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Outline of a Theory of Generations

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Abstract

The concept of generation has had little refinement and application in recent sociology. After reviewing the literature, this article modifies Mannheim's original conceptualization through Bourdieu's notion of habitus, with the aim of providing a framework for the comparative study of generations. To this end, generation is defined as a cohort of persons passing through time who come to share a common habitus, hexis and culture, a function of which is to provide them with a collective memory that serves to integrate the cohort over a finite period of time.

Key words

■ Bourdieu ■ conflict ■ generation ■ Mannheim ■ memory

It is generally recognized that Karl Mannheim introduced the concept of 'generation' as a viable addition to the analysis of social stratification in modern sociology in his 'The Problem of Generations' in an essay in the *Kölner Vierteljahrshefte für Soziologie* in 1928–9 (Mannheim, 1952). The concept was formulated as part of his broader programme for a sociology of knowledge and was an element of Mannheim's theoretical strategy to understand the 'existential basis of knowledge' by the use of concepts other than social class. It was also part of Mannheim's search for an alternative theory of social change to Marxism with its traditional epistemology, materialist definitions of interests, and narrow focus on economic class as a causal mechanism of social change. In particular, Mannheim employed the concept of generation to study the growth of conservative thought in modern societies (Mannheim, 1986) and the idea of generational differences subsequently worked its way into the conventional sociological lexicon. The contemporary sociological literature on generations is divided into (i) studies of generational experiences of major historical disruptions such as warfare and migration; (ii) research on generational differences in cultural experience and consumerism; (iii) studies of generational cohorts in terms of intellectual traditions and political perspectives; and (iv) sociological analyses of

specific generations such as the Lucky Generation or the Sixties. Thus the concept has been used productively to study generational differences, for example by Richard Wohl (1979) in his study of the First World War, by David Wyatt (1993) in his research on the Vietnam War and American culture, by T.M.S. Evens (1995) in a study of conflict on a kibbutz, by Anne Coombs (1996) in her study of the postwar Sydney generation, and by Jaff Schatz (1991) on the rise and fall of generational elites. Edmund Wilson (1993) in his autobiographical memories has provided a highly personal interpretation of the intellectual, political and artistic development of the Sixties. Alexander Bloom (1986) conducted a historical study of the first and second generation of New York intellectuals in terms of their accommodation to American society and the emergence of a distinctive social science tradition. The concept of generation has been routinely applied in the study of youth cultures and their impact on popular culture (Frith, 1984).

Although the notion of generational differences is widely accepted in contemporary sociology, generally speaking the fruitfulness of the concept has yet to be fully explored and appreciated in the sociological mainstream. There is little theoretical elaboration of the notion of generation and its relevance for cultural sociology. There are few significant theoretical contributions in modern sociology to the development of the theory of generations, apart from S.N. Eisenstadt's *From Generation to Generation* (1956). There is a clear awareness that generational experiences (of migration, persecution, and extermination) have been profoundly significant in the shaping of intellectual movements in for example the New York intellectuals. Daniel Bell has described the mood of three generations in *The End of Ideology* (1960) in which Jewish intellectuals in particular were shaped by the Depression, the rise of Hitler and fascism, the Nazi–Soviet Pact and the Holocaust. While ethnicity and class clearly influenced the New York Jewish intellectuals, there was also a definite sense of generational uniqueness and specificity (Podhoretz, 1967).

Although there is a literature on the sociology of generations, it is typically implicit rather than explicit. Our approach in this article is concerned with the cultural dimensions of generational membership rather than with the political sociology of elites and generations. This paper provides the theoretical background to an international study of postwar generations being undertaken by the authors from the perspective of generational differences in national cultures and personal experience of traumatic events (such as conscription, peace movements and warfare).

