

Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations

Revista Română de Comunicare și Relații Publice

Volume 18, no. 1 (37) / April 2016

Guest editor:

Kim SAWCHUK

ROMANIAN JOURNAL OF
COMMUNICATION
AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Volume 18, no. 1 (37) / April 2016

Guest editor
Kim SAWCHUK

Scientific Committee

- Delia BALABAN (Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania)
- Alina BĂRGĂOANU (National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania)
- Camelia BECIU (National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania)
- Lee B. BECKER (University of Georgia, US)
- Felix BEHLING (University of Essex, UK)
- Hanoch BEN-YAMI (Central European University, Budapest, Hungary)
- Diana CISMARU (National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania)
- Nicoleta CORBU (National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania)
- Alina HALILIUC (Denison University, US)
- Kathy HAUGHT (Rider University, US)
- Dragoş ILIESCU (National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania; TestCentral)
- Loredana IVAN (National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania)
- Adrian LESENCIUC (Air Force Academy “Henri Coanda”, Brasov, Romania)
- Mira MOSHE (Ariel University Center of Samaria, Israel)
- Sorin NASTASIA (Southern Illinois University, US)
- Nicolas PELISSIER (University of Nice Sophia Antipolis, France)
- Dana POPESCU-JOURDY (University of Lyon 2, France)
- Remus PRICOPIE (National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania)
- Dan STĂNESCU (National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania)
- Panayiota TSATSOU (Swansea University, UK)
- Anca VELICU (Institute of Sociology, Romanian Academy)
- Tudor VLAD (University of Georgia, US)
- David WEBERMAN (Central European University, Budapest, Hungary)
- Alexandra ZBUCHEA (National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania)

Editorial Board

Paul Dobrescu (editor in chief)

Elena Negrea-Busuioac (editor)

Cristian Lupeanu (layout)

Publisher

College of Communication and Public Relations – NUPSPA

6 Povernei St., Sector 1, Bucharest

Tel.: 201 318 0889; Fax: 021 318 0882

elena.negrea@comunicare.ro; www.journalofcommunication.ro

The Journal is published three times a year. The journal has been indexed by ProQuest CSA, EBSCO Publishing, CEEOL, DOAJ, Cabell's Directory, Index Copernicus and Genamics Journal Seek. This journal is recognized by CNCISIS and included in the B+ category (www.cncsis.ro).

The titles of the articles have been translated into Romanian by the publisher.

ISSN 1454-8100

Contents

Aging, Communication and Media Technologies

Kim SAWCHUK

Introduction. Aging, Communication and Media Technologies / 7

Loredana IVAN, Shannon HEBBLETHWAITE

Grannies on the Net: Grandmothers' Experiences of Facebook in Family Communication / 11

Andrea ROSALES, Mireia FERNÁNDEZ-ARDÈVOL

Beyond WhatsApp: Older People and Smartphones / 27

Barbara RATZENBÖCK

"Let's Take a Look Together": Walking Interviews in Domestic Spaces as a Means to Examine ICT Experiences of Women 60+ / 49

Martine LAGACÉ, Houssein CHARMARKEH, Radamis ZAKY, Najat FIRZLY

From Psychological to Digital Disengagement: Exploring the Link between Ageism and the 'Grey Digital Divide' / 65

Patrik MARIER, Isabelle VAN PEVENAGE

The Invisible Women: Gender and Caregiving in Francophone Newspapers / 77

Ioana SCHIAU

Humor, Loneliness and Interpersonal Communication: a Quantitative Study of Romanian Older Adults / 89

Book review

Mălina CIOCEA

Review of La ruse de la mondialisation. L'assaut contre la puissance américaine by Paul Dobrescu, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2015, 362 pages / 109

Call for papers / 113

Aging, Communication and Media Technologies

Kim SAWCHUK*

Introduction. Aging, Communication and Media Technologies

What does it mean to age within “networked societies” (Castells, 2000)? What might be learned if we take the Internet and Communication Technology (ICT) and media experiences of older adults into account in our research? These questions are core to this special issue on *Aging, Communication and Media Technologies*. Comprised of six papers from authors working in five cultural contexts in Europe and North America, *Aging, Communication and Media Technologies* offers insights into demographic transformations towards ‘ageing societies’ in the industrialized world, changes in the media and technological landscape, and the varied practices of communication in different cultural contexts.

Aging, Communication and Media Technologies opens with a case study on the experiences of Romanian and Canadian grandmothers who use Facebook to maintain intergenerational connection. “*Grannies on the Net: Grandmothers’ Experiences of Facebook in Family Communication*” by Loredana Ivan and Shannon Hebblethwaite queries how grandmothers integrate social media into their grandparenting practices and routines. While much differs between these two national and cultural contexts, the study affirms the generative possibilities of working across national borders when considering aging, identity and communication technologies and practices¹.

Andrea Rosales and Mireia Fernández-Ardèvol’s paper, “*Beyond WhatsApp: Older People and Smartphones*”, concentrates on two very different data sets on the use of smart phones and smart phone apps by older adults living in Spain. Quantitative log data obtained by tracking smartphone users from 20-76 years of age is compared to qualitative results captured in focus groups with users between 55-81 years of age. As a month-long collection of log data indicates, on a daily basis, Whats App is the most frequently used applications by all age groups. Older adults have a propensity to use more Personal Information Management apps such as notes, calendars, reminders, as well as weather applications than do younger cohorts of users. Older users revert to mobile (or cellular) networks to access data when they are away from their homes for short periods of time; younger users have the tendency to access free WiFi networks whenever possible. Like other papers in this special issue, they present their findings in a detailed and nuanced manner, affirm the value of combining methods and compare the frequency of use of older users to younger users without judgmentally assessing these differences, so that older users never quite measure up to their younger counterparts.

* Concordia University, Canada, kim.sawchuk@concordia.ca.

¹ There is a relatively low percentage of Romanian people aged 65 and over using the internet (6%), compared to higher rates in Canada (48%) (Blanche, 2015).

Movement, mobility and the use of ICTs within and between private and public realms is a theme that is picked up in Barbara Ratzenböck's innovative study “*“Let’s Take a Look Together”: Walking Interviews in Domestic Spaces as a Means to Examine ICT Experiences of Women 60+ ”*”. Ratzenböck takes the home as her research location to delve into the significance of ICTs for older women through storytelling and walking. What is said about ICTs in a seated interview does not always match what is said about ICTs when a guided tour of domestic space is given, as Ratzenböck discovers. This “micro-ethnography” demonstrates how devices scattered throughout the home may stimulate memories and augment, minimize or contradict statements made during an interview. Innovative methodologies, such as the domestic walking interview, engage older participants in storytelling about the changes in media and communication that they have observed over time. This process affirms their experiences, as subjects aging *with* media, as valid.

The articles in *Aging, Communication and Media Technologies* address the nexus between ageism and media technologies and the ways that it may inadvertently color our research. Coined by Robert N. Butler in 1968, ageism puts a name to “the widespread bigotry faced by older persons” (Katz, 2009, p. 13). Ageism can be embedded in the frameworks or protocols developed within disciplines. For example, the Canadian Wireless and Telecommunications Industry defines the “older user” as 50+. Data is then collected on a large undifferentiated, unquestioned statistical cohort (Sawchuk & Crow, 2011). These imprecisions and lack of attention to differences within this statistical cohort can obscure or ignore the rich experiences of the very old who have a long history with epochs and eras of media and communication technologies as well as knowledge of social practices of communication that may be ever more valuable to consider, such as conversation (Turkle, 2012).

Ageism also can be present in media representations of ageing. In “*The Grey Digital Divide in the Workplace: Matters of Age or of Language that Divides?*” Martine Lagacé, Houssein Charmarkeh, Radamis Zaky and Najat Firzly argue that ageist attitudes and perceptions are central to the existence and perpetuation of a “grey digital divide.” As they write, ageist perspectives often depict the elderly as less attractive, more forgetful, more rigid in thought, less motivated and less dynamic than their younger counterparts. These are negative stereotypes. On the other hand, older adults also are depicted as warm, caring and kindly. These are positive stereotypes. Both stereotypes, they explain, can fuel a self-fulfilling prophecy when it comes to digital learning. As they postulate, ageism is one of the driving forces driving forces behind this divide because these notions may be internalized and stand in the way of providing training.

The effect of representations on real world issues is echoed in Patrik Marier and Isabelle Van Pevenage’s “*The Invisible Women: Gender and Caregiving in Francophone Newspapers.*” As industrialised countries experience population aging, international organizations and governments are transforming, and often shrinking, the services provided by the welfare state (OECD, 1999, 2000). The expansion of an aging population and contraction of services has gendered consequences because most caregivers in these societies are female (Lavoie et al., 2014). As Marier and Van Pevenage’s study of articles discussing care work in five countries documents, the role played by women in this scenario rarely is mentioned. Marier and Van Pevenage’s study of agenda setting in the media asks us to consider how the absence of women’s role in the caregiving to older adults may impact government policies for providing support and relief to them and to their families.

In the last paper included in this special issue, “*Humor, Loneliness and Interpersonal Communication: a Quantitative Study of Romanian Older Adults*”, Ioana Schiau presents a fascinating analysis of how older Romanians use humor to address loneliness. Schiau uses psychological assessment scales to gauge feelings of loneliness and social isolation in carefully segmented generational cohorts. It is a reminder of the import, for communication scholars to consider how language operates as a mediating force and the need for remembering the role of interpersonal connection, and face-to-face communication, within digitally networked societies.

Ageing is vital process to study and the experiences of older adults in our society, who engage or disengage with ICTs, is a topic of growing concern. As these articles indicate, one must be wary of making over-generalized statements when so much more research is needed on this topic. Ageing and the use of ICTs is modulated by many contingencies including cultural context, the gender of subjects, their socio-economic circumstances, personal histories of engagement with ICTs, general literacy and education and the kinds of infrastructures that are in place in a region. As a whole, the pieces do not assume age and ageing only presents problems for us to solve or redress. These papers collectively illuminate the subtle interpersonal and mediated relationships that older adults have with others and with their devices. They help us to understand the subtle ways that *ageist assumptions* (Gullette, 2004; Cruikshank, 2003) may influence a research agenda and data analysis, produce an unwarranted fear of the processes of ageing and the elderly, or offer a partial view of the diversified experiences of ageing across nations, genders, classes and languages.

As this research suggests, the goal of research on age, ageing and technology is to generate appropriate methods for understanding the experiences of older adults. Interrogating ageing and communication through a rigorous multi-methodological analysis of the *actual* practices of older individuals within the complexities of the contemporary digital media world is essential. These essays and this issue make a contribution to this collective intellectual effort.

Acknowledgements

These papers first were presented at the 2nd Annual Qualitative Research in Communication Conference, hosted by the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), Bucharest, Romania. Much of the research for this special issue has been supported or co-sponsored by *ACT Ageing Communication Technology: experiencing a digital world in later life*. This is an international group of researchers funded by SSHRC (Project 895-2013-1018). For more information, visit www.actproject.ca. We thank SSHRC, the reviewers for their excellent comments and Kendra Besanger and Constance Lafontaine of ACT who assisted in the production of this work.

References

1. Azuddin, M., Abd Malik, S., Abdullah, L. M., & Mahmud, M. (2014, November). Older people and their use of mobile devices: Issues, purpose and context. *Information and Communication Technology for The Muslim World (ICT4M), 2014 The 5th International Conference on* (pp. 1-6). IEEE.DOI:10.1109/ICT4M.2014.7020610.

2. Blanche, D. (2015) *Statistical Summary of Ageing and ICTs*. Retrieved from http://actproject.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Report_Stats_Ageing_ICT.pdf
3. Castells, M. (2000). Materials for an exploratory theory of the network society. *British Journal of Sociology*, 51 (1), 5-24. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-4446.2000.00005.x
4. Cruikshank, M. (2003). *Learning to be old: Gender, culture, and aging*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
5. Gullette, M. (2004). *Aged by culture*. Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press.
6. Katz, S. (2009). Growing Older Without Aging? Positive Aging, Anti-Aging and Anti-Ageism. *Generations*, 25 (4), 2001-02.
7. Lavoie, J.-P., Guberman, N. & Marier, P. (2014). La responsabilité des soins aux aînés au Québec. Du secteur public au secteur privé. IRPP, 48, Montréal, Institut de recherche en politiques publiques. <http://irpp.org/research-studies/study-no48/>
8. OECD. (1999). *Maintaining prosperity in an ageing society*. Paris: OECD.
9. OECD. (2000). *Reforms for an ageing society*. Paris: OECD. DOI:10.1787/9789264188198-en
10. Sawchuk, K., & Crow, B. (2011). Into the grey zone: Seniors, cell phones and milieus that matter. *WI: Journal of Mobile Media*. <http://wi.mobilities.ca/into-the-grey-zone-seniors-cell-phones-and-milieus-that-matter/>
11. Turkle, S. (2012). *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York: Basic Books.

Loredana IVAN*
Shannon HEBBLETHWAITE**

Grannies on the Net: Grandmothers' Experiences of Facebook in Family Communication

Abstract

Despite ageist stereotypes about older people's abilities to engage with information and communication technologies, grandparents are increasingly engaged with digital media. Grandmothers, in particular, are primarily responsible for using of web-based services to communicate with their children and grandchildren (Quadrello et al., 2005). Photos and news from children and grandchildren, especially grandbabies, act as important incentives for grandparents to go online. The purpose of the study, therefore, was to investigate how grandmothers use Facebook to facilitate family communication with children and grandchildren who move far away from home. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with grandmothers living in Romania and Canada, having a Facebook account and relevant family members (children or grandchildren) far from home. Three themes emerged from the data indicating: 1) the tendency to switch between different platforms to facilitate family communication; 2) the relative passive use of Facebook, focusing on photos and quotations as content that trigger emotions; 3) that Facebook usage is influenced by social norms around decency and privacy. Findings suggest that family relationships play a central role in grandmothers' motivations and behaviours surrounding Facebook use.

Keywords: grandmothers; social media; Facebook; family communication; grandparenting.

Introduction

In a globalized world, it has become increasingly common for grandchildren to live far away from their grandparents. Transnational migration adds even more pressure to the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren, as older people are often left behind (Sigad & Eisikovits, 2013). Although we might think that the immediate effect of increased national and transnational migration might be a diminished role for grandparents, several authors (Harper, 2014; Hasmanová- Marhánková, 2015) suggest that grandparents continue to play an important role because: (1) increased life expectancy increases the opportunity for long-term grandparent-grandchild relationships (Harper, 2014); (2) the changes in the structure of modern families (as for example the increased rate of divorce, single parent families, and work mobility for both parents) create new space for redefining the role of grandparenting in maintaining family stability and intergenerational support (Szinovacz, 1998; 2007); (3) dis-

* National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Romania,
loredana.ivan@comunicare.ro, corresponding author.

** Concordia University, Canada, shannon.hebblethwaite@concordia.ca.

courses of ageing are changing what it means to age and are redefining “ageing” by putting more pressure on individuals to stay young and be active. This impacts the way grandparents themselves construct their involvement with their grandchildren. Consequently the active ageing rhetoric has shifted the perspective around grandparenting from an obligatory mission inside the family to a voluntary activity in perpetual negotiation over the level of grandparent involvement in the lives of their children and grandchildren (cf. Phillipson, 2013).

The grandparent role, however, continues to be a gendered one. Women spend a greater proportion of their lives being grandparents compared to men (Hasmanová-Marhánková, 2015) due to longer life expectancies for females. Grandmothers are more likely to be expected to perform the role of “grannies” (Sorensen & Cooper 2010; Tarrant, 2010). Furthermore, grandmothers are more involved in family bonding, emphatic and supportive communication acts with their children and grandchildren, compared with grandfathers who are focused on micro-coordination and factual communication topics (Burke, Adamic, & Marciniak, 2013). Grandmothers play a more important role in family communication not only because they are expected to do so, but also because “being a grandmother” offers them a positive identity in old age (Reitzes & Mutran, 2004; Tarrant, 2010).

We expect grandmothers to continue to play a role in family bonding and to make efforts to maintain their role as “grannies”, as a part of their identity, even as children and grandchildren are moving far away from home. The use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) could serve such purposes. In the current paper, therefore, we focus on remote grandparenting, by analysing the ways in which grandmothers use Facebook to facilitate family communication with children and grandchildren who move far away from home. Using data collected in a cross-cultural case study in Romania and Canada, we critically reflect on grandmothers’ use of social media in their family relationships. We explore grandmothers’ motivations for using web-based communication platforms [with the focus on Facebook] in everyday interactions in order to understand how intergenerational communication practices are enacted through social media.

Grandparents’ use of ICTs to communicate with grandchildren

Over the past 25 years, technology has transformed the world in which we live. Political and journalistic rhetoric suggest that the world has become an information village in which people are connected to each other in a global network society (Castells, 2010). Older adults, however, have been rendered virtually invisible in this discourse (Hebblethwaite, 2016). Until very recently, limited research has focused on understanding the technology needs of older adults. When older people are studied, they are often included in an age category of 50+ that effectively homogenizes an extremely diverse group of individuals.

Existing studies of ageing and technology have, however, highlighted the fact that strengthening communication among family members and maintaining intergenerational relationships are important reasons for older people to use email, social media, and other web-based communication platforms (Bosch & Curren, 2015; Napoli 2014; Siibak, & Tamme 2013). Moreover, building relationships with grandchildren constitutes an important incentive for grandparents to go online (Chesley, & Johnson 2014; Yuan et al., 2016). Some studies (Harley et al., 2012; Tee, Brush, & Inkpen 2009) indicate that photos and news from children and grandchildren, especially grandbabies, motivate grandparents to start using ICTs. As Harley

and colleagues (2012) suggest, the motivation to learn to use new computer-based technologies increases in the case of remote grandparents who are forced to build a relationship with their grandchildren over great geographic distance. Grandparents eventually react to social media opportunities which respond to their need to play (Raffle et al., 2010) and to get emotionally involved with their families and social networks (Breheny, Stephens, & Spilsbury, 2013; Forghani, & Neustaedter, 2014).

Despite the often reported benefits of technology and digitally-mediated leisure, the rapid evolution of media and the increased complexity of technologies create an uneasiness that cannot be ignored. We must acknowledge that some actors and agents have more power than others in this digital world (Hebblethwaite, 2016). Grandparents may face inequalities in access to ICTs and may be less skilled in using computer based applications, resulting in increased alienation and social exclusion (Friemel, 2016). Although there is a continuous development of systems designed to support family connections in these remote conditions (González, Jomhari, & Kurniawan, 2012; Judge et al., 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2015), including video communication, photo-sharing, family gaming, and story boarding applications, they all require rich technological infrastructure and some level of computer familiarity. As a recent study conducted in the rural areas of northern Canada proves, the way individuals stay in contact with family members is challenged by the communication infrastructure: people's natural desire to maintain family connectedness is adjusted when infrastructure is poor or if they had unpleasant experiences with computer based technologies. Furthermore, negative impressions of ICTs are difficult to change once the infrastructure improves, as family communication practices are time enduring (Melvin et al., 2015). Moreover, with a relative low percentage of Romanian people aged 65 and over using the internet (6%), compared to higher rates in Canada (48%) (Blanche, 2015), our comparative case study is particularly relevant to explore grandmothers' practices in using social media.

Using Facebook for family connections

In today's increasingly networked society, web-based communication platforms are used more and more in everyday social interactions (Taske & Plude, 2011). Family members admit spending increasing amounts of time to communicate on such platforms, especially on video calls via Skype or social networking via Facebook, particularly in the case of geographically distant families (Siibak, & Tamme 2013).

In the case of older people, video chat is preferred because it replicates the authenticity of everyday interactions (Yuan et al., 2016). Grandparents, in particular, have been found to prefer video chat interaction (usually Skype) since it replicates the type of social interaction that older people are familiar with (Ames et al., 2011). Among social networking websites, Facebook is widely used by older adults (Braun, 2013; Hayes, van Stolk-Cooke, & Muench, 2015), but most research on family communication has focused on video chat compared to social network sites such as Facebook. Although adults admitted they predominantly use the telephone to communicate with their parents who are living afar, video chat technology has become a common place for remote grandparenthood (Forghani, & Neustaedter, 2014), allowing people to multitask and participate together in daily family routines (Turkle, 2011).

The routine of a family video chat is similar to a ritualized face-to-face visit between grandchildren and grandparents, often arranged by parents to reinforce family identity. In

such “ritualized” online visits, remote grandparents enjoy the interaction and feel that they are part of their grandchildren’s lives. They can use visual cues in order to find more topics of discussion, they can talk longer, and find that it is easier to build intergenerational relationships. Grandparents experience the feeling of “being there”, getting to know their grandchildren better, and witnessing the way they grow up, while picking up the conversation from where it was left (Ames et al., 2011).

Less is known about the way grandparents are using Facebook or similar social network websites to build their relationships with their grandchildren. Social networking sites are often used with the intent of strengthening family ties between grandparents and grandchildren (Cornejo, Tentori, & Favela, 2013). Ames and colleagues (2011) report on the intensive preoccupation that grandparents have for photos of their grandchildren. They suggest that this need is partially fulfilled with video chats, but made no reference to the way in which social network sites are used in this respect. Instead of being a substitute for video chat, social network sites, such as Facebook, could be used as a tool for everyday reminiscing (Forghani, Venolia, & Inkpen, 2014), thus providing more topics of discussion for geographically distant families. Work by Cosley and colleagues (2012) has reinforced the value of Facebook in supporting collaborative online activities for remote families.

Sensitized by the literature on video chats, we have chosen to focus on Facebook in order to extend our understanding of the role of social media in family communication. Although we might expect that grandmothers would prefer video chat (i.e. Skype) over telephone or social network sites to communicate with their grandchildren, we explore whether Facebook could also be used as a tool to reminisce, to bring new topics of discussion from everyday life into the digital world, and to provide the opportunity for grandparents to express continued relationship availability. We presume that Skype calls with grandchildren rarely occur daily, so the *perpetual contact* (Turkle, 2011) may be revealed through the use of complementary communication practices, as for example Facebook posts and status updates.

Several authors have explored this phenomenon of so called “phototalk” (O’Hara et al., 2012) as a family communication practice whereby mementos (i.e. Facebook photos and posts) are used to trigger conversations, stories, and family engagement. Digital photos in particular are preferred by grandparents and grandchildren (Forghani, Venolia, & Inkpen, 2014) not only due to their visual effect and ease with which they convey messages, but also because they stimulate communication practices that provide opportunities for sharing stories and talking about everyday routines that are highly valued in the case of remote grandparenthood. O’Hara and colleagues (2012) point out that that personal digital photos often become the subject of enjoyable conversations once families reunite in relaxing moments, for example during family meals. This need by older people to share small things from their everyday lives with their children and grandchildren constitutes a strong incentive to go online to communicate (Santana et al. 2005). Nevertheless, sharing “everyday routine” is not only emotionally driven and enjoyable but a very useful tool to prevent alienation between grandparents and grandchildren. We explore, therefore, how phototalk might occur among three-generation families involved in retrospective storytelling, using personal photos shared via Facebook as memory triggers.

In sum, the purpose of the current study is to investigate the ways in which grandmothers engage with social media, specifically Facebook, in family communication practices through the lens of remote grandmothering (see Sawchuk & Crow, 2012). We regard challenges in the grandparents-grandchildren relationship over the remote situation as influenc-

ing the way in which grandmothers approach new web-based communication platforms in their quest for intimacy and connections with their families.

Moreover, our study focuses on grandmothers specifically, as they are more involved in family bonding and supportive communicative acts. Furthermore, we choose to investigate, in a cross cultural case study, the way Facebook is used as a communication tool to build the relationship between grandmothers and their geographically distant grandchildren. Arguably, the choice of analysing Facebook communication in the current study is supported for at least two reasons: (1) the fact that previous studies have documented the importance attributed by older people to web-based technologies which allows sharing everyday routine (i.e. by the means of photos, videos); (2) the fact that video chat has been shown to play a role in the way that remote grandparents are building relationships with grandchildren, whereas complementary tools involved in expressing continuous relationship availability (such as social network websites) are scarce.

Method

Given the exploratory nature of this cross-cultural case study, an inductive qualitative approach was judged to be appropriate to explore the use of social media in family communication among grandmothers in Romania and Canada. Internet use among adults aged 65 and over differs dramatically between the two countries (48% in Canada compared to just 6% in Romania) (Blanche, 2015).

Participants

In Romania, grandmothers were recruited through a public Facebook group of pensioners who were sharing their experience as grandparents. Snowball sampling was also used to recruit additional participants in Romania. No such publicly accessible Facebook page existed in Canada. Grandmothers in Canada, therefore, were recruited through snowball sampling in the community.

Eligibility was not based on age. Grandmothers were included in the study if they had a Facebook account, opened for more than six months, and on which they were active (checking, posting, reading) at least once per week. They were included if they had permanent internet connections in their homes and proper technological infrastructure. Additionally, they had to have at least one grandchild who lived at a distance of over 200km from their grandmother.

The study included 13 grandmothers: 8 from Romania and 5 from Canada. They varied in age from 60-80 years. The Romanian sample consisted of two grandmothers having grandchildren living in Romania (more than 500 kilometers from their grandmothers' homes) and six grandmothers having grandchildren and children living abroad. In the Canadian sample, all of the grandmothers had grandchildren living in Canada, but all at a distance of over 200 km from the grandmothers' homes. One Canadian grandmother also had grandchildren living abroad. Five of the grandmothers had a secondary school education (3 Romanians and 2 Canadians). The remainder had completed postsecondary education (5 Romanian and 3 Canadian). Most of the grandmothers were married except two Romanian grandmothers who were widowed and one Canadian grandmother who was divorced. All of the grandparents were retired.

All participants owned mobile phones (2 cellular and 11 smart phones). Two Romanian grandmothers owned only tablets while six used desktop computers. The Canadian grandmothers were more likely to own and use multiple devices: four used desktop computers, three used a tablet, and two used laptop computers.

Data Collection

Grandmothers were interviewed in-person using a semi-structured interview approach. The interviews in Romania were conducted by the first author and the interviews in Canada were conducted by the second author. Interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes. The Romanian interviews were translated from Romanian to English for analysis purposes.

