness” may also occur due to younger generations migrating to urban areas to work in an increasingly modernizing society. Times of limited resources induce a cost/contribution balance between the generations. Environmental factors, such as drought and famine as well as the struggle of adult children to care for their ageing parents in addition to their own children contribute to the lessened flow of resources to the older generation. The mobility demands of herding and horticultural societies also influence the abandonment of frail elders. Cultural and religious beliefs also influence the treatment of elders.

According to Foner (1993), the worsening position of the elderly in developed nations is only one possible outcome of modernization. Families in developing countries continue to meet caregiving obligations and filial duties. Despite the stresses placed on the family with increasing modernization, families in developing parts of the world continue to “struggle” to meet obligations to the older generation. Children continue to be the main support for elders without the safety net of a government administered benefit system.

The future of generational solidarity and conflict

What about the future? Will there be more, or less, solidarity between generations in the coming decades? It is more difficult to talk about solidarity than about conflict.

We can explore some reasons why macrogenerational solidarity will be less likely in the next few decades, and reasons why it will be more likely.

There are several reasons to suggest that there may be *less* intergenerational conflict, and that solidarity between generations at both the micro- and macrosocial levels may be high:

1. *The cultural (or structural) lag hypothesis.* Social structures and cultural values are revolving to reflect our changing age composition, with the result that we will have created more and more effective mechanisms to deal with large numbers of aged people.
2. *Norms of solidarity and support.* Many studies have described significant

- intergenerational solidarity at the family level, with relations between generations solid and rewarding and with a great deal of mutual support taking place (Rossi & Rossi, 1990). This solidarity reflects norms of (a) filial piety, (b) reciprocity, (c) altruism, and (d) self-interest (individuals' expectations for their own future) that may continue to be expressed at both the micro-social level of families and the macro-level of society.
3. *Norms of reciprocity.* Life course and intergenerational norms of reciprocity are very high. People continue to believe in a cyclical process of being helped and helping throughout life. The burdens of caretaking for a child are taken for granted, so too are many of the burdens of elder caregiving although normative expectations and obligations are changing along with global economic realities. Family contact seems to have high value, especially in terms of generational relations.
 4. *New roles for the aged.* We may also see the development of collective change in the definition of what older people can and should contribute to society. For example, they may be seen as the resource for noneconomic capital—knowledge about relationships and history. In light of global changes that threaten to break apart seemingly tenuous generational connections, older adults provide a bridge to the past, keeping families together and reminding us that our society has dealt with the problem of generations across time.
 5. *Generational altruism and the generational stake.* Previous research has shown that older generations “invest” more in younger generations than the reverse, and that elders are frequently willing to sacrifice because of the “stake” they have in the younger generations (Giarrusso, Stallings, & Bengtson, 1995). This “generational altruism” may deflect intergenerational conflict.

There are three overarching reasons for why there might be *more* conflict and a decrease in age group or generational solidarity between now and 2020:

1. *Increases in the dependency ratio.* The decline in fertility translates into fewer workers left to support ageing retirees.
2. *Increased perceptions of “generational inequity.”* If inflation continues to rise, the elderly are more and more likely to be perceived as “greedy geezers.” It will be increasingly argued that public support for the aged come from funds that could be allocated to other segments of society, such as youth, and to affordable housing for young families. This is the “generational equity” scenario as discussed above.
3. *Increased “ageism.”* There will probably be a continuation of negative stereotyping that sees the elderly as rigid, terribly old-fashioned, unable to cope, irrelevant, and worthless. As more of the elderly population of the future live past 85, and as more live with mental impairments like Alzheimer's disease and strokes, it could be that ageing itself will be more negatively viewed. Moreover, if technological advances become even more a part of personal life, those who cannot or will not adapt to these new techniques may be left behind. On the other hand, there may be even greater emphasis on the virtues of youth. With fertility low and children proportionately less common, youth will be valued more highly

and attention will be turned to the young at the expense of the old.

On balance, the evidence seems to suggest a continuation of the relatively high levels of solidarity between macrogens that has characterized the Western world in the last four decades. We foresee no coming “war between generations.”

Conclusion

In this paper we have attempted to define the sociological parameters of intergenerational solidarity. We have argued that there are two levels to the analysis, the macro social and micro social, one reflected at the level of society and groups—what we have called “macrogens”—and the other at the level of families and individuals—our term is “microgens.” Similarly we argue that it is impossible to discuss intergenerational solidarity without considering its opposite, conflict, and vice versa. Sociologists have generally focused more on conflict than on solidarity, and with the coming age boom many observers have warned about a “war between generations” as the young begin to protest what they see as an inequitable distribution of public resources favoring the old. We have reviewed the research evidence concerning intergenerational conflict at both the macro and micro level, and come to a somewhat unexpected conclusion. On the basis of the evidence it does *not* appear that here will be marked generational conflict in the future, and it is likely that intergenerational solidarity will remain at a high level. This is particularly true at the microgenerational level.

The contract between generations is changing, but there are many indications of continuity in the contract not only within the family but at the macrosocial level of age populations and policies as well. Around the world, intergenerational solidarity and altruism persists despite the stresses placed on ageing families in developed and developing nations, who struggle to balance the increasing demands of caring for the older generation as the population ages. Despite political rhetoric about intergenerational equity and the decline of the family, which suggest that intergenerational solidarity at both the societal and family level is on the decline, both continuity and change is representative in the contract between generations as it adapts to cope with contemporary demographic realities.

The succession of each generation throughout history indicates that society has been able to adapt to changing internal and external forces that threaten to divide its members along various lines. Events that occur in economic and sociopolitical areas—effects exogenous to the process of ageing and succession—will determine much of the fate of generational and age group conflicts and solidarities in the future. Greater conflict between age groups is only one possible consequence of these changes. Both perspectives should be taken into account by policy makers, who will most likely shape the destiny of intergenerational relationships.

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