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SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND
SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF THE AGED:
IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WELFARE

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The study of the relationship between the aging individual and society and of their reciprocal influences is paramount as the number and proportion of older people increases. The literature in gerontology concerning the social participation of the aged has focused on the consequences of major life cycle changes for old people. There is a concern with the nature of the aging individual's relationship to family, friends, and the community. Research efforts have attempted to explain the correlates and consequences of social participation and the variance reflected in the total population of aging individuals. The literature about social integration is concerned with the integration of social units into the social system or society. The aging individual and his patterns of social participation or interaction are units of analysis which can reflect the process of social integration. In spite of the lack of empirical measures of social integration, this concept has implications for understanding the aged vis a vis society.

The integration of individuals into their society results from forces which place them within the system and govern their participation and patterned association with others...Thus, people are tied into their society essentially through their beliefs, the groups that they belong to, and positions that they occupy (Rosow, 1967:9).

The purpose of this paper is to provide a critical review of the literature regarding the informal social participation patterns of the aged. The factors associated with degree of interaction with friends will be elaborated. For example, the relationship between morale and friendship patterns emerges as a predominant concern in the research literature. An effort will be made to examine the accumulated evidence in terms of implications for practice or further research. Finally, these findings regarding the informal social participation patterns of the aged will be analyzed within the framework of prevailing theoretical notions about social integration.

DISENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Cumming and Henry (1961:14) use the term disengagement to refer to an inevitable social process in which there is "mutual withdrawal or disengagement resulting in decreased interaction between the aging person and others in the social systems he belongs to." The implica-

tions of this approach are that old people feel happier when they are disengaged and that this process is part of normal personality development. Although disengagement theory stresses the voluntary aspects of decreased social interaction, altered social relationships, and increased self-preoccupation, it asserts that loss of morale will result when the appropriate roles for the disengaged state are not available. According to Cumming and Henry, loss of morale associated with retirement or widowhood can be circumvented by participation in recreation groups or peer groups of other widows. The authors identify sex differences in terms of the modal character of problems of retirement and widowhood which are non-modal for women and men, respectively (1961:143-160). Recreation groups provide instrumental activity to mediate social relationships following the loss of the male work status identity and peer group. Association with other widows is viewed as a way to reinforce the socio-emotional aspects of the female following the loss of social identity with her spouse.

Disengagement theory has been criticized for methodological problems and the uniqueness of its study population in terms of high socio-economic status and general well-being. It does provide practice implications by suggesting solutions to the demoralization associated with retirement and widowhood. The disengagement orientation stimulated further research by Havighurst, Neugarten, and Tobin, who compared components of disengagement theory with "activity" theory. Activity theory promotes the maintenance and substitution of middle age activity patterns in old age. The authors' findings suggest that social interaction does decline with increasing age but that life satisfaction exists for the highly engaged as well as the highly disengaged (1968:171). This finding also suggests that subjective feelings regarding a meaningful life are not always associated with actual participation in social interaction.

Rose (1964) refutes the disengagement approach through analysis of social trends and social structure. He submits that there is ample evidence to maintain that withdrawal from social interaction is neither necessary nor desirable for the aged. Social trends such as maintenance of good health through improved medical technology, social security legislation, and entry of women to the labor force following child-rearing, and the social acceptability of leisure activities are indicators that disengagement is not a "given" in the relationships between the aging individual and society. However, Rose does not adequately emphasize that these trends have less impact on the low income population than on the middle class, but he does emphasize structural variations in discussion of disengagement from the work role. Disengagement theory fails to recognize that involvement in work activities is essentially a function of opportunity. Forced retirement is one characteristic of the occupational structure. Retirement is not typical among the self-employed and professionals who are not enmeshed in the system of compulsory retirement. This broader view of the interrelationship between the individual and society suggests that disengagement is not an infeasible process.