Generation: a Working Definition

By and large the concepts which surround the idea of social class may be directly appropriated by a sociology of generations, producing a range of notions such as generational conflict, generational mobility and generational ideologies. One may conceptualize generational cultures in the same way as one now speaks

about 'class cultures' or 'occupational cultures'. Generations, like social classes in Weberian sociology, are organized in terms of social closure to maximize access to resources for their members. Social closure is a strategy for controlling resources in a context of competition by defining membership by reference to some (arbitrary) principle of inclusion/exclusion such as skin colour or age (Weber, 1978: 341–3). However, one way of identifying the important differences between social class and generation would be through the problem of time and duration. In the sociology of generations, it is important to distinguish between 'contemporaries' (those who happen to be alive at the same time) and 'coevals' (those who are the same age). Thus, the issues of time, temporal identity and collective memory can be said to lie at the core of the sociological issues relating to class. A generation involves the organization of collective memory (Schwartz, 1996).

Following the work of Anthony Giddens (1984) one can also consider generations as social cohorts stretched over time. Although a generation might be arbitrarily defined in terms of years of origination, this definition of generations gains sociological substance once we direct our attention to the problem of the final termination of a generational cohort as its members evolve through a process of retirement, physical decline and death. While there are clearly social class memories, as for example in Zygmunt Bauman's *Memories of Class* (1982), our aim is to understand how generations are constituted through the institutionalization of memory through collective rituals and narratives. Intergenerational differences ('the lucky generation', 'Sixties people' or 'the generation of 1914') are identified by reference primarily to time, because it is periodization which uniquely encapsulates the strategic opportunities and difficulties that attach to specific generational cohorts. In particular, we argue that generational cultures become embodied in their cultural dispositions (dress, language and emblems) and the postures of individuals (walk, dance preferences and songs). We attempt to develop such an approach to generational embodiments of culture by the adoption and appropriation of Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of culture, and more specifically his related notions of habitus and hexis (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1990).

We shall define generation initially as a cohort of persons passing through time who come to share a common habitus, hexis and culture, a function of which is to provide them with a collective memory that serves to integrate the cohort over a finite period of time. Such a definition draws special attention to the idea of a shared or collective cultural field (of emotions, attitudes, preferences and dispositions) and a set of embodied practices (of sport and leisure activities), that is, it identifies the importance of collective memory in creating a generational culture or tradition. We are also concerned with the issue of the management of generational resources over space and time. In addition to sharing a common collective culture, a generation may be conceived as a cohort which has a peculiar and strategic access to collective resources and which, through rituals of exclusion (Parkin, 1979), preserves not only its individual cultural identity, but excludes other generational cohorts from access to cultural capital and material resources

generally. For example, the generation of 1945, while dispersed through social space, needs to maintain a collective access to resources, but more important, in order to sustain itself it must reflexively produce a generational memory which articulates its control over cultural capital via collective rituals and ceremonial practices. Here such recurring phenomena as the nostalgic recreation of style and the attempt to relive 'significant events' from the past, as in the recent example of the Woodstock Anniversary concerts or the revival of early Beatles songs, can be given sociological content. It can be suggested that taste in music or clothing has strategic value, even where this might be unacknowledged by both the producers and consumers of such items.

Although generations, like classes, exercise strategic exclusion, because individuals within generations may typically reproduce themselves through marriage and the creation of families, the moral issues of exchange emerge through notions of justice in terms of intergenerational exchanges, normally through patterns of inheritance. This issue of intergenerational relationships introduces the idea of the political economy of generations, as Evens's study of conflict between fathers and sons introduced a moral economy into the problem of generations (Evens, 1995). There is of course an important reciprocity between generations as, for example, parents eventually hand over the familial and collective property to new cohorts. This approach to generations would draw heavily upon existing social gerontology within which an exchange framework has been developed to account for shifts in responsibility and duties between different generational groups (Dowd, 1984; Turner, 1996). Why and how these exchanges take place between generations is still to some extent unclear but generational relations are often organised around the concept of duty and obligation whereby in exchange for their lifetime of work and social involvement, older generations may expect to receive a substantial benefit from society in terms of retirement pensions and other collective forms of security. There are of course important variations here to do with the economic framework within which different generations come into existence, integrate into society and then fragment and disappear. The 1945 generation is interesting because, arising in a period of postwar prosperity, this generation has experienced very high levels of employment and material benefit. By contrast younger generations entering the labour market in the 1980s and 1990s have been faced with a much more difficult labour market characterized by flexibility, casualization and fragmentation. Within this context of generations and resources, the current debate about retirement becomes very important. Retirement as an institution emerged as a benefit to workers who could look forward to a period of enforced leisure after a life cycle of work provided they had an accumulation of benefits within a general system of social security. In the contemporary debate about welfare and citizenship, compulsory retirement is now often associated with ageism and with a particularistic response to age cohorts. Furthermore from the point of view of management, a fixed notion of retirement contradicts the search for more flexible modes of employment. Retirement has a very direct relationship to the level of unemployment in society, particularly unemployment amongst young workers. The struggle to remove