The interviews included a discussion of general technology use to determine what types of ICTs that the grandmothers used and how they engaged with these ICTs. Specifically, they discussed the time that they spent using ICTs; the types of activities they participated in, both with their families and individually; the meaning of these experiences; and how these experiences influenced their communication with their family. Participants were then asked to reflect upon the same questions but specifically related to their use of Facebook. They were also asked to reflect on their use of Facebook compared to other people in their social networks.

These interviews were audio-recorded, with participant consent, and then transcribed verbatim. Detailed field notes and a reflective journal were maintained by the researchers throughout this process, the data from which further informed the emergent understanding of participants' experiences. Participation in the study was strictly confidential and any identifying information has been removed to ensure that confidentiality was maintained.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis of the interpretive interviews employed the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as a means to process the data. This facilitated coding and comparison of data both within and between participants. Data were stored and organized using the QSR NVIVO software package to facilitate the development of categories and comparison of codes applicable to each category. Analysis began with open coding, followed by axial coding, and then selective coding (Strauss, 1987). This analysis was grounded in the experiences of the participants and data were systematically compared to the current literature on social media and intergenerational relations. Although the researchers were sensitized by the literature, the interviews were coded inductively based on the broad questions outlined in the interview guide. The findings presented here represent the common themes that were constructed from the stories of the grandmothers and the researchers' interpretations of these stories.

Findings

Data analysis revealed three themes relevant to the discussion of the use of social media in family communication for grandmothers with families living at a distance. These themes illustrate; 1) the tendency to switch between technologies and use different devices and pro-

grams to communicate with their families; 2) the relatively passive use of Facebook, focusing on reading and sharing information rather than posting original information; 3) the influence of social norms around decency and privacy in social media use.

Shifting technologies

As we expected, video chat (i.e Skype) was preferred over Facebook based on the ability to build authentic relationships with their grandchildren and the feeling of being present in their lives at a distance. Facebook was seen as a way of presenting daily life using photos. In fact, although Facebook allowed individuals to engage in collaborative communication practices by posting comments, grandparents rarely used Facebook media in this manner. Instead, they used Facebook as a platform to view photos and read posts, but then preferred to use other ICTs such as the telephone or video chat in order to engage in more in-depth conversations. They relied more exclusively on Facebook to keep in touch with more distant relatives (2nd or 3rd cousins, nieces and nephews), but engaged in a blending of technologies with their children and grandchildren. For example, one Romanian grandmother shared her family's experience, saying:

I looked on Facebook and I saw pictures with my son's house and how he decorated it, and I just picked up the phone and said to him, "I don't like it that much". I asked him to add new photos on Facebook so I can see more clearly.

We found evidence for Facebook being used as a complementary technology relative to video chats or telephone calls. Grandmothers perceived Facebook as an opportunity to keep in touch with the everyday lives of their families, but they preferred to be able to speak directly to their grandchildren, either by video chat or on the telephone. These personal communications provided a better opportunity to foster deeper personal relationships, as noted by one Romanian grandmother who said,

I like seeing their [grandchildren's] photos on Facebook, but I prefer calling them when I have something to say. And now, with the Skype, anytime I miss them I can call them, and talk with them. We talk like crazy and it is nice that we can see each other. Sometimes, when I really miss them, I just call.

The Canadian grandmothers spoke about similar experiences, emphasizing the increased depth of the conversations that happened over the telephone, as compared to Facebook or email. One grandmother stated, "It [Facebook] kind of allows you to stay in touch but it's not maybe the depth of personal connection". Another grandmother reflected,

I can sit and talk on the phone to [daughter] for an hour and, of course, you get more out of that that you get from a text or email. So I still prefer actual contact. I still like to phone.

There was one particular instance when Facebook played a more important role in family communication. One grandmother from a small town in Romania was experiencing difficulties in talking with her grandchildren and her son-in-law, as a part of an intercultural family. The grandchildren spoke only a bit of Romanian and her son in law spoke only Greek, so she had difficulties communicating with them over the phone or via video chat. She expressed her preference for sharing content (photos, quotations, videos) on Facebook, as her grandchildren and son-in-law would react to that content (giving a "Like"). In return she also learned

how to give positive feedback to the content posted by her family members. This particular participant brought into discussion a topic that needs further development: the remote grandparenting role and the use of ICTs in multicultural families. This raises new challenges to the grandparenting role and opens new possibilities for the social networks (as Facebook) in reshaping family communication practices.

Passive use of Facebook

Both Romanian and Canadian grandmothers used Facebook in a relatively passive way, despite frequent (usually daily) use. They spoke predominantly about using Facebook to view photos and read news stories and inspirational or humorous quotations. They would 'share' or sometimes 'like' stories and quotations, but none of the participants ever posted original content in this respect. One Canadian grandmother reflected, "I didn't put anything on. I was busy reading what other people were posting". A Romanian grandmother spoke about wanting to learn how to post photos, but that she had not yet been able to accomplish this task, stating, "I like to see photos. I would like to learn how to add photos on Facebook with my grandsons. It will make me happy".

This passive use of Facebook was not viewed as a significant problem by the grandmothers. While some of the Romanian grandmothers reported technological challenges with Facebook, the Canadian grandmothers all created their own Facebook account and "just figured it out on my own" without the assistance of their families. They were quite content to use Facebook to simply view items, rather than converse about them. Staying in touch with the day-to-day developments with their grandchildren was perceived to be the biggest advantage to using Facebook. As one Canadian grandmother said:

I get to see that sweet little face. She [daughter] will put pictures of the children. That's the best thing ever, when I open Facebook and I see a little video when they're [grandchildren] all involved in something so serious. They're just so sweet and I don't get to see them enough. So the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages for Facebook.

All of the grandmothers thirsted for more photos, particularly of their grandchildren and their children.

Enacting norms of decency and privacy on Facebook

Grandmothers were concerned about privacy issues, although not primarily in the sense that they were concerned about Facebook owning their information. Their concerns related more specifically to what information they perceived to be "decent" or "appropriate" to share in a public forum. One Romanian grandmother reflected,

I simply don't like people, women who undress themselves on internet. I don't want to share my problems with strangers. I have seen a lot of people on Facebook talking with others they don't know or just showing everything. I do not see myself doing this.

Another Canadian grandmother explained her reasoning as follows,

I'm not such an introverted, extremely private person, but why would I do that [post pictures of myself]? It's like going around and putting pictures of myself on my car and at my workplace saying 'This is what I look like'. It's ridiculous.

Concerns of how others would judge what the grandmothers shared on Facebook was troubling for the grandmothers. In some instances the fear of a negative judgement was more diffuse, whereas in others, such reflections directly included the relationship with the grandchildren. For example, one Romanian grandmother shared her concern over managing her identity via her photograph on her profile page.

First, I did not know how to create a page. My son, who helped me, took a photo of mine using the camera from the tablet. Then people called me and told me the photo is really ugly and I should change it. I also did not like it but I did not know how to change it. Now is better, I put a photo of my grandchildren.

Others were more concerned about teaching their grandchildren about these norms of decency and privacy. One Romanian grandmother said,

I would like to be a model for my grandchildren, to teach them well and share my wisdom. I would not like to interact with whomever on Facebook, people that I do not know well and to share things with them.

Lastly, there were concerns about how the instantaneous nature of social media can negatively influence how people converse. One Canadian grandmother reflected on this challenge, stating:

Well, what people are raising now is the privacy issues. You know, people are not very circumspect when it comes to Facebook. It's so instantaneous. People can get really hysterical and angry so quickly on Facebook.

Discussion

By engaging in a cross-cultural, comparative case study of grandmothers' use of Facebook in family communication, we have begun to develop a more detailed understanding of the role of social media in the lives of older people. Grandmothers continued to be highly involved in the lives of their children and grandchildren, despite substantial geographic separation. Our findings also indicate that we need to attend more carefully to issues surrounding not only adoption, but also the use of ICTs among older people. As a relational identity, being a grandmother impacted the experience of ICTs, particularly social media. Staying connected to the everyday lives of grandchildren was the main motivator for grandmothers' use of Facebook. Emotions played an important role in grandmothers' choices and experiences surrounding ICT use. This supports previous work that has emphasized the opportunity for social media to meet these emotional needs (Breheny, Stephens, & Spilsbury, 2013; Forghani, & Neustaedter, 2014).

Our case study provides a more nuanced understanding of how ICTs, both devices and platforms, are experienced by older people. Grandmothers engaged with multiple media (e.g., social media and video chat), often alternating between the two. The telephone was still the predominant and preferred communication medium. As Sawchuk and Crow (2010) suggest, scholars need to attend to the range of communication media with which older people engage. Singling out one device or platform to study minimizes the complexity of the experiences that older people have with ICTs. Grandmothers shifted back and forth between devices and platforms to facilitate family communication and enhance their experiences of remote grandmothers. Similarly, they also used a mixture of 'new' and 'old' media, preferring telephone

conversations to facilitate deeper family connections. While we concur with research that suggests that social networking sites were important to older people, contributing to enhanced communication with family and friends (Bosch, & Currin 2015), our findings suggest that this is a multilayered experience that involves multiple ICTs and illustrate that grandmothers have different motivations for using different ICTs.

This multilayered experience shared by the grandmothers in our study exemplified what O'Hara et al. (2012) referred to as 'phototalk'. Grandmothers accessed Facebook on a regular basis with the primary motivation being to view photos of their grandchildren. These photos allowed the grandmothers to participate, albeit remotely, in the daily lives of their grandchildren. Our findings support previous research that has shown that instead of being a substitute for video chat, social network websites could be used as a tool for everyday reminiscing (Forghani, Venolia, & Inkpen, 2014), thus providing more topics of discussion for geographically distant families. Our work also supports Cosley and colleagues' (2012) assertion that Facebook can support collaborative online activities for remote families. Facebook was used as a complementary communication medium in order to enhance communication via other media.

In addition to individual behaviours exhibited by older people using social media, our findings indicate that it is vital that we attend to the systems in which older people are embedded and focus on how these systems intersect with the technology experiences across the lifespan. ICTs are experienced within the broader social, political, and cultural systems. The growth of the so-called 'Information Society' is undermined by the fact that the benefits of digital media are not flowing evenly within countries or across the world. Unequal access to technologies results in digital exclusion at both international and local levels (Cammaerts, Van Audenjove, Nulens, & Pauwals 2003). Ricci (2000) indicates that several groups within Western society are most vulnerable to this digital exclusion, including low-income communities, individuals with little formal education, individuals who are un-employed or under-employed, foreign or diasporic communities, women, and older adults. Our comparative case study explored a population that is routinely neglected or, at best, homogenized in the study of ICTs. Findings highlight common experiences among Romanian and Canadian grandmothers and point to a complex experience of social media for older people. Our study focused specifically on grandmothers who were using Facebook.

It should be noted, however, that ownership and access do not necessarily translate to use in all cases. Nearly 50% of older adults in Canada, yet only 6% of older adults in Romania have reported using the internet at least once over the past 12 months, despite widespread internet access in both countries (Blanche, 2015). Warschauer (2004) cautions, however, that when we focus only on providing hardware and software, we pay insufficient attention to the human and social systems that must also be in place for technology to make a difference. He suggests that a complex array of factors must be taken into account if meaningful access to new technologies is to be provided, including: physical, digital and social resources and relationships; content and language; literacy and education; community and institutional structures. When marginalised groups do log on, there is often scarce content that applies to their lives and their communities. Importantly, Van Dijk (2005) points out that access also includes motivational access whereby people see a relevance or potential benefit in using ICTs, as well as having the skills to effectively use the technology, along with the ability to use the technology. Our findings suggest that family communication, particularly in relation to grandchildren, is a key factor that contributes to the relevance of social media for grandmothers.

Future research should also endeavour to explore the motivations and experiences of older people who choose not to use Facebook and develop a better understanding for the reasons behind this choice. We mustn't assume that lack of access or poor technological skills are the only reasons that older people don't engage with social media.

The findings from the current study also expand Szinovacz's (1998, 2007) work around redefining the grandparent role. Social network sites such as Facebook create a third place for intergenerational relations, endowed with specific emotions, intentions and meanings. Kyle and Chick (2007) indicate that place is a state of mind and our cultural and individual identities affect how we ascribe meaning to our experiences. Meanings that individuals and collectives ascribe to a place are considered reflections of both their cultural & individual identities (Kyle & Chick, 2007). Delamere (2011) suggests that digitally mediated third places such as Second Life, facilitate the development of social capital. Further, meaningful place experiences often occur in the presence of significant others, including grandparents and grandchildren. As such, family and close friends have been found to have particular influence on the social world perspectives of individuals (Kyle & Chick, 2007). Our findings expand this thinking and indicate that remote grandparenting benefits from the use of Facebook as a third place, allowing grandmothers to participate in the everyday lives of their grandchildren. Taking space and place into account when studying grandmothers' experience of social media can help us to derive a more nuanced understanding of the intergenerational experience of ICTs.

Participating in Facebook as a third place with their grandchildren also provided an important opportunity for grandmothers to act as role models. This was particularly salient in their actions relating to decency and privacy on Facebook. Grandmothers modelled what they felt to be 'appropriate' social behaviour by taking care not to 'overshare' personal information about themselves, in what they perceived to be a fairly public forum. This supports the idea that grandmothers use Facebook not only as a "phatic technology" (Wang, Tucker, & Haines, 2012) but also as a "socialization tool". Their choices not to actively post content about themselves on Facebook could be interpreted as 'passive' use, particularly in studies that utilize research methods that only focus on behaviours of the participants. Our case study interview methodology provided us with deeper insight into meaning and experience of social media for older people. Rather than being 'passive' users, grandmothers in our study used their participation on Facebook to model behaviours that reflected a commitment to norms of decency and privacy.

Conclusion

Although some older people may not have been early adopters of new media, generalising this as the experience of all older adults is misleading. Not all older people reject technology. Indeed, a recent Pew study has found that "older" people are the fastest growing population to use social media (Madden, 2010). Older people are agentic in their choices around ICTs. Subjective meanings attached to ICTs warrant deeper investigation. Older people have been exposed to a multitude of new technologies imbued with promises that these technologies would change the way they live (Carey, 1988). Attention to the social and historical context can deepen our understanding of their experience of today's 'new' media. Further studies are needed to explore other uses, and non-uses of social media. Our work highlights

the multilayered experience of social media among grandmothers who use Facebook to stay connected to the everyday lives of their grandchildren and use the medium to facilitate socialization and communication among family members.

Our exploratory case study comparing Romanian and Canadian grandmothers raises important methodological questions. Current research needs to move beyond the extremely basic statistics that we currently have, such as the number of households with internet connection. We need to ask more informative and critical questions such as: What factors influence acceptance or non-acceptance of specific ICT innovations? What impacts older people's choices to *not* engage on social media? Are there differences based on gender? How do race and class influence their choices? How is (dis)ability implicated with respect to new technologies? What do older people need in order to engage with social media in a meaningful way? Social inequalities are a reality in the world of digital leisure. How can this case help us to explore this issue? Studies that have been more respectful of older people's use of these technologies have argued that we must take these socio-cultural considerations into account (Horst & Miller, 2006; Sawchuk & Crow, 2010). Grandmothers are routinely rendered invisible in ICT research. By bringing the voices of these women to the forefront, we provide a foundation for a more nuanced understanding of the way in which grandmothers engage with social media to facilitate family communication.

Acknowledgements

This work is supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada to the Ageing, Communication, Technologies project (actproject.ca). We would like to thank the grandmothers who so generously shared their stories and their time with us. A previous version of this paper was presented at the 2nd Annual Qualitative Research in Communication Conference in Bucharest, Romania.

References

1. Ames, M.G., Go, J., Kaye, J.J., & Spasojevic, M. (2011, March). Understanding technology choices and values through social class. In *Proceedings of the ACM 2011 conference on Computer supported cooperative work* (pp. 55-64). ACM. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/1958824.1958834>
2. Blanche, D. (2015) *Statistical Summary of Ageing and ICTs*. Retrieved from http://actproject.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Report_Stats_Ageing_ICT.pdf
3. Bosch, T. & Currin, B. (2015) Uses and gratifications of computers in South African elderly people. *Communicar: Media Education Research Journal*, 23 (45), 9-17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3916/C45-2015-01>
4. Braun, M. T. (2013). Obstacles to social networking website use among older adults. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(3), 673-680. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.12.004>
5. Breheny, M., Stephens, C., & Spilsbury, L. (2013). Involvement without interference: How grandparents negotiate intergenerational expectations in relationships with grandchildren. *Journal of Family Studies*, 19(2), 174-184. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5172/jfs.2013.19.2.174>
6. Burke, M., Adamic, L.A., & Marciniak, K. (2013). Families on Facebook. *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Weblogs and Social Media* (pp.238-250).Cambridge, MA. 8–11 July 2013.
7. Cammaerts, B., Van Audenjoove, L., Nulens, G., & Pauwals, C. (Eds.) (2003). *Beyond the digital divide: Reducing exclusion, fostering inclusion*. Brussels, Belgium: Brussels University Press.

8. Carey, J.W. (1988) Technology and ideology: The case of the telegraph'. In J.W. Carey: *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (pp. 201–230). Winchester, MA: Unwin Hyman.
9. Castells, M. (2010) *End of millennium* (2nd edition). West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9781444323436>
10. Chesley, N., & Johnson, B.E. (2014). Information and communication technology use and social connectedness over the life course. *Sociology Compass*, 8(6), 589–602. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12170>
11. Cornejo, R., Tentori, M., & Favela, J. (2013). Enriching in-person encounters through social media: A study on family connectedness for the elderly. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, 71 (9), 889–899. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2013.04.001>
12. Cosley, D., Sosik, V.S., Schultz, J., Peesapati, S.T., & Lee, S. (2012). Experiences with designing tools for everyday reminiscing. *Human-Computer Interaction*, 27(1-2), 175–198.
13. Delamere, F. M. (2011) Second Life as a digitally mediated third place: Social capital in virtual world communities. In G. Crawford, V. K. Gosling and B. Light (eds.) *Online gaming in context: The social and cultural significance of online games* (pp. 236–248). London: Routledge. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780203869598>
14. Forghani, A., & Neustaedter, C. (2014, April). The routines and needs of grandparents and parents for grandparent-grandchild conversations over distance. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 4177–4186). ACM. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2556288.2557255>
15. Fernández-Ardèvol, M. & Ivan, L. (2013). Older people and mobile communication in two European contexts. *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations*, 15(3), 83–98.
16. Forghani, A., Venolia, G., & Inkpen, K. (2014, November). Media2gether: Sharing media during a call. *Proceedings of the 18th International Conference on Supporting Group Work* (pp. 142–151). ACM. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2660398.2660417>
17. Friemel, T.N. (2016). The digital divide has grown old: Determinants of a digital divide among seniors. *New Media & Society*, 18(2), 313–331. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444814538648>
18. Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson.
19. González, V. M., Jomhari, N., & Kurniawan, S. H. (2012). Photo-based narratives as communication mediators between grandparents and their children and grandchildren living abroad. *Universal Access in the Information Society*, 11(1), 67–84. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10209-011-0234-z>
20. Harley, D., Vetere, F., Fitzpatrick, G., & Kurniawan, S. (2012). Intergenerational context as an emphasis for design. *Universal Access in the Information Society*, 11(1), 1–5. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10209-011-0228-x>
21. Harper, S. (2014). *Ageing Societies*. London: Routledge.
22. Hasmanová-Marhánková, J. (2015). The changing practices and meanings of grandparenthood. Reflections on the demographical trends and changing representations of ageing. *Sociology Compass*, 9(4), 309–319. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12259>
23. Hayes, M., van Stolk-Cooke, K., & Muench, F. (2015). Understanding Facebook use and the psychological effect of use across generations. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 49, 507–511. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.03.040>
24. Hebblethwaite, S. (2016). The (in)visibility of older adults in digital leisure cultures. In S. Carnicelli, D. McGillivray, & G. McPherson (Eds.), *Digital Leisure Cultures: Critical Perspectives*. London: Routledge. In press.
25. Horst, H.A. & Miller, D. (2006). *The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication*. Oxford & New York: Berg. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474215657>
26. Judge, T. K., Neustaedter, C., Harrison, S., & Blose, A. (2011, May). Family portals: connecting families through a multifamily media space. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 1205–1214). ACM.
27. Kyle, G., & Chick, G. (2007). The social construction of a sense of place. *Leisure Sciences*, 29(3), 209–225. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01490400701257922>

28. Madden, M. (2010) Older adults and social media. Pew Internet & American Life Project, [Online] Available at: <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Older-Adults-and-Social-Media.aspx>
29. Melvin, R. M., Bunt, A., Oduor, E., & Neustaedter, C. (2015, April). The Effect of Signal Expense and Dependability on Family Communication in Rural and Northern Canada. In *Proceedings of the 33rd Annual ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 717-726). ACM. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2702123.2702301>
30. Napoli, A. (2014). Social media use and generational identity: Issues and consequences on peer-to-peer and cross-generational relationships—an empirical study. *Participations. Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 11(2), 182-206.
31. O'Hara, K., Helmes, J., Sellen, A., Harper, R., ten Bhömer, M., & van den Hoven, E. (2012). Food for talk: Phototalk in the context of sharing a meal. *Human-Computer Interaction*, 27(1-2), 124-150.
32. Phillipson, C. (2013). *Ageing*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
33. Quadrello, T., Hurme, H., Menzinger, J., Smith, P. K., Veisson, M., Vidal, S., & Westerback, S. (2005). Grandparents use of new communication technologies in a European perspective. *European Journal of Ageing*, 2(3), 200-207. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10433-005-0004-y>
34. Raffle, H. et al. (2010, April). Family story play: reading with young children (and Elmo) over a distance. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 1583-1592). ACM. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/1753326.1753563>
35. Reitzes, D.C., & Mutran, E.J. (2004). Grandparent identity, intergenerational family identity, and well-being. *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 59(4), S213-S219. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/geronb/59.4.s213>
36. Ricci, A. (2000) Measuring information society: Dynamics of European data on usage of information and communication technologies in Europe since 1995. *Telematics and Informatics*, 17 (1-2), 141-167. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0736-5853\(00\)00002-2](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0736-5853(00)00002-2)
37. Rodriguez, I., Oteo, M., Gleisner, S., & Herskovic, V. (2015, May). SINCOM: Communicating grandparents and grandchildren living at a distance. In *Computer Supported Cooperative Work in Design (CSCWD), 2015 IEEE 19th International Conference on* (pp. 153-158). IEEE. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1109/cscwd.2015.7230950>
38. Santana, P.C., Rodríguez, M. D., González, V.M., Castro, L.A., Andrade, A.G., & Favela, J. (2005). A Web-based system to facilitate elders communication with their families living abroad. *Computer Science*, ENC 2005, 18-25. IEEE. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1109/enc.2005.8>
39. Sawchuk, K., & Crow, B. (2010) Talking “costs”: Seniors, cell phones and the personal and political economies of telecommunications in Canada. *Telecommunications Journal of Australia*, 60 (4), 551–5511. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2104/tja10055>
40. Sawchuk, K., & Crow, B. (2012). “I’m G-Mom on the Phone” Remote grandmothering, cell phones and inter-generational dis/connections. *Feminist Media Studies*, 12(4), 496-505. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2012.741863>
41. Sigad, L.I., & Eisikovits, R. A. (2013). Grandparenting across borders: American grandparents and their Israeli grandchildren in a transnational reality. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 27(4), 308-316. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2013.06.002>
42. Siibak, A., & Tamme, V. (2013). ‘Who introduced Granny to Facebook?’ An exploration of everyday family interactions in web-based communication environments. *Northern lights: Film & media studies year-book*, 11(1), 71-89. http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/nl.11.1.71_1
43. Sorensen, P., & Cooper, N. J. (2010). Reshaping the family man: A grounded theory study of the meaning of grandfatherhood. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 18(2), 117-136. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3149/jms.1802.117>
44. Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Procedures and techniques for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
45. Szinovacz, M. E. (1998). Research on grandparenting: Needed refinements in concepts, theories, and methods. In M.E. Szinovacz (Ed.), *Handbook on Grandparenting* (pp. 257–288). Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

46. Szinovacz, M.E. (2007). The future of intergenerational relationships – variability and vulnerabilities. In W. Scheie & P. Uhlenberg (Eds.), *Demographic Changes and the Well-being of Older Persons* (pp. 262-268) New York: Springer.
47. Tarrant, A. (2010). Constructing a social geography of grandparenthood: A new focus for intergenerationality. *Area*, 42(2), 190-197. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4762.2009.00920.x>
48. Taske, C., Plude, F.F. (2011). Experiencing social media across generations. *Media Development*, 58 (1), 38-41.
49. Tee, K., Brush, A.J., & Inkpen, K.M. (2009). Exploring communication and sharing between extended families. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, 67(2), 128-138. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2008.09.007>
50. Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York: Basic Books.
51. Van Dijk, J. A. (2005). *The Deepening Divide: Inequality in the Information Society*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452229812>
52. Wang, V., Tucker, J.V., & Haines, K. (2012). Phatic technologies in modern society. *Technology in Society*, 34(1), 84-93. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2012.01.001>
53. Warschauer, M. (2004) *Technology and Social Inclusion: Rethinking the Digital Divide*. Boston, MASS.: MIT Press.
54. Yuan, S., Hussain, S. A., Hales, K. D., & Cotten, S.R. (2016). What do they like? Communication preferences and patterns of older adults in the United States: The role of technology. *Educational Gerontology*, 1-12. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03601277.2015.1083392>

Andrea ROSALES*

Mireia FERNÁNDEZ-ARDÈVOL **

Beyond WhatsApp: Older people and smartphones

Abstract

This paper analyzes how older people, living in Spain, use smartphones and smartphone applications. Using a mixed methods approach, we compare quantitative results obtained by tracking mobile app usage amongst different generational samples with qualitative, focus-group discussions with active smartphone users. A sample of Spanish smartphone users were tracked during one month in the winter of 2014 (238 individuals, aged 20 to 76 years-old). This was followed by three focus group sessions conducted in the spring of 2015, with 24 individuals aged 55 to 81. As we learned, WhatsApp is currently the most popular application used by people of all ages, including older adults. Smartphones increasingly are playing a central role in the life of older participants, although the frequency of app access is negatively correlated with age. On the other hand, as our data indicates, older adults also use a number of different types of apps that are distinct from that of younger users. Older participants access personal information manager apps (calendar, address book and notes) more often than other age groups. And comparatively, older participants use the smartphone less often in stable locations (home, office, relatives' home) with Wifi than somewhere else and with mobile data. As we argue, differences in age seem to reflect the evolution in personal interests and communication patterns that change as we grow older. Our study captures new trends in smartphone usage amongst this cohort. It also indicates how a combination of methods may help to assess the validity of the log and qualitative data. We highlight the relevance of conducting careful generational studies in smartphone use and some of the potentials and limitations of making predictive studies of ICT use as we change throughout the life course. Finally, we assert the value of the inclusion of older representatives within research, which ultimately may influence public decisions and the design of new technologies.