A "common-sense" assumption is that persons whose earlier process of social activity are low interaction or isolation will maintain these

former patterns in later life. Lowenthal (1964) studied the relationship between isolation and mental illness in old age. Her findings suggest that lifelong patterns of isolation do not promote mental illness and that isolation in old age is more of a consequence than a cause of mental illness (1964:70). These findings are further evidence of criticism of the disengagement approach. The identification of well-adjusted persons with lifelong patterns of isolation weakens the developmental proposal of Cumming and Henry that the aging individual normally moves from a state of social engagement to a state of disengagement. Therefore, it should make sense to assume that the reverse situation might also be true. Persons who maintain lifelong patterns of active social involvement should also be well-adjusted.

STATUS SIMILARITY AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Rosow (1967) studied the social interaction patterns of old people with friends and neighbors. In this research study, residential density of older people was the independent variable or predictor of the number and age of friends, the dependent variables. Rosow hypothesized that the number of local friends and the amount of neighboring activity would be a function of the local concentration of age peers (1967:141). The study population resided in several hundred apartment buildings in Cleveland. Apartments were classified according to the proportion of household with an older member as normal, with 1-15% aged households; concentrated, with 33-49% aged households; and dense, with 50% or more aged households. Rosow's data confirmed his hypothesis that there is a direct relationship between the number of local friends and the local proportion of age peers.

Rosow considered a number of demographic variables and role losses which account for variance in responsiveness to residential density in making friends among older people. The findings documented specific differences between the working class and middle class respondents. Rosow asserts that "status disadvantage intensifies the sensitivity to density variations" (1967:101). This statement is supported by the evidence of working class dependency on neighbors as friends and the local orientation of their social life in contrast with the middle class patterns of interaction outside their residential locality. However, middle class respondents who experienced high role and status losses also responded to density for local interaction but less extensively than the working class respondents. In addition to the major social class differences, Rosow found that persons more than seventy-five years old, women and unmarried or widowed persons are more responsive to density factors in their social participation.

This research study also considered the effects of residential density on neighboring in relation to two theoretical constructs: morale and the reference group. Rosow identified four functional types of neighboring patterns, one of which, "the isolated," is characterized by low local contact but by a desire for more friends. The evidence suggests that the morale of "isolates" declines in dense areas because their patterns of interaction are deviant (1967:132). The identification of types of neighboring patterns, particularly "the isolated," has important practice implications for geriatric outreach programs. Considera-

tion of the family and neighbors as reference groups resulted in the conclusion that friends are not functional substitutes for the family. "Under special and restricted conditions, the aged use neighbors as alternatives to children, but only in an interactional sense" (Rosow, 1967:244). However, in the case of individuals who did not have local children or relatives, dense neighbors were a source of care in health crises and approximated the pattern of help received by individuals with local family members. Thus, the age concentration of older persons' apartments has functional consequences. These findings should be of import in planning housing and social services for the aged based on residential density characteristics.

Rosenberg (1970) was concerned with the relationship between poverty and the social isolation of his aging study population from friends and kin. His sample was composed of poor and solvent working class members from forty-five to seventy-nine years of age. A family income of \$7,500 per year from all sources was the highest income of the solvent respondents. To control for one of the major variables, age and economic peer density, the random sampling procedure involved block sampling of neighborhoods in Philadelphia. This sampling method provided data which was not entirely congruent with Rosow's conclusions. The data suggested that the socio-economic character of the neighborhood context had a greater effect on social participation than age concentration. Rosenberg identified two types of neighborhood contexts: the dissonant context and the consonant context.

Solvent people in low income neighborhoods and poor people in higher income neighborhoods both resident in dissonant economic contexts. Solvent people in wealthy areas, however, reside in a more consonant economic context, as do poor people in poor areas. Dissonant contexts promote more individual isolation and less friendship within the area defined by the contextual variable, and consonant contexts have the opposite effect (1970:37).