retirement, while often couched within the discourse of human rights and social justice, may also contain an important element of intergenerational conflict and violence whereby prosperous older generations seek to maintain their control over the labour market by excluding younger groups from premature entry into full-time employment. These considerations provide us with yet another way of defining generation as a social cohort passing through time which as a result enjoys a strategic ensemble of life chances with respect to scarce resources of both a material and cultural character (Dahrendorf, 1979). We may expect therefore that intergenerational conflict will express itself in terms of a variety of resources. The struggle over labour markets, capital investments and salaries is a rather obvious feature of the political economy of generations, but there will be other struggles for cultural icons, national identity and various forms of cultural capital.

Pierre Bourdieu (1993a) treats generations and ageing as phenomena which are socially constructed by the conflict over resources (both economic and cultural) within a given field; each social field has its own specific 'laws of ageing'. What one generation has struggled to achieve may be regarded by subsequent generations as irrelevant and unimportant; this results in 'many clashes between systems of aspirations formed in different periods' (Bourdieu, 1993a: 99). Anti-youth sentiment grows out of this clash of aspirations, especially among declining social groups who see their power being overtaken by younger cohorts. Generally, old people are anti-youth for the simple reason that 'old age is also a social decline' (Bourdieu, 1993a: 100). The strategy of social closure of the older generations must be to delay the time at which they hand over power, for example by creating hurdles to success. Bourdieu has shown how these strategies work in the educational field where credentialism functions to protect the assets of senior generational cohorts. He argues, however, that the university crisis of May 1968 was in fact a crisis of academic generations not in the sense of age but in the sense of modes of generational qualifications, that is in terms of *aggregation* (Bourdieu, 1988). In the literary field, the competition for prestige is so intense that the life of an 'artistic generation' tends to be very brief as one style replaces another in a rhythm of literary fashion (Bourdieu, 1993b: 52–3). The 'neo' style replaces the 'paleo' with alarming speed as new products emerge in the literary market place. In these examples, we can see how Bourdieu has successfully, but implicitly, applied many of Weber's notions of social closure to cultural production, in which 'generation' is a key variable.

Cultural Dimensions of Generation

We can now offer a more complete cultural definition of generation. Following the research of David Wyatt (1993) in *Out of the Sixties*, a generation is constituted by:

- 1 a 'traumatic event' (such as a civil war, natural catastrophe or assassination of a political leader);
- 2 a set of cultural or political mentors which stands in an adversarial relation to the dominant culture and which gives articulation to the traumatic event;
- 3 a dramatic shift in demography which influences the distribution of resources in a society;
- 4 a 'privileged interval' which connects a generation into a cycle of success and failure (for example from the Progressive Era to the Depression);
- 5 the creation of sacred space wherein sacred places (Greenwich Village, Paris, or Woodstock) sustain a collective memory of utopia; and
- 6 the notion of the 'Happy Few' who provide mutual support for individuals who are accepted as bona fide members of the cohort.