Keywords: smartphones; ageing; apps; use patterns; elders; focus groups; log data.

Introduction

Older adults are often portrayed as less avid users of information and communication technologies (ICT), as uninterested in ICTs, or of not being capable to use them properly. These discourses find some support if one examines the existing available data (Eurostat, 2015). Yet, this statistical picture is changing and one must also question how this data was collected and what it may include or exclude. For example, older adults show the highest growth rate for mobile ICT adoption in developed contexts (Deloitte, 2014). An increasing amount of evidence examines older individuals as active users of social network sites (SNS) such as Face-

* Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Spain, arosalescl@uoc.edu

** Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Spain, mfernandezar@uoc.edu

book (Choudrie & Vyas, 2014; Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015; Nef, Ganea, Müri, & Mosimann, 2013), their use of virtual spaces for maintaining both weak and strong ties (Hage & Noseleit, 2015; Khvorostianov, Elias, & Nimrod, 2012) or for developing personal interests (Nimrod, 2014). Closer to home, the pervasive use of instant messaging (IM), notably WhatsApp in Spain (CIS, 2016), challenges an array of age stereotypes as demonstrated by a casual observation in the city of Barcelona where people of any age – older people included – are seen busily using their smartphones while on public transport. Such stereotypes of the participation of older people in the world of ICTs are often built on embedded prejudices that run contrary to available empirical evidence. More recent studies address this stereotypical portrait of ICT use in the case of older people (Loos, 2011) and can assist us to understand how research may be contributing to the perpetuation of an age-based digital divide (Lagacé, Chamarkeh, Tanguay, & Annick, 2015).

Digital media use, as a part of the overall landscape of mediated communication, is widely studied with respect to children and youth, but is underdeveloped with respect to older people (Colombo & Fortunati, 2011; Mihailidis, 2014; Silverstone & Haddon, 1996). Teenagers and young people often constitute reference points for ICT studies because it is assumed that they help identify the main trends of adoption and use (Castells, Fernández Ardèvol, Linchuan Qiu, & Sey, 2006; Ito et al., 2010). Contributions that take the older population into account are scarce in comparison, although there is a growing interest in how older adults engage with Internet and ICTs in general (Colombo & Fortunati, 2011; Loos, Haddon, & Mante-Meijer, 2012; Prendergast & Garattini, 2015) and in mobile communication in particular (Communello, Mulargia, Belotti, & Fernández-Ardèvol, 2015; Fernández-Ardèvol, 2016; Nguyen, Irizarry, Garrett, & Downing, 2015; Pang, Vu, Zhang, & Foo, 2015; Petrovèie, Fortunati, Vehovar, Kavèie, & Dolnièar, 2015). There appear to be (non-explicit) normativities that persistently frame the ideal patterns of use and adoption as those belonging to youth, although this is changing.

Ageing and age are socially constructed phenomena and are ongoing processes. Ageing in particular, and phases in the life course in general, shape and are shaped by broader relations of power as Calasanti & King have argued in a recent paper (2015). Being old often has negative connotations (Garattini & Prendergast, 2015) because of prevailing age-related norms that often portraying older people as limited individuals who are objects of others' actions (Jolanki, 2009). Such norms limit the perceived agency of older people in different ways. Yet as Ling has argued in 2008, intimate personal network can act either as a supportive mechanism or a limiting one (Ling, 2008). This set of conditions and context affects ICT adoption in particular and perceptions of digital technologies in general (Buccoliero & Belio, 2014). As other research indicates, personal values and interests change over the lifetime (B. L. Neugarten, 1996) and personal communication patterns and the use of media evolve as we grow old, as Ling, Bertel, & Sundsoy (2012) have demonstrated in analyzing differences in SMS use between different age groups. Stereotypes surrounding ICT use may contribute significantly to digital inequalities, as they deploy implicit modes of operation that may shape social behaviors (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), including ICT skills (Lagacé et al., 2015).

Studies that track online individual behavior have multiplied recently, and older people have started to be included in such analyses (Azuddin, Malik, Abdullah, & Mahmud, 2014; Pang et al., 2015). Tracking online activities offers new ways of achieving an accurate understanding of users' behaviors (Gonçalves & Ramasco, 2009) that partially correlates with reported use (Boase & Ling, 2013). However, these analyses tend to be ahistorical ((Up-

richard, 2012), static or focused on very short-term observations (Thomas et al., 2013). Despite the obvious necessity to question the assumptions involved in the huge capacities that big data bring to research (boyd & Crawford, 2012), few approaches try to understand the meaning behind the existing databases, databases that reflect online activity in terms of individuals' everyday life perspectives (DeLyser & Sui, 2013). In this regard, a key contribution to our understanding of data is to compare and confront the results obtained with log-tracked data with the opinions and perceptions of different groups, such as older people.

The goal of this paper is to understand the ways that older people appropriate smartphones from a perspective that challenges ageist stereotypes. To do so, we create a dialogue between the results of a generational log data study and the reported experiences of older smartphone users. We first tracked the activity of 238 smartphone users aged between 18 and 76 years old for one month. We then gathered reported experiences, related to the results of the first part of the study, in three focus groups with 25 individuals aged between 55 and 81 years old. Our analysis is oriented in two inter-related directions: the specific uses (what?) by older adults of smartphones and the routines established by our older participants (where?). We explore the specificities of smartphone use among older people, to better articulate the relevancy that the smartphone, and smartphone applications (or apps) have for older individuals. The (new) perspective that log data brings to the study of digital devices allows for an increase in our overall knowledge on the current use of smartphones while our focus group research adds nuance to these issues. With this in mind we look more closely at current research on smartphones.

Studying smartphone use

Smartphones have specific affordances and capabilities, different from computers or tablets. The comparison of use patterns among 136 smartphone users and 160 laptop users in the US, including the analysis of log data gathered in 2009, shows that use sessions tend to be shorter and more distributed through the day in smartphones than in laptops (Oulasvirta, Rattenbury, Ma, & Raita, 2012). One study, undertaken in Flanders, Belgium, analyzed news consumption on mobile devices—smartphones and tablet computers combined interviews, diaries, and automated data logs of 30 participants tracked during one week (Van Damme, Courtois, Verbrugge, & Marez, 2015). Researchers found that news media are consumed on different screens, such as computers, laptops, television, or mobile devices. The authors also identified a noticeable shift towards news consumption on mobile devices, which is considered an individual activity. Interestingly, the consumption of news on mobile devices is mostly non-mobile, as the consultation of news when at home exceeded that during the rest of the day. Indeed, the mobile phone tends to be used most (from stable locations, such as the home, work, or school (Castells et al., 2006) than on the go. This is, perhaps, a reflection of the social dynamics that articulate everyday life (Giddens, 1987 ch. 6). For instance, the Spanish population, aged 10 years old and over, spend most of the day at home (16:34 hours on average), while the second most common place for people to be is their place of work or school (2:45 hours). In addition, people spend one hour a day on the street or in open spaces, and 1:08 hours on transportation.

Mobile phones constitute important everyday life tools that allow for permanent connection (Katz & Aakhus, 2002). Permanent connection means being able to reach others at any moment, however this does not mean that individuals spend the whole day on their smart-

phones. The consultation period on the device tend to be short. What one finds are brief usage sessions repeated over time, which represent an important part of smartphone use and constitute one of its particular characteristics. Ørmen & Thorhauge (2015) term these 'microroutines', which are embedded into everyday life patterns. In the US, the 6-month tracking of 25 users demonstrated that smartphones are in the idle state most of the time (Shye, Scholbrock, Memik, & Dinda, 2010).

The design and goals of log data studies are diverse. In Finland, 20 smartphone users were tracked during four weeks and interviewed to determine their social networking patterns through a specific social network aggregator service, LinkedUI (Cui & Honkala, 2011). The authors also observed that people form habits of checking their mobile devices at frequent intervals. In South Korea, a national panel of 1646 users provided by a marketing research company, were tracked during one month in 2011 to measure usage concentration of smartphone apps (Jung, Kim, & Chan-Olmsted, 2014). While panelists' time was concentrated on a few apps, the array of game apps used was diverse. That is, most people used the same few apps but in the case of games the market was much more segmented. In addition, there seems to be the conjoint use of apps, as a study in the USA showed. Based on data traffic and the time access of apps collected from a set of 600.000 unique subscribers, gathered evidence suggests that, for instance, weather and news apps are used together (Xu et al., 2011). Finally, according to Barkhuus & Polichar (Barkhuus & Polichar, 2011), individuals use their smartphones in highly individual manners to suit their needs and lifestyle. For example many people use mobile devices during parallel activities of personal interest, such as streaming music while cycling or playing games while watching TV (Lord et al., 2015).

Smartphone logs to predict smartphone use

An array of studies have attempted to make predictions on different aspects of smartphone use (Ørmen & Thorhauge, 2015). In 2004, the MIT Human Dynamics Laboratory conducted a pioneer study that gave rise to the reality mining dataset (Eagle & Pentland, 2006) by tracking 100 smartphones to "extract patterns that predict future human behavior".¹ Within the project, a classification of daily routines based on mobile phone data, which then encouraged researchers to make predictive statements on the routines in an individual's everyday life (Eagle & Pentland, 2009). Similarly, Nokia Research Center conducted the Lausanne data collection campaign in 2009-2010 (Kiukkonen, Blom, Dousse, Gatica-Perez, & Laurila, 2010). They analyzed smartphone log data together with self-reported information. This mixed method was used to determine personality traits of mobile phone users that could feed machine learning methods (Chittaranjan, Jan, & Gatica-Perez, 2011).

A lack of generational perspective

Most papers analyzing smartphone use do not collect or report the age of participants, do not include older people, or do not report the nuances of smartphone use depending on age differences. Among this rising number of studies that track smartphone use, almost none focus on older people or make generational comparisons. One possible exception is a study on

the excessive dependence on smartphones comparing ‘digital natives’ and ‘non natives’, where (non) nativity was based on the participant’s age (Ahn & Jung, 2014). The majority of research analyzes youth and adults together (Cui & Honkala, 2011; Eagle & Pentland, 2009; Oulasvirta et al., 2012; Van Damme et al., 2015). There are also studies that look at a specific age group, such as youth (Lee et al., 2014; Mihailidis, 2014; Pan, Chen, & Rau, 2013; Raento, Oulasvirta, & Eagle, 2009) or adults (Barkhuus & Polichar, 2011; Kiukkonen et al., 2010). Jung et al. (Jung et al., 2014) analyze a sample of individuals grouped by age from 10 years old to 50 years old and over, ignoring nuances for each generation. In Chittaranjan, Jan, & Gatica-Perez (Chittaranjan et al., 2011), the sample ranges from 19 to 63 years old with no specific analysis of the age dimension. Finally, some studies do not even mention the age of participants in the case study (Böhmer, Hecht, Schöning, Krüger, & Bauer, 2011), either because authors do not consider it relevant for the topic of the study, or because it was not possible to access that information (Lord et al., 2015; Shye et al., 2010; Xu et al., 2011). Given this context, one of our goals is to contribute to a reflection on the current shortage of data on older individuals in the study of smartphone by providing specific empirical evidence and by discussing its interpretation. The research question we have is: What are the specificities, if any, in the use of smartphones by older adults?

Method

To answer this question, we have used a mixed methods approach. First, we tracked users’ smartphone activity in a sample of 283 adults during a period of one month. Second, we conducted three focus groups with older adults to have insight into the way they used their smartphones.

Research based on the log data generated by smartphones have proliferated since the mid 2000s. Smartphones open the door, as do other on line digital media, to automated log data which allow non-intrusive records of mundane everyday life activities and make possible “augmented longitudinal, process, and context-sensitive investigations” (Raento et al., 2009). Log data are used to obtain “real use” data not only in the field of the social sciences, but also in computing sciences in general (Shye et al., 2010) and in human computer interaction in particular (Cui & Honkala, 2011). However, “the log data per se cannot provide the most important insights, namely the context and purpose of use” (Ørmen & Thorhauge, 2015) and it is necessary to keep in mind that not all data gathered on the device corresponds to the activity of the user (Raento et al., 2009). Thus, a mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2003) is used to complement the quantitative data from smartphone logs, with qualitative data from focus groups. In what follows we detail these two very different yet related studies, one using mobile app tracking and one based on focus groups. Some details of the tracking are necessary for an appropriate interpretation of results.

Mobile app tracking

As we are researchers who live and work in the context of Spain, we have used a market research panel that focuses on the Spanish population to track the online activities of a set of

panelists on their smartphones (from now on in this paper we will refer to them as panelists). The panelists are active internet users, already registered in the panel when we started the study. They installed an app on their device(s) to become part of the tracked panel and received non-economic rewards for participating in the activities of the panel—mainly surveys and tracking. The dataset corresponds to one month of activity between 17 November and 16 December 2014. The software registers every time each user accesses an app, the date and time of the access, the active length of the session, and the type of connection (Wi-Fi or mobile data). For example if a panelist opens a fitness app (i.e. Endomondo) to track their running, the software counts one access when they activate it, and then logs the length of the session until the panelist moves onto another app or their phone returns to the idle mode.

The sample within our study corresponds to 171.360 hours of smartphone activities. It belongs to a wider log data collection which, in the same period, tracked the activity of 455 panelists either on their computers or on their mobile devices. The selected sample resembles the characteristics of the Spanish population who are active Internet users (INE, 2014). The oldest panelist was only 76, which is a reflection of (online) market research interests, which do not consider older people as a prominent target (Sawchuk & Crow, 2011). After filtering, the final sample of smartphone users was 238 panelists, which gave us access to 242 devices, as four panelists participated with two smartphones. With 122 women (51,2%) and 116 men (48,7%), age ranges from 20 to 76 years old: 36 panelists (15,1% of the sample) can be classified as young individuals – 20-24 years old; 94 (39,5%) as young adults – 25-39 years old; 91 (38,2%) as adults – 40-59 years old; and 17 (7,1%) as older individuals – 60-76 years old.

Focus groups

25 participants—15 men and 10 women, aged 55 to 81, participated in the focus groups (from now on in this paper we will refer to them as participants). When using quotations from participants we will indicate their sex and age to guard their privacy. Participants were involved in one two-hour session, divided in three groups of 8, 8 and 9 participants. All had different levels of experience with smartphones, from four months to three years of use. All of them are involved in a self-learning group on smartphones, showing their interest in the use of their smartphones. Participants meet weekly at Àgora, a highly participatory, lifelong-learning community, to share their knowledge about smartphones, to express their doubts and concerns, and to learn new things from their others. Àgora is committed to strengthening the social inclusion of older people and immigrants in Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain) by providing them with free courses on a wide range of areas, such as Internet and languages (Sanchez Aroca, 1999).

Three researchers, two of them the authors of the paper, conducted the focus groups. To answer the research question, the outline of the conversations included four issues: a) participants' history with smartphones, b) What do they use them for? c) Where do they use them? and d) When do they use them? Focus groups were voice recorded for further transcription. The authors listened to the audios, read the transcriptions, and discussed the more prominent topics in order to make a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Description of the data set

As we discovered, our participating panelists accessed 2247 different apps on their smartphones during the tracked month. We used OpenRefine to identify different versions of the same app and group them under the same label, e.g. “Facebook” and “Facebook for HTC” were labeled as Facebook.² In this paper we focus on the number of accesses, the time and day of access, and the type of connection (Wi-Fi or mobile data) used when the app was accessed.

For analytical purposes we have categorized the mobile apps in the sample. To optimize the research effort, we have reduced the number of apps to be categorized by applying three non-exclusive criteria to select the most used apps, namely the number of users, the number of access and the mean time of use during the tracked month. In each case we have included the top 300 apps. In terms of users, the app in the 300th position had 4 users while the top app had 233 (WhatsApp); in terms of accesses, the 300th app had 88 accesses while the top app had 188.911 accesses (WhatsApp); and in terms of average length of session, the app in the 300th position accounted a mean time of 2:57 minutes of access and the app in the 1st position accounted 60 minutes (Clean). The resulting set of apps represented 30% of the accessed apps (675 out of 2.247) and accounted for 97% of accesses among the sample, and for 98% of the time spent by the 238 panelists in their tracked devices.

Table 1 collates our classification of mutually exclusive categories. The 675 apps were categorized using an iterative and open form of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Three researchers participated in the three-iteration process that used the name of the app and its description. For those apps related to more than one category we chose the most relevant category to allow for a univocal taxonomy. While previous studies have used adaptations of the app store taxonomy (Böhmer et al., 2011; Carrascal & Church, 2015; Xu et al., 2011) we created an app taxonomy taking into account both the multimodal mass media and the interactive, horizontal networks of communication built around the Internet and wireless communication provided in the context of “mass self-communication” (Castells, 2009, p. 4).

For the analysis we focused on a selection of categories deemed relevant to the topic of our study, a generational comparison of online activities. We did not include System and Market research tools in our further analysis, as they mostly constitute activities the mobile device does by itself, or are not the users’ intended activity. For instance, launchers (part of the system category) are accessed every time the user accesses the device, but usually the purpose is to open another app. In addition, we excluded eBooks and Health & Fitness categories due to their limited number of users.

Results

Given this data, we can now discuss how smartphone use is different – or not – for older participants and why particular smartphone apps are relevant to the participants in the three focus groups. We contrast most significant results of the generational tracking study, mainly in terms of app access with the experiences reported in the focus groups, in terms of specific uses (what?) and routines (where?) participants use their smartphones in order to better understand this data.

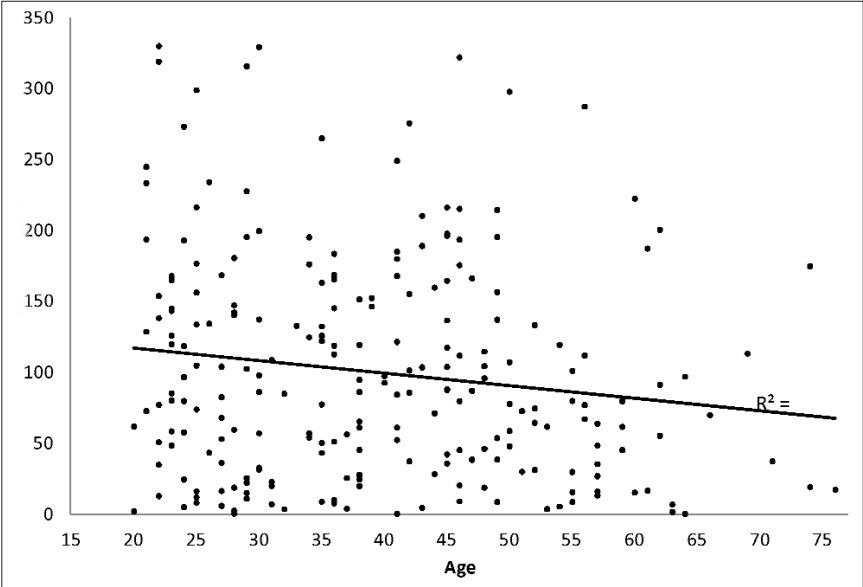
Table 1. Categories of mobile apps and their description, by alphabetical order. Number of users and number of apps in each category

Category	Users	Apps
Bank	72	9
Financial corporations' apps.		
Browsers & Searchers	208	10
Internet browsers and search engines.		
Device Management	220	52
Tools for management, improvement, and optimization of the smartphone (antivirus, app managers, battery savers and cleaning systems, amongst others).		
eBooks	34	8
Apps to read and/or download eBooks.		
Email	187	10
Apps to manage email, such as Gmail, email (for Android), or Yahoo.		
File Management	206	20
Tools for managing files inside the smartphone or with other devices, such as Gallery or Dropbox.		
Games	145	171
Games and gambling apps.		
Health & Fitness	31	9
Tools to manage data related with health & fitness, such as sport trackers and calorie counters.		
IM, Voice & Video Calls	237	20
Apps for instant messaging, phone calls, video calls, SMS or MMS.		
Market Research Tools	9	140
Apps to participate in surveys and market studies.		
Mass Media On Demand	167	34
Mainstream audiovisual contents on demand, with the exception of apps included in the Radio & TV category.		
Media Creator Tools	175	27
Tools for media creation including the camera, voice recorders and apps to edit pictures.		
Personal Information Managers	205	28
Tools to manage personal information, namely calendars, contacts, notes, etc.		
Personal Interest Content	125	43
Apps with personal interest contents including catalogues, loyalty programs and scoreboards.		
Personal Tools	220	88
Utility tools of general interest including bar codes scanner, tools to download media, flashlights, GPS, educational apps, maps and dictionaries.		
Press & Weather	116	23
Mainstream press and weather apps.		
Productivity Tools		
Tools for professional performance, including Office Mobile or Polaris Office.		
Radio & TV	68	12
Mainstream radio and TV channel apps.		
Shopping	78	24
Apps mainly devoted to sales.		
Social Network Sites (SNS)	225	25
It includes general and specialized social networks sites as well as social curator systems.		
System	37	219
Launchers.		

Older panelists accessed less often their smartphones than the rest. However, it is a central part of their lives.

Our panelists access their smartphones 100 times a day on average (outliers excluded). While the number of accesses per day are negatively correlated with age; that is, the older you are the less times you access your phone ($r = -.148, p < .05, n=234$, see Figure 1). However, the focus group participants demonstrate how embedded smartphones are in the everyday lives of all of the panelists, and the central role they play, as comments from two of our oldest participants illustrate: “Except for [cooking] fried eggs, I use it [the smartphone] for everything” (Woman, 70). “I almost don’t use the computer now; I do everything in my smartphone” (Man, 78). Indeed this type of response is made by panelists who were initially reluctant to have a smartphone, or relayed a strong discourse against mobile phones overuse, e.g. “The smartphone was a gift from my husband (Aged 60) who was tired of me not having WhatsApp” (Woman, 60). She complains about his excessive smartphone use “Does it only happen to me, that you are talking with somebody and then he gets distracted by his WhatsApp and you end up talking with nobody?” (same Woman, 60). So, while she is both a reluctant adopter, and is critical of the smartphone, she has become an active user who accepts its centrality within her everyday routines and rituals: “You see, I have no problem if you show me the picture of your grand children during a dinner with more friends” (same Woman, 60). The smartphone is also expressed as a central part of the everyday life of participants who report turning off their device when they are at home (Man, 69). Even these participants prefer to have it at hand and admit that they check it from time to time (Man, 75), or keep the smartphone close to them so they could use it whenever it was needed (Woman, 81).

Figure 1. Mean accesses a day by age break. N=234 (4 outliers excluded).



Communicating and socializing via WhatsApp: what the panelists do on smartphones

According to the generational tracking, the three most accessed app categories are IM & Calls (35,2 accesses per day on average for the whole panel sample, and 23,7 for the older age group), SNS (10,9 and 9,0) and Browsers (9,8 and 5,8) - see Figure 2. WhatsApp is the most accessed app (as discussed above), with an average of 26,4 accesses per day (16,9 among the older panelists). This could be due, in part, because in Spain where this study took place, it is common to have to pay extra for each text message, while having a small mobile data package is cheaper. In this sense, WhatsApp is seen as a cheap communication service.

Figure 3 shows which app categories are comparatively more popular among the four age cohorts. It gathers the age distribution of active users in each app category, measured in terms of average accesses per user. We are able to identify statistically significant differences for some categories of apps. On one side, there are three categories that show negative correlation with age, meaning that accesses decrease with age: IM & calls, SNS and Mass media on demand ($r = -.243, p < .001$; $r = -.138, p < .05$; and $r = -.155, p < .05$ respectively). On the other side, two apps categories show an increase of use with age: Press & Weather and Personal Information Manager ($r = .189, p < .01$; $r = .112, p < .1$ respectively). In addition, we observe another app category that is comparatively more popular among panelists between 60-76 years of age compared to young adults and adults (ANOVA test, $p < .05$ in both cases).

Figure 2. Mean accesses day by category. All panelists and Older panelists compared.

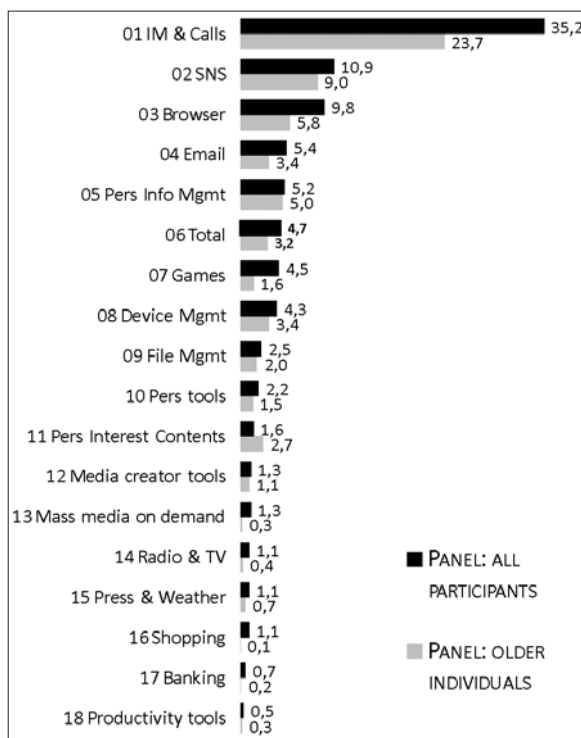
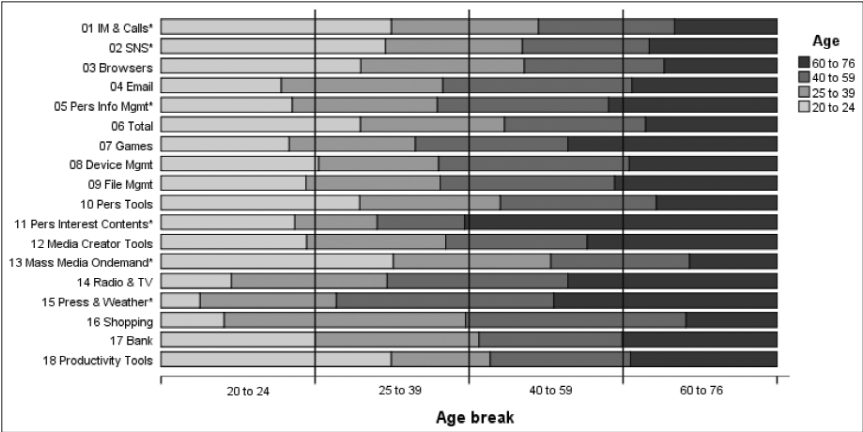


Figure 3. Age distribution of active tracked panelists by app category, in terms of mean accesses by individuals. (Active panelists are those with one or more access to a given category.)



