

Chapter 11

Anticulture and Aging

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In this chapter, we synthesize two powerful theories: the theory of symbolic violence and the theory of social death. The result is a new concept, a new way to conceptualize social structures, institutions that breed social and physical death, what we call anticultures.

Modern Segregation

In the summer of 2003, after teaching a graduate seminar in Heidelberg, I (i.e., the first author) found myself stranded for 2 days in Frankfurt, Germany, because my outbound flight was canceled. Little did I know that I was in the middle of the greatest heat wave to strike Europe since 1540, according to the World Meteorological Organization (2012). While I survived, approximately 50,000 Europeans did not (Robine et al. 2008). This heat wave expressed the weakness in the social fabric in Europe but especially France.

Why France? What failed there? It was not that the physical temperatures were higher but that social conditions were different in France than elsewhere in Europe. While many blamed the government, others looked deeper into the sociocultural fabric of France. After working to address the issue, Stéphane Manton, an official with the French Red Cross offered this explanation, “The French family structure is more dislocated than elsewhere in Europe, and prevailing social attitudes hold that once older people are closed behind their apartment doors or in nursing homes, they are someone else’s problem. These thousands of elderly victims didn’t die from a heat wave as such, but from the isolation and insufficient assistance they lived with

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day in and out, and which almost any crisis situation could render fatal” (Mantion quoted by Crumley, Sunday, August 24 2003, p. 1).

While thousands died in Paris, elderly people in southern Europe including the south of France fared better. That is because they were more integrated into families, so in more rural southern communities, where it was just as hot, if not hotter, such as Nice, Marseilles, and Toulouse, the death toll among the elderly was much lower. “The southeast and southwest had around 46% higher fatalities in the first three weeks of August compared to last year, versus 102% in Paris—a far more private and anonymous place” (Crumley, Sunday, August 24 2003, p. 1). According to Mantion, it was a cultural difference. Mantion says that where “Latin attitudes” prevail, older people are valued and remain active members of society. The operant word here is “valued.”

Before we offer a more general explanation, let’s look at why a more general explanation is necessary and why the “Latin attitudes” explanation is both correct and incorrect. On Friday, March 11, 2011, at precisely 14:46 JST (05:46 UTC), a magnitude 9 undersea megathrust earthquake lasting just 6 minutes occurred 43 miles off the east coast of the Oshika Peninsula, Japan. The “Tōhoku” earthquake and subsequent tsunamis killed 15,850 people, injured 6,011, with 3,287 missing across 18 prefectures as confirmed by the Japanese National Police Agency (Japanese National Police Agency. 20 April 2011).

Like France, rural Japan has been depopulated of young people who have flocked to the major cities. Perceived economic opportunity is motivating the greatest migration of humans in history from rural to urban places. What actually happened in France and Japan are related because in both cases there is evidence that most of these premature deaths could have been avoided if sociocultural structures had been different in historically available ways. How has the history of sociocultural structures changed and why? The operant phrase here is traditional community.

This explanation harkens back to Ferdinand Töennies’ (1887 Ger./2001 Eng.) distinction between traditional *gemeinschaft* community and modern *gesellschaft* society. What Töennies observed was the rising tide, the tsunami of social change resulting in new social formations, and psychological stresses including alienation and *anomie*. The change is what Daniel Lerner described in his 1958 classic, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*. The great cities of the modern era are the result of industrialization, including greater densities of people, especially younger labor, congregated into working class neighborhoods near production facilities.

The modern version of the generation gap is a relatively new phenomenon (Kramer 1997; Kramer 2003). It is surging across the globe as young people leave agriculture and flock to cities for economic opportunity and the entertaining diversion the city offers (Morris 1996). Thus, we have the “left behind” syndrome (Kramer *in press*) which means an increasingly aging rural population and dwindling numbers of youths who either do not want to move to the big city with its bright lights and stimulation or who have not acquired the skills and competencies necessary for success in the more complex urban environment. The result is a volatile mixture of fear and envy of the city leading to the demonization of all forms of progress represented by the city.

Our State of Affairs

The human species is undergoing an unprecedented demographic shift. Today, we speak of entire societies as aging. Indeed the entire planet's human population is aging. This is caused largely by a decline in birth rates coupled with very recent, in historical terms, significant and widespread extensions in life expectancy (Congressional Budget Office, December 2005, p. 1).

On February 14, 2012, the US Undersecretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment, Robert Hormats spoke to a special meeting of the Council on Foreign Relations entitled, "The U.S. Aging Population as an Economic Growth Driver for Global Competitiveness." In that meeting, Hormats said, "By 2050, more than 2 billion people worldwide will be over the age of 60. By then, for the first time in human history, more people will be over the age of 60 than under 15" (Hormats 2012). A day earlier, Standard & Poor's reported that, "no other force is likely to shape the future of national economic health, public finances and policy-making as the irreversible rate at which the world's population is aging" (Standard & Poors, February 13, 2012).

This trend is not unique to the USA. Rather it is an economic and demographic wave that constitutes the hegemonic postindustrial structure that spread across the globe during the twentieth century. Given current trends, by 2050, it is projected that in Italy, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, fully one-third of their respective populations will be 65 or older (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2006, p. 18). A similar trend is happening in developing countries such as Mexico and Turkey where 20% of their populations will be 65 or older by 2050 (Ibid., p. 9).

