

CHAPTER 17

Cross-Cultural Perspective on Attitudes toward Family Responsibility and Well-Being in Later Years

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we used cross-national surveys from Japan and the United States to look at the perceptions of responsibility of children toward elderly parents, desirable ways of living in old age, and well-being in later years. By comparing Japan and the United States, we want to contribute to the analysis of the role of culture in mediating between values and age structures (Foner, 1984; Riley, Kahn, & Foner, 1994). The analysis of selected questions from these surveys, referred to as the Generations project,* is used to raise theoretical issues about shared attitudes toward aging and well-being, and the emergence of a trans-cultural sense of self among older people. By comparing age groups and looking at the discrepancies between younger adults' and older persons' perceptions of aging and normative expectations, we hope to throw some light on the discourse of aging in postmodern society. We further want to explore how the family provides a context that protects and isolates, helps and controls older people,

*The Generations project refers to national surveys carried out in Japan and the United States in 1993 under the sponsorship of the International Longevity Center in Tokyo, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and Welfare (Koseisho). A joint report summarizing the key findings, *The Generations Report* (Muller & Silver, 1995), was jointly published by the International Longevity Centers (ILC-US and ILC-Japan).

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creating tensions between emotional caring in the family and social isolation in the larger community, what we describe as paradoxes of attachment. Such an analysis requires that family relations be understood within the larger cultural framework of rights and obligations in each country.

It has been suggested that in postindustrial societies, age boundaries are becoming more flexible and open. Age is no longer a strong social marker (Giddens, 1991). Despite high levels of economic and technological development in Japan and the United States, there are still clear cultural differences in the way selfhood is defined (Lock, 1993; Roland, 1988), and in the way age influences social values (Silver & Muller, 1997). Talking about the self of older persons assumes that they have distinct attitudes and values from those of younger adults. In this chapter, we want to show how age groups are differentially affected by cultural norms and social prescriptions. We suggest that the older person's sense of self and feeling of well-being reflect cultural values as well as being shaped by his or her position of economic marginalization and psychological isolation from younger age groups. Similar structural positions reinforce rigid age boundaries between adults and elderly populations, and are likely to encourage the emergence, across cultures, of common values and attitudes toward aging. By contrasting patterns of age structures in Japan and the United States, and exploring cross-cultural differences and similarities in values, we want to contribute to an understanding of the many, sometimes contradictory, ways in which aging is defined and well-being is experienced.

In our analysis, we first describe normative expectations in the two societies by presenting standardized means and means differences, followed by an analysis of norms across age groups to assess variations in their internalization. In our study, we have conceptualized age groups around the following categories: 18–29 years (younger adults); 30–49 and 50–64 years (middle-aged adults); over 64 years (older persons).^{*} These age groups correspond loosely to the different stages of the life cycle, reflecting roughly similar social and economic situations, but we do not assume that they reflect a linear process of human development. Older people are not a homogeneous group. There are differences due to a variety of economic, demographic, and social factors. However, in this overview chapter, we only focus on analyzing country and age effects, as they shape the perception of responsibility toward elderly parents, attitudes toward aging, and feelings of well-being.

The aforementioned theoretical issues cannot be analyzed unless we also look at the underlying assumptions and ideological premises embedded in doing cross-national survey research. There is a tradition of cross-national survey research on values and national identity (Inglehart, 1990), and there have been numerous criticisms of the concept of national character, especially as it was used in the 1950s and 1960s.[†] Among the criticism, it was suggested that the

^{*}The age distribution ranges from 18 to 92 years. However, there were too few individuals among the oldest-old (85 years and over) to create a distinct category.

[†]For a review and critique of studies of National Character, see, for example, Inkeles (1997) and Johnson (1993).

approach led to unwarranted generalizations about a society and to stereotyping of different cultures. While this has happened, cross-national research does not have to achieve such negative results. We agree with Befu (1986) when he suggests:

It may be impossible to eliminate stereotyping altogether even from scientific discourse. The question is, therefore, how to use stereotypes and how to interpret them when used by others. That Americans believe in free will, for example, does not mean that they will exercise it all the time or that their actions are based exclusively on it. Similarly, the truism that the Japanese are group oriented does not mean that all Japanese are, or that group orientation is the only form of relating Japanese recognized.
(p. 13)

Survey methods have to be used with caution in cross-national research. However, when combined with cultural analysis, they can provide theoretical insights and a framework to compare systematically the interplay between culture and social structure* in ways that would be impossible using only in-depth interviews. A systematic study of the interplay of culture and social structures requires working with large random samples and the use of statistical models. Such analyses, far from creating stereotypes, can help disentangle the impact of country effects from other social factors, such as gender, class, and age, and to compare their interaction.† It is nonetheless essential to rely on multiple sources of information in order to uncover and understand the contradictions between social meaning and individual behavior, internalized ideologies and lived experiences, and symbolic order and social order. This is especially important when studying groups such as older people, who tend to be marginalized, vulnerable, and isolated. The lack of in-depth interviews in the Generations project led us to use available qualitative data and clinical accounts to provide deeper interpretations of our survey findings.

The Generations data reported here were collected through interviews using national random samples of men and women 18 years and older ($N = 1,764$ in Japan and $N = 1,497$ in the United States).‡ The original survey covered large areas of inquiry around values and their transmission in the family as well as a subset of questions about aging. In this chapter, we only use a few questions about family responsibility, desirable ways of living in old age, and general issues of well-being in order to analyze the tension between emotional caring and social isolation, and to understand the different, sometimes contradictory images of aging and well-being.

Doing cross-cultural research requires a constant flow, back and forth, of ideas between cultural frames that guide conceptualization, the creation of a research instrument, and the interpretation of findings. The dangers of projecting one's frame of reference onto the "other" culture is present in all research, including survey research, despite its formal and standardized format that

*Two edited volumes provide an array of excellent articles on key theoretical and methodological issues of doing comparative cross-cultural research of old age (Albert & Cattell, 1994; Maddox & Lawton, 1993).

†In this overview chapter, we are not using regression models. We are only looking at crosstabs.

‡Institutionalized populations were not included in the surveys.

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supposedly enhances "objectivity." It was the unquestioned theoretical assumptions regarding the self that account for Ruth Benedict's (1946) depiction of Japanese society as being based on shame, compared to Western societies being based on guilt. This distinction has been seen by Japanese experts as misleading and simplistic (Doi, 1973; Johnson, 1993). It has been suggested that Benedict's classic work might perhaps be better read "less as an objective report on Japanese society than as a mirror of the author's underlying definition of the 'self,' that is, how a scholar born and educated in the West unconsciously projected her own culturally-constructed notion of the self onto Japanese" (Ikegami, 1995, p. 373).

The Generations survey, using researchers from both societies, * provides an arena to uncover shared theoretical presuppositions and biases. Despite our caution in writing a "neutral" questionnaire, the American emphasis was on issues of individual rights, autonomy, and gender, whereas the Japanese emphasis was on responsibility and mutual obligations of family members. The end product (i.e., the Generations questionnaire) reflects the many compromises and miscommunication that developed during the research process. Despite our efforts to create a questionnaire that was culturally contextualized, we faced obstacles in creating a comparable research instrument. The numerous meanings of similar words and the different ways of using language in formulating and interpreting survey questions made comparing societies often treacherous. † But these difficulties sensitized us to the role of language and the use of categorizations in the way aging is defined. In Japan, the emphasis is on fulfilling dependency needs and social guarantees, whereas in the United States, it is on autonomy and individual rights. These different conceptualizations are reflected in the ways governments define aging. Hashimoto (1996) makes an interesting case when she points out that in Japan, welfare guidelines are referred to as the responsibility of the State, not as the rights of individuals: "The Japanese declaration concerns itself with the notion of guarantee, whereas the American counterpart is geared to the entitlement to independent life" (pp. 38-39).

In this overview chapter, we draw upon a variety of sociological, cultural, and psychological conceptualizations to show general cultural patterns rather than test specific hypotheses. We explore (1) how the self of older persons is culturally organized through prescriptive norms and language categorizations; (2) how the structural position of older persons, namely their distance from the economic pressures to achieve and their social isolation, shapes the self; (3) how the links between methodological assumptions and theoretical questions affect the meaning and scope of the research findings. As an introduction, we wish to present an overall picture of some sociodemographic characteristics of older individuals in order to put the Generations study in a broader social framework.

*Charlotte Muller, an economist, and Catherine Silver, a sociologist, were the members of the American team. The Japanese team was also made up of sociologists and economists.

†The questionnaire was translated from English into Japanese and back into English by two independent Japanese students. Their translations were then compared. Any disagreement was discussed and led to a clarification of the cultural meaning of the questions.