Concentration of age peers was not found to be as conducive to local friendships of the poor and solvent working class as relative levels of income. Rosenberg found significant evidence of age heterophily in working class associations, regardless of the neighborhood structural context. However, for individuals between sixty-five and seventy-four years of age, the neighborhood age structure did influence the amount of interaction with friends. Age homophily was interpreted as a contextual pattern and a response to the greater opportunity to associate with others of the same age (1970:97). Neighborhood structural factors primarily influenced male respondents in their transition from the role of "breadwinner" to the role of "neighbor." Rosenberg (1970:95) suggested that isolation occurs when structural contexts do not promote social integration and that this is a selective process. The friendships of solvent working class respondents were influenced by socio-economic factors, whereas the friendships of the poor working class were more strongly influenced by factors related to neighborhood residents' stage in the family cycle and unrelated to socio-economic status. Contextual dissonance in these terms impeded social interaction

for the poor and the solvent in the role of "neighbor." This data has practical implications for identifying isolated or "high risk" cases in the community sector.

The findings of Rosow and Rosenberg can be contrasted in relation to two issues: the phenomenon of age-grading and the nature of age-homophilous relationships. These authors differ on the extent to which age homophily is a function of proximity created by dense concentrations of age peers or of similarity in socio-economic status, particularly income level. Consideration of the methodology and samples employed in the two studies is a key to the variation in the findings. Rosow's sample was composed of apartment-dwellers, 90% of whom are sixty-five years of age and older. His social class categories, working class and middle class, were derived according to the occupational status of the respondents. This dual classification was based on whether the occupation was manual or non-manual. To control for the effect of socio-economic status on responsiveness to density factors, Rosow's sampled apartment buildings were homogeneous in terms of the socio-economic or occupational status of their residents (1967:43). In Rosenberg's sample, 58% of the respondents were less than sixty-five years of age. Sixty-five percent of the solvent respondents had incomes of \$3,000-\$7,500 per year. The remaining poor respondents had incomes of less than \$3,000 per year. Fifty-five percent of those between sixty-five and seventy-nine are poor (1970:10). All respondents were classified as members of the working class. The block sampling techniques provided concise descriptions of neighborhood contextual characteristics. Thus, these two studies represent respondents with different age and class characteristics in quite different milieus. One question about Rosow's sample is whether similarity in occupational status is a socio-economic variable which may provide a basis for local friendship, independent of age density.

In spite of these differences in design and resultant evidence, the data generated by Rosow and Rosenberg should be discussed in relation to some of their conclusions. Rosow presents evidence of age-grading and the effects of density. The index of effective confinement (Rosow, 1967:74) is based on the difference between the observed proportion of old neighbor-friends and the proportion of aged households available to the respondents and also standardizes for any variation in available aged households due to density factors. This composite index controls for the possibility that the data reflects high concentrations of old people in apartments rather than selection of friends based on age-grading. The index suggests that age-grading is more pronounced in the working class than the middle class and that residential density of age peers fosters age-homophilous relations in both classes. The major question about Rosow's conclusions is how generalizable are these findings from such a specialized, selective sample. Rosenberg's findings are quite different regarding the influence of higher concentrations of old people in the neighborhood on local friendships. His data indicates that as the proportion of age peers increases, the solvent working class tend to go beyond the neighborhood for friends and a considerable number of the poor continue to be

isolated under these allegedly favorable circumstances (1970:64). Rosenberg speculates that these patterns may reflect our society's devaluation of being old. In other words, the isolated poor may conform to this cultural perspective by avoiding friendships with their aged peers in dense areas, and the solvent may retreat from the preponderance of available aged peers. However, Rosenberg's data does not indicate whether these friends outside the local area are also aged peers. If this were the case, there would be little basis for speculating that lowered rates of local friendship represent a tendency which counteracts age-grading.

Blau considered the effect of widowhood and retirement on friendships and the variance associated with age, sex and socio-economic status. In this study, status similarity was viewed as an important determinant in social participation patterns. Rosow and Rosenberg also studied status similarity in terms of the relative age and relative income of their respondents, respectively. The general findings were that the social participation of the married decreases with age, that social participation is lower for young widowers than young widows, and that the social participation was decreased by deviant status. However, this was not a factor for lower class widows whose participation was more limited by economic hardships. Blau (1960) has also noted that friendships maintain morale in old age. She suggested that the marriage and work roles are important sources of integration into groups other than kin. Her data documented that low morale was associated with low social participation for the widowed and the retired. Blau's data (1973:55) suggests that friends compensate for role loss. Rosow (1967:243) also studied compensatory associations in relation to decreased interaction with the family but found that neighbor-friends were not substitutes for inaccessible kinship relations. Blau's findings indicate that the extent to which friendships can compensate for role loss in retirement and widowhood varies according to the available pool of friends with similar status characteristics.