This massive demographic shift is already affecting labor and medical costs. Since a large percentage of medical costs accrued by an individual occurs in just the last 3 years of life, massive expenditures for healthcare are beginning to be manifested. And as the number of retirees rises per worker, productivity is declining and public funding ratios are getting increasingly out of balance. This dependency ratio is beginning to rise dramatically with fewer and fewer active workers supporting more and more retirees. This trope is increasingly pitting the young against the old. And, as this chapter explores, just being old may make people act negatively toward you.

Aging as the Mortality Reminder

Aging is the accumulation of changes over time. From the beginning, aging and death have been sources of considerable interest and anxiety. From the earliest magical efforts to enhance fertility and combat disease to the Pharaohs of Egypt, from the Christian promise of everlasting life, to the first emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang's (秦始皇) (259 BC) aging and death have commanded our attention.

Nonetheless, recently, researchers attempting to prevent cancer realized that virtually all people eventually get some form of cancer because the toxicity of oxidative stress increases with age (Aubert and Lansdorp 2008). When oxidation occurs, non-coded genetic material is deleted from the end of the mitochondrial DNA chain. In youth, what is destroyed are the telomeres, ineffectual genetic material. But eventually, after years of replication, the chromosome chain runs out of telomeres at the end thus exposing functionally coded DNA to damage. When this buffer of ineffective genetic material is used up, then oxidation begins to impact the mitochondrial chain higher up into the genetic material that effectively controls cellular activity including reproduction. When this encoded regulatory part of the sequence becomes damaged, not just disease is the result but aging. Researchers discovered that if they can prevent all of the telomeres from being destroyed by raising the level of a protective protein called telomerase, not only can they prevent cancer but aging as we know it in biophysical and cognitive terms (Flores et al. 2008). Fear of the characteristics of aging is so great that most people would prefer to not be immortal unless aging itself could be stopped. Increasingly, research indicates that this may be possible, but the consequences for humanity would likely be profound. Until then, we must address the consequences of aging.

Aging as Disease

The model of interpreting aging and death as a disease is one of the markers or precursors of modernism in the enlightened Muslim world. The first efforts to describe and “treat” senescence or the biological process of aging are found in medieval Muslim texts. However, in Occidental modernity, there was little organized study of aging until the turn of the twentieth century. Elie Metchnikoff coined the word gerontology in 1903. And the discipline focusing on aging was launched in 1945 when James Birren founded the Gerontological Society of America (Liebig 2003). Still, an institutional structure dedicated strictly to gerontological research and treatment was not founded until the Ethel Percy Andrus Gerontology Center at the University of Southern California began operation in 1964.

No doubt part of the reason is because the *typical* lifespan was not long enough to see the development of specific age-related physical, affective, and cognitive differences until the late nineteenth century and then only in the wealthiest societies.

Defensive Reactions to Aging and Death

Suffice it to say, our species has been concerned with aging and death for a very long time. Rich or poor, powerful or weak, Sam Keen (1992, 2010) argues that the act of dying frightens us all, and it often threatens our dignity and our self-esteem. Earnest Becker (1973, 1962/1971) argues that culture itself was invented and is

maintained as a death-defying system of symbols, which, when synthesized with Emmanuel Levinas', Pierre Bourdieu's (1990), and Loïc Wacquant's (2009) way of conceptualizing the symbolic, constitutes habitus.

According to Keen (1992), Robert Jay Lifton (1979), and others, our anxiety about death prompts us to move from the physical to the symbolic domain. When faced with mortal threats, our instinct is to avoid it (flight) or fight. Reminders of our own death trigger this response in us. We fight symbolically and physically.

The important thing here is that as we confront the claim that meanings are "all in your head," we know that symbolic structures have profound locutionary and illocutionary force that can be violent, messages, the meaning of which I cannot control by merely changing my mind or even the way I talk.

Anticulture

Anticulture is a circumstance characterized by conditions that lead not to meaningful existence but instead to social isolation and nihilism. An anticulture is a complex of values, motivations, beliefs, and behavior patterns that discourage the formation and sustenance of community. Structure by itself need not procreate meaning, justice, or human dignity but can be coercive, unjust, unjustified, and demeaning.

An anticulture is a social pattern that derogates, demeans, or dismisses the Other as insignificant. If dismissal fails to satisfy the mainstream ideology, to assuage the anxiety of difference felt by those who profit emotionally and otherwise from the status quo, then anticulture seeks to coerce conversion to one belief system. If that fails, anticulture attempts to annihilate those who do not or cannot convert. For those latter individuals who cannot conform even if they want to due to circumstances beyond their control such as their race, gender, or age, anticulture defines their existence as meaningless, a life without value or purpose—a net loss.

When we feel threatened, we act. Either we seek to modify the behavior of other people, animals, or things or we attempt to avoid them altogether. And when confronted with the reality of our eventual deaths, we respond by moving to the symbolic level of behavior (Jost et al. 2004). We create culture, religion, nationalistic symbols, and other means to maintain a habitus that is bigger than ourselves and to which we belong (Batson and Stocks 2004). This symbolic habitus shelters us against both symbolic and real threats of death. It gives us meaning, purpose, and sustains our sense of self-esteem (Salzman and Halloran 2004).

But Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg, and Thomas Pyszczynski have devised a set of simple experiments that have found that when a person is reminded, even subliminally, of their own mortality, they seek refuge by treating others who share their death-defying ideology such as their religious faith positively, while treating others who do not share their ideology violently. Pyszczynski, Solomon, Greenberg, and colleagues (2003, 2006) call this defense of worldview morality salience. These researchers concluded that hostility, symbolic or not, can be triggered by perceived threats to one's identity and group belief system (culture) when a person is reminded of their own

mortality. In short, when threatened or reminded of mortality, people react positively toward those who are similar and aggressively toward those who are dissimilar.

In this chapter, we suggest that the rising number of visibly aging people as a proportion of our populations triggers this sort of anxiety. Thus far, and despite great efforts, aging cannot be stopped. This causes great anxiety, and it proves what Eric Kramer (2003) claims, namely, that the greatest anxieties in our lives are not caused by what uncertainty management theory claims (Berger and Calabrese 1975) but by unavoidable certainties that we perceive as negative. In this case, the result of being reminded of mortality by the very presence of a dramatically rising number of older adults is a form of symbolic violence codified within the very structure of modern institutions that fosters neglect and indifference toward older adults.

What has transformed aging into a threat, a disability, even a disease, is modern modes of production and profit taking. This withering away of social support and insistence upon personal liberty and self-reliance manifested as ultimate and uncompromising virtues of late modernity has left aging people in an increasingly vulnerable situation. At the same time, we see a concurrent erosion of the public sphere as private interests are presumed to be threatened by public interests. The result is isolation and alienation.

Anticulture and Spoiled Identity

Cultures that breed economic poverty or the constant threat thereof, that count on structural poverty to suppress wages, for instance, also breed spiritual and symbolic poverty. Their motivational fuel is greed and anxiety. Hoarding behavior is a manifestation of anxiety. Poverty and the threat of it and the dawning realization that one's "golden years" are not so emotionally satisfying due to financial ruin and social isolation leads to unhappiness. Unhappiness and bitterness leads to physical illness and higher rates of mortality. In other words, symbolic violence and death beget physical violence and death.

Despite modernity's dialectical-oppositional struggle between extreme relativism and positivism, relationships endure; value and belief systems, cosmologies and ideologies, and languages and identities persist across generations despite calamities. The semantic field, with its various structures and shifting currents, forms habitus, the lifeworld (Husserl 1936 Ger./1970 Eng.; Mauss 1934 Fr./2006 Eng.; Lévinas 1972 Fr./2006 Eng.; Bourdieu 1982 Fr./1991 Eng.). But to go beyond how positivists conceptualize the lifeworld, it is not a sort of objective "background" to our activities. But even Husserl, who links interest, expectations, motivations, and beliefs to the individual ego, fails therefore to recognize that "my" interests, "my" way of perceiving is a marker of my membership in a particular lifeworld. I am "always already" common. But if my interests or capabilities become too unusual as to become unfamiliar to others, then I will generate anxiety among them and will likely suffer stigma or a "spoiled identity" (Goffman 1963/1986).

A spoiled identity means that the structures I find myself in identifying me as evil or insignificant. I can become the target of escalating violence; both symbolic and physical, a hierarchy of defensive reactions that Becker (1962, 1973) identifies as beginning with derogation moving to forced assimilation, and then to accommodation where parts of my being that the mainstream can profit from are co-opted and the rest discarded. If I continue to resist disintegration, the final reactionary move is an attempt to annihilate me (difference).

Fitting in presumes conventions. Culture is a vast accumulation of conventions. This is what Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960 Ger./2004 Eng.) means by the pseudo-objectivity of convention. Conventions, like the rules of language games, are social, and if I become too unconventional, I slip from sense into nonsense, from acceptance, meaning recognition and approval, to rejection. I can become the target of blame or, as Ralph Ellison (1952) puts it, I can become invisible and suffer symbolic death.

Thus, our culture, as shared expectations, beliefs, and values, conditions the reality we inhabit. Communal symbol systems, accordingly, reproduce themselves forming stable habitus for us that continually inspires us, gives us purpose, meaning, and identities, both collective and individualistic (to fall once again into dualism). As Becker (1973) argued, these transcending symbolic structures enable us to think in certain ways and afford us public opportunities to be someone... or no one.

Reacting to the stark contrast between absolute relativism and absolute positivism, Kramer (1997) promoted a relative relativism, which recognizes time, not merely as a disruptor of meaning but as a memorial repository, that recognizes for instance, that aging is a universal process, but how we cope, the sense, or nonsense we make of it, what our culture makes of it, varies. The sense that consensus is reasonable and self-evident is rooted in the *doxic* pre-reflexive mode of being that social psychologists call “equilibrium.” It is associated with sanity, being “well adjusted,” and “balanced.” Such a harmonic psychological state of equilibrium in ideological terms means that the social world is perceived as taken-for-granted, natural, justified, even rational.

As noted below in our discussion on youth-oriented popular culture, the modern lifeworld is spreading in part through mediation, popular imagery, and also through the fetish seduction of technology. And that same technology tends to be focused on the mobility of ideas and things, transportation and communication systems such as the Internet which in turn disseminate seductive imagery forever newer technologies constituting progress in itself—the self-perpetuation of cultural production. But how deluded are we about being “forever young”?