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Sociodemographic Features of Aging in Japan and the United States

Modern industrial societies have experienced drastic demographic and social changes over the years that have led to State intervention in responding to the social and economic needs of elderly populations (Campbell, 1992; Kinsella, 1995). Recent demographic changes in the past decade, such as the sharp increase in the population of the very old (85 years and over), the decrease in birthrates, the increase in longevity of men and women, and the coming of age of the baby-boomer generation, have created new pressures on governments (Cantor, 1983; Maeda, 1983). While the governments in Japan and the United States continue to play key roles in creating programs and policies to address these issues, such as the Golden Plan in Japan, the demographics of a post-industrial society have led to questioning the responsibilities of the State in providing resources and care in the later years (Soldo & Freedman, 1994). Japan and the United States have comparable levels of economic and technological development, but different systems of pensions, retirement plans, health benefits, and forms of governmental intervention at the community level (Campbell, 1992). It is not our intention to discuss any of these features in detail, but merely to give a simplified overview of key issues as a background to the analysis of our data.

What some have called industrialization's "gift of mass longevity"* has created an array of new social challenges for postindustrial nations, but nowhere has the impact of an aging population been more dramatic than in Japan (Kinoshita & Keifer, 1992; Plath, 1980). The "graying" of the Japanese population has been more accelerated than among Western nations, and this pace is expected to continue through the first two decades of the next century. One can observe in Japan, the United States, and many Western countries a gradual shift in the provision of care in the later years, particularly to the disabled elderly, from the government to individual families. This shift toward the responsibility of families has important social implications, especially regarding the expected role of women as caregivers (Bubeck, 1995).† In the United States, aging has become the next frontier of the Women's Movement (Friedan, 1993). In Japan, the government asserts that the responsibility for the welfare of the aged belongs to the household, urging that the elderly can best be cared for in the home, and suggesting that women be the primary source of care (Lock, 1993, pp. 118-119). This position is increasingly becoming a critical issue for women in Japan (White, 1992).

In both Japan and the United States, survey analysis has taken on a key role in shaping and organizing values through the creation of standards of behavior. The Japanese Government provides yearly surveys of values that seem

*Life expectancy in the United States, as of 1990, was 73 years and 79 years for men and women, respectively. In Japan, the life expectancy was 76 years and 83 years for men and women, respectively, the highest life expectancies in the world (Muller, 1996).

†Gender plays a crucial role in caregiving. In this overview chapter, however, the focus is not on the role of gender. Such an analysis will be provided in a subsequent paper.

to play as much a descriptive as a prescriptive role.*) As Lock commented, "Contemporary Japan is a number-cruncher's paradise: the dissemination of national surveys results and commentary is an integral part of the apparatus that promotes the postwar moral and behavioral order" (1993, p. 136). This tendency to use surveys to set moral standards that monitor behavior has influenced the use of social science as an instrument of social control. The use of surveys when studying aging issues is especially problematic, because older persons are vulnerable to labeling, stigmatization, and control, and because the government, under increasing social and economic pressures, is trying to legitimate the shift of caring for older persons, as mentioned earlier. The survey results presented here provide a normative view of attitudes toward aging, rather than being the expression of older individuals' points of view, spoken in their own words. However, we have tried to assess critically these views by comparing different age groups and exploring the different images of aging that they portray. We also relied, as much as possible, on available material from studies that recorded older persons' life stories and/or personal feelings about aging.

GENERAL FRAMEWORK: FAMILY OBLIGATIONS AND THE SELF IN JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES

In this section, we first discuss the links between autonomy and (inter)dependence, caring and isolation, in looking after elderly parents within a general framework of social relations in Japan and the United States. This is followed by an analysis of the Generations data about adult children's perceived responsibility for parents with physical and financial needs, and about lifelong friendships. We propose an analysis of these issues that combines cultural and sociopsychological frameworks.

Contextualizing Family Relations

Familial Contexts. In contrast to the United States, most Japanese elderly live with their children (over 60% compared with 20% or less in the West).† Although Japan (along with South Korea) continues to have the highest rate of three-generation households—Japan's Management and Coordination Agency reports that 79% of young adults live with their parents—the prevalence of three-generation households is expected to decline slowly (Kinoshita & Keifer, 1992). Multigenerational households reduce the financial and social burden of

*Government surveys by the National Character Research Committee for the Study of the Japanese National Character (Nipponjin No Kokuminsei, 1992). Other public surveys investigate all aspects of social life in publications labeled *White Papers*, such as the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1994).

†Although this proportion has steadily dropped, the decrease has only been at a rate of about 1% per year (Koseisho, 1991).

taking care of the elderly. However, in urban settings, dwellings are often overcrowded, with a lack of privacy that can give rise to conflicts, jealousy, and mistreatment of the elderly despite an ideology of respect (Tomita, 1994). At present, the majority of Japanese aged 64 and over prefer to be looked after by their children. In one five-country study, 58% of the older Japanese stated that they would like to live with their children, whereas only 3% of older Americans responded the same way. Should they become physically ill, 95% of Japanese aged 64 and over would like family members to care for them and designate as preferred caregivers almost exclusively wives, daughters-in-law, or daughters (Lock, 1993, p. 121).

The rate of institutionalization is relatively low in Japan and the United States, about 5% in each country. However, the prevalence of extended family households—called the *ie* in Japanese—and the tradition of the oldest male child inheriting the house and the land (primogeniture) in exchange for the care of his elderly parents,* presents a striking contrast with the United States. Studies in the United States have shown that the disabled elderly also reported that they would like to be taken care of by family members as a first choice. But in the United States, 40% of elderly, who are currently living with children, expressed a desire to live alone in the future. Nonetheless, they would prefer to continue to live in close physical proximity to their children (Moody, 1994).†

Household structure has a strong impact on the values placed on the family as a source of economic sharing and psychological caring. In rural societies, the extended family has traditionally provided economic security and social protection to its members against public demands and the intrusion of the State (Banfield, 1958). The isolation of the extended family, its distance, and its hostility toward nonfamilial groups often made the emergence of trust and cooperation difficult (Fukuyama, 1995). In Japan, however, the isolation of the family is not the product of distrust of the Government or lack of cooperation with public institutions; rather, it stems from the complex system of social obligations and the organization of society around the categorization of “inside and outside” (*uchi/soto*), that orders social relations throughout society and provides both protection and isolation to older persons. Familism, as an ethos, also characterizes extended forms of family organization. It is defined by a set of values that link family members together economically and psychologically, making the family the primary center of their emotional attachment and social commitment. Familism is sustained by strong hierarchical systems of power and authority based on age and gender stratification. It can be a source of family cohesiveness, but it can also be an obstacle to change and adaptation, especially among younger generations, who feel stifled by this system of social relations (Hashimoto, 1996; White, 1993). Furthermore, the value of family privacy and the shame of being exposed to public scrutiny constrain the use of outsiders such

*Despite the fact that Japanese law now requires equal distribution among the heirs, the tradition of favoring the oldest son is still widespread.

†Although the United States does not have a system of primogeniture and the importance of the traditional extended family has declined, the emergence of a modified extended family based on social and emotional support rather than physical contiguity is widespread.

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as nurses or family helpers, increasing the isolation of the family, and especially of older persons (Lock, 1993, p. 112). Thus, as far as the elderly are concerned, we must consider that the ideology of familism does not necessarily translate into caring behavior (Nydegger, 1983).

In the West, the emergence of the nuclear bourgeois family during the period of early industrialization introduced new concerns for greater privacy and a view of the family as providing a refuge from the cold and competitive world of the market (Aries, 1962).^{*} The United States is characterized by a multiplicity of family forms. Some writers have argued that the weakening of the traditional family stems from the demise of community life, the loss of paternal authority, a decrease in moral responsibility, combined with a focus on personal needs and individual rights. It is argued that these features of American society have created an emotional vacuum, rather than a sense of intimacy based on bonds of attachment (Bellah, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985), and have helped develop the narcissistic personality of our time (Lasch, 1984). Feminists' critiques have further challenged the security and protection provided by the modern nuclear family to its members. They have pointed out that the modern family, ever more hidden behind the walls of privacy, has become a place of struggle, control, and violence especially directed toward children, women, and the elderly (Fineman & Mykitiuk, 1994). The debate over the decline of the American family does not concern us here; we only wanted to contrast the image of the family as a source of support and stability in Japan to that of vulnerability and deterioration in the United States. Such images influence the ways older persons are defined and treated. In both societies, older persons are socially and emotionally isolated from the broader social structure, but the isolation has a different cultural meaning and is expressed in different social contexts, as we discuss later.