* Statistically significant differences among age groups.

Communicating and socializing within the budget: what is relevant, according to focus group participants

WhatsApp is a very relevant app, as it is always associated to a flat rate bill, it has no limitations and is cheaper than phone calls or text messages (SMS): *“I use WhatsApp extensively, as I have a limited number of phone calls a month”* (Man, 55). Indeed, participants report that they tend to restrict heavy media consumption when using their mobile data plan in order to control their budget. Otherwise they do not care about the use of other services with mobile data if they are not that heavy in terms of data consumption. *“I don’t watch YouTube videos, because it consumes my data plan, unless I have Access to a Wi-Fi connection. If I have Wi-Fi I watch YouTube videos”* (Man, 68). Thus, the combined use of traditional voice calls, with text messages and video calls, is influenced by flat rates and the relevance of each communication interest. In fact, phone calls are mostly used to access close personal networks, which includes relatives and friends. *“I have a family group in WhatsApp, but I prefer to call my daughter when I want to talk with her”* (Woman, 70).

In addition to being restricted to contacting those who are in a close personal network, voice calls are used for urgent or relevant issues that require an immediate answer. *“A WhatsApp is not an important call”* (Man, 55), while *“[a] phone call urges more”* (Woman, 76). Finally, Skype and other video call systems are mostly used to talk with close relatives living abroad:

I use Skype to talk with my daughter who lives in Morocco, while my grandchild [who lives in the same city] calls me through Hangout, I did not know Hangout, or how it works, but they manage to call me (Woman, 77).

WhatsApp is used to keep in touch either with close or extended personal networks, helping to maintain and reinforce both strong and weak ties. WhatsApp groups play a role in these dynamics. In this sense, groups with family, friends or peers are common, and they can be either local or transnational. Groups allow participants to be in touch with relatives who are far from distance; *“We have a family group, and this way my son in Australia is up to date*

on the family issues, and I do not have to update him” (Woman, 70). Finally, it is also widely used for social entertainment:

I think it is a tool to bring joy to people [A woman interrupts to say “Yes, I know it”] to break monotony. Whenever I receive a nice WhatsApp, I forward it immediately, I want others to enjoy it. I do not want to be the only one who can enjoy it (Woman, 81).

I have a lot of fun with WhatsApp (Woman, 76).

Personal and social concerns over time

Despite its pervasiveness, IM is not exempt from personal concerns or social controversy. Participants report controlling their own access to WhatsApp. Participants speak of situations in which others either had limited face-to-face interaction because of the immediacy of WhatsApp or that WhatsApp had become a distraction from more relevant things: “*You cannot be all the day in WhatsApp*” (Woman, 76). “*I’m in two groups and I receive too many messages, my wife asks me every time if it’s from our daughters, I have to check it to confirm that it’s not them*” (Man, 72).

As our data indicates, WhatsApp is both one of the main motivations for our participants to get a smartphone and, at the same time, is the most polemic app. Yet, even highly reluctant smartphone users admit that they end up using it:

I was initially reluctant to have a smartphone (...) I only use the smartphone when needed, and to check all the rubbish people send through WhatsApp. (Man, 69 – *ironic comment*)

You know, I am anti WhatsApp but I see no problem to see somebody else’s grandchildren pictures in the smartphone. (Woman, 60)

While participants described their experiences and enthusiasm for WhatsApp, they did not have the same experience or opinions about Facebook. Most of participants report using this Social Networking Software on their smartphones but only a few of them had experiences to share during focus groups. One woman reports that Facebook allows her to “*get back in touch with old friends from Colombia*” (Woman, 69). Another male participant is dissatisfied with the use of his image on Facebook “*I have seen pictures of myself in Facebook, and I don’t agree with it*” (Man, 78). Other participants did not report using other SNS in their smartphones, even though some of them use Moovit – a public transportation SNS. They do not use the social features of this app or Endomondo.

This disparity between the number of accesses of these apps and the short-lived enthusiasm that the participants in our focus group had for these particular apps could be because the tracking of panelists and the focus group selection involved a different cohort of individuals. However, in the focus groups, participants expressed an ambivalence that is worth noting. While they have and may use the Facebook app on their smartphones, they are not necessarily enthusiastic about its presence on their phones or in their lives.. It is possible that for these participants, Facebook’s novelty has passed, it is already integrated in the everyday routine, and other tools are more central. In a discussion of the novelty-factor of WhatsApp, one participant reports “*In the beginning you laugh a lot, then you get used to that and you can’t be hooked all day*” (Man, 55).

A similar ambivalence for the use of particular apps on the smartphone surfaces in discussions of email, an app that all of the participants have on their smartphones. On the one

hand, participants appreciate the possibility of receiving and *reading* emails at any time; on the other hand, most of them wait to *answer* emails at home as the computer's keyboard and the screen are more comfortable. While some report their efforts in dealing with uninteresting emails, such as junk mail, others report using email to send "interesting" contents to their friends, such as PowerPoint presentations with pictures or jokes (Man, 76a). Another participant uses his Gmail account on the smartphone as Gmail is used by his inner circle. This tactic allows him to automatically avoid receiving irrelevant or uninteresting emails on the device (Man, 76b). Finally, another participant reports using her smartphone to filter uninteresting emails before moving to the computer to go further with the interesting ones (Man, 64).

Calendar, Weather and Games. Other smartphone uses

The tracking study indicates that Personal Information Management apps are used more frequently as we age. Similarly, focus group participants report the extensive use of notes and calendars as memory aids. Some participants use reminders on the smartphone. The management of doctor's appointments by those following a strictly controlled medical program surface in the focus groups as do other uses of notes and calendars as a part of daily or weekly routines: *"I use the calendar to remember medications, and doctor appointments with notes"* (Man, 55). *"I do the shopping list [in the smartphone]"* (Woman, 77). The specific app used to remember things is a personal choice for the execution of everyday activities. Amongst participants who rely on mobile apps, some prefer the calendar to remember an appointment while others prefer notes: *"I don't use the calendar, I use notes to remember appointments and other things"* (Man, 69). Finally, others reported that they prefer to use a paper-based calendar, or – for medical appointments – to rely on the doctor to call you the day before (Woman, 76). Some describe the use of such apps as a challenge they want to address, even if they do not need reminders or they are not going to use them for relevant things. In other words, we find that Personal Information Management tools are important to some older participants as they assist them in remembering dates, tasks and other items "to-do", while for others, these tools symbolize the fun of learning something new, even when "traditional" systems are positively evaluated. As one participant put it: *"I don't use the calendar, I trust this [putting his forefinger in his head]"* (Man, 73).

While Device Management apps are not particularly relevant for older panelists, participants in our focus groups report the frequent use of these apps. These apps are particularly important for those possessing phones with limited storage space or battery issues. The use of these apps is mainly pushed to the user by notification systems. The cleaning systems, particularly Clean Master, were appropriated by participants who identify it by way of the broom metaphor, the icon that identifies the app: *"I use the broom every day"* (Woman, 81). *"I use it when there is a notification about it"* (Man, 55). The use of this app is influenced by the learning community to which these participants belong, as they had discussed this topic together shortly before the focus groups. Although participants rarely report using browsers directly, some of them use the phone to search and their use of apps related to their personal interests, such as recipes, poetry, history: any topic inciting curiosity.

I use it for inquires while reading, I like Spanish history so I see videos in the smartphone. Then, I like poetry and in the smartphone you can see the meter in a verse. (Man, 78)

I use it to follow the football match abroad (...), and I use the app Seient Lliure [to manage his football season ticket]. (Man, 76b)

I check the movie listings. (*Woman, 70*)

In line with the tracking study, where News & Weather apps are more popular as age increases, weather apps are popular among participants. One participant, who is very reluctant to have a smartphone, uses a weather widget in his device (Man, 69). Yet, few participants read the news on their smartphones: *"In the morning I read the newspaper, Sports, and El Periódico"* (Man, 76b). *"I use it to read the headlines in 'El País' and other newspapers"* (Woman, 70).

Finally, games on the smartphone are not that popular among the participants, although those who do play games are quite active. Instead of playing games on the smartphone, most participants play games on the computer, or the tablet because of the bigger screen. Participants describe how playing games on different devices are a part of their routine: *"I play Rummikub on the tablet; whenever I can't play I log in the app [at least] to obtain the daily credits"* (Woman, 77). Beyond the mere fun of the activity, games on the phone are useful in alleviating boring situations and periods of waiting: *"You can spend half an hour in the doctor's waiting room, and it is a pastime"* (Woman, 55). Games are described as a way to build links with grandchildren: *"My grandchild asked me to download a game, War of clash, and then I was hooked because it is addictive, we also exchange things in the game, with my grandchild"* (Man, 68).

Different routines amongst older participants

In the focus groups we asked participants to reflect on how they use their smartphones and how they manage their device's connection. The initial discussion tended to focus on the use of the smartphone outside the home, in the streets, when some information was needed, such as getting in touch with somebody or for practical purposes such as looking for an address: *"I use it outside, when looking for a place, and this way I don't get lost"* (Woman, 76).

While this would explain the extended use of Personal Information Management apps, Media Creator tools, and Health and Fitness apps through mobile data access, this discussion ignores many of the above-described uses of smartphones, which include entertainment, emotional support, social interaction with an extended social network, expressive uses, or its use for non-urgent matters connected to daily life. In the focus groups, it was commonplace to talk about using the phone outside of the home. We needed to prompt further conversation around other locations of use and whether the use of these locations was habitual or not. For example, some participants did not take their mobile phones out when going to a social event, or when going to the cinema, the theatre or other events. In contrast, others turn their phones on silent when they arrived home. Still others explain using the phone when needed, which means having it close to them all the time so that they are able to receive notifications. Others discuss having the device accessible to check notifications, regardless of whether they are at home or outside, with Wi-Fi or with mobile data:

I use it more at home, because of WhatsApp, and because of having the family abroad. (*Man, 64*)

I use it when I need it. (*Man, 78a*)

I have it always with me. (*Man, 76a*)

At home I always leave the phone on a table; from time to time I check it, because I can't hear it. (*Man, 75*)

This became an important insight into a key difference between difference age groups: where data is accessed and how it is accessed. Smartphones work with two different types of internet connection: Wi-Fi and mobile data. Significantly, amongst all panelists with Wi-Fi and Mobile data connection, Wi-Fi is more commonly used to access apps than mobile data connection (56,3% of accesses, ahead of 43,6%).³ However, older panelists (60 to 76 years old) rely more on mobile data. This cohort use more mobile data than other age group (50,1% vs. 43,6%) and use mobile data as much as Wi-Fi (50,1% vs. 49,9%). The question is why.

All participants in our focus groups have a mobile data plan, and all but one participant has Wi-Fi at home. Those who have it at home always use their Wi-Fi connection when at home, and most of them use Wi-Fi in places they visit *frequently*, such as their children's house, where they know how to connect and they are sure that it is reliable: *"I use Wi-Fi in my everyday places, where I already have the password and it connects automatically, otherwise I use the mobile data"* (Man, 76a). *"For the half hour you are going to be in a bar there is no need (to connect to the bar's Wi-Fi)"* (Man, 69). Joining any and all networks, just to connect for a short or temporary period of time, is not perceived as a desirable option. Public Wi-Fi accesses, however, is relevant when on a trip abroad or for accessing public Wi-Fi while travelling. However, in Barcelona the use of public WiFi connections are not a common practice for the following reasons:

I use Wi-Fi at home, in my son's house, in hotels and abroad in some airports where you can find free Wi-Fi. (Man, 76b).

I don't even try to connect to public Wi-Fi accesses, except when I'm on vacations. (Man, 73).

Here [municipality's open public] Wi-Fi is that slow, I prefer not to use it. (Man, 76b).

In summary, participants use Wi-Fi at home, while visiting familiar locations, or during longer vacation-style trips. Otherwise, this group of over-seventies report that they prefer to use their mobile data connection in other places, while commuting, in non-habitual places, or in habitual places where they do not find it worthwhile to make the effort of accessing the Wi-Fi because it is for too short a period of time or is likely to be too slow.

Discussion

To return to our main research question: What are the specificities, if any, in the use of smartphones by older adults? We have discussed how, in this case study, a combination of qualitative and quantitative data may contribute to a nuanced generational analysis of how changes in interests throughout the life course influence and impact the communication practices and use of mobile media technologies, such as smart phones, amongst older users. We now return to these findings.

Validity of quantitative and qualitative results

Similar to previous results (Böhmer et al., 2011) our data indicates that IM & calls are the most accessed apps with a lower use among the older panelists (60-76). Even though it is also the most accessed app for all age groups, an easy conclusion would be that for older panelists, IM & Calls is comparatively less important than for younger generations. If we accept

this reasoning, we tacitly are assuming a common normativity: the higher the use of a given technology or service, the better. Yet, discussion groups allow us to understand how important WhatsApp is for participants, who describe both (micro) coordination and expressive uses. They also explain non-dependent uses of the phone and describe a set of issues around the inappropriateness of using WhatsApp e.g. at some hours of the day or to send some type of contents.

We find an important disparity between the number of accesses to some apps, most notably social networking apps, in the tracking and the descriptions by participants in the focus groups of their sense of the importance of these apps. Consistent with older peoples' interest in social networks (Righi, Sayago, & Blat, 2012), it is not surprising that these were the second most often accessed app category, in general for all panelists, and more specifically for older panelists. However, despite their frequency of occurrence in the log data, participants do not report using them with enthusiasm, have few experiences to share and convey little explicit interest in learning more about them. Despite the frequency of appearance of social networking apps, when we probed further, these apps are less important than we initially thought. Beyond the concerns of older people about social network sites (ibid), it seems that the social network sites they use are not a novelty anymore. Even though all participants use them, they do not constitute a topic of conversation. When an ICT becomes a part of everyday life, there might not be that many new anecdotes to put on the table. Conversely, WhatsApp could be seen as a trending topic with more issues to discuss and resolve, such as use-norms. Therefore, it seems that conversations might focus primarily on specific ICTs but not on all of the ICT individuals use in their daily lives.

Beyond age stereotypes, personal interest change throughout the life course

The generational analysis of the data indicates how smartphone use changes throughout the entire life course and how this might influence the results of studies that do not consider the age of participants. Similar to previous studies (Nylander, Lundquist, & Brännström, 2009), our data suggest that users make more application accesses at stable locations with Wi-Fi (56,6% of accesses) than in other places with mobile data (43,6% of accesses), similar to previous findings by Castells et al., 2006. However, given the slight differences between Wi-Fi and mobile data accesses, and the time spent by people at a stable location or somewhere else (Giddens, 1987) it is striking that proportionally, our panelists use the smartphone more outside of their stable locations than we anticipated, and that older panelists use mobile data on the smartphone when they are outside of the home, more than they used a Wi-Fi connection.

In addition to the greater use of mobile data among older panelists than the rest of the panelists, participants often reported their preference for using alternative devices, such as a tablet, computer, TV or fixed phone when possible. The screen size of tablets, the comfort of personal computers, and the ubiquity of smartphones are some of the arguments supporting a position that encourages a wider ecology of media (Hearn & Foth, 2007) at home. As well, specific content might be available only on one of the devices. In other words, making less application accesses on the smartphone does not mean that older adults use ICTs less often, but that they prioritize ergonomics when choosing the ICTs to be used at home.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to analyze the use of smartphones by older adults by putting quantitative and qualitative data on smartphone usage into conversation: log data that indicates general patterns of usage and focus group data that helps to understand usage patterns from the perspective of the users' reported experience. While this approach is not new, the novelty of our study lies in our addition of an age-related dimension to the research. We highlight the relevance of generational studies, showing some of the nuances of smartphone use by different age groups. Without a generational analysis, smartphone use-studies and predictive systems miss the particular interests of older people potentially excluding them from future technology developments.

The paper has examined two dimensions of smartphone use, namely specific uses (what) and routines (where). First, in terms of specific uses we observe that Instant Messaging (IM), particularly WhatsApp, is one of the most prominent services being used by our older panelists. These older panelists access personal information manager apps (calendar, address book and notes) more often than other age groups. Second, regarding routines, focus group participants explain how location shapes their connection decisions – Wi-Fi or mobile data – and the ways that they try to make the most of their data plan. Older participants' discourses highlight the practical uses they make of the mobile phone in public places and the confinement of social network sites, gaming and media consumption to private spheres and, therefore, to the use of a Wi-Fi connection.

From a generational perspective, we find differences in smartphone use-patterns in terms of specific uses and places of use. Such differences seem to reflect the evolution of personal interests and communication patterns as we grow older (B. L. Neugarten, 1996). Empirical evidence emerges from the basic analysis of tracked data while the discussion groups bring insights on these results. In this, the combination of methods helps to assess the validity of the log data. The dialogue between quantitative results and qualitative discourses we have proposed in this paper clearly enriches the interpretation of tracked data and also the interpretation of qualitative data. In addition, we adopt a special focus on older people and a generational approach, that includes generational recruitment and analysis. Empirical evidence on the practices of older people in this area are in need to contest the stereotypes and ageist attitudes that are commonplace.

This study is admittedly a historical one (Uprichard, 2012) and it has limitations. Indeed, both the tracking data and the focus groups include older active users of smartphones, which does not represent the majority of the older Spanish population. There is a clear auto-selection bias as a consequence of volunteering to participate in the two studies. However, participants in the focus groups means that the sample includes old and new smartphone users, those who chose to have a smartphone or who were given one as a gift, and users who range from engaged users to reluctant users with different levels of appropriation and uses of their smartphones in their everyday life. In addition there are not any panelists aged over 76 or focus group participants aged over 81, who have contributed to this study. Similarly, the tracking sample of older people is too small to perform some statistical tests. As well, these results might be influenced by the fact that tracked individuals belong to a market research panel, and that focus group participants take part in an educational group on smartphones. Diverging from other studies, our case study involves different participants in the tracking and in the focus groups. While this can be seen as a limitation, we consider the discussion with old-

er people and the results of the generational tracking relevant as they provide rich and in-depth insights for future research.

Acknowledgments

We thank the participants in the focus groups for their invaluable contribution. Lluís Teixidó Seix contributed in different stages of data processing, in the construction of the taxonomy of apps, and gave support during qualitative fieldwork. Daniel Blanche conducted one focus group and helped in transcriptions. The authors are indebted to all participants who took part in the studies and acknowledge the support from the ACT Project 895-2013-1018, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which partially funded this project.

Notes

¹ <http://realitycommons.media.mit.edu/realitymining.html> (accessed 06/06/2015).

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OpenRefine> (last accessed 15/06/2015).

³ Average accesses per day ascends to 64,1 (SD=2,9) for Wi-Fi, versus 49,6 (SD=3,3) for mobile data ($t(202) = 3,364, p < ,005$).

References

1. Ahn, J., & Jung, Y. (2014). The common sense of dependence on smartphone: A comparison between digital natives and digital immigrants. *New Media & Society*, 24, 1–21. doi:10.1177/1461444814554902
2. Azuddin, M., Malik, S. A., Abdullah, L. M., & Mahmud, M. (2014). Older people and their use of mobile devices: Issues, purpose and context. In *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Information and Communication Technology for The Muslim World (ICT4M)* (pp. 1–6). IEEE. doi:10.1109/ICT4M.2014.7020610
3. Barkhuus, L., & Polichar, V. E. (2011). Empowerment through seamfulness: Smart phones in everyday life. *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing*, 15(6), 629–639. doi:10.1007/s00779-010-0342-4
4. Boase, J., & Ling, R. (2013). Measuring Mobile Phone Use: Self-Report Versus Log Data. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 18(4), 508–519. doi:10.1111/jcc4.12021
5. Böhmer, M., Hecht, B., Schöning, J., Krüger, A., & Bauer, G. (2011). Falling asleep with Angry Birds, Facebook and Kindle: A large scale study on mobile application usage. In *Proceedings of the 13th International Conference on Human Computer Interaction with Mobile Devices and Services* (pp. 47–56). New York, NY: ACM. doi:10.1145/2037373.2037383
6. Boyd, danah, & Crawford, K. (2012). Critical questions for big data: Provocations for a cultural, technological, and scholarly phenomenon. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(5), 662–679. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2012.678878
7. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp0630a
8. Buccoliero, L., & Bellio, E. (2014). The Adoption of ‘Silver’ e-Health Technologies: First Hints on Technology Acceptance Factors for Elderly in Italy. In G. Cardoso & R. Espanha (Eds.), *Observatorio (OBS*) Journal* (Vol. 1, pp. 304–307). New York, NY, USA: ACM. doi:10.1145/2691195.2691303
9. Calasannti, T., & King, N. (2015). Intersectionality and age. In J. Twigg & W. Martin (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Cultural Gerontology* (pp. 193–200). London: Routledge/Taylor and Francis.

10. Carrascal, J. P., & Church, K. (2015). An in-situ study of mobile app & mobile search interactions. In *CHI 2015: Extended abstracts publication of the 33rd annual CHI conference on human factors in computing systems: April 18-23, 2015, Seoul, Republic of Korea* (pp. 2739–2748). Nueva York, NY: Association for Computing Machinery. doi:10.1145/2702123.2702486
11. Castells, M. (2009). *Communication power*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
12. Castells, M., Fernández Ardèvol, M., Linchuan Qiu, J., & Sey, A. (2006). *Mobile communication and society: A global perspective*. Cambridge, MA: MIT.
13. Chittaranjan, G., Jan, B., & Gatica-Perez, D. (2011). Who's who with big-five: Analyzing and classifying personality traits with smartphones (pp. 29–36). Los Alamitos, CA: IEEE Computer Society. doi:10.1109/ISWC.2011.29
14. Choudrie, J., & Vyas, A. (2014). Silver surfers adopting and using Facebook? A quantitative study of Hertfordshire, UK applied to organizational and social change. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 89, 293–305. doi:10.1016/j.techfore.2014.08.007
15. CIS. (2016). *Barómetro de Febrero 2016. Avance de resultados. Tabulación por variables sociodemográficas. Estudio nº 3128. Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS)*.
16. Colombo, F., & Fortunati, L. (Eds.). (2011). *Broadband society and generational changes* (Vol. 5). Berlín, Alemania: Peter Lang Publishers.
17. Comunello, F., Mulargia, S., Belotti, F., & Fernández-Ardèvol, M. (2015). Older people's attitude towards mobile communication in everyday life: Digital literacy and domestication processes. In *ITAP 2015, Part I. LNCS 9193 (2-7 August, Los Angeles CA)* (pp. 439–450). Berlin, Germany: Springer. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-20892-3_43
18. Cui, Y., & Honkala, M. (2011). The consumption of integrated social networking services on mobile devices. In *Proceedings of the 10th International Conference on Mobile and Ubiquitous Multimedia* (pp. 53–62). New York, NY: ACM. doi:10.1145/2107596.2107602
19. Deloitte. (2014). *The smartphone generation gap: over-55? there's no app for that. Technology Media & Telecommunications Predictions*.
20. DeLyser, D., & Sui, D. (2013). Crossing the qualitative- quantitative divide II: Inventive approaches to big data, mobile methods, and rhythmanalysis. *Progress in Human Geography*, 37(2), 293–305. doi:10.1177/0309132512444063
21. Duggan, M., Ellison, N. B., Lampe, C., Lenhart, A., & Madden, M. (2015). *Social media update 2014*. Washington, DC.
22. Eagle, N., & Pentland, A. (2006). Reality mining: Sensing complex social systems. *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing*, 10(4), 255–268. doi:10.1007/s00779-005-0046-3
23. Eagle, N., & Pentland, A. S. (2009). Eigenbehaviors: Identifying structure in routine. *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology*, 63(7), 1057–1066. doi:10.1007/s00265-009-0739-0
24. Eurostat. (2015). Computers and the internet in households and enterprises (isoc_ci). *Eurostat: Your key to European statistics*. Data explorer.
25. Fernández-Ardèvol, M. (2016). An Exploration of Mobile Telephony Non-use among Older People. In E. Domínguez-Rué & L. Nierling (Eds.), *Ageing and Technology. Perspectives from the Social Sciences* (pp. 47–65). Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
26. Garattini, C., & Prendergast, D. (2015). Critical reflections on ageing and technology in the twenty-first century. In D. Prendergast & C. Garattini (Eds.), *Ageing and the digital life course* (pp. 1–15). New York, NY: Berghahn Books.
27. Giddens, A. (1987). *Social theory and modern sociology*. CA: Stanford University Press.
28. Gonçalves, B., & Ramasco, J. J. (2009). Towards the Characterization of Individual Users through Web Analytics. In J. Zhou (Ed.), *Complex Sciences. First International Conference, Complex 2009, Shanghai, China, February 23-25, 2009, Revised Papers, Part 2* (pp. 2247–2254). Springer Berlin Heidelberg. doi:10.1007/978-3-642-02469-6_102
29. Greenwald, A. G., & Banaji, M. R. (1995). Implicit social cognition: Attitudes, self-esteem, and stereotypes. *Psychological Review*, 102(1), 4–27. doi:10.1037/0033-295X.102.1.4