Symbolic Does Not Mean It’s “All In Your Head”

Anticulture involves symbolic and “real” structures that deprive people of self-esteem, purpose, and dignity. What we know is that being unhappy and lonely is not merely symbolic. These states lead to higher rates of mortality. What we know

about loneliness is that it “does eat at you.” In a study at the University of Chicago involving men and women 50–68 years old, researchers found that the morbid health effects of loneliness accumulate faster as you grow older, and the magnitude of the relationship between loneliness and hypertension was “surprising” (Hawkey et al. 2006). Loneliness posed a greater threat to blood pressure and therefore heart disease, which is the number one killer in most industrialized nations, than any other factor such as alcohol consumption, smoking, age, or race and including other psychological or social factors such as stress, depression, and hostility (Hawkey et al. 2006). Loneliness leads people to perceive stressful circumstances as threatening. The overall conclusion is that “[s]ocial trends in the United States suggest a recipe for greater loneliness and thus higher blood pressure and risk of heart disease. The population is aging and more people move around and live alone than ever, contributing to greater separation from caring friends and family” (Lloyd 2006, p. 1).

But money acts as a buffer to protect one’s sense of well-being most especially when it is threatened as during a health crisis. Smith et al. (2005) found, “Happiness and well-being may not depend on a person’s financial state in times of health, but when that health fails, as it will eventually for most of us, money matters” (p. 665). Smith et al. (2005) concurs, “Money may not buy happiness, but it does seem to buy people out of some of the misery that’s associated with a decline in health status” (p. 666). If you get sick in America, be prepared to lose everything you have earned over a lifetime of labor including your house. This puts tremendous stress on both the ill person and their family, especially a surviving spouse. This threat, which is real, not merely in one’s head, combined with social factors that plague aging populations such as social isolation are turning the golden years into something far less pleasant, and it is rational for an aging person to be anxious about this state of affairs.

Medical bankruptcy has been called an epidemic. It is especially egregious in making older Americans vulnerable to financial and emotional collapsed (Thorne et al. 2009). This could also be called a tidal wave of symbolic violence. It is also a major threat to middle-class Americans. In a study based on interviews with 1,771 individuals conducted by researchers at Harvard’s medical and law schools, 931 cited medical bills as the cause of their economic demise (Himmelstein et al. 2005, p. 63). Regarding privations in the period surrounding bankruptcy, David Himmelstein and his colleagues at Harvard found, “In our follow-up telephone interviews with 931 debtors, they reported substantial privations. During the 2 years before filing, 40.3% had lost telephone service; 19.4% had gone without food; 53.6% had gone without needed doctor or dentist visits because of the cost; and 43.0% had failed to fill a prescription, also because of the cost” (Himmelstein et al. 2005, p. 68). They conclude, “Middle-class families frequently collapse under the strain of a health care system that treats physical wounds, but often inflicts fiscal ones” (Himmelstein et al. 2009, pp. 745, 746). In short, symbolic violence has increased sharply and rapidly. Neither insurance nor educational attainment nor good careers are safeguards against this wolf at the door.

It's Your Fault, Just Be Happy: Personal Empowerment as Anticulture

Psychologists and neurologists who presume a difference between intrinsic and extrinsic realities tend to seek intrinsic sources of attitude and conclude that health and happiness may be largely in the mind. And yet they argue that happiness, being well adjusted, means that a person has achieved internal psychic equilibrium with external reality. So to be happy, one need only become “well adjusted.” What is alluded to here is that those older adults who socialize most, fair better—that adjustment always presumes an external reality.

For instance, Diener and Chan (2011) argue that the happiest people are those with strong social support networks and friendships. This is well established. They are happier but then what causes anxiety, fear, dread, and depression? Social interaction is not the only extrinsic or environmental factor. It seems obvious that socio-economic rank and access to wealth are also important when facing health problems. But there has existed a contrary position that still enjoys being counter-intuitive as a scientific mark of discovery.

Early in his career, the Princeton psychologist and Nobel winner in economics, Daniel Kahneman, was caught up in the positive psychology movement that swept academe in the 1970s. He concluded that being happy and satisfied was not effected by how much money a person had, that feelings of pleasure, sadness, joy, and sorrow were largely in one's head, and that the psychology of utility had to do with what Mihály Csíkszentmihályi (1996, 2003) called flow, the satisfaction one gets in the timeless moments when one is totally engaged in a task (Kahneman et al. 1999). This state of flow constitutes well-being.

Consequently, a bad attitude that negatively impacted emotional equilibrium, objective productivity, and “competence” at both the individual and societal levels could be corrected. One could adapt and meet objective needs in functional terms, and that would lead to happiness. Being realistic was melded with being “proactive.” Being a visionary was good so long as the vision matched the facts. The onus of success lies entirely on the individual's mind-set and “appropriate” motivation. One merely had to say everything is “glorious” to feel great. A new industry of consultants, motivational speakers, and the profession of life coaching proliferated teaching people how to be happy by just shifting their attitudes and being thankful.