Family Identity and Caring for Elderly Parents. Caring for elderly parents reflects the different levels of resources available in Japan and the United States,[†] as well as deeper psychocultural factors. Family responsibility, particularly the responsibility of adult children toward elderly parents, needs to be understood within the larger framework of social identity. In a previous paper, we analyzed and compared *familial identity*, *work identity*, *social identity*, and *cultural identity* using the Generations data (Silver & Muller, 1997). In the present chapter, we summarize the key components of familial identity as a backdrop to the analysis of caring for elderly parents. Familial identity among Japanese respondents combines concerns for generational linkages, identification with family history, ancestor worship, and a sense of national identity. Thus, Japanese familial identity incorporates historical as well as a national and religious dimensions (Lock, 1993, p. 88). It is located in an ongoing space-time

^{*}This view of the family as a place of protection, renewal, and caring represents an idealized view of a type of family based on traditional/patriarchal principles of age and gender organization (Parsons, 1964).

[†]With a sophisticated set of social services, including a two-tiered pension program and national health insurance, the elderly in Japan are economically less vulnerable than elderly in the United States (Campbell, 1992; Kinoshita & Kiefer, 1992; Takayama, 1992).

mutually reinforcing dynamic that interacts with the social order over time (Bachnik & Quinn, 1994, p. 145).*) In this context, the image of the older person is imbued with respect and honor because it simultaneously symbolizes the past, present, and future of the family line. Furthermore, a rigid age stratification in Japan also strengthens the basis of intergenerational linkages in the family. In the United States, familial identity focuses on generational links, but without reference to historical or national identity. Educational achievement, rather than age, affects the acquisition and transmission of values (Silver & Muller, 1997).

From a psychological point of view, the Japanese familial self is anchored in strong achievement motivations to enhance familial honor and a sense of a "we-self." It is based on the internalization and fulfillment of maternal expectations for achievement as a repayment for her total devotion, combined with a constant fear of failure (Roland, 1988). The focus on achievement—in school and in the workplace—for the sake of the family's name creates constant pressure for high performance in order to avoid self-blame and family dishonor. In such a system, it is not surprising to find ambivalent feelings toward the elderly, who are no longer productive but still have to be honored and respected (Palmore & Maeda, 1985). The sense of familial identity affects the nature of social relations in caring for elderly parents, as we discuss in the next section.

Social Relations and Caring for Elderly Parents. The Japanese view of social relations, based on intricate sets of reciprocal obligations, has been widely discussed in literature on the Japanese character (Doi, 1973; Lock, 1993; Plath, 1980). Unlike the United States, however, it is (inter)dependence, rather than dependence, that characterizes Japanese relationships at all levels of the social system. Hence, there is a reluctance to create embarrassing nonreciprocal relationships, even in the most intimate sphere of the family. The feelings of obligation that tie family members together are not based on general principles and abstract notions of individual rights. They reflect a sense of emotional dependency that is expressed in daily life, through what Japanese call *amae*.

Amae, translated as indulgent dependency, constitutes a combined verbal and nonverbal request for cherishment and security, a passive yearning for support and love in the image of a mother–infant relationship (Johnson, 1993, p. 85).† Dependence in Japan does not have a negative connotation; it is experienced at all ages throughout the life course, not just by infants and the very young. Indeed, it has been argued that unless this need for special, self-indulgent caring were met, the fabric of Japanese society would break apart (Smith, 1983). This passive demandingness among adults, however, often turns into resentment and rage when not fulfilled, as clinical accounts with Japanese patients

*The need for linking the past to daily life can be illustrated in the case of rural Japanese who keep an ongoing communication with dead family members, who continue to give them help and advice (Kristof, 1996).

†Intrapsychically, *amae* is present as "a motive, a drive, or a desire that becomes expressed as a yearning and expectation to be held, fed, bathed, made safe, kept warm, comforted emotionally and given special cherishment." (Johnson, 1993, p. 85)

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reveal (Roland, 1988, pp. 274–310).*) (Inter)dependence, as a principle of social organization in Japan, gives support and legitimacy to older persons' orientation toward greater familial identification, expectation of being cared for, interiority, and social withdrawal. From a Western point of view, we may see such processes as a way to marginalize and infantilize older persons by isolating them from other sources of sociability and well-being. While this may be objectively the case, one would need to understand the inner experience of older persons. The sense of selfhood, based on (inter)dependence, reflects social sharing and active inner involvement. Unlike the concept of dependence, (inter)dependence refers to an active involvement with others, and with oneself, that underscores different social and emotional mechanisms.

In the United States, the psychological meaning of dependency stresses that infants, born in a state of total dependency (symbiosis), have to strive through several stages of individuation toward autonomy and the creation of an "autonomous self" (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975). The maintenance of an autonomous self is seen as a lifelong goal. Seen through gross historical lenses, the autonomous self is the product of enlightenment philosophy and a free market economy in the West. In postindustrial societies, it is further argued, the self is characterized by a sense of emptiness and narcissistic injury (Lasch, 1979). This "empty self," the product of a consumer society and its advertising empire, needs to be constantly filled with consumer products. Thus, the "empty self" supports the dynamics of a market economy and benefits professionals, especially mental health professionals, in their unending attempts to help fill the void that is constantly recreated (Cushman, 1995). Individuals with empty selves are more vulnerable and thus more easily manipulated and controlled.

We would like to suggest that older persons are likely to feel less empty because, being removed from the pressures to achieve and consume in a market economy, they are more willing to rely on their own inner resources and enjoy greater "interiority." If so, we can expect older persons to be more satisfied than younger ones with their present lives, a point to which we shall return later in the analysis. We now illustrate these ideas by looking at the attitudes of adult children toward elderly parents using questions from the Generations survey.

Family Responsibility Seen through the Generations Survey

Family Responsibility for Disabled Parents. The Generations questionnaire asked several normative questions regarding attitudes toward the care of elderly parents. Separate questions were asked about parents with disabilities and parents with financial needs. For each question, three options were presented, reflecting different models of responsibility toward elderly parents.† The

*Takeo Doi, a Japanese psychoanalyst, goes as far as talking about an instinctual need for dependence that shapes the self, together with sexual and aggressive drives.

†In order to minimize the cultural difference in the propensity to agree with normative statements, we have standardized the means in the statistical tables. The sum of the Japanese means was set equal to the sum of the American means, to adjust for the differences between the two societies in the tendency for respondents to agree with an interviewer's statement.

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Table 17-1. Norms of Responsibility toward Elderly Parents with Physical or Mental Disability

Type of responsibility	American means (N = 1,497)	Japanese means* (N = 1,764)	Means difference Japan-United States
Children have own responsibilities, no need to look after parents	0.02	0.06	0.04**
Children should look after parents as long as burden not too great	0.43	0.68	0.25**
Children should look after parents even if they have to make sacrifices	0.53	0.23	-0.30**
Average	0.32	0.32	0.0

*Japanese means adjusted so that sum of Japanese means equals sum of American means. Based on U.S. Question No. 19 <1-3>, Japanese Question No. 14.
 Level of significance: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

results show that both American and Japanese respondents were reluctant to disavow all responsibility for disabled aging parents, with low mean responses of .06 (Japan) and .02 (United States). Thus, Japanese respondents are less likely to put their personal needs first.

What is striking in Table 17-1 is the significant difference in the answers to the other two options. In one option, "Children should look after their disabled parents even if it means making sacrifices," Japanese have a mean of .23 compared to American respondents, with a mean of .53, and a highly significant mean difference of -0.30. The Japanese are less likely to support the abstract idea of sacrifice. The third option, "Children should look after their parents as long as the burden does not become too great," was more acceptable to the Japanese than to American respondents: Japanese show a mean of .68 compared to .43 for the American respondents, with a mean difference of 0.25. The Japanese are more likely to support the idea of mutuality. The norms of family responsibility are clearly different in the two countries.

In order to give meaning to these differences, we need to expand on our previous discussion of social relations. In Japanese society, norms regarding social and familial obligations are complex, shaped by the status of the person to whom one feels obligated. There are several words with many nuances that refer to social obligations (Benedict, 1946, p. 116). One meaning of "obligation" (what is called the *on*) is based on the Confucian moral precept commanding filial piety. It supposes a great emotional debt and indebtedness. Such sense of obligation creates an imbalance that needs to be corrected: "In order to minimize the potential indebtedness of the "on,"* Japanese strive to reduce obligations by rebalancing indebtedness through returning the "on" or reducing the obligatedness through a calibrated payoff of prior indebtedness" (Johnson, 1993, p. 81).

*The *on*, the term used to refer to filial obligations, is to be contrasted with *giri*, a Japanese term that refers to obligations outside the family that require some form of equalization. The *giri* relationships "constitute a potential license for the imposition of demands for reciprocity" (Lebra, 1976, p. 93).