Wyatt's approach captures the sociological consequences of temporal specificity or contingency, and its cultural opportunities and consequences. For example, young men born in Europe around 1894 were highly likely to experience the first mass technological war where pacifist counter-ideologies were underdeveloped and patriarchal values of unquestioned service to the nation were dominant. The First World War experience in Germany produced, through groups like the *Freikorps*, the historical and mythological foundation of European fascism; it also produced a collection of 'male fantasies' (Theweleit, 1987) which constituted the imagination of young German fascists (fear of proletarian women, hatred of women in the role of communist prostitute, fantasies of sexual and military conquest, national hygiene and purity, the dream of a male community of blood, and fear of racial impurity by rape and occupation of the homeland). By contrast, men who were born around 1907 were not available for military service and were often seen subsequently to be unmanly. Christopher Isherwood wrote of his schoolboy experiences in English public schools where his generation, by not serving in the trenches, had failed 'The Test'. And, because of a perceived lack of imaginative sensibility of a technology-fixated culture, American intellectuals of the same period felt themselves part of a 'lost' generation forced into European exile. Men born in 1945 in most European countries missed both world wars and entered life as 'a lucky generation' which experienced peace, full employment and mass consumerism.

In our approach to generations, therefore, we wish to draw attention to the modes through which a generation embodies its collective identity in response to traumatic or formative events (wars, civil conflicts and other disasters). An example of this could be a typical physical body or body image produced by generational cohorts. Just as Bourdieu has drawn attention to the body image of different classes and class fractions, so the sociology of the body could also play an interesting role in the elaboration of the theory of generations. For example, it is typically noted that men who enjoy a significant control over economic resources will form marital and sexual relations with much younger women from other generational cohorts. We could regard this strategic differential in age as part of a intergenerational struggle over sexual resources within the market place

of potential sexual partners. These strategic sexual and/or material opportunities are also expressed culturally as generational types. There were specific body images associated, for example, with proto-fascist males in the *Freikorps* culture, and Hitler came to embody the romantic images of knight on horseback as national saviour in for example 'Hitler as Flagbearer' in the painting by Hubert Lanzinger. Issues relating to sexual liberation and experimentation – the availability of the Pill, legal liberalization of divorce, and pre-marital sexual experimentation – are often seen as experiences which are constitutive of the Sixties generation (Green, 1993). It is also assumed that issues like AIDS, homosexual politics, sexual citizenship, internet sexuality and sexual tourism will shape the self-definition of generations which came to maturity in the 1980s. This consideration however leads us on to a more extended discussion of the idea of culture, habitus and generation.

A generational cohort survives by maintaining a collective memory of its origins, its historic struggles, its primary historical and political events, and its leading characters and ideologists. The Sixties generation would be therefore a classic illustration. In Australia, there is a lively discussion about the impact of warfare and postwar reconstruction on the culture and mentality of various generations, specifically with respect to their impact on national culture. For example, in *Sex and Anarchy*, Anne Coombs (1996) has described 'The Sydney Push as a generation in search of freedom' (1949–1957). Recruited from the postwar bohemian, university and fringe cultures of central Sydney, The Push expressed the oppositional values of the philosopher John Anderson and its membership included such figures as Roelof Smilde, Germaine Greer and Darcy Waters. The Push produced a series of films, plays and novels which challenged the conservatism of white, postwar Australian prosperity. Eyerman and Jamison (1995) have analysed the role of popular music in the 1960s in order to understand how social movements obtain and maintain a collective identity. A similar approach could be adopted for understanding how generations maintain themselves, that is, maintain their identity over time and space. In the modern period with improved methods of information, storage and dispersal, generations may maintain themselves more easily over both time and space by the use of electronic media such as television, film and radio. These media provide the cultural means of communication whereby shared images, shared songs and shared rituals can be enjoyed and appropriated by members of the generational cohort. These collective rituals produce an affective basis to generations, namely, an emotional substratum which is sustained by ritual practice. We may expect that in the modern period these generational cohorts will become increasingly reflexive in the sense that email and internet will be used as mechanisms whereby generational cohorts in different cultures may sustain generational conflict. With the globalization of popular culture, generations will exist more easily across social space because they will be able to share more easily a collective culture.

