Cross-age friendship in 25 European countries

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BIOGRAPHIC NOTES

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on individual and country-level circumstances shaping friendships between young and old to gain insight into conditions for intergenerational solidarity. Using European Social Survey data, findings show that relatively few people have cross-age friendships (18% of the young and 31% of the old). As predicted by the "meeting principle", individuals who operate in settings where there are opportunities for meaningful interactions with people belonging to a different age group are more likely to have cross-age friendships. As predicted by the "disposition principle", individuals with more favourable attitudes towards other age groups are more likely to have cross-age friendships. Neither the Active Ageing Index nor macro-level trust show significant associations with the likelihood of having cross-age friendships. Apparently, conditions that bring generations together are at the local level, underscoring the importance of decentralized initiatives aimed at increased contact and co-operation across age groups.

KEY WORDS: friendship, ageism, age segregation, active ageing, intergenerational solidarity

BACKGROUND

"Homophily" (Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1954) refers to the tendency to form relationships with others who are similar in some designated aspect such as age, sex, marital status, ethnic background, religion, and social class (McPherson *et al*. 2001). The psychological view is that similarity in backgrounds, social values, and life phases facilitates interactions and eases relationship formation (Huston *et al.* 1978). The sociological view is that the homogeneity of the settings in which people meet creates relationships with others like themselves (Huckfeldt 1983). Homophily is a tenet of relationship research, and this might be why relationships between non-similars have been neglected in the literature. In this paper we focus on friendships between people of different ages. Comparatively little is known about where, when and how such ties are formed and maintained (Riley *et al.* 2000). We feel this is a critical omission. A better understanding of the bases of meaningful interactions between young and old in ageing societies provides insight into conditions for intergenerational solidarity.

Hagestad and Uhlenberg (2005, 2006; Uhlenberg 2000) use the term "age segregation" for the separation of children and young adults into schools, the separation of adults into workplaces that exclude the young and the old, and the separation of older people out of the workplace and, in some cases, into institutional housing and care arrangements. Age segregation is produced and reinforced by the "tripartite" life course (Kohli 1988; Riley *et al.* 1994) with its temporal ordering into periods of preparation, family building and work, and retirement. Tripartisation is linked historically to the transition from a home-based system of production to a wage labour economy and the concomitant abolishment of child labour, expansion of compulsory education, and creation of social security schemes (Mayer *et al.* 1989; Kohli 2007). The chronologically standardized life course has come to achieve social order by providing the rules by which individuals conduct their lives. These rules are apparent in socially-shared expectations about the "appropriate" timing of transitions in life (Settersten *et al.* 1996a, 1996b; Liefbroer *et al.* 2010), formalized as legal norms regarding the rights and obligations of people of different ages (Mayer *et al*. 1986), and structurally implemented in age-graded educational, employment, and social welfare systems (Lynch 2006).

Age segregation merits scientific attention. As Coleman (1982) notes, age barriers deprive the young of a proper view of mid-life and old age, and produce adults who have little experience with and understanding of the young. The author also argues that age barriers can be an antecedent as well as a consequence of ageism, defined as prejudice by members of one age group against another age group (Butler 1969). The separation of age groups can contribute to and reinforce negative stereotypes, which, in turn, contribute to the formation of cleavages between younger and older generations. Bringing down age barriers and increasing cross-age interaction may be an effective way of reducing social segmentation and thus promoting more inclusive societies (Hagestad *et al.* 2005, 2006).

Societies are more age inclusive when people of different ages occupy the same space and hence can engage in face-to-face interactions (Vanderbeck 2007). Uhlenberg (2000) argues that some societies are more age segregated than others. In his view, researchers need to consider the extent to which formal and informal barriers restrict opportunities for individuals of different ages to mingle, socialize, collaborate, learn, and worship together. We use data from the fourth round of the European Social Survey (ESS), which had a special module on "Age attitudes and experiences of ageism", developed by Abrams, Lima and Coudin (2007) to identify conditions at the individual and country level that encourage cross-age interaction, and thus, the formation of cross-age friendships.