The other explanation for success and failure came from biological predeterminism. This position claimed that some people are coded or genetically predisposed to be disparaging and distrustful cynics, while others are genetically fated to be trusting and happy. This scenario is fatalistic and so the pessimists will self-select for failure no matter what. Again, the onus for reality comes down to the individual, and therefore there is no need to critically interrogate the instituted values, goals, and belief system of the cultural complex.

The personal empowerment movement that promoted the idea that we can choose to be happy was part of the New Age crusade in psychology and existential philosophy of the times. Nonetheless, anxiety is real, and it is often not the consequence of

uncertainty as many social psychologists argue, but, as Eric Kramer (1997, 2003) has argued, the worst anxiety comes from inescapable certainties we encounter in the world. Our vulnerabilities as much as our resoluteness constitute who we are. Being trapped by debt, illness, and other obstacles manifests great anxiety often spiraling and compounding. My response to such threats is limited.

What if I cannot do the activities that lead to flow? What if I could not afford the energy, time, or money to do the things I know give me pleasure, purpose, and meaning? Clearly, social structure is not genetic fatalism and is available for discursive interrogation and modification. However, such change requires a great deal of effort and community. Despite the motivational speakers' standard trope, it takes more than one person to make a difference in social structure, and community is precisely what anticulture annihilates. While memory may tend to distort the past into something more pleasant than it actually was (Walker et al. 2003), optimism about the future can be equally delusional which implies that things are not "all in our heads."

\$75,000 Buys a Lot of Optimism

In a 9-year-long study, investigating the health effects of attitude, researchers at the Psychiatric Center GGZ Delft, The Netherlands, found that of a group of 999 older adults, optimistic participants had a 55% lower risk of death than pessimistic subjects (Giltay 2004). The study concluded, "we found that the trait of optimism was an important long-term determinant of all-cause and cardiovascular mortality in elderly subjects. Our results, combined with the finding that hopelessness was associated with an increased incidence or progression of disease, suggest that dispositional optimism affects the progression of cardiovascular disease" (Giltay 2004, p. 1135). Here, we must focus on trait psychology that suggests that attitude is an inherent attribute of certain types of personalities suggesting that pessimism and optimism are independent of environmental factors. This approach presumes that there are optimistic or pessimistic people, not social conditions.

Similar to Erik Giltay's (2004) work, Dilip Jeste (2005) conducted a study of 500 Americans age 60–90 who live independently and who had serious diseases including cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and so forth. Jeste found that "optimism and effective coping styles were found to be more important to successfully aging than traditional measures of health and wellness. These findings suggest that physical health is not the best indicator of successful aging—attitude is" (2005, p. 323). Jeste found that the old criteria of level of disease and disability did not indicate happiness. But is there a connection between the symbolic and the physical, and if so, the what is the nature of that connection?

The research thus far does not tell the whole story. Jeste and others have found that attitude is not affected by disease and disability, that older adults who are ill and disabled are often as happy as others. Why are some who are ill optimistic while others are not? While they claim to prove that disease and aging does not affect attitude, they fail to get at what does. The disability itself may not be the problem

but rather its broader social and economic connections and consequences. In this regard, Deaton and Kahneman claim to have found the “magic number” for happiness to be \$75,000 annual household income.

Symbolic Violence and Real Disappointment

Disappointment and expectancy violations are real. Affective forecasting is often wrong as when people dream of moving to California believing that living there will make them happy or happier than they currently are only to make the move and find they were wrong, that they were living a “focused illusion” as surveys of people who actually did move to California revealed (Schkade and Kahneman 1998). Romanticizing mediated images of places, including the wonderful future presented by World’s Fairs and the like, impact the imaginations of individuals and entire societies.

The same sort of anticipatory delusion can occur with growing old and pondering “carefree” retirement. Even when expectations are violated and a contrary reality sets in, still people often exhibit “making the best of a bad situation” by attempting to hedonically adapt, to make excuses for the less than satisfying reality in a manner that is the opposite of buyer’s remorse. People do attempt to adapt to and excuse unsatisfying facts by rationalizing the status quo (Kay et al. 2002).

In economic terms, romanticizing the future can involve delusions of what wealth will mean to a person. Kahneman and colleagues were suggesting that when people do come into money, they are wrong, it does not solve problems or make them happier (Kahneman et al. 2006). This was a case of affective forecasting. While Kahneman and his colleagues admitted that having enough money to escape objective poverty did make a person happy, any additional money had little effect on increasing their measure of happiness, their measure of subjective well-being as self-reported memories of moment-to-moment activities (Kahneman and Krueger 2006). Kahneman thought he had solved the Easterlin paradox whereby self-reported life satisfaction had changed little in prosperous countries over the past several decades despite large increases in standards of living (Easterlin 1974, 1995).

Richard Easterlin was not alone in claiming that wealth and income are not connected to happiness. As late as 2005, drawing on data from the World Values Surveys that were conducted in over 80 countries in four waves (1981, 1990–91, 1995–96, and 1999–2001), Richard Layard concluded that for “the Western industrial countries, the richer ones are no happier than the poorer” (p. 32). However, he and others did take away from the World Values Surveys a growing understanding about the gaps in wealth and happiness between rich and poor countries.