30. Hage, E., & Noseleit, F. (2015). Changes and Variations in Online- and Offline Communication Patterns: Including Peer Effects. *ECIS 2015 Completed Research Papers*, 22(5), 530–537. doi:10.18151/7217342
31. Hearn, G. N., & Foth, M. (2007). Communicative ecologies, Editorial Preface. *The Electronic Journal of Communication*, 17(1-2).
32. INE. (2014). Population at 1st January 2014. Municipal Register. Revision of the Municipal Register. Official Population Figures. Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE).
33. Ito, M., Baumer, S., Bittanti, M., boyd, danah, Cody, R., Herr-Stephenson, B., ... Yardi, S. (2010). *Hang-ing out, messing around, and geeking out: Kids living and learning with new media*. The Ecologist. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
34. Jolanki, O. H. (2009). Agency in talk about old age and health. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 23(4), 215–226. doi:10.1016/j.jaging.2007.12.020
35. Jung, J., Kim, Y., & Chan-Olmsted, S. (2014). Measuring usage concentration of smartphone applications: Selective repertoire in a marketplace of choices. *Mobile Media & Communication*, 2(3), 352–368. doi:10.1177/2050157914542172
36. Katz, J. E., & Aakhus, M. (2002). *Perpetual Contact. Mobile Communication, Private Talk, Public Performance*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
37. Khvorostianov, N., Elias, N., & Nimrod, G. (2012). 'Without it I am nothing': The internet in the lives of older immigrants. *New Media & Society*, 14(4), 583–599. doi:10.1177/1461444811421599
38. Kiukkonen, N., Blom, J., Dousse, O., Gatica-Perez, D., & Laurila, J. (2010). Towards rich mobile phone datasets: Lausanne data collection campaign. In *Proceedings ACM International Conference on Pervasive Services (ICPS)* (p. 62). n.p.
39. Lagacé, M., Charmarkeh, H., Tanguay, J., & Annick, L. (2015). How Ageism Contributes to the Second-Level Digital Divide: The Case of Canadian Seniors. *Journal of Technologies and Human Usability*, 11(4), 1–13.
40. Lee, U., Lee, J., Ko, M., Lee, C., Kim, Y., Yang, S., ... Song, J. (2014). Hooked on smartphones: An exploratory study on smartphone overuse among college students. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 2327–2336). New York, NY: ACM. doi:10.1145/2556288.2557366
41. Ling, R. (2008). Should We Be Concerned That the Elderly Don't Text? *The Information Society*, 24, 334–341. doi:10.1080/01972240802356125
42. Ling, R., Bertel, T. F., & Sundsøy, P. R. (2012). The socio-demographics of texting: An analysis of traffic data. *New Media & Society*, 14(2), 281–298. doi:10.1177/1461444811412711
43. Loos, E. (2011). Generational use of new media and the (ir)relevance of age. In F. Colombo & L. Fortunati (Eds.), (Vol. 5, pp. 259–273). Berlin, Germany: Peter Lang.
44. Loos, E., Haddon, L., & Mante-Meijer, E. A. (Eds.). (2012). *Generational use of new media*. Farnham, Reino Unido: Ashgate.
45. Lord, C., Hazas, M., Clear, A. K., Bates, O., Whittam, R., Morley, J., & Friday, A. (2015). Demand in my pocket: Mobile devices and the data connectivity marshalled in support of everyday practice. In *Proceedings of the 33rd Annual ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 2729–2738). New York, NY: ACM. doi:10.1145/2702123.2702162
46. Mihailidis, P. (2014). A tethered generation: Exploring the role of mobile phones in the daily life of young people. *Mobile Media & Communication*, 2(1), 58–72. doi:10.1177/2050157913505558
47. Nef, T., Ganea, R. L., Müri, R. M., & Mosimann, U. P. (2013). Social networking sites and older users – a systematic review. *International Psychogeriatrics*, 25(07), 1041–1053. doi:10.1017/S1041610213000355
48. Neugarten, B. L. (1996). *The meanings of age: Selected papers of Bernice L. Neugarten*. (D. A. Neugarten, Ed.) (3rd ed.). London, England: University Of Chicago Press.
49. Nguyen, T., Irizarry, C., Garrett, R., & Downing, A. (2015). Access to mobile communications by older people: Mobile phone use by older people. *Australasian Journal on Ageing*, 34(2), E7–E12. doi:10.1111/ajag.12149

50. Nimrod, G. (2014). The benefits of and constraints to participation in seniors' online communities. *Leisure Studies*, 33(3), 247–266. doi:10.1080/02614367.2012.697697
51. Nylander, S., Lundquist, T., & Brännström, A. (2009). At home and with computer access: why and where people use cell phones to access the internet. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1639–1642. doi:10.1145/1518701.1518951
52. Ørmen, J., & Thorhauge, A. M. (2015). Smartphone log data in a qualitative perspective. *Mobile Media & Communication*, 2050157914565845. doi:10.1177/2050157914565845
53. Oulasvirta, A., Rattenbury, T., Ma, L., & Raita, E. (2012). Habits make smartphone use more pervasive. *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing*, 16(1), 105–114. doi:10.1007/s00779-011-0412-2
54. Pan, D., Chen, N., & Rau, P. P. (2013). The Acceptance and Adoption of Smartphone Use among Chinese College Students. In P.-L. Patrick Rau (Ed.), *Cross-Cultural Design. Methods, Practice, and Case Studies. 5th International Conference, CCD 2013, Held as Part of HCI International 2013, Las Vegas, NV, USA, July 21-26, 2013, Proceedings, Part I* (pp. 450–458). Berlin, Germany: Springer. doi:10.1007/978-3-642-39143-9_50
55. Pang, N., Vu, S., Zhang, X., & Foo, S. (2015). Older adults and the appropriation and disappropriation of smartphones. In J. Zhou & G. Salvendy (Eds.), *Human aspects of it for the aged population: Design for aging* (Vol. 9193, pp. 484–495). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
56. Petrovè, A., Fortunati, L., Vehovar, V., Kavè, M., & Dolničar, V. (2015). Mobile phone communication in social support networks of older adults in Slovenia. *Telematics and Informatics*, 32(4), 642–655. doi:10.1016/j.tele.2015.02.005
57. Prendergast, D., & Garattini, C. (Eds.). (2015). Aging and the digital life course. In *Aging and the digital life course* (pp. 594–595). Nueva York, NY: Berghahn Books.
58. Raento, M., Oulasvirta, A., & Eagle, N. (2009). Smartphones: An emerging tool for social scientists. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 37(3), 426–454. doi:10.1177/0049124108330005
59. Righi, V., Sayago, S., & Blat, J. (2012). Older people's use of Social Network Sites while participating in local online communities from an ethnographical perspective. In *Proceedings CIRN 2012 Community Informatics Conference: 'Ideals meet Reality'* (pp. 7–9).
60. Sanchez Aroca, M. (1999). Voices Inside Schools - La Verneda-Sant Martí: A School Where People Dare to Dream. *The Harvard Educational Review*, 69(3), 320–336. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.17763/haer.69.3.gx588q10614q3831
61. Sawchuk, K., & Crow, B. (2011). Into the grey zone: Seniors, cell phones and milieus that matter. *WI: Journal of Mobile Media*.
62. Shye, A., Scholbrock, B., Memik, G., & Dinda, P. A. (2010). Characterizing and modeling user activity on smartphones: Summary. In *Proceedings of the ACM SIGMETRICS International Conference on Measurement and Modeling of Computer Systems* (pp. 375–376). New York, NY: ACM. doi:10.1145/1811039.1811094
63. Silverstone, R., & Haddon, L. (1996). Design and the domestication of information and communication technologies: Technical change in everyday life. In R. Mansell & R. Silverstone (Eds.), *Communication By design: The politics of information and communication technologies* (pp. 44–74). Oxford, Reino Unido: Oxford University Press.
64. Thomas, L., Little, L., Briggs, P., McInnes, L., Jones, E., & Nicholson, J. (2013). Location tracking: Views from the older adult population. *Age and Ageing*, 42(6), 758–763. doi:10.1093/ageing/af069
65. Uprichard, E. (2012). Being stuck in (live) time: the sticky sociological imagination. *The Sociological Review*, 60, 124–138. doi:10.1111/j.1467-954X.2012.002120.x
66. Van Damme, K., Courtois, C., Verbrugge, K., & Marez, L. De. (2015). What's APPening to news? A mixed-method audience-centred study on mobile news consumption. *Mobile Media & Communication*, 3(2), 196–213. doi:10.1177/2050157914557691
67. Xu, Q., Mao, Z. M., Arbor, A., Erman, J., Park, F., Gerber, A., ... Venkataraman, S. (2011). Identifying Diverse Usage Behaviors of Smartphone Apps. *Internet Measurement Conference (IMC)*. doi:10.1145/2068816.2068847

Barbara RATZENBÖCK*

“Let’s Take a Look Together”: Walking Interviews in Domestic Spaces as a Means to Examine ICT Experiences of Women 60+¹

Abstract

Although mobile methods are becoming more common within the social sciences (e.g. Ricketts Hein et al., 2008 and Wiederhold, 2015, p. 607), they mostly take place outdoors. This paper examines the potential of *walking interviews conducted in small domestic spaces* to explore the ICT experiences of women aged 60+ and to discuss the challenges and advantages of this method. This *case study of indoor walking interview material is a part of a larger research project on the ICT experiences of women 60+ in the Austrian province of Styria. The advantages and challenges of conducting walking interviews in the homes of interviewees are identified and explored. As this case study demonstrates, walking interviews in homes give the researcher a glimpse into the private areas of everyday life, let the interviewees lead the researcher through the space, allow the participants to conduct the conversation, and thus invite a reflection on the power dynamics inherent in the interview situation. This method also compares the statements provided by participants in semi-structured interviews with the information gathered through an encounter with media and ICTs in the home. These comparisons yield a variety of insights on prior statements through the addition of emphases, “contradictions,” or minimizing the importance of previous interview statements. Moreover, interactions with the objects in the home that are encountered during the walking interview also provide important “prompts” to stimulate a detailed and multifaceted discussion of everyday life experiences with ICTs and other media.*

Keywords: mobile methods; indoor walking interview; domestic space; older female ICT users; aging.

Introduction

During the past several years, mobility research and issues of mobility have become central topics within the social sciences (e.g. Ricketts Hein et al., 2008 and Wiederhold, 2015, p. 607). More and more research projects “are seeking to bring mobility into the research process, particularly in the investigation of ‘everyday’ life practices and lifeworlds”, as Ricketts Hein et al. (2008, p. 1266) explain. However, walking interviews (e.g. Jones, Bunce, Evans, Gibbs & Ricketts Hein, 2008) are still a comparatively recent *qualitative* method within the social sciences. *In walking interviews the interviewer and interviewee are in movement while they converse. During these mobile conversations, the surroundings often act as stimuli for discussion* (Anderson, 2004, p. 257). Disciplines such as cultural geography and ethnog-

* University of Graz, barbara.ratzenboeck@uni-graz.at.

¹ **Acknowledgement note:** Supported by funds from Oesterreichische Nationalbank (Oesterreichische Nationalbank, Anniversary Fund, project number: 15849).

raphy regularly employ qualitative research methods and have developed the concept of mobility in the context of qualitative research. In ethnography, for example, Kusenbach (2011) has developed the “go-along” method. According to Kusenbach (2011, p. 184), go-alongs constitute “a hybrid between participant observation and interviewing.” Although mobile methods were already being used repeatedly to investigate “‘everyday’ life practices and life-worlds” (Ricketts Hein et al., 2008, p. 1266), the interviews mostly took place in *outdoor* contexts. Examples include, among many others, studies conducted by Doughty (2013), Jones et al. (2008) or Anderson (2004). The use of walking interviews within people’s homes, however, seems to be less common. This, Robertsⁱ notes (personal communication, July 23, 2014), has resulted in a gap in research literature on the topic.

This paper examines the potential *and the challenges* of *walking interviews conducted in small domestic spaces to explore the* information and communication technology (ICT) experiences of women aged 60 *plus*. It is important to note that the walking interviews are one part of a three-part methodology *used in this larger research project*, which also includes life-graphing and semi-structured interviews. The results of these other methodologies *are not the focus of this paper, but they are used to provide a context* for the discussion of the indoor walking interviews.

Examining the ICT Experiences of Women 60+

As everyday life in private spaces and public arenas is permeated by *an increase in the number of* information and communication technologies (ICTs), *as well as media devices*, questions of unequal access and competencies related to ICTs become crucial. Access and competencies often define opportunities for participation in social, cultural, economic, and political spheres. Reflecting on these opportunities *or blockages to participation in the world of ICTs* and on “skilled access” (Garson, 2006) when using ICTs, the current empirical studyⁱⁱ investigates the use of ICTs by older women in Austria, a group significantly affected by the so-called *digital divide* (e.g. Doh, Wahl & Schmitt, 2005, p. 36) in terms of Internet usage (Statistik Austria, 2015). Specifically, *this case study* explores how women from various socio-economic backgrounds, between the age of 60 and 70, and residing in the Austrian province of Styria,ⁱⁱⁱ have been using and have ascribing meaning to ICTs throughout their lives. In doing so, the study explores *continuities and changes* in strategies of ICT usage over the life course.

Theoretical Framework

Karl Mannheim’s (1952) notion of “generation location,” Burkhard Schäffer’s (2009) concept of “generation-specific media practice cultures,”^{iv} and Roberta Maierhofer’s (1999, 2004, 2007) term “Anocriticism” *provide theoretical tools* to investigate how interview participants have been using and ascribing meaning to ICTs throughout their lives. According to Mannheim, youth experiences are particularly influential on the formation of general attitudes and perceptual patterns. Youth experiences lead to what Mannheim terms a “similarly ‘stratified’ consciousness” (1952, p. 297) of a generation. Mannheim’s idea of “generation location” is used in the analysis of *this empirical material to examine, specifically, the generational aspects of ICT usage by women 60+*. In a similar way, Schäffer’s (2009) idea of “generation-specific media practice cultures” is used to investigate generation-specific practices in the

context of ICTs, *such as* the carefully planned execution of actions in opposition to “trial and error approaches.”^v In addition to Mannheim’s perspective, which emphasizes the influence of a person’s experience in their youth *on* their observations and interpretations later in life, Maierhofer’s (1999, 2004, 2007) concept of “Anocriticism” is used to investigate the influence of *individual* (media) biographies and practices. Anocriticism is “an interpretational approach that validates individual experience of age and aging in resistance of normative assumptions” (Center for Inter-American Studies, 2015) and emphasizes the diversity of life course experiences as well as the difference between chronological age and cultural assumptions associated with age (Maierhofer, 2007, pp. 111-112).^{vi} *While Mannheim’s notion of “generation location” emphasizes the importance of collective experiences within time, Maierhofer’s analytic lens of “Anocriticism” draws attention to the individual interpretation of life course experiences.*

Study Design and Methodology

In comparison to the research that has been done on the media biographies of young people, less research has been done on older adults (Vollbrecht, 2009, p. 23). For this reason, this case study adopts an exploratory qualitative research design to investigate the ICT experiences of women 60+. A starting point for the overall study emerged from the idea that ICT devices might change more rapidly over decades while basic modes of interaction are perhaps more stable; thus, a broad definition of ICTs, inclusive of other media, has been adopted to allow for a comparison of media experiences and strategies of use across different devices. Referring to a definition suggested by the United Nations Development Programme (2001), this study conceptualizes ICTs as comprising both new ICTs (e.g. the Internet) and older ICTs, such as radio, sound-systems, and television.

In order to investigate the strategies of use and the processes *deployed by* older women to ascribe meaning to ICTs, this *larger research* project employs three qualitative research methods: life-graph discussions^{vii}, sedentary semi-structured interviews, and indoor walking interviews. While life-graph discussions serve as a means to emphasize *a life course perspective* in the conversations, the semi-structured interviews focus on a variety of topics that are relevant to the usage of ICTs. Semi-structured interviews, for example, *bring forth* media-biographic memories, strategies of usage, and attitudes towards various kinds of ICTs (computers, the Internet, cell phones, TV, and radio).^{viii} The indoor walking interviews in the homes of the interviewees are then employed to explore more *implicit* aspects of media practices and experiences. This *larger research project* uses the Grounded Theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) *to examine these different* phases of data collection and analysis, *regularly alternating the collection and the analysis of the data*. An open coding approach, as described in Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), was applied to most of the analysis of the empirical material collected.

Initial Findings from the *Broader Research Project*

To date, five lengthy, semi-structured interviews, five walking interviews, and life-graph discussions^{ix} have been conducted and analyzed. The first interviewee was *contacted* by a fellow researcher at the Center for Inter-American Studies which lead to *the snowball recruitment* of further participants.

The preliminary findings obtained through the analysis of the material thus far shows that both *generation-specific* media practices as well as *individual* media biographies affect the way in which the participants use and ascribe meaning to ICTs. In terms of *generational elements*, generation-specific media experiences and strategies of ICT usage as well as inter-generational experiences are relevant. In the context of generation-specific media experiences, early-life experiences with ICTs *are* especially important *to highlight*. Examples include childhood rules for interacting with ICTs (e.g. the rule to “not break media devices”), experiences of collective media interactions (e.g. collective TV-watching with neighbors), as well as war and post-war experiences related to ICTs (e.g. the radio as source of bad news). The importance of the way in which early-life experiences frame ICTs during other life phases affirms to some extent the relevance of Mannheim’s (1952) idea of “generation location.” Regarding generation-specific strategies of ICT usage, the notion of “guided and planned execution of actions” *is* important and supports the results Schäffer obtained from his 2009 study. Participants also repeatedly mention strategies of preserving, saving, and passing on of materials that were produced with the help of ICTs; for example, photographs. However, the most dominant theme *is intergenerationality*. A wide variety of intergenerational experiences were shared in the conversations but these stories often focus on the help participants receive from their sons and/or the means through which their sons help them *to* acquire their ICT devices. The stories about the participants’ intergenerational interactions with ICTs *are* salient in terms of gender and *in reference to* other studies on seniors’ usage of ICTs *as they support the findings of previous studies conducted in other countries*, such as *those of* Crow and Sawchuk (2015, p. 196), on the use of mobile devices by Canadian seniors. This will be discussed in more detail later in the paper.

With regard to more *individual elements* of ICT usage and media biographies, participants shared a variety of stories that reflect the individuality of their life experiences. However, one dominant theme across all conversations *is* the relevance of previous work experiences and the way in which these experiences influence the way in which participants currently use and think about ICTs (“new” ICTs in particular). Another topic worthy of note *is* the interviewees’ reflections on the way in which their own ICT usage changed due to changes in location, e.g. in the context of trips for medical rehabilitation. For the most part, however, stories on individual experiences of ICT usage reflect the diversity of life course experiences and individual relevancies, such as political or leisure interests.

Painting a Fuller Picture: ICT Usage by Women 60+ and the Indoor Walking Interview

Following this brief outline of *the* initial findings from the larger research project, particularly from the semi-structured interviews, the subsequent sections discuss how *walking interviews in small domestic environments* can help *researchers to* understand *a lifetime of* experiences with ICTs. As the initial results of this study *demonstrate*, walking interviews conducted in domestic spaces *may* lead to more complex and more personal accounts of everyday life experiences, thus providing “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) *of these experiences*.

Interviewing as “Travelling” and Presentation as “Storytelling”

To frame the discussion of the indoor walking interviews, it is important to address the underlying epistemological assumptions of (walking) interviews. While some interview studies and walking interview studies allude to what Kvale (2007) labels the “minor metaphor” in terms of epistemological assumptions, this case study explicitly draws on Kvale’s notion of interviewing as “traveling.” Thinking of the interview process as “mining” means conceptualizing knowledge as something “waiting in the subject’s interior to be uncovered, uncontaminated by the miner” (Kvale, 2007, p. 19). Such notions of qualitative research as “mining” do not necessarily refer to mere positivist understandings of qualitative research, but can, for example, express a psychoanalytical understanding of the research process as a “quest for the hidden meanings in the unconscious” (Kvale, 2007, p. 19). Thinking of qualitative research and indoor walking interviews not as “mining,” but instead as “travelling” (Kvale, 2007, p. 19) emphasizes the pluralities of meaning and generates a fuller picture of everyday life experiences. As Kvale (2007, p. 19) puts it, “[t]he interview traveller, in line with the original Latin meaning of conversation as ‘wandering together with’, walks along with the local inhabitants, asks questions and encourages them to tell their own stories of their lived worlds.” Rather than looking for “authentic meanings,” the interview traveler is interested in “potentialities of meanings,” interpretations and narratives (Kvale, 2007, p. 19). Building on such an understanding of knowledge production, one can also think of the qualitative researcher as “researcher-story-teller” (Brown, 2010), as someone telling empirically-grounded “stories” about social realities.^x In what follows, the findings obtained through indoor walking interviews are presented by telling stories: the stories of women living in the province of Styria in Austria, all of whom are aged 60 or older. The participants’ stories about their experiences with ICTs provide insight into how the walking interviews in the home offer the researcher and the participant the opportunity to co-create rich and multidimensional narratives on ICTs.

The Indoor Walking Interview

Indoor walking interviews are very loosely structured interviews that are conducted during walks with the participants in their homes. In my project, these indoor walking interviews occurred after the life-graph discussions and the semi-structured interviews. After conducting a sedentary semi-structured interview on the same day, the researcher and the participant begin the walk through the house to discuss the interviewee’s media devices. It is important to note that, at this point in time, the researcher suggests “Let’s take a look together at all media devices at the house, if this would be okay”^{xi} to check in and to ensure that the participant is comfortable with the walking interview. Under the lead of the interviewee, who sets the pace and route for the joint tour through the apartment or house, the interviewee and interviewer walk through the different rooms and eventually stop when the interviewee points out an ICT device. At this point, the interviewees immediately may begin to elaborate a story about the device. If not, then the interviewer may acknowledge the presence of the device by saying something like “So this is your TV-set/ your radio/ your computer” etc. and then ask the interviewee to comment on the device. As a stimulus for the commentary, the interviewer poses very general and open-ended questions, such as “What does this TV-set/ radio/ computer look like to you?” or “Where is this positioned?”. After a short conversation about the device, the interviewer will usually ask the interviewee to turn it on and to elaborate on

what they usually do with it. The interviewer *then* asks the interviewee for permission to take photos of the ICT devices presented. The photos *primarily* serve as a memory-aid for the interviewer later on, but sometimes the photo-taking prompts the interviewees to explain the device in more detail or to show additional functions or features.

Challenges in the Context of Walking Interviews in Domestic Spaces

While some advantages of walking interviews in small domestic spaces are rather intuitive, as will be discussed below, *the challenges* of indoor walking interviews are more difficult to pin down. In general, *the practicalities* regarding mobile methods are *an issue*. Researchers perform a multiplicity of tasks simultaneously, such as carrying a recording device in motion, watching their step and direction, formulating questions and listening attentively to the stories of the interviewees. As Hall et al. (2006, p. 3) state: “movement puts the interview at risk [...]; it exposes the interview to interruption, it ratchets up the ratio of noise to signal.” In addition, walking interviews – similar to other empirical methods – are *more suited for the investigation of some topics than others*. Mobile methods in general are well-suited for exploring a range of specific topics such as special practices, engagement with the environment or biographies, as Kusenbach (2011, pp. 187-197) convincingly outlines in the context of the “go-along.” *However, mobile methods* are less suitable for the exploration of topics such as group values, which can be better explored in group discussions (Bohnsack, Przyborski & Schäffer, 2007, p. 7).

Another challenge, which is particularly relevant for walking interviews conducted in small domestic environments, is the subtle *negotiation of privacy and trust* as researcher and interviewee move through the *bedrooms and bathrooms* of the interviewee, *which are very personal and intimate private spaces in a home*. The particular significance of *privacy and trust* is highlighted by the fact that four out of five participants chose to show their bedrooms last or second to last during the interview. Only one interviewee did not include the bedroom in the tour. Bathrooms were only included in the tour by one participant, but this might also be because ICT devices are less common in Austria in bathrooms than in bedrooms, where, for example, a TV or radio alarm is often situated. Sometimes the participants negotiated trust and privacy in subtle ways; other times, these negotiations were more explicit. For example, Interviewee five (I-5) expressed worries *that* the bed in the bedroom might not be made. On other occasions, the participants addressed tidiness and housekeeping during the tour. One participant (Interviewee four) explained that she puts a kitchen towel on the printer in the study so that it does not collect dust and was then quick to add “This doesn’t mean I don’t want to clean.” This example illustrates the importance for the interviewer to convey that they will not impose any judgments on the organization of everyday private life but want to *learn* more about practices and objects of the interviewee’s everyday life through the joint tour of the house.

As Elwood and Martin (2000, p. 650) point out, interviews represent socio-spatial relationships on a small scale, they produce their own “microgeographies” and “reflect the relationships of the researcher with the interview participant, the participant with the site and the site with the broader sociocultural context that affects both researcher and participant.” The socio-spatial situated-ness and interconnectedness of the interview site, as well as the proximity of the participant and the researcher were crucial to this study. For example, the participants *make* recurrent references to housekeeping during the home tours. *These comments* are not surprising, given that women in Austria continue to do the majority of unpaid work,

such as housekeeping (*Gender Equality in the Labour Market*, 2010, p. 18). All of the participants and the researcher are women; thus, the references made by the interviewees contribute to sense-making in a cultural environment *where the home has been constructed as a place where the expectation, culturally, is that women will care for it*.

Advantages of Walking Interviews in Domestic Spaces

Although negotiations of privacy can be a challenge, the closeness to private, everyday life and its objects constitutes one of the very *advantages* of (walking) interviews conducted in domestic spaces. First, being at the homes of the interviewees allows for family-related and household-related themes to be elaborated on extensively. As Sin (2003, p. 306) has noted, “[i]nterviews are, at least in part structured by the spatial context in which they are conducted.” This was made apparent when participants would *share family-related stories* on ICT usage (e.g. on intergenerational ICT experiences). In this study, the interview site thus helped to foreground the social and familial embedded-ness of the ICT usage of the participants.

Secondly, conducting interviews in the home context allows for the *participation of interviewees who are less mobile or flexible in terms of location*, be it in terms of a health condition, geographical location, or care and family responsibilities. This has also been illustrated by Sin (2003, p. 308) in the context of health status. In this study, multiple Interviewees (three, four, and five) had been responsible for family responsibilities during the day (e.g. watching grandchildren, cooking for (extended) family, household work), so the home as an interview location seemed to allow participants to take more time for the interviews. With the interview taking place in their home, they could take breaks from it in order to put a dish in the oven or to talk to one of their grandchildren. Interviewee three voiced this advantage explicitly by calling her friend on the phone to recommend participating in the study. As she *exclaimed*: “This is great. You can even get your cooking done during the interview.”