CONDITIONS FOR CROSS-AGE INTERACTION[1]

Individual level

A key principle of research on personal relationships is that there is "no mating without meeting" (Blau 1977; Fischer 1982; Verbrugge 1977): people find friends among those they encounter in the course of their daily activities. The meeting principle emphasizes that *social settings* offer opportunities to meet particular categories of individuals and thereby influence the kinds of personal relationships that develop. Applied to cross-age interaction, this principle suggests that those who can draw upon an age diverse pool of ties are more likely to have cross-age friendships.

Families provide a context in which people of different ages continually meet and interact. Hagestad and Uhlenberg (2005: 354) argue in fact that "the family represents the *only* truly age-integrated social institution" (emphasis in original). In their view, well-functioning family bonds have distinct characteristics such as sustained contact, long durations, emotional complexity, shared identity, and perspective-taking that help make people more mindful. Mutual socialization of the young and old in families encourages people to "stretch", to use the authors' term. Durable interactions in families produce a better understanding of people of different ages and presumably foster positive inclinations towards engaging in interactions across age borders. Empirical support for the notion that cross-generational family experiences are generalised to age groups as a whole comes from studies of grandparenthood. Higher levels of quality of contact with grandparents are associated with more positive feelings toward older people in general (Harwood *et al.* 2005; Tam *et al.* 2006). We acknowledge that the presence of family ties cannot be equated with having close interactions (Dykstra *et al.* 2011), and that closeness fosters understanding between generations. Nevertheless, we hypothesize that people with close ties to family members much different in age than themselves are more open to cross-age contact than those without such ties, and thus are more likely to have cross-age friendships (H1).

[1] The section on hypotheses leans heavily on an earlier publication (Fleischmann & Dykstra, forthcoming).

There is a dearth of information on the proportions of young people have regular interactions with older people outside the family, who are sources of help, encouragement and learning, and how they became connected to them (Hagestad 2008). Examples of settings outside the family where old and young can meet and interact are religious communities (Evans 2011; Grefe 2011), work (Uhlenberg 2000), volunteer work (Uhlenberg *et al.* 2004), and neighbourhoods (Vanderbeck 2007). Few scholars have examined whether age-integrated settings actually facilitate the formation and maintenance of cross-age ties. Insofar research on this issue has been carried out, it has been from the perspective of older generations (Uhlenberg *et al.* 2004), not from that of younger generations. We test the hypothesis that those whose daily activities are in settings enabling cross-age interaction are more likely to have cross-age friendships than those whose daily activities do not bring them to such settings (H2). The settings we consider are: paid work, volunteer work, and religious organizations.

The meeting principle is not the only explanation for differences in personal networks (Fischer *et al*. 1983; Mollenhorst *et al.* 2008). A second explanation focuses on *dispositions:* people form relationships on the basis of their preferences, which in turn originate in socialization practices. Though dispositions are phrased in terms of preferences or personal choice, the importance of external constraints may not be ignored. Fischer's (1982) choice- constraint approach emphasizes that people choose to form and maintain friendships within the constraints posed by structural conditions, such as free-available time, financial resources, and geographic proximity. Thus dispositions are not always evident in actual relationship behavior. Applied to cross-age interaction, the disposition principle suggests that those who by learning, experience or internalization of cultural climate are oriented towards age diversity in their personal ties are more likely to have cross-age friendships (H3).

Country level

Next to individual conditions for cross-age interactions, we consider societal forces shaping opportunities and preferences for cross-age interactions. National policies geared towards services, financial entitlements, and amenities for specific age groups are an example. Such policies not only serve to distance specific age groups (e.g., placing older adults in residential facilities; separating children and young adults into schools), but might also shape how age groups perceive one another. Binstock (1983) introduced the term "compassionate ageism" to describe how policies reflect or encourage the view that specific age groups, such as the young and the old, have needs that deserve being cared for. This sense of benevolence might make people feel more sympathetic and open towards people differing in age. In a later publication, Binstock (2010) referred to "double-edged" compassionate ageism. This term conveys that economically assisting older adults is apparently generous, but also reinforces negative stereotypes of frailty, poverty and dependency (for a similar argument, see Townsend 2006; Walker 2000).