The study of structural or status variables such as roles, age and income by Blau, Rosow, and Rosenberg provides information about informal social participation in old age which conflicts with stereotyped conceptions of aging as an inevitably isolating process. In other words, these studies indicate how variance in these status variables produce different outcomes for individual behavior patterns. Peter M. Blau has identified a number of structural effects. Two types pertain to the patterns of association observed in this research literature.

Contingency effects of relational networks are those in which the association between the individual social position or relations and another factor depends on the distribution of social positions or relations in the collectivity.

Inverse structural effects of relational networks are indicative of the fact that the status distribution or network of social relations in a collectivity has an impact which is the very opposite of that of the individuals' social status or social relationships (Blau, 1960:192).

Contingency effects relate to the findings of Blau regarding the effect of the deviant statuses of widowhood and retirement on social participation. Peter Blau cites this study as an example of contingency effects and notes that "contingency effects of status variable identify the implications of minority status as such, just as contingency effects of normative variables identify the correlates of deviancy as such (1960:192). A case can be made for suggesting the operation of inverse structural effects in relation to Rosenberg's findings about attitudes towards social class. Rosenberg (1970:181) found that solvent old men in economically dissonant contexts gave proportionally comparable closed system responses as poor old men in economically consonant contexts. Through association with neighbors who have not or have been unable to take advantage of opportunities to improve their economic position, solvent members of the working class may tend to perceive a closed system which is inconsistent with their actual social experience.

ROLE LOSS AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Widowhood and retirement appear in the literature as key events which affect the social participation of old people. The findings of three studies concerned with widowhood and retirement will be discussed. Lowenthal was concerned with the relationship between age-related role loss and morale. The effect of retirement or widowhood on morale was studied with a control for the withdrawal from social participation which may accompany these role losses. Lowenthal (1964) found that low morale was directly associated with retirement or widowhood and that socially withdrawn respondents maintained high morale through association with a confidant. Furthermore, the confidant relationship was associated with high morale regardless of the degree of social interaction. This research suggested that the correlates of low morale are widowhood, retirement, and the absence of a confidant. However, the reaction of age-related role loss measured by low morale may be altered through a confidant relationship.

Lopata (1973) studied three hundred widows in the Chicago area, 50% of whom were between fifty and sixty-four years old and the remainder were sixty-five and older. Approximately one-half of the respondents were living alone and 81% were in their pre-retirement years when they became widows. Lopata, who is particularly concerned with the concept of social role, stated that the age at which a woman loses her husband is significant because relative age influences the social roles in which she is involved (1973:33). Furthermore, role orientations affect patterns of interaction during widowhood. For example, Lopata found that better-educated women with a number of social and personal resources tended to be more oriented to the role of wife during widowhood than less-educated women with lower socio-economic status. The former group shared more in multi-faceted relationships with their husbands. Lopata (1973:92) concluded that this group experienced a more severe grief reaction but was better able to revamp their social lives than those who were less socially engaged before the death of their husband.

These socio-economic status variations are critical in looking at Lopata's data on friendship in widowhood.

In general, the lower the socio-economic class, the more dependent the woman on ascribed interaction, particularly with kin members in sex-segregated scenes. The higher the class, the more likely the wife to be engaged in couple-companionate, achieved friendships to which the husband was a major contribution (1973:184).