The statistical results described show a preference in Japan for a normative situation in which the relationships between the children and the elderly parents are not overly one-sided, stressing instead a sense of "we-self." Thus, our findings should be understood within the framework of the dynamics of mutuality and reciprocity that characterize norms of family life in Japan.

American respondents, on average, were more likely to say that they would make sacrifices to help elderly parents. The structure of American families, no longer based on rigid age and gender stratification, supports an ideology of equality and individualism that often conflicts with the needs of the family as a whole (Bellah et al., 1985). In the United States, family life is organized around abstract principles and moral precepts rather than concrete rules of behavior, an observation made more than a century ago by Alexis de Tocqueville in his American tour (1840/1969). Thus, American respondents' answers to questions about the care of elderly parents have to be understood within a framework of moral principles and abstract concepts of responsibility. Engaging in some form of "bargaining" around how much care to give elderly parents is experienced as less moral than supporting the abstract idea of "sacrifice." We would like to suggest that the recourse to abstract thinking denotes the existence of coping mechanisms (intellectualization and idealization as defenses), used to distance oneself from painful social realities in a youth-oriented culture such as the United States when aging and the fear of death stay hidden and repressed (Silver, 1992).

When the Generations questionnaire was created, the Japanese and United States teams tried to contextualize the questions about responsibility to incorporate the different meanings of selfhood. However, we did not realize that the term *sacrifice* would have strikingly different meanings in the two cultures. After the data were collected, the findings about sacrificing for elderly parents surprised us, and we decided to interview three students from Japan doing graduate work in the United States. It became clear that *sacrifice* had a different meaning for Japanese and American respondents. The Japanese, whose sense of self is formulated in relation to the group, are so attuned to the needs of the others that they are not likely to experience "sacrifice" the way Westerners do (Smith, 1983, pp. 128-129). Americans, who are highly attuned to individual rights and needs, experience themselves as making sacrifices for the group in a variety of circumstances. If a Japanese person is asked to make a sacrifice on behalf of an elderly parent, the magnitude of the sacrifice may be understood as considerably greater than in the United States. A similar issue arose when analyzing the relationship between parents and their younger children. In Japan, giving-up one's time and career to help in the education of one's children is not perceived as a sacrifice; rather, it is a most important virtue (White, 1992). Sacrificing is part of a cluster of idealized features around endurance and suffering. In everyday life, sacrificing is idealized, especially in regard to mothers sacrificing for their young children, or elderly for the sake of younger generations.

The qualities of sacrifice and endurance for Japanese, and of autonomy and self-help for Americans, tap into deep layers of the self. However, it would be misleading to assume that these normative statements apply equally to all age

groups. Indeed, despite the different cultural expectations regarding models of responsibility, our analysis of age groups shows how older persons in both countries have similar attitudes toward family responsibility and how different they are from younger age groups. In popular literature, the elderly are often seen as emotionally demanding and unrealistic, whereas younger people are seen as pragmatic and in control. Our results present a different image. In both countries, the older age group is more realistic, less likely to believe that children should make sacrifices for their parents, and more likely to think that children should provide care only if the burden is not too great. Looking at each country separately, we see significant age differences between the younger adults and older persons. In the United States, 60.5% of younger adults compared to 35% of older persons believe that children should make sacrifices for parents, while 60% of older compared to 36% of younger respondents believe that children should help as long as the burden is not too great. In Japan, we find a similar general pattern, but of a lesser magnitude. Younger adults are more likely to want to make sacrifices for their parents than older persons (34.5% and 21.3%, respectively).

How can we make sense of these findings? There are several overlapping theoretical interpretations: Younger adults have more recently undergone socialization processes and internalized social prescriptions. Their lack of experience in caring for elderly parents is more likely to make them rely on abstract moral principles. Another interpretation rests on the fact that younger adults are more likely than older persons to experience fears and anxieties about aging and old age. One way of coping with the anxiety is to become more idealistic and more emotionally removed. By contrast, older persons seem more realistic and less likely to idealize filial responsibility as a form of sacrifice. They have lowered their expectations about children's help and put greater emphasis on concrete human relations rather than on upholding abstract moral principles (Vaillant, 1993). Thus, despite clear differences in norms of responsibility, and despite different conception of selfhood, older people in both countries show similarities in their views of the importance of mutuality and their desire of not being fully dependent on their children.

Economic Responsibility of Children toward Elderly Parents in Need.

Attitudes toward helping elderly parents in financial need was another way of understanding norms of family responsibility. In the Generations questionnaire, the following question was asked: "To what extent do you think that children should help their elderly parents economically when the parents have financial problems?" The same three options, used in the analysis of responsibility toward helping disabled parents, were used. The answers show a pattern similar to that in the previous question.

Table 17-2 shows that in Japan and the United States, only a very small percentage of respondents believe that children do not have to help their parents economically. Abnegating responsibility for one's parents is not looked on favorably in either society but the Japanese, again, show greater concern for putting their family's needs first. However, there are striking differences in the two other

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Table 17-2. Norms of Responsibility toward Elderly Parents with Financial Needs

Type of responsibility	American means (N = 1,497)	Japanese means* (N = 1,764)	Means difference Japan-United States
Children have own responsibilities, no need to look after parents	0.03	0.07	0.04**
Children should look after parents as long as burden not too great	0.45	0.70	0.25**
Children should look after parents even if they have to make sacrifices	0.51	0.22	-0.29**
Average	0.33	0.33	0.0

*Japanese means adjusted so that sum of Japanese means equals sum of American means.
 Based on U.S. Question No. 20 <1-3>, Japanese Question No. 15.
 Level of significance: *p < .05; **p < .01

options. To the answer "Children should support their parents economically, even if they have to make sacrifices," the mean for Japanese is .22 compared to .51 for American respondents, with a highly significant mean difference of -0.29. In other words, American respondents are significantly more likely to believe in making sacrifices. In the third option, "Children should support their parents economically as long as the burden does not get too great," the mean is .70 for Japanese compared to .45 for American respondents, with a significant mean difference of 0.25. Thus, Japanese were less likely to want to make sacrifices but more likely to want to look after their parents as long as the economic burden was not too great. There are clear normative differences in the two countries that support our previous findings.*

Having found different cultural norms of responsibility toward parents in financial need, we now examine the perception of these norms in different age groups. In Japan and the United States, younger adults and older persons show significant differences in the way norms of responsibility are perceived. Younger adults are more likely than older persons to believe that children should sacrifice for their parents, whereas older persons are more likely to believe that children should help as long as the burden is not too great. In both countries, younger adults tend to be more idealistic (i.e., more willing to make economic sacrifices for the sake of elderly parents) than older persons, who tend to be more grounded in reality, concerned with reciprocal obligations. Thus, despite different norms of responsibility in Japan and the United States, older persons across cultures share attitudes toward family responsibility that stress mutuality while rejecting

*The full interpretation of these results would necessitate having information about family income, social class, and family size, and using multivariate analysis. In the present overview, however, we are only looking at general patterns of responsibility and their variations by age groups. We can report that in the United States, income did not make a difference regarding attitudes toward helping disabled parents. However, it did make a difference regarding economic help. Respondents with the highest income were more likely to believe that they had to make sacrifices for parents.

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forms of idealization of family relations. In the next section, we pursue our analysis of family obligations by contrasting them with lifelong friendships in order to discuss the paradoxes of attachment.

Situated Meaning: Family Obligations and Lifelong Friendships. The analysis of lifelong friendships provides another avenue for understanding the role of the family in creating an arena for social and emotional support and, at the same time, restricting and isolating older family members from other forms of sociability. Doi (1985) has analyzed how the categorization of "inside-outside" (*uchi-soto*), structures all social relationships. Such categorization is a major organizational focus for self, social life, and language in Japan. The conceptual contrasts of *uchi* versus *soto* are too complex to be discussed here at length. We only need to mention that they cover a wide array of contrasts, such as self-other, included-excluded, us-them, known-unknown, and engaged-detached, to name a few.

As applied to the household (the *ie*), "inside" refers to an inner circle of family members and close relatives who share asymmetrical intimacy and passive acceptance of endearment (*amae*), as we have seen before. These experiences occur within hierarchical relationships whose boundaries are flexible through a system of reciprocal obligations. "Outside" refers to all other social relationships where emotional distance (*enryo*) is expected. The category "inside-outside-needs to be analyzed in relation to the concept of *freedom* in order to understand its full impact on older individuals' identification with the family. In Japan, unlike in the United States, freedom does not refer to abstract individual entitlements; rather, it refers to an individual's ability to join social groups outside of one's own family. Such freedom in Japan is not encouraged. Furthermore, obligations based on reciprocal interchange (*on*), as was discussed before, limit involvement outside the family for fear of incurring indebtedness. The ethos of family privacy, combined with the categorization of "inside-outside," blocks, for older persons, most other avenues of sociability. Friends are part of the "outside" social arena, unless they are recoded as belonging to the intimate circle of family relations.