The portrayal of age groups in mass media or advertising is a second example of the ways in which their visibility and appeal are structured at the societal level. Lepianka (2015) uses the term "othering" to describe media practices of constructing images of the young and the old. Studies from a wide range of countries reveal that older people and especially older women and the very old are under-represented in television series and commercials (Kessler *et al*. 2004; Roy *et al*. 1997). Unlike some critics of advertising who suggest that older people are most often depicted negatively (Abrams *et al*. 2003), a cross-national review of the portrayal of older adults in magazine and television advertisements concluded that older adults are depicted relatively favourably (Zhang *et al.* 2006), possibly reflecting conscious efforts on the part of marketers to target older consumers.

Legislation defining the rights and duties of members of different age groups is a third example of the macro-level organization of age relations. Age discrimination laws, which reflect dominant values about "proper" age relations, are most relevant to the issue at hand. It is important to note that there is no simple answer to the question of whether legislation determines the lived reality of age relations or whether it is a reaction to pre-existing views on the equal treatment of different age groups. Generally speaking, it is safe to posit that cross-age interactions are more likely in a country that promotes equal treatment of all ages than in a society that does not encourage that kind of equality (cf. Rippon *et al*. 2015). Non-discrimination by age became legally enforceable in the European Union in 2006 (Lahey 2010). Some member states have only recently implemented the strand of the Framework Directive prohibiting age discrimination, whilst others have longstanding age discrimination laws (Ius Laboris, 2010). Although similar in many ways, a diverse set of these laws exists across the EU. Each country has unique prohibitions and specific exemptions regarding discrimination, and enforcement mechanisms differ widely (Ius Laboris 2010).

This brief overview highlights the complexity of delineating country-level influences on cross-age interactions. Mixed effects are plausible, and as yet, there are few clues as to how to unravel them. The paucity of cross-national comparative data (e.g. on portrayals of youth and advanced age in mass media; of age-discrimination legislation and practice) is an additional problem. For that reason, we decided to focus on the Active Ageing Index. Given its focus on the outcomes of and capacities for participation of older adults in society (Zaidi *et al*. 2013), the AAI provides an accumulated appraisal of the ways in which policies, laws, mass media depictions, and social norms produce and reflect age barriers. The AAI is a tool that acknowledges that individuals live in a world of multiple jurisdictions and are affected by multiple policies at once (cf. Campbell 2012). The AAI was developed in the context of the 2010 European Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity.[2] The aim was to move beyond a productivist perspective that prioritizes the extension of working life (cf. Foster *et al*. 2015), and to include assessments of older adults contributions to society (e.g., volunteering and caregiving) and enabling conditions for active ageing (e.g., educational attainment, remaining life expectancy). We argue that high-

[2] http://ec.europa.eu/archives/ey2012/ (24/1/2016)

AAI countries, given their high proportions of visible and productive older adults, have created macro-level *structural conditions* that promote cross-age interaction. We test the hypothesis that a higher value on the Active Ageing Index increases the likelihood that people have cross-age friendships (H4).

Previously, we argued that dispositions towards cross-age interaction are shaped through experiences in private life. Here, we posit that such dispositions are also created and recreated in the larger context of society. We draw attention to growing up in or living in a *cultural climate* that makes people more open to forming and maintaining relationships with people who belong to different social categories such as class, ethnicity, gender, religion and age. More specifically, we focus on levels of trust, defined as "the belief that people will not deliberately or knowingly do us harm, if they can avoid it, and will look after our interests, if this is possible" (Delhey et al. 2005: 311). We hypothesize that higher levels of trust at the societal level increase the likelihood that people have cross-age friendships (H5).