In terms of the recent interest in the sociology of the body (Turner, 1996), we can argue that generational cultures become inscribed upon the surfaces of bodies, producing distinctive and unique body images whereby members of a generation

can identify themselves in public spaces as members of a common generational cohort. Through collectively shared notions of fashion which are embedded in a generational habitus, members of a generation, in order to enjoy the benefits of collective rituals and collective memories, will tend to adopt appropriate generational styles. The legacy of the 1960s has been the somewhat ubiquitous use of jeans, t-shirts with appropriate slogans, leather jackets and so forth. Typical for the 1970s, the Punk generations by contrast had an entirely different fashion style, and somewhat different body shape, to indicate membership. Regardless of shifts and changes in fashion, a generational habitus will tend to produce a limited and distinctive range of body style, body type and corresponding forms of fashion. The sharing of a common body image thus becomes an important index of the success of a general generational habitus in imposing particular lifestyles and life careers. The notion of 'images of aging' (Featherstone and Wernick, 1995) could be applied more generally to the question of how images of bodies become attached to cultures of generations. Obviously one answer lies in the ways in which the fashion industry creates generational bodies and types which are then attached through fashion magazines to specific generational cohorts. In Britain in the early 1980s, fashion magazine editors identified a niche market for male advertising and fashion journals for the age group around 16 to 25 years, but this group lacked a coherent image. Fashion journals came to focus on a homosexual image of strength and sensitivity (Mort, 1996).

Finally, we would suggest that with the postmodernization of culture there may be a greater fluidity in generational identity and memory. In the traditional sociology of generations, it was assumed that the history of generations as cohorts would resemble the life careers of individuals in the sense that the social history of the generation would be marked by its coming into existence, its rise to maturity, its involvement in the labour market and its final retirement and extinction. As labour markets and lifestyles have become more flexible and fragmented, it may be that generational experiences become markedly different. However, these changes may in fact reinforce the importance of generational membership. As we have already noted, the generation of 1945 has enjoyed enormous material benefits in terms of full employment, access to the property markets and entrance into a mass higher educational system. In a period of high youth unemployment, it may be that the material prosperity of older generations reinforces their sense of a separate identity from younger cohorts. Youth are regarded as an unemployed, dependent and useless generation. Youth fashion emphasizes their dependency while musical groups like UB40 in the United Kingdom develop lyrics which represent the culture of the dole queue. While older generations may be successfully excluded from dominance in the area of sport and youthful leisure, they will nevertheless continue to dominate the political and economic resources in society, giving them considerable power over the cultural icons of a particular society. While many sociologists may be currently considering the decline or end of social class (Lee and Turner, 1996), it may well be that intergenerational conflicts increase with the growing uncertainty of employment and security for many sections of the population.

Habitus and Generation

Speaking generally and broadly, Bourdieu (1990: 53) defines habitus in terms of

... systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.

A habitus circumscribes a set of dispositions to act and an evaluation frame of perception which are at once historical, social and individual. These dispositions are incorporated, embodied in individuals in practical interaction within an historically formed social context. Since the basic structuring structure of modern society is that of class hierarchy, the structuring structure of habitus is linked to class location. Feminist theory can be used to incorporate gender into habitus. Here gender is theorized as a social identity incorporated in relation to an objectified gender division of labour. While class identity is linked to a complex scale of social and cultural differentiation, formed in relation to a hierarchical social structure, the identity of gender is the effect of a labour of differentiation and cultural distinctions. This labour consists of numerous exclusions, oppressions and classificatory simplifications in terms of the antagonistic dichotomy of 'male' and 'female'. The body is crucial to Bourdieu's account of classification and competition, because 'the body is a mnemonic device upon and in which the very basics of culture, the practical taxonomies of the habitus, are imprinted and encoded in a socialising or learning process which commences during early childhood' (Jenkins, 1992: 76).