Lower class women tended to report no change in their social life as a result of their husband's death. Higher class women maintained old friendships, but actual social activity with old friends decreased for some respondents. These respondents were not interested or invited to couple-companionate activities. This evidence lends support to Blau's findings that social participation is influenced by status similarity or dissimilarity. On the other hand, only 4% of the respondents stated that "all" and 19% answered that "most" of their friends were also widows (1973:184). This evidence is not consistent with Blau's analysis of structural effects. However, this data does not include information about other structural correlates such as relative age or income level which were included in the Blau study. Lopata also studied the neighboring patterns of widows and identified six types of neighborhood settings. She presents data which compares form of neighboring with the related frequency of the neighboring and concludes that widows are characterized by unplanned, sporadic neighboring patterns (1973:233). The simplistic presentation of such tabulated data lends little support to this conclusion. This data would be much more significant if neighborhood setting were introduced as a variable which influences forms of neighboring and their related frequencies. Lopata's data may be reflecting the differential effects of hostile areas, relocation with a child, or the availability of kin which she identified as characteristic neighborhood settings.

Lopata's ultimate analysis of social interaction in widowhood is based on orientation to ascribed or achieved roles. It was previously noted that socio-economic factors influence the extent to which friendship patterns are characterized by ascribed or achieved status. Through the extensive use of attitude scales, Lopata described three types of urban widows and measured their role orientations. The social isolate is one of these types which should be a target for geriatric outreach. As a result of lifetime involvement in ascribed relations, she is unable to extend her participation to achieved relations and becomes isolated when kin or old neighbors are not accessible (1973:266). This study indicates that maintenance and development of friendship patterns and an active social life is correlated with high socio-economic status, a history of achieved relations, and the ability to utilize these social and personal resources. This is consistent with Blau's finding that the social participation of lower class widows in her sample was limited by economic hardship. Lopata's conception of ascribed or achieved role orientation also suggests that the individual's perception of relationships in her social world affects actual involvement in social interaction.

Streib and Schneider (1971) were also interested in what happens when a social role is relinquished. They conducted the Cornell Study of Occupational Retirement, a seven-year longitudinal study. Respondents

were contacted one year before they reached the usual retirement age of sixty-five and four subsequent contacts were made. The sample is not representative of the general population in that it was primarily composed of persons with relatively high socio-economic status and white-collar or professional occupations. This study was concerned with the affect of role change on the health, economic situation, and social psychological dimensions of the retiree. Some of the general findings about attitudes toward retirement will be considered, as well as the findings about the social psychological aspects of retirement.

The authors measured willingness and reluctance to retire in relation to voluntary and administrative retirement. They use the term "administrative" instead of "compulsory" retirement because they feel that the latter label has negative connotations (1971:45). Their data indicates definite sex differences in attitudes and variation in the desirability of the retired state. Streib and Schneider (1971:49) document that the women in this sample are more reluctant to retire than the men. Furthermore, those who are required to retire, the administrative retirees, are somewhat more reluctant to retire than those who may do so voluntarily. This data is inconsistent with the propositions of the disengagement approach. Cumming and Henry have referred to the instrumental orientation of males and the socio-emotional orientation of females. These findings suggest that women are also task-oriented, and in this case, more so than men. The relative reluctance of administrative retirees implies that the opportunity to retire and, thereby, "disengage" is not particularly viewed as desirable. In their study of the social psychological aspects of retirement, Streib and Schneider compared pre-retirement and post-retirement measures of life satisfaction. Their findings indicate that there is no significant decline in life satisfaction associated with retirement and, particularly, in the case of men (1971:110). This evidence is not consistent with predominant thinking in the literature that low morale associated with retirement can be offset through associations with friends or a confidant. These factors may be influencing the lack of change in the post-retirement measure of life satisfaction. Unfortunately, the nature of Streib's and Schneider's sample is such that this information is unavailable. It may also be that this sample's existing social resources in the form of friends are also pursuing the same retirement patterns. If this were the case, the existing friendship associations would not be adversely affected by dissimilarity in employment status. It would be interesting to replicate this aspect of the study concerning social psychological dimensions and life satisfaction and to include these additional factors regarding friends.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Social integration can be understood in terms of integration of the individual to a small group or to the wider society. The concept of social cohesion refers to the nature of affiliations in a small group. Schlacter (1968) notes that persons belong to groups to achieve their goals, satisfy personal needs, or to gain evaluations of their abilities and feelings. These factors pertain to the friendship patterns of widows in Lopata's study. One reason that some widows may drop out of couple-companionate activities is that these activities do not satisfy the same

social function as when their husbands were alive. Involvement in cliques of widows may satisfy personal support needs. Rosenberg's finding that solvent old men are more isolated in poor neighborhoods may indicate that they do not seek the evaluative opinions of their poor neighbors.