Controls

Most research shows that women have larger and more diversely composed networks than men (Antonucci 2001), but patterns are not always clear-cut. Gender differences in personal networks vary by age, life stage, and marital history (e.g., Ajrouch *et al*. 2005; Fischer et al. 1983; Van Tilburg 1995). That is why we introduce controls for gender, age, and partner status in the analyses. We also control for self-reported health given the role possibly played by selection: health status can contribute to the creation or dissolution of specific network ties or to the formation of networks with particular features (Smith et al. 2008). Finally, we control for Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita as a measure of wealth and economic development of a country. GDP per capita is positively linked with both trust at the national level (Delhey *et al* 2005) and the Active Ageing Index (UNECE/ European Commission 2015).

METHOD

Data

To answer our research question, we make use of the fourth round of the ESS, which was collected in 2008-2009 in 31 countries, of which 25 are EU countries (Italy, Malta and Luxembourg do not participate in the ESS). Our analyses are based on these 25 EU countries. We enrich the individual-level data with two country indicators that provide a measure of conditions structuring cross-age interactions: the Active Ageing Index and trust in a country. We restricted the analyses to two age groups. The "young" are respondents aged 18 to 30 (N=8633); the "old" are respondents aged 70 to 90 (N=6483).

Measures

The number of *cross-age friendships* was measured by asking "About how many friends, other than members of your family, do you have who are [younger than 30/aged over 70]?". Answer categories were "none" (1), "one" (2), "2-5" (3) "6-9" (4) and "10 or more" (5). The variable was dichotomized, assigning respondents the value one when they had two or more cross-age friendships.

We had a set of dummy variables representing individual-level settings enabling cross-age interaction. The first was whether the younger [older] adult had any *household member* aged 70 and older [aged 18 to 30] (1=yes). Given that sustained contact, emotional complexity and perspective-taking are particularly likely to produce a better understanding of people of different ages, we included whether the younger adult [the older adult] had any *family member* over 70 [any children or grandchildren] with whom they were able to discuss at least "a few personal issues such as feelings, beliefs or experiences" (1=yes). Attendance of *religious services* was measured by asking: "Apart from special occasions such as weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services nowadays?". We created a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent attended religious services at least monthly (=1) or not. The question "In the last month have you done any paid or voluntary work? And if yes: Is that paid work only, voluntary work only or both?" was used to create a dummy variable indicating whether respondents had done *paid work, voluntary work*, or both in the last month (1=yes). A drawback of the previous measure is that it provides no indication of the age composition of the *work settings*. For that reasons we added a dummy variable assessing whether respondents spent some, most or (almost) all of that time working with colleagues or volunteers in their 20s [or aged over 70], (1=yes).

To assess whether respondents were oriented towards age diversity in their networks, we included a five-item scale on *views towards other age groups*. The items are: "Most people view those in their 20s [over 70] …" (a) "as friendly", (b) "as competent", (c) "as having high moral standards", (d) "with respect", and (e) "with admiration". The internal reliability of the views of the young towards the old is good (Cronbach's Alpha=0.684) and the internal reliability of the views of the old towards the young is very high (Cronbach's Alpha= 0.806). Scores range from 0 to 4, with higher scores indicating more positive views of the other age group.

We used two indicators reflecting societal forces structuring cross-age interactions. The 2010 values for the overall *AAI* were taken from the publicly available AAI website.[3] These values are based on surveys (e.g., EU Labour Force Survey, European Quality of Life Survey, EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions) carried out in or close to 2008, the year during which wave 4 of the ESS was fielded. The AAI is expressed in percentage terms, with values ranging from 0

[3] http://www1.unece.org/stat/platform/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=76287845 (5/1/2016)