We would like to add another dimension to this gender classification by including generation as a mode of distinction, one based in age differentiation. These criteria of social stratification can overlap, but, as we suggested earlier, one can also think of historical circumstances where the hegemonic relations between these dimensions might shift in favour of generation, rather than class. For example, while class can be said to be the dominant structuring of collective identity formation in early modern society, gender became an important, even dominant force in modern society and generation can be said to have reached such a level of significance in late modern society. Class, gender and age (and, we might add, ethnicity in some societies), as scales of differentiation, can be thought of as different dimensions of a force field with varying degrees of significance at different historical moments.

A Generation Represents Itself

We can illustrate our more general account of generational habitus and generational identity formation with the example of the generation 1945. This generation is often identified in more popular forums as the 'baby-boomers' or

the lucky generation that came before 'Generation X'. This is the cohort born at the end of the Second World War in a time when anxiety concerning peace and security in the industrialized nations co-existed with unprecedented economic expansion. In his work on the generation of 1914, Wohl recounts how the very notion of generation, as formulated most cogently in Mannheim's work, was in an essential sense a product of its time. While formulated in conjunction with Mannheim's own attempts to free himself from Marxism, the idea of a generation also expressed a more generally felt desire among the young to break with a past identified with older members of the population. The First World War was a watershed, a breaking point which clearly and cleanly divided 'youth' from 'the elders' in terms of outlook and experience, as it separated an old from a new world order. This divide helped create a self-conscious cohort whose collective identity was itself contained in the idea of 'youth', a conceptualization which cut across national and class barriers. The idea of generation, in other words, emerged as a distinctive and real social possibility in the wake of total war, and not merely as part of an intellectual discourse.

The Second World War created a similar cultural watershed. It was the same kind of 'significant event' identified by Philip Abrams (1982), following in Mannheim's path, which demarcated a social space in which biological (age) and cultural factors could interact to produce the basis for collective identity formation. In Mannheim's original formulation (Mannheim, 1952), generational unity was the last phase in a complex process where individual and collective biography interacted within a common historical context. In order for an age cohort to become a generation, something like a significant event, a war or revolution, which sorted a population not so much according to which side one was on, but more in terms of who experienced it first hand and who did not, was a clear delimiter. Of course, the more ideological or political dimensions could also prove decisive in that they could bridge gaps between age cohorts and create them amongst those of the same age group. In this case, there would be continuity rather than a change as defined by generational identity and conflict. Mannheim used the term 'generation-unit' as a means of dealing with the problem of subgroups and subdivisions within an age cohort. The Second World War created the conditions for both. Some of the old enmity which produced the war was reproduced across generations, but this was nothing compared to the sense of a new age dawning, where old antagonisms would not be the defining characteristic. It was just this sense of before and after which made for a line of demarcation of a new social space, which Mannheim called a generational location. J. Whalen and R. Flacks (1989) have employed the idea of intra-generational differences to test the degree of identification with the Sixties Generation among its remaining members. The Vietnam War served a similar watershed function here. Their research casts doubt on the idea of a coherent and continuing generational identity; rather there were a number of distinctive groups or 'generation-units' in the Sixties.

This geographically and politically demarcated social space created the conditions for the optimism which helped produce an unprecedented upswing

in the birth rates of the industrial nations. While the original idea of generational awareness was more tied to ideological factors connected to disenchantment and pessimism after the First World War, this new postwar generational awareness was as much related to the expanding numbers of young people as it was to optimism in the face of economic expansion and to what Daniel Bell (1960) identified as the desire for the end of ideology. Rapid population growth, economic expansion and a growing optimism in spite of the nuclear threat were in the background out of which a postwar generational identity took form. The new generation's primary disposition was expansionary optimism, which came to be summarized in slogans such as the Lucky Generation and the Baby Boomers. A key mechanism in coalescing this identity – as both cause and effect – were the new forms of mass media emerging out of the same context and the mass or popular culture they helped produce.

