

## Chapter I: Intergenerational Relationships in the Process of Civilization

This chapter takes up a dimension of the subject that has often been neglected in generation research and particularly in the study of intergenerational relationships. It focusses on analysis and description of comparatively *long-term* transmission processes, both on the level of general social development and on that of everyday practice.

Though discussions of generations in historical terms are available (Marías, 1970; Spitzer, 1973; Jaeger, 1977, and others) and several intercultural comparisons have been made (Mead, 1970; Wieder & Zimmermann, 1974), many of these studies are devoted to more or less limited fields of inquiry, spotlighting as it were certain details of particular historic periods and special cultural circumstances. Most of them do not attempt systematic analysis from a broader perspective. And like the social sciences in general, discussion of generational problems is characterized by this predominant trend of a — usually empiricist — analysis of current developments. “Very little effort seems to be given any more ... to tracing the idiosyncracies of present-day societies with the aid of broad historical or ethnological knowledge and comparisons with other developmental stages of society, in order at last to get a theoretical grasp of this development itself” (Elias, 1983, 31). An effort of this kind, however, would imply that more far-reaching perspectives and observations made over longer historical time spans must be taken into account, focussing on the transformation of society, changes in social character (Riesman, 1958), and changes in human relationships. It would also mean incorporating the results of many different scientific disciplines, including the subdisciplines.

Why does an analysis and description of comparatively long-term transmission processes appear so important to us? It is not only the social contingency of current intergenerational relationships, their state of becoming, that must be elucidated by way of example and comparison and thus rendered amenable to systematic analysis. Rather, the fundamental dependency of one human being on the next has to be taken account of: the transformation of meaning for each individual life actually lived. Generation research is currently dominated by analysis of generational relations in an attempt to explain social and historic change. This attempt is legitimated by numerous theoretical constructs on the problem of generations, by concepts seeking to explain historical rhythms like that of Mentre, Rümelin, von Ranke, etc. as well as by the historically more recent and still very useful construct advanced by Mannheim in 1928. Inquiries into the vehicle of social transformation, on the role of generations, etc. are the main focus of this work. Yet the converse is rarely inquired, namely, what is the significance of continuity and dependency in human relationships, and of the changes that take place in them in the course of social developments — a question that is of equal explanatory value in analyzing the relationships among generations.

In generational succession this dependency becomes apparent not only with respect to the transmission of knowledge and the passing down of power and property — as investigated, for example, by Held in this chapter — but is manifested itself particularly in what people consider meaningful and fulfilling. “That the significance of everything a human being does, lies in what it means to others, and not only to those living now but to the yet unborn, thus making him dependent on the

continuance of human society through the generations, certainly belongs to the fundamental dependencies of human beings on one another" — this is how Elias describes this dependency (1982b, 54). Individual life planning is significant only when it goes beyond one's own life and becomes meaningful for others, above all for future generations. Hence, the structuring of individual lives must be seen as contingent on the continuity of social development, predestined by the traditions of the past and shaped by hope in the future.

This perspective leads particularly to a consideration of the everyday life of past periods. Not only must human relationships and their dependency on historic change be investigated, but also changing attitudes to life and death and to the different phases and cycles of life, that is life planning and living as oriented to the lives of future generations. It moreover means studying past notions of careers or life courses and their phases, as well as the attitudes such notions imply concerning the relationships between different age groups. The contribution by Kondratowitz is devoted to these questions, and clearly indicates that the problem of generations is necessarily involved with the problem of life courses.

If here generational relationships are seen in connection with the development of Western civilization, we also look at the topic of continuity from another point of view. In contrast to the process of cultural development, this point of view stresses continuity as an ongoing process of "humanization of peoples" (Humboldt) or, as Max Weber called it, a universal process which through its formative tendencies "affects cultural aspiration and behaviour." Weber basically saw this process as a progressive intellectualization of the way people cope with existence. Elias, whose work may be considered the most significant in the field, emphasizes another aspect as the main characteristic of the civilization process — an increasing restraint of human affects and a raising of the embarrassment plateau (Elias, 1977).

Elias describes the process of civilization as a continual increase of external controls over all direct emotional and physical expressions, and an internalization of these controls by the individual. This process is linear and takes place in two phases. The first involves the formation and ritualization of norms, manifested, for example, in a widening dissemination of "etiquette literature," in changing educational concepts, etc. The second phase brings an internalization of norms via the socialization process. Self-control becomes the predominant character trait; external sanctions are replaced by such psychological reactions as shame, embarrassment, guilt feelings, etc. This is also the period in which the psychological sciences, including psychopathology, develop. According to Elias, this process filters through the class strata from top to bottom, beginning in the upper class and gradually extending down to the lower. A superb description of this processual aspect of the civilization process may be found in the work of Philippe Ariès (1975; 1980). He shows how the formation and institutionalization of the various age groups begins in the aristocratic, upper stratum while the lower social strata retain residues of older — and from the point of view of the history of civilization, outmoded — ideas.

In the context of our topic, however, another more comprehensive question initially arises, that as to the relationship of generations to historic social structures and to social evolution. What function can be attributed to generations and relationships among generations in the process of civilization, and for the maintenance of the civilized behavior of a society, and what forms did intergenerational relation-

ships take on during the various phases of this development? The contributors to this chapter have approached this question from the perspective of diverse scientific disciplines. By the way, the point of view outlined in this preface merely represents a programmatic sketch for an analysis of the generation problem which the individual contributions to this chapter can approach only tentatively. Tentatively, because each contribution necessarily analyzes the topic from the perspective of a single discipline and can take broader points of view into account only sporadically.

Hans Peter Dreitzel, in his introductory contribution, points out one basic characteristic of current intergenerational relationships. Increasingly rapid technological and social change produce an increasing differentiation in the realms of experience (Schütz) of the different age groups and thus a growing distance between them, and concomitantly lead to ongoing conflicts between the various age and/or generational groups.