The closeness to the private and family-related aspects of everyday life and the potential inclusiveness are not only advantages of walking interviews, but of any interview conducted at home. So what does *joint walking* in the home add to the research process? First, the movement through different rooms in the house provides the researcher with the opportunity to *observe the interactions of participants with everyday life objects at their homes*. In the context of this study, the indoor walking interviews were a suitable means of exploring how informants act “together with” ICTs, if we – following Latour (1993, p. 55) – conceptualize ICTs as “quasi-objects.” This interview style also helps draw attention to the fact that media technologies themselves incorporate habitual aspects, for example with regard to design and usability (Schäffer, 2009, p. 43), and influence how individuals *interact* with them. In this way, interaction with objects during the tours allowed for the expression of non-verbal forms of knowledge, for example of routines and implicit knowledges, which are more difficult to verbalize during a sedentary face-to-face interview situation. The house tours thus allowed for *different ways of expressing experiences*; in particular, *showing* instead of telling.

Secondly, the physical shifting of perspectives during the home tour allowed participants to “*complicate*” *their stories*. If walking interviews are conducted subsequent to other conversations (in this case, the life-graph discussion and the semi-structured interview), they *may* provide study participants with the *opportunity to emphasize*, “*contradict*,”^{xii} *weaken* or *add* to statements made earlier. While this certainly is not a unique feature of indoor or outdoor walking interviews, it emphasizes advantages of a multi-method approaches in general. A multi-

method approach often gives more space to participants to share their stories. However, the physical shifting of perspectives by walking through several rooms during the walking interview in the homes of participants *seems* to support a simultaneous *shifting of perspectives and reflections* on ICT-related issues. Anderson (2004, pp. 257-258) and Ricketts Hein et al. (2006, p. 1277) make a similar point in their discussion of the walking interview. Specifically, Ricketts Hein et al. (2006, p. 1277) argue that “[w]alking, like telling stories, is the movement between places [...]” Thus, walking interviews can, in a very literal sense, shift perspectives of participants and allow them to share stories that are more contradictory or complex. Ultimately, such perspectives contribute to richer accounts of experiences.

Hall, Lashua, and Coffey (2006, p. 3) suggest that walking interviews “even out some of the power differentials which even the most informal of interviews can struggle to throw off.” Similar observations were also made by Anderson (2004, p. 258) and can certainly be acknowledged as being important to his study. Participants often seemed to be more open *and willing to elaborate their thoughts* during the walking interviews. *This* is noteworthy since the preceding life-graph discussions and semi-structured interviews also took place in their homes. This is likely because interviewer and interviewees have had some time (approximately two hours) to get to know each other. It may also be because the interviewees *lead* the walking interviews through their homes bringing about a *more balanced power situation*. As Hall et al. (2006, p. 3) write: “Leading the way, interviewees can shift the discussion from description to personal commentary and back, as it suits them; if the talk takes a wrong turn, diversions are at hand.” The walking interviews in this study resemble a *normal tour of a house that might* be offered to a visiting relative or neighbor. The walking tours thus *allude to a common form of social interaction* that is less hierarchical than *traditional, face-to-face sit-down interviews*. For the most part, interviewees seem to enjoy the walking interview and to be pleasantly surprised that the interviewer *genuinely is* interested in *their* way of living at home.

The walking interviews at home allow for a less-hierarchical interaction during the interview process and *provide* the researcher with *glimpses* of what Goffman (1956) calls the “backstage.” *This is that place and that moment* where interactions are more informal and it is easier to make “contradictions,” reinterpret or add to one’s stories. As explained earlier, walking interviews in homes are not *entirely* void of power dynamics. *The* interviewer is still a visitor who should not, for example, see an unmade bed *if the interviewee decides*. However, the physical movement through the home means *that* the interviewees do not *need* to get stuck in moments of discomfort; walking can allow them *to move on* and *to* shift their perspectives on the content, as the subsequent discussion of walking interview material demonstrates. If asked what the particular advantage of walking interviews in domestic homes is, one could answer that it is the combination of: being granted access to parts of *the* “backstage” (Goffman, p. 156); allowing interviewees to exist in a position in which *they* get to decide when to shift perspectives, *either by controlling the movement through the home or by* or shifting the *emerging* content *by changing the context and prompting the interview to move on*. *In this way*, participants paint a “fuller picture” of their everyday life experiences with ICTs.

Highlighting Statements, Negotiating Experiences, and Shifting Perspectives: Preliminary Findings from the Indoor Walking Interviews

Drawing from examples from the walking interview *material*, the subsequent discussion focuses on how indoor walking interviews allow interviewees to highlight and negotiate their ICT experiences and to shift their perspectives. It shows how interviewees use the walking interviews to *emphasize* themes or stories that are important to them; to *add new aspects* not mentioned before; to “*contradict*” or *weaken* statements made earlier (during the preceding life graph discussions and semi-structured interviews); or to *introduce entirely new ideas*. It also demonstrates how indoor walking interviews allow the interviewees to interact with ICT devices.

Highlighting Statements: Emphases of Experiences

During the walking interviews, all five participants *emphasized the relevance of themes* or statements mentioned during the preceding life-graph discussions and semi-structured interviews. One example *illustrates the gender-related connections and expectations that the participants have in their understanding of ICTs and expertise*. In the semi-structured interviews, four out of five interviewees shared stories explaining how their sons regularly help with the use and/ or acquisition of ICT devices. As mentioned earlier, this is an interesting finding with respect to gender and ICTs. *Most of the participants have daughters or daughters-in-law (sometimes even living in the same house) who could potentially help them trouble-shoot their ICTs. However, with the exception of one interviewee, the participants do not mention their daughters as ICT helpers.* Interestingly, in the indoor walking interview, the importance of the son as a helper is underscored by three out of four interviewees (I-2, I-4, I-5) who also address this topic in the semi-structured interview. To use an example from the interview material: Interviewee four (I-4), a woman in her mid-sixties from a small village in southern Styria *who had worked as an accounting clerk before retirement*, emphasizes the importance of her son as an ICT helper in the semi-structured interview: “Thank goodness that I have a son; when I didn’t know about something or when we [her and her husband] didn’t know about something, then we get him [laughs], he then has to fix it [the computer] again, when something is broken or whatever.” In the walking interview in the home, *while standing in front of the computer in the study*, I-4 elaborates *by giving a concrete example* of how *her* son provides help with *her* ICTs. Pointing at the computer’s personalized desktop background, a picture of a landscape in the spring, she *exclaims*: “[He] set this up, so everybody has their own [background image], because otherwise you keep searching. Everybody has got something else.” This example underscores the general importance of her son as an ICT helper but, at the same time, sheds light on what she means *when* stating that “he has to fix [...] *whatever*” (own emphasis). In this case, the son is *not only being* consulted when hardware is broken or advice on a program is needed *but also* assists with organizing more common settings, such as the desktop.

Negotiating Experiences: New Interpretations, “Contradictions” and Minimizing Importance

While I-4 provides a concrete example for the help of her son with ICTs in the example cited above, Interviewee five (I-5), a 62-year old woman from a small city in Upper Styria

who *apprenticed as a seamstress* but has been a family manager for most of her life, emphasized the important role her son plays in her relationship to ICTs. During the semi-structured interview, she elaborates the ways that her son helps with various ICT interactions (e.g. searching for things online because he is “faster and more competent”), and *she* explains that he *has* handed down his old computer to her and her husband. Later, in the walking interview through the house, she emphasizes the influence of her son in ICT matters. Standing in front of her TV-set in the large living room, she *states*: “And I actually didn’t want it [the TV-set] to be as big and I wasn’t there [at the electronics store]. [My son] of course was there and they [her husband and her son] took the bigger one, of course.” Notably, I-5 finds it natural (*she says* “of course”) that her son, together with her husband, *are* deciding what TV-set should be bought for her and her husband’s household. Interviewee five also talks about her son’s involvement with ICTs in a less than positive light when *she* frames the TV as something she actually “didn’t want.” This *detail is notable*. The majority of stories about “the helping son” are framed very positively across all interviews.^{xiii} Thus, the walking interview conducted in the homes of interviewees may support the discovery of “potentialities of meanings” (Kvale 2007, p. 19) – in this case in the context of stories on gendered intergenerational relationships and expectations with respect to ICTs. It also exemplifies how *the* literal shifting of perspectives during the walking interview in the homes of the interviewees *may* contribute to a simultaneous *shift in terms of content*, a point Ricketts Hein et al. (2006, p. 1277) have made discussing walking interviews.

Other parts of the walking interview material illustrate how previously-made statements may be weakened in terms of significance or “contradicted.” Compared to statements that are either emphases of previously-made statements or the introduction of new aspects of ICT experiences, these two categories of statements are not as empirically present. It may be easier to recognize themes that *have been deemed less important* or „contradictions” in statements. An example of a previous statement that had been minimized or tempered is a story shared by a 60-year-old former secretary and family manager living in a suburb of Graz (I-3). In the semi-structured interview, I-3 described her usual handling of new ICTs: “And this is always at the back of my mind, that you should not break anything. It is idiotic, I know very well that I won’t break anything, but it doesn’t work anyways. I prefer asking first and then I do it.” During the joint inspection of her mobile phone during the walking interview, however, she states that she changed the size of characters on her phone display by just trying and finding out “by accident”: “There, I tried and then I saw that you can [put] bigger characters. [...] I did this myself.” While at some points during the semi-structured interview, she briefly mentions that she “occasionally” tries out things herself, this *is* the only concrete example she provides which weakens her previous statement of “not just trying out things.”

Regarding “contradictions” of previously made statements, an illustrative example from the current analysis is an account of I-5, a woman who identifies as a non-user of computers and the Internet. In the semi-structured interview, she frames computers and the Internet, on the one hand, as a waste of time and, on the other, as a necessity for work. For instance, she states: “Of course, if you need it [the computer] for work, as it is everywhere today, it is great and everything is faster [...], but for us this is not essential anymore [...]. [W]e don’t need the computer, not necessarily, right, something like the Internet.” In the walking interview through the home, however, she mentions that her husband often goes to “play on the computer” in the evening while she reads or goes to sleep, only to shortly afterwards correct herself and say that she did not mean that he literally plays computer games, but that he looks

up some things that are related to his former job as an alpine tour guide. This is a significant addition or perhaps more accurately a "contradiction" of her previous description of the computer and the Internet as things primarily related to work. It also explains why she thinks that computers and the Internet are a waste of time: she sees them as something similar to kids' toys, as something you should not bother with as an (older) adult.

A "contradictory" aspect of another interviewee's (I-1's) relations to ICTs was shared during the walking interview. *Interview one* is a 66 year-old woman from the suburbs of Graz, who *had worked* part-time as a secretary in the public sector *and* continues to be the family manager. During the walking interview, she *first speaks about the TV-set in the living room and then* suddenly turns to an amplifier and stereo next to it *to point out the record player on top of the stereo*. She *then* compares records to CDs, *eloquently* elaborating on the high acoustic quality of *the music on the records*. She then shares an example of "that (!) difference" between music on CDs and records. During the minutes *that follow*, I-1 *continues to* play a variety of pieces of music recorded on records to *emphasize the wonderful* quality of music *that* records provide. Her comments on the quality of the music are informative as she introduces a device that *is* of obvious importance to her: *her stereo*. She *also expresses* the bodily dimension of her interaction with *this particular media device*. *As she puts it*, listening to records gives her "the goosebumps." The most valuable part of this interaction is a comment she *makes* on her *general technological* skills. Getting ready to play the next piece of music on the record player, I-1 states: "Alright, this I can even handle! Well, I even know how to lift that thing [the needle of the record player]. Well, this dates back to my youth." This statement is vitally important to interpret. During the semi-structured interviews that *had been conducted earlier*, I-1 repeatedly presented herself as "a strong user" of new ICTs. However, during the walking interview, she demonstrates and expresses considerable insecurities while handling a range of ICTs, *except for her sound system*.

Another particularly illustrative example in the context of "contradictions" is the competency that *Interview three exhibits while handling* the computer during the walking interview. In the semi-structured interview, this participant talked extensively about the computer programs she used at work prior to retirement *and yet continually* played down her computer competencies *by offering* stories about the ways that her son helps with new ICTs. Her actual expertise in interacting with computers, however, *is demonstrated* in the walking interview. Interacting with the computer, she skillfully uses various key combinations (shortcuts) to successfully enter commands. This observation highlights the potential downplaying of ICT skills by the women interviewed and draws attention to social norms and cultural narratives associated with aging *and gender*. It *also* highlights the importance of "Anocriticism" (Maierhofer, 1999, 2004, 2007) as an interpretational approach for the analysis of the material. *It draws attention to normative assumptions with regard to age and aging in cultural representations, such as this interview material*. This example also underscores an advantage of *conducting* walking interviews in homes *as a method* to examine everyday life experiences and ICTs. Walking interviews allow interviewees to express *their* experiences verbally, but also to show instead of *just tell*.

Shifting Perspectives: Introduction of New Aspects of Use

Aside from emphasizing previously made statements or negotiating them, the walking interviews often were used by participants to *introduce entirely new aspects of ICT usage and*

experiences, which they had not mentioned earlier. In this context, one could argue that the participants' interactions with devices serves as a stimulus for further discussion. Examples from *the* transcriptions are numerous. For example, an interesting story by I-4 surfaces in the walking interview, *when our encounter with the landline telephone prompts her to reveal that she and her husband rarely use it. She further explains that the only time they use it is when somebody calls them. As she elaborates looking at the landline phone, her older sister, in contrast, mostly uses the landline. She then reflects on this in detail:*

My sister for example, she is still used to calling on the landline, yes, because the number is shorter or I don't know. [...] [I]t is funny, [...] she [her sister] always calls me on the landline, apparently this is so deeply internalized by her [literally: "deep inside of her"], the landline phone number. She always knows that one by heart and a cell phone number is just inconvenient for an older person. [...] [I] don't know for how long we have been having this landline already, 30 years or something? And this sticks, while these days, a cell phone number doesn't mean anything to anybody. Actually, every few years you can get a different number; this is why I guess that she likes to call on the landline.

This statement is very informative as she herself introduces the idea that ICTs and people can be deeply connected and *interact* in a very literal way. More precisely, she thinks that things, such as a phone number, can become *part* of a person: the landline phone number is "deep inside" of her sister. This statement is reminiscent of Latour's argument that technology is a "quasi-object," "a moving actant that transforms those who do the moving, because they transform the moving object" (Latour, 1996, p. 379). This example *further* demonstrates *how* the presence of *media and technology* devices *encountered* during the walking interviews at home may lead to processes of extensive reflection *and* to new perspectives on experiences and objects.

Conclusion

As the above analysis indicates, walking interviews that are conducted in small domestic spaces allow for a joint exploration of "potentialities of meanings" (Kvale, 2007, p. 19) of a subject by interviewer and interviewee. They can lead to relevant empirical material and reveal everyday life experiences and nuance the researcher's understanding of their participants' engagements with ICTs. The main advantages of this method are that it addresses some of the power imbalances in interview situations by letting participants shift directions and perspectives at any point and that it allows the researcher to get glimpses of some of the "backstage" areas of everyday life (Goffman, 1956). It thus invites researchers to reconsider new emphases, "contradictions," to lessen the import of previous statements, to generate insights on the devices discussed on location and may stimulate ideas for further reflection. During walking interviews in domestic spaces, objects are invited into the research process where they may prompt a more detailed and multifaceted discussion of everyday life experiences and the complex and nuanced entanglements with media and ICTs. As Wiederhold (2015, pp. 612-613) succinctly puts it, albeit in another context: "Mobile methods deviate from more traditional approaches to interviewing by inviting disruption, serendipity, and unplanned interactions [...]." In the context of walking interviews at home, the on-site interaction with everyday life objects, such as ICTs, can help to nuance the stories of participants through "contradiction" and rich detail. This is crucial for the telling of empirically-ground-

ed complex “stories” about the lived ICT experiences of these interviewees. It supports the exploration of cultural narratives that inform everyday life practices related to media and their representation in controlled research environments, as the example of I-3 and her (non-verbalized) mastering of shortcuts illustrates. The walking interviews that are conducted in the homes of the participants also contribute to a fuller understanding of the importance of gendered intergenerational relationships in the ICT context and the complexity of these relationships, as the story of the unwanted big TV shared by one interviewee (I-5) reveals. In conclusion, walking interviews conducted in the homes of the participants are a potentially productive approach to understanding the role of ICTs in everyday life. In this case, this method draws attention to the multidimensionality of the ICT experiences of women 60+ and, most importantly, points to the on-going need for researchers in age/aging studies to create empirically-grounded stories that may counter the one-dimensional cultural images of older women and ICT use.

Notes

ⁱ Thomas Roberts is a research fellow at the *Centre for Research in Social Simulation* (CRESS) at the University of Surrey.

ⁱⁱ This study belongs to the research project “Cultural Narratives of Age and Aging,” a project located at the *Center for Inter-American Studies* of the University of Graz, Austria and directed by Roberta Maierhofer (supported by funds from Oesterreichische Nationalbank, Anniversary Fund, project number: 15849).

ⁱⁱⁱ The reason behind limiting the age range was the need to create a comparable group of participants. In Austria, the Internet became more widely accessible shortly after the turn of the millennium (GfK Austria, 2012, p. 2). Thus, women now aged 60 to 70 are likely to have been engaging with new ICTs such as the Internet on a discursive or a practical level already during their careers, if they were employed before retiring. The limitation of geographical radius is based on the fact that Styria is one of the three Austrian provinces which are close to the overall Austrian percentage of Internet users (Statistik Austria, 2012). Thus, the province of Styria can be considered a good vantage point for the investigation of the interaction with “new” ICTs in Austria since the study – although including a broad variety of ICTs for reasons of comparability – focuses on the usage of “new” ICTs in particular.

^{iv} Translated into English from Schäffer’s (2009) original German expression “generationsspezifische Medienpraxiskulturen” by the author of this paper.

^v In an empirical study from 2009, Schäffer investigated media practices and attitudes towards different types of media among various age groups. In this study, Schäffer showed that older participants (the oldest participant group was aged 60 to 70), were more likely to prefer carefully planned and executed actions to “trial and error” approaches when engaging with new media devices.

^{vi} The adoption of a biographical and life course perspective is crucial, as previous studies on the usage of ICTs by seniors have shown; one of them is a case study conducted by Fernández-Ardèvol and Arroyo Prieto in 2012. In their case study on the adoption and use of mobile telephony by seniors in Barcelona and its metropolitan area, Fernández-Ardèvol and Arroyo Prieto (2012, p. 20) have shown that the expert (highly informed) use of mobile telephones is related to an already existing and lifelong strong interest in technology. Regarding the importance of previous life course experiences related to information and communication technologies, the analysis of the overall empirical material of this study gathered so far has led to similar results.

^{vii} Life graphs are graphic representations referring to life course experiences over time in a particular context, and in this study they are drawn by research participants themselves prior to the interview appointment. On the x-axis, participants can indicate relevant periods of time and on the y-axis they can write down important experiences and events in this time span. In this study, the life graphs drawn by the participants prior to the interview appointment are subsequently used as a starting point for the sedentary semi-struct-

tured interview on ICT experiences over the life course. For an example of a life graph see: Lancaster University. (2014). *Transitions in practice: climate change and everyday life: The shower-bath path*. Retrieved July 30, 2014, from <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/staff/shove/exhibits/showerv2.pdf>.

^{viii} Some of the specific questions asked in the semi-structured interviews have been adopted – sometimes in close translations and sometimes in slightly modified formulations – from an interview outline developed by Mireia Fernández-Ardèvol for a case study on the adoption and use of mobile telephones conducted in Los Angeles (shared via personal communication, September 29, 2014).

^{ix} All but one participant had prepared a life graph prior to the interview appointment.

^x Such empirically-grounded stories can be understood as “broad-form stories” which are used to “illuminate something” (Moon, 2010, p. 28).

^{xi} The participants are of course also asked prior to the appointment, whether they would agree to a joint tour of the home after the semi-structured interview.

^{xii} The term contradictions is used with quotation marks in this analysis because contradictory statements made by interviewees are not interpreted as indissoluble contradictions or incompatible, false statements, but rather as different and equally legitimate angles from which empirically grounded “stories” can be told – to return to Kvale’s image of interviewing as traveling (Kvale, 2007, p. 19) and Brown’s idea of qualitative research as storytelling (Brown, 2010).

^{xiii} Only interviewee two very briefly mentioned at some point that she feels “dependent” on her son in ICT matters.

References

1. Anderson, J. (2004). Talking whilst walking: A geographical archaeology of knowledge. *Area*, 36(3), 254-261. DOI: 10.1111/j.0004-0894.2004.00222.x.
2. Bohnsack, R., Przyborski, A., & Schäffer, B. (2010). Einleitung: Gruppendiskussionen als Methode rekonstruktiver Sozialforschung. In R. Bohnsack, A. Przyborski & B. Schäffer (Eds.), *Das Gruppendiskussionsverfahren in der Forschungspraxis* (2nd ed.) (pp. 7-22). Opladen: Verlag Barbara Budrich.
3. Brown, B. [TEDx Talks] (2010, October 6). *Brené Brown at TEDxHouston*. [Video file]. Retrieved July 14, 2015 from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4Qm9cGRub0Mills>.
4. Center for Inter-American Studies. (2015). *Anocriticism. A New Approach to Literary and Cultural Studies. Project: Roberta Maierhofer (Publication)*. Retrieved July 13, 2015, from <https://interamerikanistik.uni-graz.at/en/research/intersectionality-aging-studies/anocriticism/>.
5. Crow, B., & Sawchuk, K. (2015). New and Old, Young and Old. Aging the Mobile Imaginary. In A. Herman, J. Hadlaw & T. Swiss (Eds.), *Theories of the Mobile Internet: Materialities and Imaginaries* (pp. 187-199). Routledge Studies in New Media and Cyberculture. New York: Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781315849850.
6. Doh, M., Wahl, H.W., & Schmitt, M. (2005). Medienverhalten der 1930/32-Geborenen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Internetnutzung: Befunde der Interdisziplinären Längsschnittstudie des Erwachsenenalters. *Spiel*, 24(1), 35-66.
7. Doughty, K. (2013). Walking together: The embodied and mobile production of a therapeutic landscape. *Health & Place*, 24, 140-146. DOI: 10.1016/j.healthplace.2013.08.009.
8. Elwood, S. A., & Martin, D. (2000). “Placing” Interviews: Location and Scales of Power in Qualitative Research. *The Professional Geographer*, 52(4), 649-657. DOI:10.1111/0033-0124.00253.
9. Federal Minister for Women and Civil Service at the Federal Chancellery. (2010). *Equality in the Labour Market*. National Action Plan. Vienna. Retrieved March 18, 2016, from <https://www.bka.gv.at/DocView.axd?CobId=42528>.
10. Fernández-Ardèvol, M., & Arroyo Prieto, L. (2012). Mobile telephony and older people: Exploring use and rejection. *Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture*, 3(1), 9-24. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/iscc.3.1.9_1.

11. Garson, D. G. (2006). *Public Information Technology and E-governance: Managing the Virtual State*. Mississauga: Jones and Bartlett.
12. Geertz, C. (1973). Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture. In C. Geertz, (Ed.), *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (pp. 3-30). New York: Basic Books.
13. GfK Austria. (2012). *GfK Online Monitor. 4. Quartal 2011*. Retrieved July 10, 2014, from http://www.e-government.steiermark.at/cms/dokumente/10103295_34808287/b8a4cf27/gfk_online_monitor_4_qu_stand_Juni_2012.pdf.
14. Goffman, E. (1956). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday Anchor.
15. Hall, T., Lashua, B., & Coffey, A. (2006). Stories as Sorties. *Qualitative Researcher*, 3, 2-4. Retrieved July 15, 2015, from http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/qualiti/QualitativeResearcher/QR_Issue3_06.pdf.
16. Jones, P., Bunce, G., Evans, J., Gibbs, H., & Ricketts Hein, J. (2008). Exploring Space and Place With Walking Interviews. *Journal of Research Practice*, 4(2), n. p. Retrieved July 13, 2015, from <http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/150/161>.
17. Kusenbach, M. (2011). Street Phenomenology: The Go-Along as Ethnographic Research Tool. In P. Atkinson & S. Delamont (Eds.), *Sage Qualitative Research Methods* (Vol. II) (pp. 177-204). Sage Benchmarks in Social Research Methods. London: Sage. (Originally published in *Ethnography* 4(3) 2003, 455-485. DOI: 10.1177/146613810343007).
18. Kvale, S. (2007). *Doing Interviews*. London: Sage.
19. Lancaster University. (2014). *Transitions in practice: climate change and everyday life: The shower-bath path*. Retrieved July 30, 2014, from <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/staff/shove/exhibits/showerv2.pdf>.
20. Latour, B. (1993). *We Have Never Been Modern* (C. Porter, Trans.). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
21. Latour, B. (1996). On actor-network theory: a few clarifications. *Soziale Welt*, 47(4), 369-381.
22. Maierhofer, R. (1999). Desperately Seeking the Self: Gender, Age, and Identity in Tillie Olsen’s ‘Tell Me a Riddle’ and Michelle Herman’s ‘Missing’. *Educational Gerontology*, 25(2), 129-141. DOI: 10.1080/036012799267918.
23. Maierhofer, R. (2004). The Old Woman as the Prototypical American – An Anocritical Approach to Gender, Age, and Identity. In W. Hölbling & K. Rieser (Eds.), *What is American? New Identities in U.S. Culture* (pp. 319-336). Vienna: LIT.
24. Maierhofer, R. (2007). Der gefährliche Aufbruch zum Selbst: Frauen, Altern und Identität in der amerikanischen Kultur. Eine anokritische Einführung. In U. Pasero, G. M. Backes & K. R. Schroeter (Eds.), *Altern in Gesellschaft. Ageing – Diversity – Inclusion* (pp. 111-127). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. DOI 10.1007/978-3-531-90416-0.
25. Mannheim, K. (1952). The Problem of Generations. In P. Kecskemeti (Ed.), *Karl Mannheim: Essays* (pp. 276-322). London: Routledge. (Original work published 1927/28).
26. Moon, J. (2010). *Using Story In Higher Education and Professional Development*. New York: Routledge.
27. Ricketts Hein, J., Evans, J., & Jones, P. (2008). Mobile Methodologies: Theory, Technology and Practice. *Geography Compass*, 2(5), 1266-1285. DOI: 10.1111/j.1749-8198.2008.00139.x.
28. Schäffer, B. (2009). Mediengenerationen, Medienkohorten und generationsspezifische Medienpraxiskulturen. Zum Generationenansatz in der Medienforschung. In B. Schorb, A. Hartung & W. Reißmann (Eds.), *Medien und höheres Lebensalter. Theorie – Forschung – Praxis* (pp. 31-50). Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-531-91900-3.
29. Statistik Austria. (2012). *IKT-Einsatz in Haushalten. Einsatz von Informations- und Kommunikationstechnologien in Haushalten 2012*. Retrieved July 1, 2014, from http://www.statistik.at/web_de/statistiken/energie_umwelt_innovation_mobilitaet/informationsgesellschaft/ikt-einsatz_in_haushalten/index.html.
30. Statistik Austria. (2015). *Internetnutzerinnen und Internetnutzer 2014*. Retrieved June 3, 2015, from http://www.statistik.at/web_de/statistiken/energie_umwelt_innovation_mobilitaet/informationsgesellschaft/ikt-einsatz_in_haushalten/073636.html.
31. Sin, C. H. (2003). Interviewing in ‘Place’: The Socio-Spatial Construction of Interview Data. *Area*, 35(3), 305-312. DOI: 10.1111/1475-4762.00179.

32. Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Grounded Theory. Grundlagen Qualitativer Sozialforschung*. Weinheim: Beltz.
33. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Evaluation Office (EO). (2001). *Essentials No. 5 September*. Retrieved July 9, 2014, from http://web.undp.org/evaluation/documents/essentials_5.pdf.
34. Vollbrecht, R. (2009). Der medienbiographische Ansatz in der Altersmedienforschung. In B. Schorb, A. Hartung & W. Reißmann (Eds.), *Medien und höheres Lebensalter. Theorie – Forschung – Praxis* (pp. 21–30). Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-531-91900-3.
35. Wiederhold, A. (2015). Conducting Fieldwork at and Away from Home: Shifting Researcher Positionality with Mobile Interviewing Methods. *Qualitative Research*, 15(5), 600-615. DOI: 10.1177/1468794114550440.

Martine LAGACÉ*
Houssein CHARMARKEH**
Radamis ZAKY***
Najat FIRZLY****

From psychological to digital disengagement: exploring the link between ageism and the ‘grey digital divide’

Abstract

The need for digital literacy is apparent in today’s workplace, driven by strong pressures for constant technological innovation. Previous studies have shown that although older workers make up (and will make up) a great proportion of the workforce, there persists an age-based digital divide in the workplace; and the outcome of such divide is quite negative: at the individual level, older workers feel they’re being marginalized and as such, become dissatisfied and disengage from their workplace; at the organizational level, a pool of skills and expertise is lost as a result of the older worker’s disengagement, putting at risk effective knowledge transfer and mentoring process. Hence, the importance of a deeper understanding of the contextual factors that may feed the ‘grey digital divide’ in the workplace. The goal of this paper is to address such factors moving beyond the ageist claim that a worker’s chronological age is the driving force behind the ‘grey digital divide’.

Keywords: ageism; older workers; workplace; Information and Communication Technology.

Introduction

The “grey digital divide” conceptualized as the lower usage of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) by older adults (Millward, 2007) in comparison to younger adults, is often explained by age related presumptions. Precisely, one’s chronological age is sometimes perceived as a central factor explaining the discrepancy between younger and older adults in terms of interest and usage of ICT (Cameron, Marquis, & Webster, 2001). On the contrary, chronological age, as argued by Olphert and Damodaran (2013), is not among the factors explaining the divide as many seniors use and enjoy using ICT. Rather, the age-based digital divide can only be understood through a thorough examination of *social* factors that surround older adults’ life. In other words, as stated by Granjon (2009), those who are digitally disadvantaged are often those who are socially disadvantaged. As such, this paper ar-

* University of Ottawa, Canada, mmlagace@uottawa.ca, corresponding author.

** Center on Governance, Canada, hcharmar@uottawa.ca.

*** University of Ottawa, Canada, radamishany@gmail.com.

**** University of Ottawa, Canada, nfirz015@uottawa.ca.

gues that the so called “grey digital divide” can only be addressed by countering the social disadvantage at its source, namely stereotypes and discrimination based on age.

In the context of the workplace, driven by strong pressures for constant ICT innovation, the need for digital literacy is apparent. Taking into account that older workers make up (and will make up) a great proportion of the workforce, the outcomes of an age-based digital divide can be catastrophic (Duchesne, 2004; Rizzuto, 2011): at the individual level, older workers may feel they’re being put aside, marginalized and as such, become dissatisfied; at the organizational level, a pool of skills and expertise may be lost as a result of the older worker’s disengagement, putting at risk effective knowledge transfer and mentoring process. Hence, the importance of a deeper understanding of the contextual factors that may feed the grey digital divide in the workplace.

The goal of this paper is to address such factors moving beyond the claim that a worker’s chronological age is the driving force behind the grey digital divide. In fact, we argue that ageism, although prevalent in today’s workplace, is still under looked in research as the major driver feeding into the grey digital divide. This paper is divided in three sections. First, an overview of the sources and consequences of ageism in the workplace will be presented. The second section will focus on identifying organizational practices toward older workers that actually embody ageist beliefs and discrimination and as such widen the digital divide between young and older workers. Finally, building on empirical findings from studies discussed in sections 1 and 2, a theoretical model designed to counteract the age-based digital divide in the workplace will be presented in section 3. At the core source of this model, lies the issue of ageism. In other words, the argument sustained in this paper is that the workplace digital divide is first and foremost one stemming from stereotypes and discrimination based on age.

Ageism in the workplace: understanding the consequences

Age and most importantly “perceived” age, is a social criteria which plays a significant role in determining one’s beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. A number of studies have shown that in Western societies, the aging process per se and older adults are often the target of age-based prejudice (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005; Nelson, 2005; Palmore, 2001), which in turn, often lead to discriminatory behaviors toward older patients (Kagan & Mellendez-Torres, 2015) or older workers (Brownell & Kelly, 2013; Lagacé & Tougas, 2006; North & Fiske, 2012). Butler (1975) first coined the term “ageism” to describe stereotyping and discriminating specifically against the old. For example, elderly are often perceived as being less attractive, more forgetful, more rigid in thought, less motivated and less dynamic than their younger counterparts (Barrett & Cantwell 2007; Palmore, 2001). Needless to say that the relationship between age and each of these characteristics is more complex: it is either mediated by different factors or simply a non-existent relationship. Beauty and attractiveness are indeed in the eyes of the beholder and as such, are a matter of perception above all. On the other hand, positive stereotypes are also ascribed to older adults, such as being kind and trustful and older workers, as being more loyal than their younger peers. Fiske, Cuddy, Glick and Xu (2002) have captured the ambivalent nature of ageist stereotypes through the Stereotype Content Model (SCM). In essence, this model suggests that interpersonal and intergroup dynamics are strongly determined by the assessment of two core social dimensions: warmth and compe-

tency. In the case of elders, they are perceived as members of groups that are *warm* (kind, sincere, trust worthy) but not very competent (i.e. incapable of achieving their goals). More importantly, these perceptions may result in ageist behaviors such as neglecting, ignoring and patronizing communication (Fiske *et al.*, 2002). For example, Nelson (2005) underlines that in the context of care giving, health professionals may interact with elder patients using “baby talk”/over accommodating language. Moreover, Bowling (2007) states that older individuals receive less aggressive treatment for chronic illness as these are perceived as naturally fitting the path of old age.

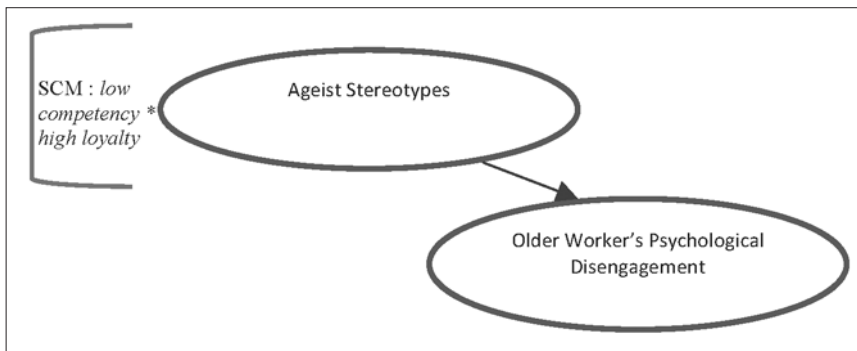
SCM illustrates the ambivalent nature of age-based stereotypes, through the combination of positive views on one dimension (high warmth) and negative views on the other (low competency). Does this mixed combination mitigate the impact of age-based stereotypes on senior’s wellbeing? In the case of ICT precisely, results of a study conducted by Lagacé, Charmarkeh, Laplante and Tanguay (2015) suggest a negative impact. Precisely, the study shows that the more (Canadian retired) seniors internalized ageist messages (such as being nice but not very competent) the less was their interest in learning and using ICT. Such results reveal the insidious impact of age-based stereotypes through a process of “self-fulfilling prophecy”; more importantly, they call upon a reflection as to the psychosocial factors (beyond structural factors) that may partly contribute to the so called grey digital divide.

The current study builds on these results to further explore the link between interest as well as usage of ICT and ageism, focusing on the workplace. As stated previously, two major trends are shaping contemporary organizations: one is the increased reliance on ICT (to process and exchange information as well as to remain competitive in a highly globalized world), the second is the aging of the workforce. For example, in Canada, the National Household Survey (NHS) shows that workers aged 55 years and over accounted for 18.7% of total employment compared to 15.5% in 2006 as a result of the aging of the baby boom generation (Statistics Canada, 2011). In the face of such trends, policies and practices must be put in place to hire, retain and keep older workers up to speed in terms of digital literacy. The digital divide which is at stake in the workplace goes beyond issues of access and connectivity; it is about providing older workers the appropriate skills and abilities to use ICT as well as maintain high levels of motivation to fully engage with these (Zhang, 2005). In doing so, the issue of ageism must be initially addressed as a process which a) legitimizes a *laissez-faire* management approach towards ICT training and older workers; b) lowers older workers’ motivation to engage with ICT. We now turn to studies that suggest a link between the digital divide and ageism in the workplace (either direct or indirect).

Although pervasive in the workplace, ageism is seldom recognized as a prejudice; *de facto*, neither are its negative outcomes. This may be partly explained by the fact that many employers themselves (including older managers) subscribe to beliefs such as older workers are less flexible, less creative, less productive and harder to train than younger workers (Chiu, Chan, Snape, & Redman, 2001; Barth, 2000). Hence, as noted by Walker (2002), ageist stereotypes reduce the possibility for older workers of being reemployed or finding a new job. The negative impact of ageism on older workers’ wellbeing has also been documented. For example, Lagacé, Tougas, Laplante & Neveu (2008, 2010) have conducted a series of studies to assess the repercussions of ageism on Canadian health care workers aged 45 years and above. Amongst the findings is that the more older workers perceived they were the target of ageist stereotypes (such as being denied training or excluded from decisional process, being depicted as resistant to change because of their age), the more psychologically disengaged

they became from their workplace which in turn lowered their self-esteem. Psychological disengagement has been defined as a coping strategy used by individuals who are the target of negative stereotypes and prejudice (Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolfe, & Crocker, 1998). The coping occurs through a process of psychological detachment where one's domain (and/or the people in that domain) becomes less and less important. For example, older workers disengage from their workplace by devaluing the importance of work domain in their life and/or by dismissing performance feedback when they perceive they are the victims of ageist beliefs and attitudes. Although initially conceptualized as a defense mechanism, results of empirical studies suggest that psychological disengagement can actually damage one's self-esteem (Lagacé et al., 2008, 2010; Tougas, Beaton, Rinfret, & de la Sablonnière, 2005). Moreover, from a social perspective, it is plausible that disengagement inadvertently reinforces the (pseudo) legitimacy of negative stereotypes which are at the source of the process.

Figure I. Psychological disengagement as a response to ageism in the workplace.



As can be seen from the previous studies, the cost of ageism in the workplace is high and multi-level. At the individual level, it puts at risk older worker's engagement and wellbeing; at the organizational level, it deprives an organization from the experience and expertise of older workers who have psychologically disengaged from their workplace and in turn, may contemplate the idea of retirement (Tougas et al., 1998). Keeping in mind the context of labor participation declines and labor shortages as well as the increased reliance on ICT, few organizations can afford the cost of ageism, in its pervasiveness and persistence.

In the aim of a better understanding of age-based stereotypes in the workplace, Posthuma and Campion (2009) have conducted a thorough review of such stereotypes and analyzed 117 scholarly articles and books. Stereotypes were combined into clusters such as "poor performance" (older workers have lower ability, are less motivated, and are less productive than younger workers); "resistance to change" (older workers are harder to train, less adaptable, less flexible, and more resistant to change), "lower ability to learn" and "more dependable" (older workers are more stable, dependable, trustworthy and loyal). Looking back at the bi-dimensional Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002), we can see that these clusters of stereotypes clearly position older workers as « less competent » but « more sincere/loyal » persons than younger workers. Posthuma and Campion have also documented the impact of ageist stereotypes in terms of age-based discriminatory practices in terms employment-related decisions such as *lower performance evaluation, fewer promotions and training opportunities, lower retention and more frequent lay-offs for older workers*.

Building on the results of the above studies (Lagacé et al., 2008, 2010; Posthuma et al., 2009), we hypothesize that the grey digital divide in the workplace is partly the outcome of ageist stereotypes who's impact is mediated by factors such as older worker's disengagement and discriminatory practices. Precisely, from the perspective of older workers, when these workers subscribe to ageist stereotypes such as being less productive and more resistant to change than younger colleagues because of age, Lagacé and al.,(2008, 2010) have shown that psychological disengagement follows. Let us recall that this concept refers to a defense mechanisms in response to a threat to self-esteem; in other words, in responding to ageist attitudes, the older worker psychologically disengages from his/her work domain. From there, we can postulate that psychological disengagement is the step towards digital disengagement: in substantially reducing the importance and the value of the work domain in his/her life, the older worker may also lose motivation to engage with ICT which, assuredly widens the digital divide. From a managerial perspective, Posthuma et al., (2009)'s meta-analysis suggests that when managers agree with ageist stereotypes they tend to favor organizational practices that mirror these stereotypes and as such, offer less promotion/training opportunities and provide more negative performance feedback to older workers in comparison to younger workers. Plausibly, having less opportunities for promotion and training can, in the long run, render the older worker's knowledge obsolete, which again, widens the digital divide.

Figure II. Ageist stereotypes paving the way to the grey digital divide.

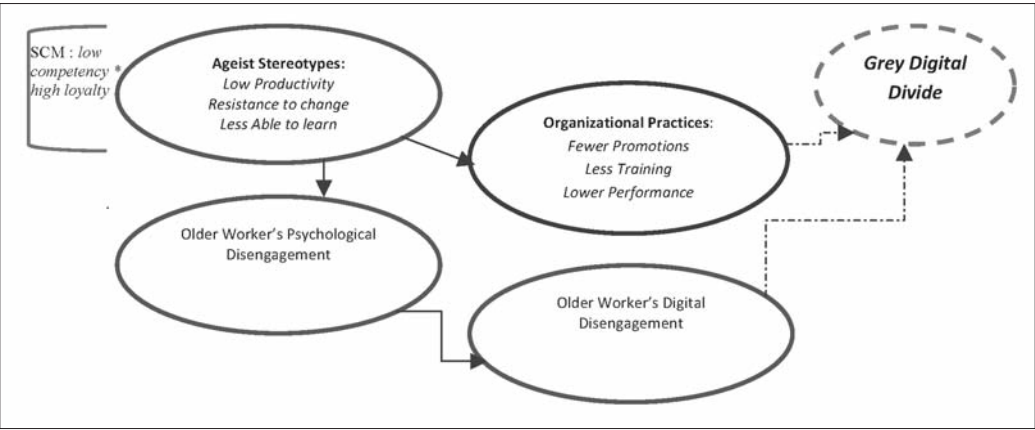


Figure II illustrates the different paths leading to the grey digital divide, which all stem from a subscription to ageist stereotypes, either on the part of older workers or of managers. It is important to note that taken separately, the components and links in the postulated model are derived from previous empirical studies; however, the entirety of this model has yet to be tested in future studies.

Countering the grey digital divide in the workplace: communication as a central force

Communication, conceptualized as a process that involves the exchange of information and most importantly the interpretation of such information (Barnlund, 2008), is highly influenced by perceptions. Indeed, when two people exchange information, the meaning given to such information is filtered by each person's own perceptions. From a social perspective, perceptions refer to the mental schemas that people form about the world, about society, about people; such schemas can, by nature, be biased as they stem from social categorizations. For example, if a person perceives that age (precisely old age) is negatively correlated with a worker's ability to learn new things, communication patterns will then be filtered by such perception and adjusted accordingly. Precisely, Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles & Coupland, 1991) postulates that during social encounters people modify their communication patterns (speech, voice, gestures, etc.) according to how they perceive one another, precisely the degree of positivity or negativity attributed to group membership. When negative stereotypes are ascribed to the interlocutor's group membership, communication will be adjusted in such a way as to reinforce and confirm stereotypes.

When it comes to age-based stereotypes, communication in the workplace is a driving force that can either counteract or reinforce negative outcomes of such stereotypes. What is communicated, who communicates, when and how it is communicated have been shown to impact older worker's sense of well being as well as workplace collaboration between different generations (Brownell & Kelly, 201; Leisink & Knies, 2011). For example, as stated previously, when workplace communication practices toward older employees rely on patronizing and controlling components (mirroring the stereotype of low competency among others), these become dissatisfied, disengage from the workplace and contemplate the idea of retirement (Lagacé et al., 2008, 2010). More often than seldom, ageist communication patterns and practices can be subtle: at the micro level, the older worker a) is not kept in the loop as far as important decisions or decisional process in the organization; b) is being talked down by colleagues and/or managers through condescending and patronizing verbal and non-verbal language (often taking the form of downgrading humour about one's age); c) is denied opportunities for training/learning as well as promotions. At the macro level, organizational norms, which embrace the way the organization brands itself, its mission and vision, may not value the older worker's contribution, experience and expertise but rather, focus exclusively on the added-value of young employees. An example of this is when employers indicate that they "want/need/are looking to rejuvenate their workforce": such language disseminated either externally or internally, implicitly suggests that older workers are a less valuable resource to invest in than are younger workers. Here again the grey digital divide can be partly explained by the underestimation of older worker's capabilities.

Although workplace communication can be a powerful transmitter of ageist stereotypes it can also be an important leveraging tool in counteracting ageism and de facto, in narrowing the digital divide between young and old. Some studies, such as the ones conducted by Iweins, Desmette, Yzerbyt and Stinglhamber (2013), indeed suggest that workplace communication practices that foster intergenerational contacts and multi-age perspective can reduce ageism and improve attitudes at work. Precisely, their work shows that a) quality age-based intergroup contacts lead to positive perceptions of older workers on the part of younger workers, such that the former are depicted as trustworthy *but also* as competent, effective and

adaptable; b) workplace norms and culture that emphasize the added-value of multiple age groups also contribute to positive perceptions of older workers, enhancing in turn, collaboration and facilitation behaviors (Iweins et al., 2013). Top managers as well as middle managers are key players in fostering these two processes. As argued by Collette, Schneider and Legris (2003), how managers communicate and what they communicate in regards to aging in the workplace and older workers can either facilitate or impede a change of culture, hence of intergenerational contacts.

Drawing from results of previous studies, we can plausibly postulate that workplace communication, in its micro and macro level aspects, is a key component when it comes to addressing ageism and ultimately, in countering the grey digital divide. As stated previously, communication relies on perceptions, which in turn are shaped by psychological, sociological, economical and political factors. As microcosms of society, organizations often mirror the negative, or at the very least, the ambivalent societal discourse around aging and relay it through communication practices that tend to downplay the contribution of the older worker. Countering such social trend means that organizations must create a work climate that not only values older workers but fully integrates them into core components, such as vision and mission. Communication is the first step in doing so.

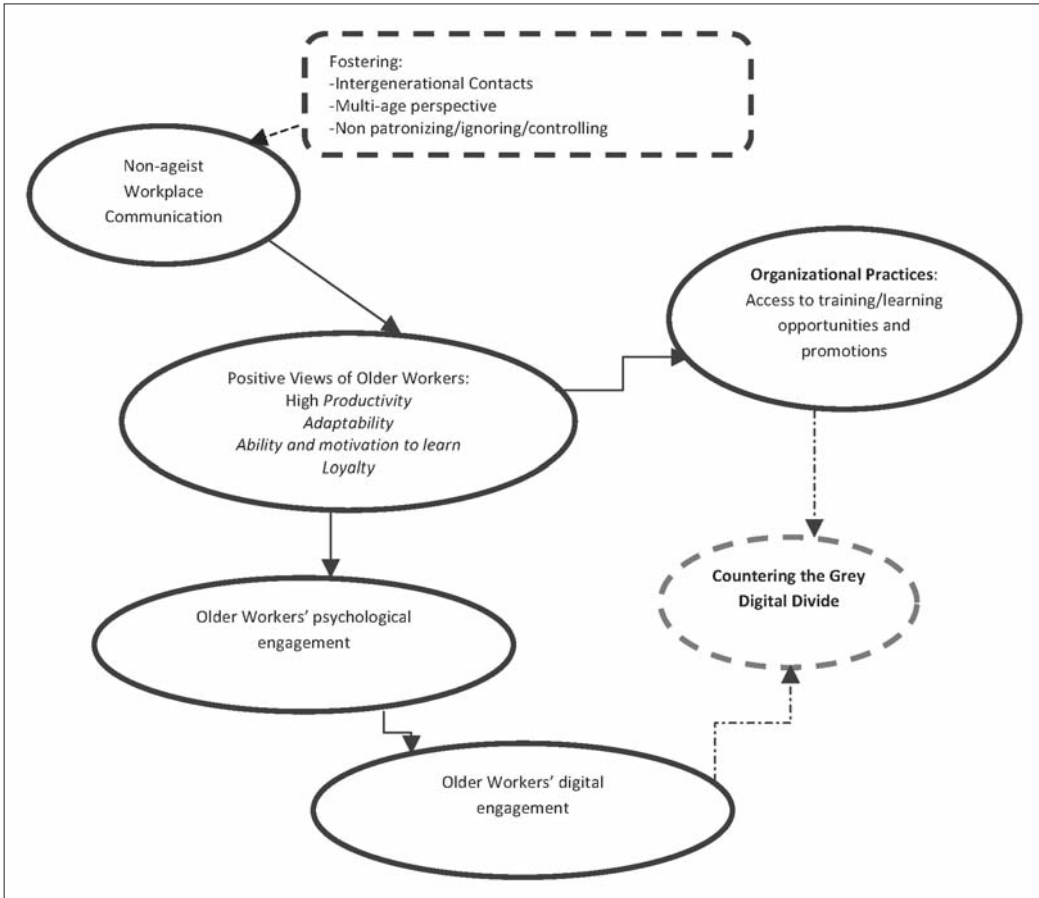
Integrated model: communication, ageism and the grey digital divide in the workplace

Combating the age-based digital divide in the workplace as well as one of its *modus operandi*, ageism, starts with an understanding of the way older workers are perceived as well as of the negative outcomes of such perceptions. As individuals who largely embody and shape the culture of an organization, managers (especially human resources managers) are key factors in this process (Brownell & Kelly, 201; Leisink & Knies, 2011). As such, they must first become aware of what ageism is¹ and acknowledge the threat it poses to an organization's sustainability; this initial step is a "condition sine qua non" for a change of perception in regards to older workers and the experience of aging in the workplace. Managers should then address workplace communication practices; indeed, as stated before, communication is a powerful vehicle of perceptions and as such, who communicates, what is communicated and the modes through which it is communicated can either exacerbate ageist stereotypes toward older workers or counter these, which in turn, can widen or narrow the digital divide. For example, what kind of discourses (informal and formal) do managers carry in regards to older workers and age-group dynamics? Are these discourses (inadvertently or intentionally) ageist driven? To what extent do work policies reflect an inclusive/exclusive workplace climate when it comes to age and fostering positive views of older workers?

Building on the results of previous studies on ageist stereotypes (Fiske et al., 2002, Fiske, Thomas & Vescio, 2007; Posthuma et al., 2009), their negative outcomes on older workers (Lagacé and al., 2008, 2010), and the key role that workplace communication plays in countering such outcomes (through a top to bottom process), we postulate the following: the more managers endorse (through their own discourse and actions) a workplace culture a) that thrives on the added-value of intergenerational contacts; b) that favors a multi-age perspective and c) that excludes age-based patronizing messages, the more positive will be the views about older workers. In turn, such positive views may increase, at the individual level, older work-

er's psychological engagement to the workplace which in turn can reinforce digital engagement (for example, through a will to learn ICTs); at the organizational level, when managers subscribe to positive views about aging in the workplace and older workers they may facilitate opportunities for learning/training as well as career development for these workers. Ultimately, non-ageist workplace communication, one that stresses the added-value of older workers instead of emphasizing the “problem” of managing an aging workforce can lead to a reduction of the aged-based digital divide (see Figure III).

Figure III. Countering the grey digital divide through non-ageist workplace communication.