A defining characteristic of the new generation and the grounds of its distinction in Bourdieu's double-edged sense were the consumer items made available through mass media and mass production. A central aspect of the habitus of this generation-in-formation was first of all the habit of regular consumption of the commodities of popular culture. Economic expansion and optimism were in part made possible through the incredible growth of consumer industries, as well as the means to market them through mass media, and the new generation to consume them. Popular music provides an example. Recorded mass produced and distributed music had been an essential part of popular culture of the industrial nations since the early part of the century. The United States, where radio and records were available to both urban and rural populations on a mass scale since the 1920s, was perhaps the extreme, but even in the smaller nations of Europe, Sweden and The Netherlands, for example, records and radio were common consumer items, with a limited market of course, by the end of the 1930s. All this exploded in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In Sweden the idea of a specific youth culture was beginning to form just prior to the outbreak of war, but in the postwar period the notion solidified and music was one of the central components of this process. It was African-American inspired music, first jazz and then rock and roll which provided the significant symbolic keys. Both served to represent 'youth' and the 'modern', against the classical and traditional music of the elders, marking off the new generation against the old. The postwar period was the American Age and mass produced popular culture, exemplified as music, was its most visible and available form of expression. It was this that youth took as its form of representation.

In American sociology, the notion of a specific youth culture was formulated by Talcott Parsons in the 1940s. The founding father of structural functionalism was one of the first to speak of a distinct 'youth culture'. Already in 1942, Parsons referred to 'adolescence' as part of the life cycle where 'there first begins to develop a set of patterns and behaviour phenomena which involve a highly complex combination of age grading and sex role elements . . . [that] may be referred to together as the phenomena of the "youth culture"' (Parsons, 1964: 91). In the context of discussing emerging gender differences among American adolescents,

Parsons characterized the period of youth as one of considerable 'strain and insecurity' in American society, at the same time as he warned against the 'tendency to the romantic idealization of youth patterns' by adults who, because of similar 'strains', look back upon childhood and adolescence as a period of care-free existence which contrasted greatly with their present work and family-related responsibilities.

Parsons was also one of the first to notice the potential emergence of the great cultural shift which occurred in the 1960s: when youth and youth culture became a model and ideal for the rest of society. It should also be noted that in this essay Parsons is very much aware of the differences related to social class. The 'youth culture' he is concerned to identify in the 1940s is that of the urban middle and upper class. In the 1960s, when Parsons (1962) returned to the theme in 'Social Change and Youth in America', the idea of youth and youth culture had become more general and universal, reflecting shifts not only in American social structure but in the rest of the industrially developed world as well. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, the 'privilege' of youth had spread to a much wider segment of the population. These circumstances led social scientists like Flacks (1971) and Kenneth Keniston (1968) to speak of youth as a social movement and as a source of radical social change.

While social scientists pondered the meaning and effects of youth culture on postwar society, young people were themselves forming their own particular frames of reference and identity, their own generational habitus. With money to spend and age-specialized consumer items becoming more available, regular visits to the record shop, cinema, and clothing store began to produce an outward generational style and an inward framework of evaluation or taste. What was good was noisy, fast and colourful; what was bad was mundane and mediocre, the colourless grey-flannel suit of the new men of power that C. Wright Mills and other theorists of mass society were analysing in the early postwar period. Marlon Brando's 'The Wild One' (1950) helped crystallize the black-leather jacket, the motorcycle and the tough-guy posturing that Elvis Presley later put to music, and which James Dean would modify. These mass projected image-styles which, along with the hip existentialism of the Beats, were formative seeds from which the social movements of the 1960s would flower. It was these movements however which were the real catalysts to the identity formation of the generation of 1945.