But already in 2000, Ed Diener and Oishi Shigehiro had begun to look at income and well-being across nations. When one of Kahneman’s collaborators Angus Deaton extended this research by turning to evidence gathered in 2006 from 132 countries by the Gallup World Poll, the results demanded a fundamental reversal of their thinking (Deaton 2008). The wake-up call came when they realized that their

“solution” to the Easterlin paradox had been limited by the scope of their own studies. Because they had not previously taken an international view, they could not explain the global frustration of rising expectations as the symbolic field had expanded via new communication systems letting people see what others had and how they lived.

Average life satisfaction is strongly related to per capita national income; each doubling of income is associated with a near one-point increase in life satisfaction on a scale from 0 to 10. Unlike most previous findings, the effect holds across the range of international incomes; if anything, it is slightly stronger among rich countries. Conditioned on national income, recent economic growth makes people less satisfied with their lives, improvements in life expectancy make them more satisfied, but life expectancy itself has little effect. In most countries, except the richest, older people are less satisfied with their lives. What was revealed was that being satisfied is not the same thing as being happy and that earlier claims that “the effect of income on life satisfaction seems to be transient. We argue that people exaggerate the contribution of income to happiness because they focus, in part, on conventional achievements when evaluating their life or the lives of others” were false (Kahneman et al. 2006, p. 1908). In short, relative poverty is not a “focusing illusion.” And the pain of it, both symbolic and actual, is real especially when older adults face sudden and significant health expenses, which underscore the contingent, relative nature of their wealth.

So let’s put this all together. The population of the USA and other industrialized countries is aging rapidly. Most catastrophic illnesses strike in the last 5 years of life. A single catastrophic illness can wipe out savings even where health insurance is involved, dropping not only those already struggling into the suffering category but even those in the thriving category can be devastated financially and emotionally with one major bout of ill health. The link to wealth and happiness has been repeatedly established both within the USA and around the globe. Thus, the threat to financial health is concomitant with threats of illnesses associated with aging. Along with this is the specter of loneliness that comes from the loss of a spouse or the sense of being “left behind” by family members and/or disengaging from workplace social connections after retirement especially in places like Japan. The link between loneliness and health has been established. The consequence is a maelstrom of challenges to older adults making them vulnerable to symbolic violence that is directly associated with deteriorating physical power. Symbolic death and physical death are connected in anticultural societies manifesting social structures that foster social isolation.

A 2006 Gallup World Poll found that GDP difference between countries did indeed have enormous and highly predictive differences in life satisfaction. Gallup sampled over 130,000 people from 132 countries, something Kahneman had never done (Kahneman 2008). And the correlation between the life satisfaction of individuals and the GDP of the country in which they lived, Gallup found to be very strong at over .40. Kahneman and his colleagues had to admit that people everywhere were increasingly evaluating their lives by a common global standard of material prosperity. The effect of income on measure of life satisfaction was profound.

People in different countries do *not* adapt to their level of prosperity. Instead, we see a strikingly strong correlation between happiness/frustration and income. But

this always seemed obvious to anyone who surveyed the history and founding motivations for modernity itself. For this is why people around the globe exhibit ambition and migrate by the millions seeking better economic opportunities leading to the social issues we see across the globe and across time from slavery to imperial struggles for domination to today's concerns and unease, from Japan to Sweden, from the USA to Saudi Arabia, about large-scale immigration.

Happy Happy, Joy Joy¹

Death-Defying Delusions and False Affective Forecasting on a Mass Scale

In this section, we retrace how commercial media responded to the growing “threat” of aging. What was invented was the global slogan, “forever young.” From its inception up into the 1970s, American television looked very different from what it does today. Suddenly, in the mid-1970s, network television executives canceled all the top-rated shows, replacing them with what every critic of the day and since, such as Horace Newcomb (1974, 2007) and Hal Himmelstein (1981, 1984), decried as insipid programming lacking in substance, redeeming sociocultural value, even internal narrative coherence. Shows that had garnered huge audiences such as *Studio One*, *The Defenders*, *The Philco Television Playhouse*, *Kraft Television Theatre*, *Playhouse 90*, *Route 66*, *Naked City*, *Mr. Lucky*, *Gunsmoke*, *Bonanza*, *Family Affair*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, *The Red Skelton Hour*, and so forth were all replaced by cheap sitcoms such as *The Monkees*, *Giligan's Island*, *The Munsters*, *The Adams Family*, *Petticoat Junction*, and so forth. Initially a few, such as *All in the Family* and *MASH* held the high ground. But they too ended and have not been replaced by shows of equal quality on network TV.

Relevant writing, writing that had sociocultural import, was replaced with writing found on shows such as *Cheers*, *Seinfeld*, and *Friends* that is utterly irrelevant to any context and so is perfect for endless syndication. Jerry Seinfeld himself marveled at the success of his namesake show, because it connected with Millennials and was “about nothing.” Even zany shows of an earlier era, such as *Gomer Pyle*, *USMC* (1964–1969), the pilot for which aired as a spinoff of *The Andy Griffith Show* about a hapless underemployed youth from Mayberry, North Carolina, who liked everybody and hated to shoot guns, presented political sub-currents as Gomer found himself preparing for war against the backdrop of the Vietnam conflict.