The Generations survey provides data that can be used to illustrate the tension between involvement in the family and social isolation outside the family. Respondents were asked, "Do you have lifelong friends?" and "In what way did you get acquainted with them?" Japanese and American respondents report similar levels of involvement with lifelong friendships.

Table 17-3 shows distinctive patterns of friendship between the two countries. Japanese were more likely to have made lifelong friendships through childhood friends (mean difference 0.13), the armed forces (mean difference 0.09), and work colleagues (mean difference 0.04). These are the three major arenas of loyalty and identification outside the family. The largest difference is with "childhood friends," who are defined as an extension of the family, developed in childhood when the prescribed circles of intimacy and appropriateness were less rigidly defined (Kinoshita & Keifer, 1992). As for friends from the army

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Table 17-3. Sources of Lifelong Friendship among U.S. and Japanese Respondents

Sources of Lifelong Friendship	American means (N = 1,497)	Japanese means* (N = 1,764)	Means difference Japan-United States
1. Childhood friends	0.58	0.71	0.13**
2. Friends from work	0.52	0.56	0.04*
3. Neighborhoods and the community	0.43	0.46	-0.03
4. Friends through hobbies, sports, study	0.33	0.30	-0.03
5. Friends through social activities	0.23	0.14	-0.09**
6. Friends through religious or political activities	0.27	0.11	-0.16**
7. Friends through family or relatives	0.37	0.27	-0.10**
8. Friends from the army	0.07	0.16	0.09**
Average	0.36	0.36	0.00

*Japanese means adjusted so that sum of Japanese means equals sum of American means.
 Based on U.S. Question No. 25 <1-3>, Japanese Question No. 19.
 Level of significance: *p < .05; **p < .01

and the workplace, Japanese invest a great deal of their loyalty and self-identification in these social spheres.*

Japanese respondents were less likely to report establishing lifelong friendships with neighbors (mean difference -0.03), with persons met through leisure activities (mean difference -0.03), through religious and political groups (mean difference -0.16), through friends of the family (mean difference -0.10), and through social activities (mean difference -0.09). In the logic of reciprocal obligations and indebtedness, it makes sense that families in Japan would want to restrict access to new acquaintances that enlarge the circle of obligations. The sources of friendship are very different in the United States, where numerous forms of sociability are encouraged. For older persons, friendship becomes a source of emotional support and social recognition, often becoming more important than family relations (Maddox & Lawton, 1993).

These patterns of friendship illustrate the different symbolic meanings of social relations in the two societies. The multiple obligations of reciprocity, through gifts and remembrances, show the familial paradox of attachment in Japan whereby solidarity enhances intimacy but at the same time isolates family members—especially older persons—from alternative sources of social and emotional support. In Japan, familial intimacy and support lead to greater social isolation for older persons and potential conflicts in family relations, especially between daughters-in-law and elderly parents. Furthermore, the characteristics of family obligations prevent the development of alternative systems of caring, such as nursing homes, retirement communities, or other group-living situations. This pattern, however, is changing as young generations born after World

*To a question regarding whether priority should be given to work obligations over family obligations, the Japanese were significantly more likely to agree with this statement than U.S. respondents (Muller & Silver, 1995, p. 168).

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War II—particularly the women—are beginning to express some reluctance to sacrifice themselves for the elderly. Among older parents, there are also new signs of ambivalence and reticence about living with their children, as was described in the in-depth interviews with older persons (Hashimoto, 1996).*) In the United States, the paradox of attachment revolves around the tension between weaker norms of family solidarity and a tradition of active participation and involvement outside the family. These features of the social organization, combined with social and geographical mobility, induce older persons and their families to rely on friends and community, and to support alternative systems of caring. Having discussed the different meanings of family responsibility and the tensions between family support and social isolation, we now turn our attention to an analysis of the different definitions and experiences of well-being.

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WELL-BEING IN JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES

Emergence of a Transcultural Sense of Well-Being among Older Persons

Satisfaction with Present Life. A popular image of older persons in the United States is that they are unhappy and depressed, whereas in Japan they are more likely to be satisfied and adjusted. Our findings present a somewhat different image. To the question, "To what extent are you satisfied with your present life?" a surprisingly high percentage of Americans—42%—answered that they were very satisfied with their present life, compared to only 22% among the Japanese respondents†—a significant difference. While the full interpretation of these findings requires data on economic and social variables, an analysis not undertaken here, the difference reflects cultural definitions of what is acceptable to feel and to express in each country. As was mentioned before, sacrifice, suffering, and endurance are seen as core values that define the Japanese "(inter)dependent self." In the United States, however, we judge ourselves by how "happy" we are, how "good" we feel, and how much we smile—all a reflection of our ability to satisfy our narcissistic needs and enhance our "autonomous self." How do these general views about satisfaction with present life differ by age groups?

We saw previously that age introduces significant variations between younger adults and older persons regarding norms of responsibility in caring for elderly parents. We also saw that older persons across countries show sim-

*Age differences are not introduced in this analysis, because respondents' positions in the life cycle make their life experiences noncomparable. For example, many younger adults have not yet been inserted into the workforce, the army, or the local community.

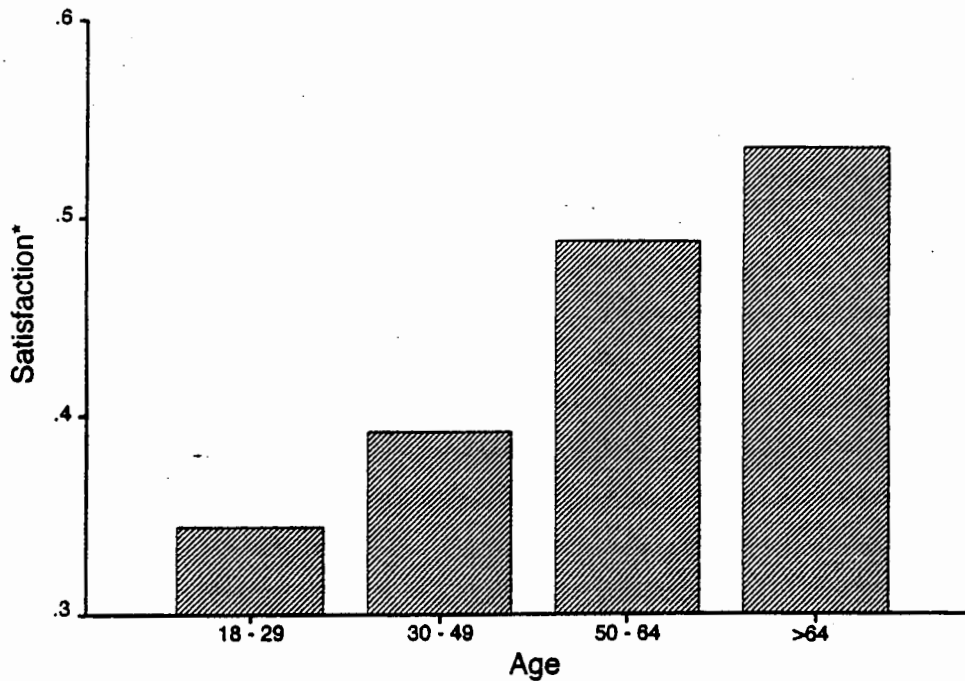
†The full distributions are as follows: *Very satisfied*—22% (Japan) and 42% (United States); *Satisfied*—57% (Japan) and 46% (United States); *More or less satisfied*—12% (Japan) and 6% (United States); *Dissatisfied*—7% (Japan) and 4% (United States); *Very dissatisfied*—2% (Japan) and 1% (United States).

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ilarities in their emphasis on reciprocity. We expect age to have an equally important impact on perceptions of well-being.

Despite the tensions between caring in the family and social isolation discussed earlier, we find the highest percentages of very satisfied individuals among older respondents. When looking at Figures 17-1 and 17-2 separately, we see that there is a clear effect of age on satisfaction with present life. In each country, the older the age group, the more likely that respondents are very satisfied with their present life. In Figure 17-1, we see a linear increase of the percentage of U.S. respondents who are very satisfied with their present lives: 34% (18-29 age group), 39% (30-49 age group), 49% (50-64 age group) and 54% (over 64 age group). In Figure 17-2, we see that in Japan, the increase is not as great but the linear effect is equally clear: 18% (18-29 age group), 18% (30-49 age group), 23% (50-64 age group) and 33% (over 64 age group). The respondents are very satisfied with their present life. Across countries, the older age groups are significantly more likely to be very satisfied with their present lives than younger ones.