(minimum goalpost) to 100 (maximum goalpost). Note that upper goalpost of 100 should not be equated with the optimum, as it represents utopian circumstances of fullest possible active ageing (Zaidi *et al*. 2013). The overall mean AAI is 32.3 for the 25 countries included in this study (see Table 1), ranging from 26.3 in Hungary to 42.6 in Sweden. The AAI was centered on its mean to allow a meaningful model interpretation. The measure for *trust* was taken from the 2011-2012 European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS). The question was "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?". Respondents answered on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 referring to "You can't be too careful" and 10 to "Most people can be trusted". The variable was aggregated to the country level. Across countries, the overall mean level of trust is 5.02 (see Table 1), with trust levels ranging from 1.84 in Cyprus to 7.17 in Finland.[4]

We used four control variables for respondents' *gender* (1=female), *age* (in years), *partner status* (1=lives with a partner), and *health status*, respectively. Health status was measured by asking "How is your health in general? Would you say it is…". Answer categories ranged from "very good" (1) to "very bad" (5). We reverse coded the responses so higher scores indicate better health. To control for the economic prosperity of a country, we included the *GDP per capita* of 2008 in our analyses. The GDP we used is measured in purchasing power parities and is expressed relatively to the average GDP in the EU-28 countries. Countries where the GDP per capita was lower than the average of the EU-28 countries received values lower than 100, while countries higher than the country average received values higher than 100. We centered the measure on zero by subtracting 100 from the country GDP per capita to allow a meaningful model interpretation. As shown in Table 1, the lowest GDP per capita is found in Bulgaria (-56) and the highest in the Netherlands (+39).

Analytical strategy

We carried out separate analyses for the two age groups under consideration. Given that we combine macro-level and macro-level information from 25 different countries, we used multilevel logistic regression models to estimate the likelihood of having two or more cross-age friends. The baseline model is an empty model without predictors in order to assess the between level variance and within level variance. In the next step, we included all individual level predictors. Thereafter, we separately added the country indicators to the model. Results are

[4] The low level of trust in Cyprus has been reported elsewhere, see e.g., http://www.intrac.org/data/files/resources/739/Building-Trust-civil-society-trade-and-cooperation-event-report.pdf (22/1/2016). The low level of trust is attributed to the division of the island, a lack of good governance and corruption.

reported in Odds Ratio's (OR, Exponentiated coefficients). An OR with a value above one expresses a positive association, an OR below one a negative association.

RESULTS

Across all countries, the young are less likely than are the old to report having two or more cross-age friends, 18% and 31% respectively. The proportion of young adults reporting cross-age friendships is lowest in Lithuania (4%) and highest in Ireland (36%) (see Table 2). The proportion of older adults reporting cross-age friendships is lowest in Lithuania (6%) and highest in Finland (51%).

Individual-level determinants of cross-age friendships

We report the individual-level analysis predicting at least two cross-age friendships in Table 3. We show that the young have a higher probability of reporting at least two friendships with people over 70 when their daily activities take place in settings providing opportunities for cross-age interaction. More specifically, the young who live in a household with someone over the age of 70, have a close relationship with a family member over the age of 70, attend religious services, and/or work with older persons all have significantly higher odds of reporting cross-age friendships than those who are do not participate in those settings. Note, however, that having performed paid and/or volunteer work in the past month is not associated with a higher likelihood of having cross-age friends. The odds of having more than two cross-age friendships are a factor 1.4 higher for the young who have an older household member, and a factor 1.7 higher for the young who discuss personal issues with a family member above age 70. The odds of having more than two cross-age friendships are a factor 1.7 higher for the young who attend religious services and a factor 2.7 higher for those who worked together with people in their 70s. Table 3 also shows that the young have a higher probability of reporting at least two friendships with people over 70 the more positive their views are of older adults. The odds of having more than two cross-age friendships increase by a factor 1.3 with each point increase on the scale assessing how positive the young feel towards the old.