Older shows had extensive scripts, many of which dealt with issues of social justice, structural inequality, and production values featuring professional actors, sophisticated lighting, and cinematography. Norman Lear (writer and producer), who declared himself a “born-again American” at the US Presidential inauguration in 2009, convincingly observes that today, one cannot find anything rivaling pro-

grams such as *All in the Family*, *Soap*, *Mary Hartman*, or *MASH* (Lear 2008). Shows with strong philosophical narratives such as *Then Came Bronson*, *Kung Fu*, or even *Star Trek* that had stories typically touching on race relations and even “half-breed” main characters vanished. Eventually those contents, despite their youthful characters were regarded as appealing to an audience that was too old, and so they were replaced by even cheaper to produce reality programming that is all about the machinations of marginally literate adults caught in extended adolescence. Why?

Youth Fetish: Money and Globalization

Because by 1975, a new approach to programming had finally solidified as the industry standard. The shift, initially rejected by advertising experts, began earlier in the 1950s. While industry types were slow to come around, academics were pushing the new social scientific paradigm of audience research from rough demographics and mass appeal to psychographics. Eventually, sponsors realized that they were reaching a massive older audience that did not spend money the way they want them to (Schudson 1984; Ewen and Ewen 1982; Ewen 1976). At the same time, the economist Walter Rostow, who was National Security Advisor and arch anticommunist in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, was formulating a major propaganda push initially in Southeast Asia but then around the globe to encourage people to develop—but to develop into what? American-style consumers of course, and Rostow sought to achieve this goal by promoting American popular culture around the globe through US media content (see Rostow’s *Anti-communist Manifesto* 1960).

The kind of popular culture Rostow had in mind had to be irrelevant; when taken at face value, perceived to be dissociated from local political and cultural standards. *I Love Lucy* was perfect. It was the first postmodern television show that had appeal everywhere precisely because it was about nowhere and nothing significant. Few American cultural products since have rivaled its international appeal except *Bay Watch*. Like the Beatles singing inane lyrics like “I want to hold your hand,” and “I say hello and you say goodbye,” the new powerful media found contents that were truly massifying. *I Love Lucy* became the new standard vehicle to accompany commercials.

Rostow wanted to exterminate “traditional society” by promoting “maturity” and “evolution” toward high mass consumption, ostensibly of American manufactured goods (Rostow 1960). It worked, perhaps all too well, as we have seen the emergence of the “generation gap” everywhere along with a rising tide of expectations for consumer culture and frustration at “culture lag,” a euphemism for the death of traditional cultures. Young people judge cultures by who gets the latest video game platform or iPhone first.

In the home of this colonial effort, the largest audiences ever produced were abandoned and content was systematically restructured to produce a younger more economically impulsive audience for sale to advertisers (Barnouw 1978; Arlen

1981; Gitlin 1994). Publications such as *Ad Age* and *New York Magazine*, the forums for Madison Avenue news, heralded the brilliant new application of survey data, and the new computing power with its statistical software that was enabling greater control over mass mediated messages and targeted consumers. This new computational power massively enhanced the initial efforts and dreams of mass manipulation cherished by the social scientists who made their ways to Madison Avenue.

What was the goal? What, according to consumerism, was to be done? Change American's attitudes about money, debt, wealth, and aging. What sells is what is fun, what makes you feel young—not complexity and nuance. Immediate gratification became the mantra. Initially, commercial network television featured the likes of Leonard Bernstein and Arturo Toscanini conducting the NBC symphony orchestra at Carnegie Hall and presented performances composed and produced specifically for telecast such as Tchaikovsky's ballets *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker* and the first opera composed for television, Gian Carlo Monotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, which debuted live on the *Hallmark Hall of Fame* (1951). The work was the first of many commissioned by Peter Herman Adler, a famous Czech conductor who became Director of Opera Programming for NBC. Yes, the commercial networks had such positions.

Television was a boon to artists and the arts. It brought the best available talent into living rooms across the nation. Carnegie Hall and Broadway had never been so relevant before or after the sudden shift in programming. The networks commissioned many artists including such notable talents as Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein. Their fame was already solidified by Broadway successes such as *South Pacific*, *Carousel*, *The King and I*, *Flower Drum Song*, *Oklahoma!*, and *The Sound of Music*. They brought their collaborative talents to television with the debut of the musical *Cinderella*, starring Julie Andrews. *Cinderella* aired March 31, 1957 on CBS and was watched by over 100 million people.

Theater houses of the air proliferated. The masses could partake of William Gibson's *The Miracle Worker*, a teleplay written specifically for *Playhouse 90*, or watch Alistair Cooke on *Omnibus* (1952–1961) interview Frank Lloyd Wright or watch one of the many “music lectures” given by Leonard Bernstein on topics such as Handel's *Messiah* and Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*. The mass American audience looked forward to telecasts of Shakespeare and ballets by Tchaikovsky. The audience numbers were staggering.