Four types of social integration have been discussed by Landecker. This typology is based on sociological literature which has described the extent to which integration exists in a group. Landecker (1951) notes that the major problem with available writings about social integration is that they are not amenable to quantification or adequate empirical analysis by which social integration can be measured. Landecker's typology includes: cultural integration, the congruity of cultural standards; normative integration, the conformity of persons' behavior to cultural norms; communicative integration, the transmission of cultural meanings throughout the group; and functional integration, the interdependency of group members through the division of labor (1951:332-340). A particularly interesting aspect of this typology is the relationship that communicative integration should have to cultural and normative integration. Interpersonal communication should function to transmit the nature of cultural norms and the related behaviors which denote conformity to these norms. This phenomenon is related to issues regarding the social participation of old people. If the communication structure of a group or society conveys that the aged are inactive or unable to interact socially, it is more likely that old people might conform to this orientation or that others will treat them on the basis of this cultural perspective. The effects of this cultural stereotype are manifest in the fears of some elderly persons to participate in an increasingly complex environment or in the pervasive inadequacy of public social services to provide them with opportunities for social engagement. The concept of functional integration may pertain to the low status given to the aged and their exclusion from the work force through compulsory retirement. A normative conception of the aged as unable to contribute to the division of labor beyond a certain age may be communicated and is manifest in the system of forced retirement. This phenomenon may serve to sever the aged from the system of interdependency and severely reduce their integration to the society-at-large.

Gouldner (1960) has described the "norm of reciprocity" and discussed its contribution to the social system stability. Adherence to this norm indicates that relationships are based on reciprocal obligations and that there is a tendency to establish relationships only with those who can reciprocate. The "norm of reciprocity" states that "people should help those who help them, and therefore, those whom you have helped have an obligation to help you" (1960:173). Thus, behavior conforming to this norm is problematic for old people to the extent that they are received as unable to reciprocate in social exchanges. In fact, Angell (1968:383) has noted that "functional integration requires adherence to the norm of reciprocity and hence, is related to, if not dependent on, normative integration." This analysis offers some explanation for the exclusion of the elderly from the work force or the decreased involvement of children with their older parents. Old people can become detached from these two systems of interdependency to the extent that members of the occupational system or the kinship system

perceive them as unable to make reciprocal contributions. If this phenomenon does, in fact, serve to reduce the degree of social integration of old people, its effects should be mitigated by friendship associations in which reciprocal exchanges may or may not be required. Friendships are related to the communicative types of integration. These interpersonal exchanges serve as a means to connect old people to their social environment. High measures of social participation with friends and low measures of social isolation might serve as indicators of social integration among the aging population. Qualitative assessments of the intensity of friendships would enhance an evaluation of how friendship interaction contributes to degrees of social integration.

SOCIAL WELFARE IMPLICATIONS

Social welfare programs and policy should maximize opportunities for older persons to engage in reciprocal relationships. Such relationships promote social integration. There are several issues which should be considered before proposing specific programs or policies. Special housing arrangements for the elderly are an important means to circumventing decreased social integration resulting from isolation. However, physical proximity to relevant others, such as neighbors, does not guarantee social proximity. There may be problems promoting social proximity between the older person and others. The aged must have some resource to offer to engage in reciprocal exchanges. The older person can exchange counsel based on his wisdom and experience for respect from others. Receiving respect would strengthen the informal relationships of the aged. Social proximity can also be promoted in terms of formal relationships and roles. The development of post-retirement work roles would provide opportunities to engage in the system of productivity and its related rewards. The informal as well as formal levels of social integration should be recognized. These are the kinds of considerations which should precede the development of social welfare programs and policy.

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