Among the older respondents, the individual-level determinants of having cross-age friends are quite similar to those for the young. Older respondents living with a person under the age of 30 and those who attend religious services at least monthly have a factor 1.4 higher odds of reporting at least two friends under 30. Having worked with colleagues or volunteers under the age of 30 increases the likelihood of reporting cross-age friendships with a factor of 2.0. Additionally, having done (volunteer) work is associated with a factor 1.4 higher odds of having cross-age friendships. More positive views of the young are again significantly and positively

associated with having cross-age friendships. Note, however, that having a (grand)child with whom older respondents discuss personal issues is not significantly related to reporting cross-age friendships. Taken together, the findings for both the young and old confirm Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3.

Regarding the individual-level control variables, we find the following. Among the young, age is not associated with cross-age friendships. Young women are less likely to have cross-age friends (the odds are a factor 0.8 lower). The young in better health are also less likely to have friends over the age of 70 (the odds are 0.9 lower with every point increase on the health measure). The young who live with a partner are more likely to have cross-age friendships (their odds are a factor 1.2 higher). Among the old, a higher age is associated with a lower likelihood of having cross-age friendships (with every additional year, the odds decrease a factor 0.03), whereas better health is associated with a higher likelihood of having cross-age friendships (the odds are 1.2 higher with every point increase on the health measure). As was the case among the young, older women have lower odds of having cross-age friendships than older men (a factor 0.8 lower), and living with a partner in late life contributes to having friends below the age of 30 (the odds are a factor 1.2 higher).

Country-level determinants of cross-age friendships

The intra-class correlations in Tables 3 and 4 suggests that about 6-7% of the variance in cross-age friendships is attributable to country differences. Unfortunately, we are unable to account for any of this variance once individual-level determinants are controlled for (see Table 4). None of the country indicators is significantly associated with having cross-age friendships, neither among the young, nor among the old. We expected to find higher likelihoods of cross-age friendships in countries with structural and cultural conditions that presumably enable cross-age interaction. Though the coefficients point in the right direction – with higher active ageing and higher trust associated with higher likelihoods of cross-age friendships – these associations are not significant. Thus, we find no support for hypothesis 4.

Note that if the AAI is entered into the analysis *without* considering the individual-level determinants, results show that the old in high AAI-countries are more likely to have friends under the age of 30. Similarly, if GDP per capita is entered into the analysis *without* considering the individual-level determinants, results show that older adults in more prosperous countries are more likely to have friends under the age of 30. Hypothesis 5 can also not be supported: Trust at the country-level trust shows no association with the likelihood that young and old report cross-age friendships with or without considering the individual-level determinants.

CONCLUSION

The ties people have with others, and the networks of which they are part, play a key role in creating and maintaining cohesive societies. Sustained contacts between people belonging to different social categories (e.g., class, religion, gender, age, ethnicity, race, and educational attainment) provide opportunities to move beyond "us versus them" distinctions. Starting from the premise that intergroup contact can effectively reduce prejudice, under the right circumstances (Pettigrew 1998; Pettigrew *et al*. 2006), we focused on conditions enabling friendships between people who strongly differ in age to gain an understanding of how intergenerational solidarity might be developed. Little research has been devoted to cross-age ties outside the family, which is surprising given the abundant literature on ageism (see e.g., Palmore 2015).

Our study reveals that young adults with friends over the age of 70, and older adults with friends under the age of 30 are minority groups within their respective age categories: 18% of the young and 31% of the old in the 25 European countries under consideration report two or more cross-age friendships. This finding attests to the age segregation in our societies (Hagestad *et al*. 2005): close ties outside the family between young and old are relatively infrequent. The lower prevalence of cross-age friendships among the young is consistent with findings from the United States showing that young adults are more likely to live in age-homogenous "ghettos" than are the old (Smith et al. 2014), a tendency that has increased in recent years. The growing isolation of the young from older age groups outside of the family is attributed to the growing importance of delayed life course transitions, which in turn, is linked with increasing economic precariousness.