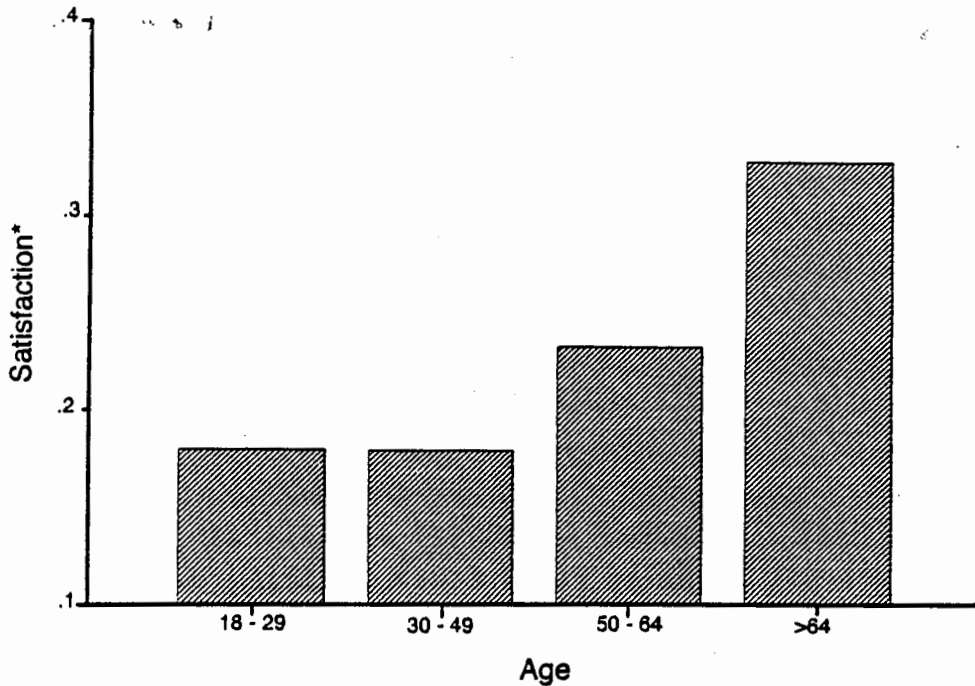
How can we make sense of these findings? We expected that older persons' position of marginalization and isolation would make them less satisfied with their present lives. However, our findings tell a different story. Despite, or



* High value = high satisfaction

Figure 17-1. Satisfaction with present life by age—United States.

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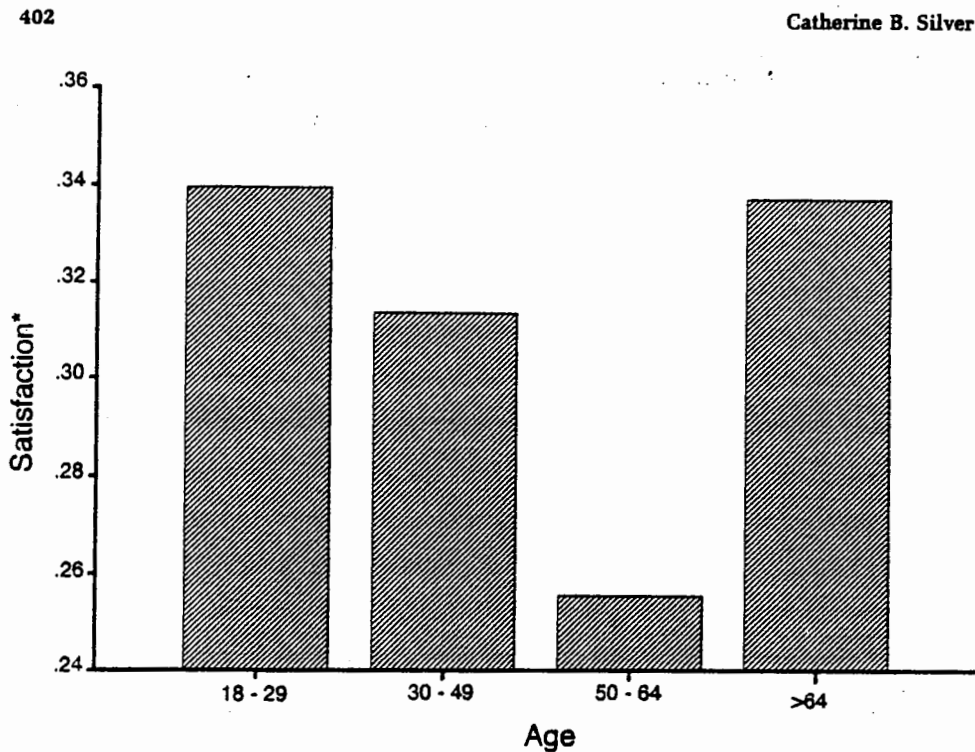
* High value = high satisfaction

Figure 17-2. Satisfaction with present life by age—Japan.

because, of their structural position in society, older persons have created their own world, distinct and separate from that of younger people. Satisfaction with present life is an indicator of inner contentment, and a form of personal achievement. We suggest that older individuals are able to distance themselves emotionally from normative constraints and create a world of their own, a "limbo state" to use Hazan's (1980) formulation, protected from past and future social and emotional demands. Our research supports the existence of commonalities—such as a present orientation, weaker normative expectations, an ability for self-expression, and a sense of interiority (Erikson, Erickson, & Kivnick, 1986; Gutmann, 1964; Vaillant, 1993)—that characterize the transcultural self of older persons. While satisfaction with present life represents an indicator of personal well-being, we now turn to an examination of satisfaction with society that represents an indicator of social well-being.

Satisfaction with Society. Satisfaction with society, a less personal expression of well-being, is more likely to be shaped by cultural prescriptions. Thus, we expect to find clear differences between the two countries. Japanese respondents are more satisfied with society than American respondents (42%

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* High value = high satisfaction

Figure 17-3. Satisfaction with society by age—United States.

and 29%, respectively), the reverse pattern from the answers to satisfaction with present life.* These findings can be explained by a combination of factors: There is a greater tendency among Japanese to approve social arrangements and not to verbalize their dissatisfaction, whereas Americans are more likely to be direct and critical of the social order; Japanese society is more likely to provide greater economic resources in the form of social safety nets, especially for older persons; Japanese are more likely to identify with the country's history and to exhibit a sense of social and national loyalty, as we discussed earlier.

We saw that age introduced significant variations regarding satisfaction with present life, older persons having a higher likelihood of being very satisfied. We now explore age variations in respondents' level of social well-being.

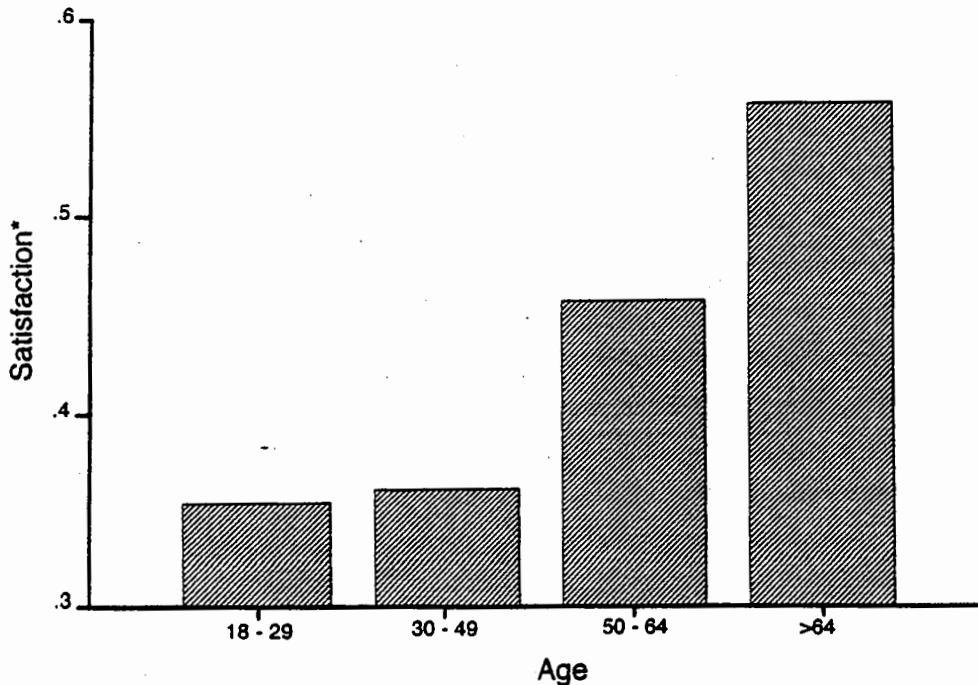
Unlike respondents' satisfaction with present life, we do not find comparable age patterns in the two countries. Figure 17-3 shows that in the United States, the younger adults and the older persons have equally high levels of

*The full distributions are as follows: *Very satisfied*—3.5% (Japan) and 3% (United States); *Satisfied*—38% (Japan) and 26% (United States); *More or less satisfied*—27% (Japan) and 12% (United States); *Dissatisfied*—24% (Japan) and 34% (United States); *Very dissatisfied*—6% (Japan) and 24% (United States). In the analysis of satisfaction with society, we have combined *Very satisfied* and *Satisfied* answers.