Dreitzel develops his thesis with reference to the work of Elias (1970), but opens up a broader perspective in his analysis. Central to Dreitzel's discussion is the present, third phase of the process of civilization, which is characterized by a de-ritualization and de-emotionalization of everyday life. Typically representative of this phase is the person who has a highly flexible social character but must also develop a high degree of stability in order to cope with a multiplicity of differing demands – skills which are certainly contradictory and which face him or her with paradoxical challenges. Another consequence of accelerating technological and social change is that each age group assumes the character of a generation with its own specific historical experiences.

Dreitzel attributes a great significance particularly to youth, the vehicle of civilization in this third phase of the de-ritualization of everyday life. In contrast to the first two phases of civilization, where the development works its way straight through the class strata, it now works through the age groups, from youth through the progressively older groups and finally to the elderly.

By producing new fashions, subcultures and social movements, youth take a stand against the existing value system and against current formalized and ritualized behavior, thus encouraging that growing informality of behavioral standards which characterizes the process of civilization. Accordingly, this process becomes the very issue of ongoing generational conflict – older people are shocked by new, increasingly informal dress, drinking, dancing, or speaking habits, altered sexual behavior, and not lastly by young people's refusal to participate in formalized ceremonies (particularly in the family context – family reunions, etc.). The manner in which this confrontation comes about, that is, through the establishment of new trends, sounds, and styles in the various youth subcultures, is the subject of D. Hebdige's analyses (cf. Hebdige, 1979 and Hebdige, this volume, Chapter IV).

In sum, Dreitzel gives a clear answer to the question as to the function of generational succession in the process of civilization, seeing conflict among the generations as decisive. He considers it – at least in the present phase – to be the driving force behind developments in the direction of increasing informality of everyday life.

Hans-Joachim von Kondratowitz brings us from youth to the elderly. With recourse to "new social history" (cf. Mitterauer & Sieder, 1982) and particularly to

the history of ideas, he attempts to trace the formation and institutionalization of age. In his analysis of various dictionary and encyclopedia articles he inquires into the changing historic significance of the life phase of old age. This inquiry necessarily leads to considering the entire life course, as well as age group (or generation) specific behavior, in a historic context. Kondratowitz reconstructs the way in which mental images and the doctrines of scientific disciplines were perpetuated in reference articles and how these in turn affected social practice.

Point of departure for his analysis is the hypothesis that attitudes toward the elderly have changed, from devotion and respect to an identification of this phase with physical and mental decline. This change has its source in modernization, and parallels a processualization of the social organization of knowledge, which analogous to the process of civilization takes place in three phases: from naturalistic thinking to the evolutionary tradition and finally to what might be called a re-naturalization of thought. Typical of the first two phases is that the division of life into separate stages gives way to the notion of a life curve, which automatically implies a decline towards the end, in old age. Kondratowitz sees the negative attitude to old age as a consequence of this development. Nevertheless, most reference book articles are characterized by what he calls an "unresolved tension" between these two notions, as expressed in the use of certain concepts. The category "life cycle" serves to link the two streams of thought. Kondratowitz also sees this term as indicating a re-naturalization of the scientific view, which is expressed in a tendency to let both positive and negative evaluations of old age stand side by side or, more recently, to see it in primarily positive terms.

In tracing this development, Kondratowitz illustrates very clearly the way in which different age groups were expected to deal with each other in the past and what codes of morals and behavior underlay changing conceptions of old age. Doctrines adapted to each phase of social development fed back into social practice, being transformed into rules and orientation patterns for everyday behavior.

Thomas Held looks at the topic from the point of view of social history. Based on an example — co-residence in northwest European households during the pre-industrial age — he elucidates the structure of intergenerational relationships and attempts to describe their function in the process of social transformation.

During the period analyzed by Held, generational coexistence within the family also included non-family members. Members of households, whether young or old, were frequently not relatives, for instance those young adults who as servants or maids were exchanged among different households. Held emphasizes that "service" should not be seen so much as an occupation per se, but as a specific phase in the life cycle which generally preceded the establishment of a household of the servant's own. The relations among generations in these families were characterized by common housekeeping; power over the household in the sense of authority and possession was embodied by the householder who as a rule was a member of the middle generation.

Held points out that the problem of the dependent elderly was much less pressing than is generally assumed. Thus he sheds doubt on the myth of the "family of bygone days" in which dependent elderly people were ostensibly well treated and cared for.

Finally, Held discusses the question of household authority and the transmission

of social values. Though co-residence implied generational transfer, that is the transmission of authority, property, and social values, generational power problems, arising from the possession of social or political power, were themselves determined by the social structure. They were overlaid with feudal and semi-feudal dependencies. When individuals were incorporated as citizens and legal persons in the modern, bourgeois state, authority shifted to the extrafamilial realm. With this development the significance of familial generational succession for the transfer of social values declined, shifting more and more into the extrafamilial realm, that is, with the establishment of national education.

Rainer Mackensen traces the constants in long-term developments from the demographic perspective. Beginning with a definition of the terms "generation," "age group," and "cohort" and their relevance in the demographic context, Mackensen then asks what influence the population development which accompanied modernization has had on intergenerational relationships. The demographic perspective outlined by Mackensen represents an invaluable precondition for understanding present-day forms of familial coexistence. Some of these forms are treated in the subsequent chapters, that is, under the motto of "years gained" (Imhof, 1981) and that of the "empty nest" (Lehr, this volume), to name only two.

Particularly in view of the fact that demographic transition in other societies (developing countries) takes place at a different rate than in Western industrialized societies, the demographic perspective will certainly be deserving of increased attention in future research.