Our concern was to identify conditions that enable the formation and maintenance of cross-age friendships. In accordance with the "meeting principle", our findings show that the young and the old who operate in settings where there are opportunities for meaningful interactions with people belonging to a different age group are more likely to have cross-age friendships. Examples of such settings are age-integrated work places (paid jobs and volunteer positions) and religious communities. Interestingly, volunteer and paid work per se, do not appear to offer opportunities for older adults to meet and interact with young people. Rather, actually interacting with colleagues from different age groups is what counts. Work provides a context for developing cross-age friendships at work when there are positive social interactions with fellow workers and volunteers who strongly differ in age. .

Results also show, as predicted, that close ties with family members who strongly differ in age (co-residential arrangements or confidant relationships) provide opportunities to meet, interact and create cross-age friendships. Note, however, that among the old, a close relationship with a child or grandchild is not associated with a greater likelihood of reporting cross-age friendships. Failing to find the predicted association might be attributable to imprecision in the measure of close family ties: contacts with children and grandchildren are bunched together. It is conceivable that close contacts with grandchildren are more crucial to cross-age interactions than are close contacts with children. Unfortunately, the measure does not allow us to make this

distinction. Another reason for not finding the predicted association is overlap in the categories of "household member under the age of 30" and "discusses personal issues with a child or grandchild". Collinearity might underlie the failure to find an independent effect of having a close relationship with a child or grandchild once household composition is taken into account.

In accordance with the "disposition principle", our findings show that people with more favourable attitudes towards others who are much younger or older than they are themselves are more likely to have cross-age friendships. Of course causality is a problem here: it could run in either direction. We cannot unravel whether the favourable attitudes make people more amenable to cross-age friendships or whether having cross-age friendships results in more positive views of people who strongly differ in age.

The differences between the 25 European countries in the likelihood that younger and older adults report cross-age friendships are rather small. Our findings show that Individual-level circumstances are more strongly linked with the likelihood of reporting cross-age friendships than are country-level differences. Neither the AAI, our indicator of macro-structural conditions, nor trust, our indictor of cultural climate, show significant associations with the likelihood of having cross-age friendships. Apparently, conditions that bring generations together are at the local level, underscoring the importance of decentralized initiatives aimed at increased contact and co-operation across age groups. The importance of local initiatives also emerged in a 2009 Eurobarometer study on intergenerational solidarity.[5] According to this study, the majority view in Member States is that there are insufficient opportunities for older and younger people to meet, and work together, via associations and community initiatives. Rather than turn to national governments, it appears crucial to focus on community efforts to improve greater understanding between young and old.

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[5] ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=5693&langId=en (14/1/2016)

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics: Country indicators.

Country	Active Ageing Index	GDP per capita in purchasing power parities, (centered on 100)	Aggregated trust, EQLS
Austria	31.3	24	5.20
Belgium	32.4	14	5.47
Bulgaria	26.9	*-56*	4.52
Croatia	28.3	-37	4.59
Cyprus	32.4	5	*1.84*
Czech Republic	31.0	-19	4.01
Denmark	38.8	23	7.01
Estonia	33.4	-32	4.79
Finland	36.9	20	**7.17**
France	33.0	6	5.32
Germany	34.3	16	5.01
Greece	28.7	-6	4.28
Hungary	*26.3*	-37	4.33
Ireland	35.8	32	5.54
Latvia	32.2	-40	4.08
Lithuania	30.1	-37	4.54
Netherlands	38.6	**39**	6.23
Poland	27.0	-46	4.74
Portugal	32.3	-21	4.20
Romania	29.4	-52	4.95
Slovakia	26.8	-28	4.13
Slovenia	30.0	-11	5.25
Spain	30.4	2	5.41
Sweden	**42.6**	26	6.41
United Kingdom	38.0	14	5.50
All	32.3	EU-28: 100 (0)	5.02

Note: by column: lowest country value in *italic*, highest country value in **bold**.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics: Prevalence of having more than two cross-age friendships per country.