With the exit of older sophisticated directors and writers went an entire apparatus that had been writing and producing complex scripts specifically for television such as *The Haven* (1953) for *Philco Television Playhouse*, *Other People's Houses* (1956) on *Goodyear Television Playhouse*, *Twelve Angry Men* (1954) written by Reginald Rose for *Westinghouse Studio One*, *All the Way Home* (1960) by Tad Mosel that won the Pulitzer for Drama in 1961, and *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1959) by Abby Mann, *Days of Wine and Roses* by J. P. Miller, and *Requiem for a Heavyweight* written by Rod Serling, all three written for *Playhouse 90*. These original teledramas were replaced with cheap sitcoms (Maniewicz and Swerdlow 1978). And the writers were replaced with much younger people, often their interns. Characters in scripts and guests invited onto talk shows got younger. Gone were older adult sidekicks like the

“toastmaster general” George Jessel, Arthur Treacher (Merv Griffin’s sidekick), and Ed McMahon (Johnny Carson’s sidekick). News anchors got younger. Comedians got younger. Even children’s television hosts and televangelists got younger, prettier, and more bombastic. Other countries around the world are following the trend.

The David Frost Show and *The Dick Cavett Show* featured guests such as the presidents of countries; ambassadors; novelists and poets including Hunter S. Thompson, cofounder of *The Village Voice* Norman Mailer, Tom Wolfe, John McPhee, and Truman Capote; political leaders and activists such as Lester Maddox (who stormed off the stage of *The Dick Cavett Show*) and John Lennon; and artists and architects such as Salvador Dalí. On one show, to commemorate the knighting of Noël Coward, the prolific playwright and author of *Private Lives*, Cavett not only had Coward on but a panel of other literati including Alfred Hunt, Lynn Fontanne, and Brian Bedford. This was not an isolated event.

Today, most purveyors of broadcast talk and comedy either propagate thoroughly inane chatter such as Regis Philbin and Kelly Ripa on *Live! With Regis and Kelly* or like Andrew Dice Clay, Daniel Tosh, and others who thoroughly confuse critical social commentary with juvenile vulgarity (Dalton and Kramer 2012). No such equivalent to earlier mainstream TV talk exists today on the major broadcast networks. To find an equivalent forum today, one must invest in premium cable—in other words, pay to watch commercially supported television. Examples include Bill O’Reilly on *The O’Reilly Factor*, Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show*, Stephen Colbert on *Colbert Nation*, and Sean Hannity, Rachel Maddow, and Bill Maher. Limbaugh offers no such forum. He never hosts guests but prefers to speak for them, especially his straw man version of the categorically stupid and dangerously anti-American “liberal.”

Times have changed and much of the change involves the abandonment of older adults and their sensibilities. Millions of older Americans suddenly found themselves watching shows not written with them in mind, selling products not intended for them. We can see a sudden change in philosophy governing US commercial media, and its attitude toward older adult Americans in the mid-1970s gaining momentum up through the period of the Reagan administration. *The Phil Donahue Show* started in 1967. It typically hosted long discussions with the likes of Alex Haley, Mother Teresa, Ayn Rand, the Dali Lama, and other influential people in political and intellectual circles.

Donahue was the undisputed top-rated TV talk show for years, and then in 1986 Oprah Winfrey introduced a new genre known as tabloid talk. Winfrey was famous for spending 5 hours a day in makeup and wardrobe making herself look anything but herself, some would say making herself look safe to “Middle Americans” (Isa and Kramer 2003). Winfrey climbed in the ratings against the established Donahue by featuring episodes dedicated to male strippers, prostitutes, transsexuals, and promoting a pseudo-psychology of positive thinking. Donahue’s rating plummeted. Watching Winfrey made people think less and feel good.

Put into political context, things really changed during the Reagan administration (1981–1989). This was the time when Generation Y or Millennials (also called Echo Boomers) were born and grew up. The new emphasis in media was directed

toward younger and younger audiences. Gen Y members don't remember the world without MTV or the great distractor the Internet, a field where everything becomes equally trivial (Jackson 2008; Carr 2010; Weinberger 2007) and attention blindness intensifies (Oppenheimer 2003). In August 1993, the moniker Generation Y was coined in the magazine *Ad Age* to describe people who were in their mid- to late teens by that time. The first president they knew was Reagan. They are characterized by demographers as heavy Internet surfers (some say addicts), consumption-oriented, politically apathetic compared to previous generations, and "increasingly narcissistic" (Twenge 2007). Some call them the "boomerang generation."

While the previous Generation Xers are the first generation to make less than their parents, the Generation Y youth are the first to expect to make less than their parents, and thus they tend to have lower measures of life satisfaction (Howe and Strauss 2000). And yet, according to William Strauss and Neil Howe (1997), they exhibit a deep trust in authority leading to apathy. This is the progeny of the time when the cultural industry became super commercialized and obsessed with youth as consumers. They have been called the "Me First" generation when and where "everyone gets a trophy" (Lipkin and Perrymore 2009). The economic realities belie the notion that Gen Y's are spoiled brats except that in the history of the USA, this generation is the most likely to be obligated to take care of its elders.

The point is that a new habitus has been encouraged. Simply put, the image has been created that societies are homogenous, at least the mainstream. Youth are the centerpiece, while the rest of the population is marginalized and generally denigrated. People should not be reminded of their mortality. The world is now a safe place, without worries or other indications of frailty. The message is "be happy"!

Note

1. These are the immortal words of the sickeningly optimistic and moronic cartoon character Stimpson J. Cat from *The Ren & Stimpy Show* (1991–1992), Nickelodeon Animation Studios, John Kricfalusi creator.

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