From the perspective of generational habitus, the social movements of the 1960s, the student movements, anti-war and peace movements, the radicalism in support of third-world national liberation, the women's movement and gay liberation movements, and the cultural avant garde in theatre and the arts, can be seen as part of the social space in which the generation of 1945 could define its collective identity. If we view social movements as forces which open up social spaces where new forms of knowledge, as well as collective identity, can emerge, then the social movements of the 1960s were constitutive of a generational consciousness (Eyerman and Jamison, 1994). Within their sphere the marks of generational distinction were realized. That is to say, the social

movements of the 1960s were as much social and cultural as they were political in the instrumental and strategic sense. The forms of music, the electric rock which evolved out of the rock and roll of the 1950s, the revived and rejuvenated forms of diverse 'folk' music, and the associated lifestyles, clothing, sexual attitudes and practices, and so on, were constitutive of the social movements of the 1960s and the generation of 1945 (Gitlin, 1987; Cantwell, 1996; Eyerman and Barretta, 1996; Eyerman and Jamison, forthcoming). While the movements provided space for the self-production of a generational identity, the commercial mass media amplified and, at the same time, commodified it. In this sense, the culture industry played an important role in the social movements of the 1960s, in helping to solidify and magnify a generational identity. This role was neither entirely unintended nor strategically planned; rather one can say the interests of industry and the needs and desires of actors coincided for a time.

The specific details of this aspect of generational habitus are too well known to bear much elaboration here. What we would point out however is that to the extent that these social movements can be considered 'youth' or 'new' social movements, they can be studied as both cause and effect of generational identity-formation. At least as a hypothesis one could view these movements as expressing strivings for generational distinction, as well as being a formative aspect of that distinction. As this generation has matured, the romanticism of youth may have declined, being replaced increasingly by negative images of youth. This negative image of youth may now be associated with dependency, as unemployment, alcoholism and high suicide rates are characteristic of youth in a period of globalization of labour markets, and a decline in mass employment (Cote and Allaha, 1995). In economies which have embraced Thatcherite social policies and abandoned postwar commitments to mass education and full employment, many of the institutional conditions which fuelled youthful rebelliousness and radical politics have been eroded, leaving behind a more alienated but compliant youth population.

Conclusion

The principal conclusion of this article is that generational consciousness, when it is forged by a major traumatic event such as mass warfare, can overcome and transcend the barriers of social class to produce a powerful, solidaristic force in social relationships. These solidaristic ties can, of course, often assume a romantic or nostalgic aura, but they remain no less powerful. British Second World War films such as *Dam Busters* have a powerful message of social nostalgia in which class divisions did not stand in the way of heroic cooperation between men and women of different class backgrounds. These war films and classic actors such as Jack Hawkins probably help to compensate for Britain's monumental postwar failures. In general, wartime experiences have in the 20th century produced an influential and emotionally powerful source of social identity and imagery.

However, the Sixties generation, which in most societies grew up in a period of peace and prosperity, was held together more by novel experiences of consumerism than by warfare. For this generation, war, the Second World War and the Vietnam War, formed part of the Other against which it distinguished itself.

As economic class has declined in significance as the primary form of social stratification, lifestyle and generational differences have increased as indicators of status variations. In a mass cultural market, 'there is also the persistent reassertion of hierarchy and distinction, as elite groups and privileged consumers attempt to distance themselves from the vulgar world of the masses' (Turner, 1988: 71). Generational conflicts over positional goods and the symbols of cultural distinction will increase. At least the 'strong idiom' of class analysis (Lee and Turner, 1996) has receded, creating social opportunities where cultural capital can function as the basis of social membership and identity. In the late 20th century, generational differences are increasing in importance as the foundation of the lifestyle attributes of status.

In conceptual terms, generation can provide a useful dimension for the analysis of changing life cycles in modern society, especially in terms of inter-generational conflicts over scarce resources. As youth unemployment increases with technological change, and as compulsory retirement has been made questionable by legislation relating to ageism, there are significant political conflicts around the generational dimensions of ageing, the life course and resource allocation. Because the Sixties generation was brought up with an ideology of perpetual youthfulness, it may be difficult for this generation to withdraw from a leadership role in cultural and social terms. The 1990s have seen a more or less permanent 'revival' of nostalgic interest in the music and lifestyle of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Doors and Elton John, who have become the icons of the century. A sociological understanding of the 20th century requires a better understanding of the distinctive generational movements which have shaped its history, politics and culture.

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