	≥ 2 cross-age friends	
Country	Age 18-30 (N = 8633) %	Age 70-90 (N = 6483) %
Austria	12.0	22.6
Belgium	20.5	29.7
Bulgaria	14.1	24.1
Croatia	13.5	38.6
Cyprus	9.4	31.0
Czech Republic	16.7	30.2
Denmark	13.4	26.9
Estonia	15.7	32.5
Finland	20.8	**50.5**
France	19.5	29.7
Germany	29.1	39.8
Greece	13.8	28.2
Hungary	14.1	16.2
Ireland	**35.9**	43.7
Latvia	16.8	22.0
Lithuania	*4.3*	*6.0*
Netherlands	8.8	18.4
Poland	16.3	35.0
Portugal	34.4	40.5
Romania	20.2	30.7
Slovakia	17.6	29.6
Slovenia	21.0	35.2
Spain	18.8	22.8
Sweden	18.6	47.2
United Kingdom	27.9	38.6
All	18.2	31.1

Note: by column: lowest country value in *italic*, highest country value in **bold**.

Table 3. Multilevel logistic regression analysis predicting having at least two cross-age friendships. Micro-level predictors only. 25 countries.

	≥ 2 cross-age friendships Age 18-30 (N= 8633)			≥ 2 cross-age friendships Age ≥ 70 (N=6483)		
	Baseline model	Micro-level predictors		Baseline model	Micro-level predictors	
	OR	OR	95% CI	OR	OR	95% CI
Settings						
Has household member >70 [<30]		1.373*	[1.050,1.797]		1.396*	[1.030,1.892]
Discusses personal issues with family member >70 [with (grand)child]		1.674***	[1.479,1.895]		1.097	[0.974,1.236]
At least monthly religious attendance		1.654***	[1.425,1.919]		1.372***	[1.211,1.553]
Did paid or volunteer work past month		1.063	[0.931,1.215]		1.404**	[1.144,1.724]
Worked with colleagues or volunteers in their 70s [20s]		2.683***	[2.237,3.219]		2.028***	[1.481,2.778]
Disposition						
Positive views of old [young]		1.303***	[1.186,1.431]		1.243***	[1.153,1.340]
Controls						
Gender (female=1)		0.805***	[0.716,0.905]		0.768***	[0.679,0.868]
Age		1.002	[0.985,1.020]		0.967***	[0.956,0.978]
Lives with partner		1.229**	[1.074,1.407]		1.199**	[1.058,1.360]
Health status		0.918*	[0.848,0.993]		1.291***	[1.209,1.380]
Between level var. (σ_u^2)	0.238	0.246		0.250	0.254	
Within level var. (σ_e^2)	3.290	3.289		3.291	3.294	
Intra- class correlation	0.0675	0.0696		0.0706	0.0716	

Table 4. Multilevel logistic regression analysis predicting having at least two cross-age friendships. Macro-level predictors only. 25 countries.

	≥ 2 cross-age friendships Age 18-30 (N= 8633)					≥ 2 cross-age friendships Age ≥ 70 (N=6483)				
	OR	95% CI	Between level var. (σ_u^2)	Within level var. (σ_e^2)	Intra- class correlation	OR	95% CI	Between level var. (σ_u^2)	Within level var. (σ_e^2)	Intra- class correlation
Macro, controlling for individual level										
Active Ageing Index (centered)	1.016	[0.989,1.043]	0.230	3.293	0.0654	1.019	[0.992,1.046]	0.232	3.282	0.0661
Aggregated trust, EQLS	1.101	[0.909,1.332]	0.235	3.286	0.0668	1.089	[0.897,1.322]	0.245	3.286	0.0694
Control										
GDP per capita in purchasing power parities, 2008 (centered on 100)	1.003	[0.996,1.010]	0.238	3.295	0.0674	1.002	[0.995,1.009]	0.252	3.297	0.0710

Note: Exponentiated coefficients (Odds ratio's); 95% confidence intervals in brackets; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$