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satisfaction with society (33.9% and 33.8%, respectively), compared to middle-aged groups (30–49 and 50–64 years), with 31.4% and 25.6%, respectively, suggesting a cohort effect rather than an age effect. The 50–64 age group has the lowest level of satisfaction with society, representing a cohort faced with the combined pressures of retirement and caring for elderly parents. The higher level of satisfaction with society among the younger and older age groups may point to similarities of values compared to the middle-aged adults. Additional research needs to be undertaken to specify these common values. However, Figure 17–4 shows that in Japan, there is a clear linear effect of age on satisfaction with society. The older the age group, the more likely respondents are to be satisfied with society: 35% (18–29 age group), 36% (30–49 age group), 46% (50–64 age group) and 56% (over 64 age group). These results show the continuous impact of age norms in Japan based on the expectations of caring, (inter)dependency, and social entitlement in later years.

In both countries, older respondents have among the highest levels of satisfaction with society, despite ageism and marginalization. Different theoretical explanations could be suggested: Older individuals reframe social encounters by giving them a more positive light as a form of self protection (Silver, 1992); older people are likely to have lowered their expectations and become more



* High value = high satisfaction

Figure 17–4. Satisfaction with society by age—Japan.

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disengaged and socially detached (Cumming & Henri, 1961); older persons are sheltered from the pressures of economic competition and social performance (Mouer & Sugimoto, 1986). Thus, despite cultural differences, the structural position of older persons induces common attitudes regarding general feelings of well-being. The extent to which this general feeling of well-being translates into desirable ways of living in old age is the subject of our next section.

Controlling the Discourse of Aging: Desirable Ways of Living in Old Age

When studying older persons' well-being, it is essential to look at both their general satisfaction with life and concrete, desirable ways of living in later years. Respondents were asked what activities they would like to be engaged in during their old age. A battery of 12 items, around "Desirable ways of living in old age," provides an image of how respondents would envision their lives in these later years.

Table 17-4 shows three patterns of results. In the first pattern, Japanese are less likely to want to get involved in voluntary associations (mean difference -0.12), teach children in school (-0.13); take on leadership responsibilities in the community (-0.06); stay involved in political activities (-0.07); enjoy the company of friends and colleagues (-0.12); and say that they would enjoy living

Table 17-4. Desirable Ways of Living in Old Age among U.S. and Japanese Respondents

Desirable ways of living in old age	American means (N = 1,497)	Japanese means* (N = 1,764)	Means difference Japan-United States
1. Contributing through volunteer activities	0.57	0.45	-0.12**
2. Teaching school subjects to children	0.40	0.27	-0.13**
3. Taking leadership in social development	0.28	0.22	-0.06**
4. Detaching from social, political, and job	0.38	0.31	-0.07**
5. Enjoying traveling, hobbies or sports	0.64	0.85	0.21**
6. Enjoying learning	0.50	0.50	0.00
7. Continuing career as long as possible	0.30	0.52	0.22**
8. Taking up new business or occupation	0.23	0.27	0.04
9. Living peacefully with offspring	0.52	0.62	0.10**
10. Living in harmony with husband/wife	0.73	0.65	-0.08**
11. Enjoying living alone	0.26	0.26	0.00
12. Enjoying company of friends and colleagues	0.73	0.61	-0.12**
Average	0.46	0.46	0.00

*Japanese means adjusted so that sum of Japanese means equals sum of American means.
 Based on U.S. Question No. 17 <1-3>, Japanese Question No. 12 <55, 56>.
 Level of significance: *p < .05; **p < .01

in harmony with their spouse (-0.08). All the items, with the exception of the last one, fit into our previous theoretical discussion, in as much as the image of aging in Japan that is depicted stresses greater family (inter)dependence, lesser active involvement in the community, and participation in voluntary associations. These findings seem to support an image of aging based on withdrawal into family life combined with a reluctance to reach out for the company of friends in the community.

However, it would be a mistake to conclude that older people in Japan are disengaged. Such a conclusion uses United States values as standards of comparison that reflect normative statements that may be strikingly different from the norms of other societies such as Japan. Indeed, the battery of questions used in defining desirable ways of living in old age emphasizes activities rather than contemplative inner states, and does not provide questions about what Roland calls the "spiritual self" (1988, p. 307). An emphasis on activities introduces a bias in the direction of a cultural image of "productive aging" (Butler, 1975), often with little room for reflexivity and interiority. This image is especially strong in a consumer-driven culture such as the United States, which has a weak tradition of reliance on spiritual inner-self as a source of intrapsychic autonomy (Featherstone & Wernick, 1995).

In the second pattern of findings, we see that Japanese respondents are more likely to desire continuing a career as long as possible (mean difference 0.20); enjoying traveling, hobbies, and sports (mean difference 0.21); desiring to live peacefully with offspring (0.10); and taking up a new occupation (0.04). Paradoxically, these items give an image of elderly persons in Japan as more active and involved in work and leisure activities compared to their American counterparts. How can we make sense of these findings? The interest in continuing one's career in Japan can be partly explained by socioeconomic factors: Mandatory retirement ages have been quite low (between 55 and 60 years at major private companies), and the Japanese government continues to seek higher retirement ages by providing incentives and organizational support for retirees who want to continue to work (Campbell, 1992, pp. 263-281; Palmore & Maeda, 1985). The desire to continue a career as long as possible is also based on psychocultural factors. In Japan, work means an attachment to an institution that requires strong links of loyalty and identification. Metaphorically, the workplace has become a family outside the family. Retirement from the work arena creates psychological stress for Japanese that can ignite a deep sense of loss of their own social identity. With few alternative sources of emotional identification outside the family, this shift to retirement is momentous (Hashimoto, 1996; Johnson, 1993). In the United States, there is also, among retirees, a desire to continue to work, if only part time, but the identification with the workplace is weaker. Furthermore, the lack of fit in the United States between older individuals' fast-changing life patterns and actual organizational arrangements has created new social problems for older persons (Riley et al., 1994).

The interest in hobbies and other leisure activities reflects the Japanese passion for using hobbies as a means of asserting individual identity, as well as the notion that old age is a time for relative liberation from the demands of work

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and the responsibilities of family life (Reischauer, 1977). In the Confucian tradition, daily life comprised duties and mutual obligations until, at the age of 70, following the example of Confucius, individuals could for the first time "follow their hearts' desire" without violating social expectations (Lock, 1993, p. 205). In the United States, leisure activities among older persons are also used to express individuality, but above all, to reinforce support systems and enhance sociability outside the family during later years (Mancini & Sandifer, 1994).

The last pattern of findings refers to two items that show no significant difference between Japan and the United States: "Enjoying learning things that you did not have time for before" and "Enjoying living alone." The lack of differences between the countries is the interesting finding here. What this may suggest is the existence of transcultural views about desire to learn, to be intellectually active, and to live alone. Indeed, the joy of "pure" (i.e., nonapplied) learning is a central thrust among the older persons in the University of the Third Age studied by Hazan (1996). Among older persons, learning is no longer an investment in the future but becomes an enjoyable expression of the self in the present. We were surprised to find no difference between countries about "Enjoying living alone" in view of the group orientation of the Japanese discussed previously. This finding illustrates another transcultural image of aging, as a time freer of familial obligations and social constraints. The statistical means discussed earlier provide a general view of normative expectations. But the internalization of norms varies as a function of age. As we saw before, Japan has stronger age norms than the United States. We also observed that the older age groups in both countries have strikingly high levels of satisfaction with life and society. Are similar patterns reproduced in respondents' projected desired ways of living in later years?

There are clear differences in the way the older age groups define aging in later years. In Japan, the image of aging among the older age group reflects a vision that includes a desire for spiritual leadership and a sense of honor and recognition, combined with the joys of family life. This image of aging is richer than that of the United States, where, despite the emphasis on active aging, it is more narrowly defined around the wish to live peacefully with children and grandchildren, enjoying the company of friends or colleagues, but without the image of honor and public recognition. In both countries, older age groups share common views—views that for many of them have become reality—showing a weaker desire for social activities, including learning, and a stronger wish to enjoy the company of family and friends, as well as living alone.

In Japan and the United States, the younger age groups are more likely to have an active image of old age, organized around hobbies, sports, traveling, the continuation of a career, the challenge of a new business enterprise, and taking the lead in social development. In both countries, the views of old age are projections of present interests and needs. Such an image of active aging, however, does not correspond to the image of older persons themselves. Among the older age groups, there seem to be a qualitative shift toward emotional involvement with friends/colleagues and a desire for interiority, rather than active participation in social activities. This view of "productive aging" represents the

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image of younger adults rather than those of older persons themselves. The contrast between these images is disquieting because this view of productive aging in a youth-oriented culture, like the United States, takes on a universal meaning that implies a natural link between productive aging and mental health. However, what we see in the Generations survey are the many, sometimes contradictory, images of aging across cultures and age groups. Our findings seem to suggest that younger adults are in a position to enhance their own interests and keep their fears of aging at bay by controlling the discourse of aging. These observations raise the question of appropriateness of the categorizations used to describe older persons as either active or passive, involved or isolated, (inter)dependent or autonomous, and withdrawn or self-attuned.

CONCLUSION: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Cross-cultural research is a powerful and humbling experience that has raised many theoretical and methodological questions in my mind. As a conclusion, I would like to briefly discuss some of the theoretical implications of our findings and address a few themes that emerged in the research process.

A first theoretical implication has to do with the importance of culture in defining feelings of responsibility toward elderly parents and desirable ways of living in old age. Our research demonstrates the role of cultural norms in the way they shape perceptions and values about aging. It also shows the importance of contextualizing answers by relating them to conceptions of social obligations and definitions of selfhood in each society. Equally important, our findings point to clear differences in the way age groups internalize norms, challenging some of the stereotypical views of older persons in each society. But, despite cultural differences, older persons, across countries, report higher levels of satisfaction with their present lives and with society. Older age groups are less likely than younger ones to idealize, more likely to have lower expectations about children's obligation to sacrifice themselves, and less likely to emphasize active participation in the community. While these findings reflect a tendency toward conformity, they may suggest that older people create a sphere of their own, insulated from the pressures and ageism of the social environment. Thus, satisfaction with present life reflects a feeling of contentment that simultaneously protects and insulates older persons.

We suggest that older persons' marginalization from productive spheres and their psychological isolation lead to a social and emotional withdrawal from the world of middle-aged and younger adults. The high levels of satisfaction and shared values across countries point toward an emergent transcultural sense of self. We need to understand how this sense of inner well-being emerges and is sustained through the creation of distinctive language(s), symbolization, images, and spiritual experiences around permeable boundaries between self and others. However, in view of the pervasive ageism of both societies, inner contentment and satisfaction with self and society may well protect older persons, but, at the

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same time, sustain images of aging that fit younger adults' social and psychological needs, and reinforce their control over the discourse of aging. The social and political implications of these observations are far-reaching at a time when the growth of elderly populations has created new economic pressures and greater social obligations toward the elderly, a situation likely to strengthen the need to control the discourse of aging.

A second theoretical implication has to do with the meaning of concepts such as individuality, autonomy, and (inter)dependence. We need to explore theoretical models that contextualize these concepts and look at their reciprocal influence in order to understand their linkages rather than seeing them as opposite formulations. For example, Cohler's (1983) contention that (inter)dependence in the family is the basis for the emergence of a sense of individuality provides such a model. The ability to be (inter)dependent, based on sharing and mutuality, is likely to promote a sense of autonomy and individuality. Comparative analysis, by eliciting new theoretical questions and conceptual linkages, facilitates the creation of alternative aging models. The study of aging has traditionally emphasized the values of dependence in Japan and autonomy in the United States, providing a distorted and simplified image of social reality. Theoretical models of the role of autonomy and individuality in the family reflect historical circumstances, ideologies, and cultural prescriptions. The focus on these features of the self delegitimizes the expression of needs for connectedness and interiority. The need for passive caring, interiority, and self-indulgent behavior should be explored in Western models of human development. The suppression of these features in theories of aging needs to be understood through a critical analysis of the sociocultural and ideological factors that privilege concepts of activity, productivity, consumption, and independence as the main constituents of the modern American self (Cushman, 1995). In Japan, the use of models that underplay autonomy and individuality should undergo the same critical analysis (Mouer & Sugimoto, 1986).

A third theoretical implication refers to the distorted image of older people as conforming to normative expectations. Underneath the conformity, there is a layer of needs and feelings that seem to go counter to, or coexist with, existing social norms. The value placed on group orientation in Japan and individuality in the United States are among the most accessible and acceptable features of the self, those that get easily identified in surveys. However, there are deeper layers of needs and wishes that challenge these characteristics of the self. In our research, the expression of individuality and the yearning for individual recognition, education, and independence was visible among Japanese elderly, despite the expected social norms of conformity to group needs. Among older Americans, the yearning for passive emotional caring and cherishment was tentatively expressed, despite the norms of autonomy and active aging. These observations are supported by the in-depth interviews of older persons, undertaken by Margaret Lock (1993), that clearly show attitudes and values that do not fit the modal self. We need theoretical and methodological tools that can reach underneath social conformity and self-deception to express the contradictory or ambivalent feelings, needs, and thoughts that reflect older persons' sense of self

as captured, for example, through the concept of *aintegration* developed by Lomranz (1997).

A fourth theoretical implications refers to the fact that most models of aging are based on views of aging that fit the ideas and needs of the nonelderly, creating knowledge about older persons that can be used as tools for controlling the definition of the aging process (Mouer & Sugimoto, 1986). As we saw earlier, there are important differences between age groups in their views of family responsibility, sense of well-being, and desirable ways of living in old age. With increasing life expectancy, the meaning and definition of aging are changing. The reference point of the aging process seems to have moved toward a greater identification with younger adults, demonstrating the increasing role of middle-aged values and lifestyles. Thus, we need to compare the views and attitudes of middle-aged groups to those of younger adults and older persons. Our data shows that in the United States, middle-aged respondents (the 50–64 age group, traditionally referred to as “young elderly”), are closer in their values and attitudes to the younger middle-aged groups (30–49 years) than to the older age group (over 64), reinforcing the already rigid boundaries between adults and elderly. In Japan, however, this pattern of the relationship between age groups shows greater continuity and less cleavages than in the United States.

While these theoretical implications are important, we also need to assess the challenges and limitations of doing cross-national research in the study of aging. As part of the research process, we struggled with several issues. We attempted, with only partial success, to write a questionnaire that was culturally contextualized. Our difficulty stemmed from the differences in language, communication patterns, and social expectations used by the two research teams. Not only did the same words mean different things in the two countries, but in Japan, a word can take on a variety of meanings, depending on the context in which it is used. As explained before, it was after being confronted by some surprising findings that we went back to analyze the formulation of questions. These difficulties sensitized us to the use of categorizations to describe the self and the social order, providing an entry into the complex patterns of social relations and the paradoxes of attachment.

The danger of stereotyping the “other” culture in cross-national research is real, but the unchallenged assumptions about one’s own culture and a lack of critical thinking about its ideological underpinnings are equally problematic. Indeed, it was easier to see cultural distinctiveness and ideological premises as they characterize the “other” country than to see one’s own theoretical presuppositions. Critical analysis is especially needed with large-scale social surveys—especially State-sponsored surveys—studying elderly populations, because they are used to monitor a country’s process of change or “modernization,” creating an unacknowledged collusion between researchers’ agendas and policy demands that tend to misrepresent older persons. This issue is compounded by the fact that Japanese researchers often replicate American models of research, incorporating uncritically parameters of social reality in the study of their own social structures. Thus, an important implication of these observations about the research process is the need to analyze questionnaires as a “text” to uncover the

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different theoretical presuppositions and ideological agendas encoded in them. Furthermore, the unchecked tendency of researchers to project their own fears and anxieties about aging and death onto their visions of older persons should not be underestimated. These tendencies create another potential for collusion between the researchers' own agendas, the normative image of aging, and official ideologies reinforcing what Hazan (1980) called "knowledge traps." The challenge for gerontologists is how to get beneath the conscious and unconscious compliance to detect anxieties, tensions, conflicts, and splits that go into the research process, as well as into respondents' answers. Cross-national research provides an arena to reflect on these unchecked tendencies in ways that can help deconstruct the experience of aging.

These implications, stemming from an analysis of the Generations survey, are important for understanding the well-being of older people. Cross-cultural analysis can challenge the definition of aging as a linear process of deterioration, loss, and depression, as well as the idealization of aging as a time of peace, honor, productivity, and self-discovery. It can provide an arena for comparing mechanisms of social and emotional control that keep older persons in their place. Finally, the tendency of older persons to be submerged in the societal needs and values of adult populations makes discovering and hearing their separate voice across nations an ever more meaningful task for sociologists. Indeed, despite the growing proportion of older persons in advanced industrial societies, they have yet to contribute to defining the discourse of aging through their own vision and in their own terms.

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