Let us recall that the starting point of this proposed model is communication, precisely non-ageist communication practices, including intergenerational contacts, multi-age perspective and non-patronizing/ageist messages. In concrete terms, this means that managers must encourage the creation of workgroups that are diverse in terms of age. Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) have shown that intergroup contact is a powerful mean to reduce bias, especially when it is strongly supported by authority (in this case, by managers). Simultaneously, as stated by Iweins et al. (2013), managers must foster a multi-age perspective by stressing the value of age diversity in the workplace, through their formal and informal discourses. In line with the positive effect of intergroup contact hypothesis, Ely and Thomas (2001) argue that the endorse-

ment of a diversity perspective is a powerful tool in reducing intergroup biases but also in terms of increasing innovation and performance. It is important to underline that positive outcomes of intergenerational contacts and multi-age perspective can only be attained if overall organizational discourses discard allusions to negative age-based stereotypes. Managers and human resources experts should especially set the tone through discourses that value younger *as well* as older workers. On a more informal level, needless to say that downgrading age-based humour, which nurtures and legitimizes ageism (Ciampa & Chernesky, 2013; Cuddy & Fiske, 2002; Middlemiss, 2007) should be forbidden. As stated previously, although the different components and links proposed in this model rely on previous empirical studies, the entirety of the model has yet to be tested.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to reflect on the factors that may contribute to the grey digital divide in the workplace. Although structural factors, such as access to ICT, have been thoroughly addressed in previous studies, psychosocial components that may actually feed the divide have yet to be fully explored and this paper contributes to this exploration. Building on previous studies that have shown the pervasiveness of ageism in Western societies and its negative outcomes in the workplace particularly, we hypothesized that age presumptions/ perceptions are one of the driving factors behind the digital divide. Without confronting such perceptions, little can be done to address (at least partly) this divide. As communication is a powerful vehicle of perceptions, we proposed a theoretical model whereby the fostering of communication practices that are age aware and that value a multi-age climate is the starting point in addressing the grey digital divide. We postulated that non ageist communication practices will lead to more positive views of older workers, fostering psychological and digital disengagement as well as facilitate access to learning/training and career development opportunities, key elements in keeping older workers up to date in a changing workplace. More so, managers play a central role in this sequence of links as attitude change on their part can foster a culture change among all workers, young *and* old. Such culture change should be one of inclusiveness based on age which, we argue, is a core component in narrowing the grey digital divide.

Note

¹ Managers are often not aware of ageist practices and when they are, many subscribe to such practices (Dennis & Thomas, 2007).

References

1. Barrett, A.E. Cantwell, L.E. (2007). Drawing on Stereotypes: Using Undergraduates Sketches of Elders as a Teaching Tool". *Educational Gerontology*, 33(4), 327-348. DOI:10.1080/03601270701198950
2. Barnlund, D. C. (2008). A transactional model of communication. In C. D. Mortensen (Eds.), *Communication theory* (pp. 47-57). New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction.

3. Barth, M. C. (2000). An Aging Workforce in an Increasingly Global World. *Journal of Aging & Social Policy*, 11(2-3), 83-88. DOI:10.1300/J031v11n02_09
4. Bowling, A. (2007). Honour Your Father And Your Mother: Ageism in Medecine. *British Journal of General Practice*, 57, 347-348.
5. Brooke, L., Taylor, P. (2005). Older workers and employment: managing age relations. *Ageing and Society*, 25, 415-429. DOI: 10.1017/S0144686X05003466
6. Brownell, P. & Kelly, J.J. (2013). *Ageism and Mistreatment of Older Workers, Current Reality, Future Solutions*. New York: Springer.
7. Butler, R. N. (1975). *Why survive? Being old in America*. New York: Harper & Row.
8. Cameron, D., Marquis, R., Webster, B. (2001). Older adults perceptions, experiences and anxieties with emerging technologies, *Australasian Journal on Ageing*, 20 (2), 50-56.
DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-6612.2001.tb00399.x
9. Chiu, W. C., Chan, A. W., Snape, E., & Redman, T. (2001). Age Stereotypes and Discriminatory Attitudes towards Older Workers: An East-West Comparison. *Human Relations*, 54(5), 629-661.
DOI: 10.1177/0018726701545004
10. Ciampa, E. & Chernesky, R. (2013). Creating Supportive Workplace Environments for Older Workers In P. Brownell and J. J. Kelly (Eds.), *Ageism and Mistreatment of Older Workers, Current Reality, Future Solutions* (pp. 93-110). New York: Springer.
11. Collette, P., Schneider, R., Legris, P. (2003). La gestion du changement organisationnel. Cinquième partie : Communication et changement. *ISO Management Systems*, mai-juin, 48-57.
12. Cuddy, A.J.C. & Fiske, S.T. (2002). Doddering But Dear: Process, Content, and Function in Stereotyping of Older Persons. In T.D. Nelson (Ed.), *Ageism, Stereotyping and Prejudice Against Older Persons* (pp. 3-26). Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
13. Dennis, H. & Thomas, K. (2007). *Ageism in the Workplace. Generations*, 1, 84-89.
14. Duchesne, D. (2004). More seniors at work. Perspectives, *Statistics Canada-catalogue*, no. 75-001-XIE, 5-16.
15. Ely, R.J. & Thomas, D.A. (2001). Cultural Diversity at work: The effect of diversity perspectives on work group processes and outcomes. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 46, 229-273. DOI: 10.2307/2667087
16. Fiske, S. T., Cuddy, A. J., Glick, P., & Xu, J. (2002). A model of (often mixed) stereotype content: Competence and warmth respectively follow from perceived status and competition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82(6), 878-902. DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.82.6.878
17. Fiske, S. T., Thomas, M., and Vescio, T. K. (2007). Universal dimensions of social cognition: warmth and competence. *Trends Cogn. Sci.* 11, 77-83. DOI: 10.1016/j.tics.2006.11.005
18. Giles, H., Coupland, J. & Coupland, N. (1991). Accommodation Theory: Communication, Context, and Consequence. In H. Giles., J. Coupland & N. Coupland (Eds.). *Contexts of Accommodation* (pp. 1-68). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
19. Granjon, F. (2009). Les inégalités numériques et la reconnaissance sociale. Des usages populaires de l'informatique connectée. *Les cahiers du numérique*, 1 (5), 19-44. DOI:10.3166/LCN.5.1.19-44
20. Hagestad, G.O. & Uhlenberg, P. (2005). The Social Separation of Young and Old: a Root of Ageism. *Journal of Social Issues*, 61(2), 343-360. DOI: 10.1111/j.1540-4560.2005.00409.x
21. Iweins, C., Desmette, D., Yzerbyt, V., Stinglhamer, F. (2013). Ageism at work: The impact of intergenerational contact and organizational multi-age perspective. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 22 (3), 331-346. DOI:10.1080/1359432X.2012.748656
22. Kagan, S. H. & Melendez-Torres, G. J. (2015). Ageism in Nursing. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 23, 644-650. DOI: 10.1111/jonm.12191
23. Lagacé, M. & Tougas, F. (2006). Les répercussions de la privation relative personnelle sur l'estime de soi : une étude du rôle du désengagement psychologique auprès de travailleurs de la santé de plus de 45 ans. *Cahiers internationaux de psychologie sociale*, 69, 59-69.
24. Lagacé, M., Tougas, F., Laplante, J. & Neveu, J-F. (2008). Les répercussions de la communication âgiste sur le désengagement psychologique et l'estime de soi des infirmiers de 45 ans et plus. *Revue canadienne du vieillissement*, 27(3), 285-299. DOI : 10.3138/cja.27.3.241

25. Lagacé, M., Tougas, F., Laplante, J. & Neveu, J.-F. (2010). Communication âgiste au travail : une voie vers le désengagement psychologique et la retraite des infirmières d'expérience? *Revue internationale de psychologie sociale / International Review of Social Psychology*, vol.23 (4), 91-121.
26. Lagacé, M., Charmarkeh, H., Laplante, J., & Tanguay, A. (2015). How Ageism Contributes to the Second-Level Digital Divide: The case of Canadian Seniors. *Journal of Technologies and Human Usability*, 11 (4), 1-13.
27. Leisink, P.L.M. & Knies, E. (2011). Line managers' support for older workers. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 22 (9), 1902-1917. DOI:10.1080/09585192.2011.573969
28. Major, B., Spencer, S., Schmader, T., Wolfe, C. & Crocker, J. (1998). Coping with Negative Stereotypes about intellectual Performance: The Role of Psychological Disengagement. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 24 (1), 34-50. DOI: 10.1177/0146167298241003
29. Middlemiss, S. (2007). Legal Regulation of Harassment on the Ground of Age: Lessons from America? *International Journal of Discrimination and the Law*, vol. 9, 57-65. DOI:10.1177/135822910700900104
30. Millward, P. (2003) The "grey digital divide": perception, exclusion and barriers of access to the Internet for older people. *First Monday* (online), 8 (7).
http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue8_7/millward/index.html. (Retrieved on February 2nd, 2016).
31. Nelson, T. D. (2005). Ageism: Prejudice Against Our Feared Future Self. *Journal of Social Issues / Social Issues*, 61(2), 207-221. DOI: 10.1111/j.1540-4560.2005.00402.x
32. North, M. S. & Fiske, S.T. (2012). An Inconvenienced Youth? Ageism and Its Potential Intergenerational Roots. *Psychological Bulletin*, 138 (5), 982-997. DOI: 10.1037/a0027843
33. Olphert, W. & Damodoran, L. (2013). Older people and digital disengagement: a fourth digital divide? *Gerontology*, 59, 564-570. DOI: 10.1159/000353630
34. Palmore, E. D. (2001). The ageism survey, First findings. *The Gerontologist*, 41 (5), 572-575. DOI:10.1093/geront/41.5.572
35. Pettigrew, T.F., Tropp, L.R. (2006). A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, 751-783. DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.90.5.751
36. Posthuma, R.A. & Campion, M.A. (2009). Age Stereotypes in the Workplace: Common Stereotypes, Moderators, and Future Research Directions. *Journal of Management*, 35 (1), 158-188. DOI: 10.1177/0149206308318617
37. Rizzuto, T. E. (2011). Age and technology innovation in the workplace: Does work context matter? *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27(5), 1612-1620. DOI:10.1016/j.chb.2011.01.011
38. Statistics Canada. (2011). *2011 National House Hold Survey*. Retrieved from <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-012-x/2011002/tbl/tbl04-eng.cfm>
39. Tougas, F., Beaton, A., Rinfret, N. & de la Sablonnière (2005). Policewomen Acting in Self-Defense: Can Psychological Disengagement Protect Self-Esteem From the Negative Outcomes of Relative Deprivation? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88 (5), 790-800. DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.88.5.790
40. Walker, A. (2002). A strategy for active ageing. *International Social Security Review*, 55(1), 121-139. DOI: 10.1111/1468-246X.00118
41. Zhang, Y. (2005). Age, gender, and Internet attitudes among employees in the business world. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 21, 1-10. DOI: 10.1016/j.chb.2004.02.006

Patrik MARIER*
Isabelle VAN PEVENAGE**

The Invisible Women: Gender and Caregiving in Francophone Newspapers

Abstract

This contribution analyses the importance given to gender in articles related to caregiving for older adults in five francophone newspapers (*Le Soir*, *Le Devoir*, *Figaro*, *Libération* and *La Presse*) across three countries (Belgium, France and Canada). Out of the 254 articles in our sample, less than a fifth (49) made any mention of gender. A closer analysis of the gender related contributions reveal that only 18 articles devote more than a line to the interaction between gender and caregiving activities and its multiple socio-economic consequences. This is highly surprising since women provide the bulk of caregiving efforts and are the ones facing difficulties due to the lack of governmental actions to assist with these functions. These consequences are well documented in the scientific literature and feature caregiving burnout, loss of employment and economic insecurity. This contribution features an analysis and some extracts from the 18 articles in question.

Keywords: caregiving; caregivers; older adults; social services; Belgium; France; Canada; newspapers.

Introduction

Industrialised countries are all experiencing some forms of population aging, most frequently conceptualized as having an increasing proportion of individuals aged 65 and above relative to younger cohorts. The primary causes of this demographic are well known: the “baby boom” of the post-world war II years was quickly followed by a “baby bust” with a sharp decline in birth rates. This was accompanied by steady increases in life expectancy (OECD, 2000). Other elements have also played an important role. For example, in many Eastern European countries, outmigration patterns following the transition from communism have accelerated this demographic shift towards an aging population (Coleman & Rowthorn, 2011; Nancu, Guran-Nica, & Persu, 2010).

This demographic shift, accompanied by slower economic growth, has led many international organizations and governments to seek measures to adapt or transform their welfare state to face changing socio-economic realities (OECD, 1999, 2000). It has also prompted multiple debates on the relationship between population aging and the size of the welfare state (Disney, 2007; Gee & Gutman, 2000; Razin, Sadka, & Swagel, 2002; Tepe & Vanhuysse, 2009). These demographic and socio-economic transformations, often resulting in the retrenchment of popular social policies, have had a particularly negative impact on women

* Concordia University, Canada, patrik.marier@concordia.ca, corresponding author.

** Université de Montréal, Canada, isabelle.van.pevenage@umontreal.ca.

prompting further studies on the role of gender in contemporary welfare states (see for example, Bashevkin, 2002). Across most countries, multiple studies have emphasized the lack of support and social services to cater to a growing cohort of older adults (Lavoie, 2014). Family members, and most notably women who continue to perform most caregiving functions, have been filling the increasing gap between needs and the lack of support offered by the public sector.

Our contribution analyses the extent to which the gender dynamic surrounding caregiving issues in an aging population have been addressed in news media. As part of a larger project on the representation of caregivers in the news media, we collected newspaper articles from five francophone newspapers (*Le Soir*, *La Presse*, *Le Devoir*, *Le Figaro*, and *Libération*) over a period of 20 years (1994-2014) in three different countries (Belgium, Canada and France) and targeted those devoted to the subject of gender. Much to our surprise, the issue of gender and caregiving shines by its absence and caregiving is mostly presented as a “genderless” activity. Women are simply invisible in these debates. Out of the 254 articles on caregiving during this period, only 18 articles made reference to role of gender in giving caregiving support. 16 of those were in Canada, two in Belgium and none in France. During the entire time periods, there were ten years without articles on the subject.

This contribution is divided onto four sections. The first summarizes the place of gender within the comparative welfare state literature with a special emphasis on the role of caregiving in aging societies. The second provides discuss the importance of media attention and public policy. The third features a discussion on the method employed for this research featuring extracts from the articles discussing caregiving. The conclusion provides potential reasons behind the dearth of articles on gender and caregiving and offers avenues for further research.

Gender and the Welfare State

Until recently, gender represented a largely ignored dimension of analysis in comparative welfare studies. Debates on the creation and expansion of the welfare state typically focused on social spending and program development attributed largely to broad phenomenon such as the industrial revolutions and the importance of social partners. The highly popular *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Esping-Andersen, 1990) inserts itself in this tradition by, for example, introducing a new creative way to conceptualize and measure welfare state generosity. However, it also became highly notorious for the ways in which it failed to account for gender differences (Lewis, 1992; Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1994).

Lewis (1992) and Orloff (1993) provide salient critiques on the ways in which unpaid workers, mostly women, were forgotten from the *Three Worlds* due to their marginal position within the labour market. This acted as a catalyst triggering an impressive wave of contributions on the role of gender in welfare state analysis (Fraser, 1994; Koven & Michel, 1990; O'Connor, 1993; Sainsbury, 1999) to the point where an in-depth review of the welfare state literature demonstrated that studies on gender represent one of the three worlds of welfare state analyses (Pierson, 2000). Caregiving quickly became an important point of departure to understand welfare state configurations and the gendered impact of their policies. The focus of the comparative literature, however, remains strongly anchored in care strategies for children and those analysing older adults have received less scrutiny (Bettio & Plantenga, 2004, p. 95). A comprehensive treatment of this literature lies beyond the scope of this article, but few no-

table studies relevant to our three country (Belgium, Canada and France) comparisons are worth highlighting since they point towards very different treatment of caregiving.

Belgium and France share many characteristics in common with other continental European countries as part of the called conservative regime with the presence of “familialist” policies meaning that women are assumed to perform an informal caregiving role and social rights are primarily derived from the husband via payroll taxes (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Guo & Gilbert, 2007). This extends beyond the traditional household with, for example, Belgian grandmothers being amongst the most active caregivers in Europe (Bettio & Plantenga, 2004). While typologies of welfare states have been hotly disputed, a recent article on familisation featuring a new cluster analysis and an extensive review of the existing literature demonstrate that Belgium and France remain in the same categories across nine classifications (Bambra, 2007; see also Bettio & Plantenga, 2004).

Belgium and France stand in opposition to social democratic and “de-familiasing” welfare states, such as Sweden, which benefited from the formalization of care in the forms of highly accessible public services. A recent analysis attempting to move beyond the paid/unpaid work narrative focused on whether or not care arrangements exhibit a family, geared towards the structure of the family and the gender division of labour, or welfare value bias, devoted to the provision of social services (Pfau-Effinger, 2005). France, despite benefiting from strong childcare access, is stuck in a conflict between these two care arrangement ideals with the enhancement of the social standing of motherhood and the promotion of births competing with the ideals of a dual breadwinner model (Pfau-Effinger, 2005).

Recent contributions have been more focused on the decline of the male breadwinner model and its impact on care and work (Lewis, 2001). Ongoing changes to traditional family structures and the necessity to have dual earner households to sustain a family wage within continental European welfare states result in the apparition of ‘new’ social risks affecting primarily women who must conjugate increasing participation in the labour market with a lack of adequate formal care arrangements (Palier, 2010; Taylor-Gooby, 2004).

In contrast, Canada belongs to the liberal family composed primarily of former British colonies such as the United States and Australia (O’Connor, Orloff, & Shaver, 1999). With social benefits being relatively marginal and geared towards alleviating poverty, the liberal regime is clearly “de-familialised” and the primary challenge is to afford the cost of formal care in the private sector (Esping-Andersen, 1999). The lack of affordable alternatives often creates a dynamic where men are fully engaged on the labour market while women pursues a part-time work and caregiver track (Pfau-Effinger, 2005) although socio-economic status matters greatly with high income earners being able to embrace a dual-income earner career (Esping-Andersen, 1999). The Canadian literature on caregiving has provided strong support to this thesis while emphasizing the shortcomings of the Canadian welfare state to provide sufficient formal care support (Chappell & Hollander, 2013).

A key weakness of typologies is that they tend to exaggerate the scope and extent of differences between countries featuring in each cluster. For the three countries under study (Belgium, Canada and France), it is worthwhile mentioning that the underlying principles upon which older adults benefit from social services to alleviate losses in autonomy are quite similar. In all three countries, some forms of financial assistance aim to compensate for the costs of seeking services outside the public realm. These are the *allocation pour l’aide aux personnes âgées* (Belgium), the *allocation personnalisée d’autonomie* and the means-tested *allocation de solidarité aux personnes âgées* (France), and the *cheque emploi-service*

(Québec/Canada). In all three cases older adults can also benefit from healthcare services, primarily nursing ones, and some basic services such as cleaning and cooking. Both private and public providers provide these services in all three cases, which operate at the margins of their respective healthcare systems. Thus, as stated earlier, the coverage is sporadic and reliance on informal caregivers remains strong, which is becoming increasingly problematic due to the shared commitment to maintain older adults in their own domicile as long as possible. Recent European and Canadian studies have emphasised that this is also a desired objective for older adults, as long as this can be achieved without having to depend on their children (Masuy, 2010; Guberman et al., 2012).

It is important to note that all Canadian articles originate from Quebec newspapers, which is where most of the francophone population resides. Provinces, such as Quebec, have the primary policy responsibilities for the majority of issues surrounding caregiving for older adults. Intuitively, it may seem more appropriate to mention that Quebec, rather than Canada is the third case analysed in this article. However, as is the case with all Canadian provinces, care services have been developed within the framework of the Canadian Health Act, which specifies the conditions that must be fulfilled by provinces to receive federal funding. Inspired by the United Kingdom's National Health Service, the Canadian health care system prioritises curative care resulting in a strong emphasis on hospital care, often at the expense of preventive health measures and social services. As a result, care policies operate at the margins of the health care system - with many services to older adults not covered by the Canadian Health Act - and, consequently, there are no substantial differences with regards to the issues facing caregivers since informal care remains crucial due to poor formal arrangements across Canada (Chappell & Hollander, 2013).

Similar conclusions apply to Belgium. Our articles originate from *Le Soir* and may thus ignore some concerns that are particular to the Flemish region. There is no explicit national policy or strategy for informal caregivers, and as stated above, public support takes mostly the form of modest financial assistance (Masuy, 2010, p. 63). Belgium is rapidly federalizing since 1993 and noticeable regional differences exist with regards to the support granted to older adults and caregivers. For example, the Flemish region has established a mandatory insurance against dependence and broad measures to facilitate staying at home while Wallonia has opted to build institutional support, such as respite centres, often initiated at the local level (Masuy, 2010, pp. 64-65).

Gender and Caregiving in Aging Societies

The absence of women in policy discourses is hardly new and it even confines to comparative analysis. Providing support to older adults to maintain or enhance their quality of life is increasingly considered a vital part of social programs offered by industrialized societies, especially within the context of aging populations. Beyond the desire of most older adults to remain at their domicile as long as possible, policies facilitating aging in place and avoid placement in a long term care facility are surfacing as governmental priorities across western countries (Déchaux, 1996; Lavoie et al., 2005). While these policies gather substantial support due to the expected reduction in costs provided by such a shift, these policy choices are also justified to counteract the negative impact of long term hospitalization: isolation, resignation, dependency and stagnation (Guberman, Maheu, & Maillé, 1991). However, while this

shift favouring aging at home policies should result in an increase in human and financial resources devoted to social services, there is a widening gap between needs and resources allocated. For example, in Québec, public services to support older adults in their domicile cover only 8% of their needs (Lavoie, 2014) leaving seniors to seek assistance from family members, friends, community groups and the private sector.

As a result, within this difficult context, the enactment of an “aging at home” or an “aging in place” strategy involves a strong participation from family members. Studies on the subject underline that family support in fact equates caregiving support from women, most frequently as a partner, friend, daughter or daughter-in-law (Martin, 2003; Kempeneers & Van Pevenage, 2011; Chappell, 2011). The literature on caregiving is unequivocal that family caregiving is first and foremost an activity performed by women. Men perform mostly instrumental assistance such as home repair or usually step in when no female help is available (Chappell, 2011, p. 11). Although the underlying reasons behind these outcomes go beyond the confines of this study, this well-documented reality follows from the fact that women are the ones who are mostly involved in performing caregiving functions within households; they are thus the ones who are relied upon when additional familial responsibilities arise.

Informal caregiving has also important socio-economic and health consequences for the women who assume this role. There are important professional consequences such as refusing to accept a promotion, working fewer hours in the labour market and being absent from work more frequently (Fast et al., 2011). This in turn has a highly noticeable impact on retirement incomes, making women far more likely to depend on means-tested benefits and pension benefits derived from a husband (Marier & Skinner, 2008). Multiple studies have also emphasized negative impacts on the well being of caregivers such as declining physical health (Vitaliano, Zhand & Scanlan, 2003) and a higher propensity to suffer from psychological conditions such as stress, depressions (Turcotte, 2013). In sum, while rewarding, informal caregiving can also plant the seeds of a vicious circle with caregivers likely to depend strongly on informal care later on due to a precarious financial situation and poor health.

In line with the previous section on caregiving and the welfare state, we would expect two different dynamics with regards to the three cases under study despite the fact that all three countries face similar challenges resulting in informal caregivers playing an important role in the lives of older adults in need. First, in the case of Belgium and France, the erosion of the breadwinner model has been somewhat compensated by expanding formal care strategies, but these have mostly been geared towards childcare (Bettio & Plantenga, 2004, p. 102). Thus, recent developments do not seem to alter the place and traditional role granted to family members, primarily women, when it comes to caregiving for older adults. Second, in the case of Canada and contrary to the other two cases in this study, formal caregiving roles are not assigned to family members. This explains why various forms of informal caregiving arrangements are particularly popular in Canada. This even features an immigration program to recruit care workers predominantly from emerging countries such as the Philippines (Ferrer, forthcoming).

Gender, Caregiving and Media Framing

As discussed in the preceding sections, there is now a rich and thriving literature analysing the relationship the interplay between gender, the welfare state and aging societies. Many of

these research findings have led to explicit acknowledgement of policy issues surrounding the question of gender and caregiving. However, to what extent has this translated onto the public sphere and being reported by the media?

The role of the media occupies a privileged place in public policy and for many good reasons. First, issue attention matters a great deal in public policy since there is a strong correlation between the priorities reported in the media and the legislative agenda of policymakers (Jones & Baumgartner, 2004). Succinctly put, unless there is acknowledgement of societal problems, policy initiatives are unlikely to be initiated and policy entrepreneurs cannot put forth their proposals (Kingdon, 2003). Second, the media does not only report problems, but also shapes or frames the ways problems are being defined by attributing blame when policy problems are being constructed (Bacchi, 1999). Research demonstrates that the media plays an important role in depicting social groups in highly negative or positive lights, which facilitates the production of policies that target specific populations (Schneider & Ingram, 1993).

Third, the use of public information campaigns represent a potent policy instrument for governmental authorities seeking to achieve certain policy outcomes, but also to communicate political preferences to a broad audience with the hopes of engaging or stimulating debates on a question of importance for the government (Weiss & Tschirhart, 1994). The media plays a crucial role when such instrument is deployed since it is the primary conveyor of information and one conveyor likely to foster or hinder public engagement. Finally, there are growing concerns about the concentration of ownership of the media and its incidence on the diversity of views and opinions diffused (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010).

With debates surrounding an aging population expected to trigger a wide range of outcomes ranging from minor adjustments (Gee & Gutman, 2000) to generational storms (Kotlikoff & Burns, 2005), media analysis on the various policy issues surrounding aging have become more common. According to Quadagno (1989), the media played a key role in promulgating the presence of intergenerational conflicts, which frequently depicts older citizens as “greedy geezers”. Multiple studies also denote, for example, the pervasive presence of diverse forms of ageism across a wide range of medium such as television (Lee, Carpenter, & Meyers, 2007), magazines (Harwood & Roy, 1999), and newspapers (Lagacé, Laplante, & Davignon, 2011; Rozanova, 2010).

What to expect with regards to caregiving and older adults? To our knowledge, there is no study analysing the ways caregivers assisting older adults are portrayed in the media and, consequently, no comparative studies of newspapers across countries. Nonetheless, two basic expectations can be derived from earlier writings on aging in the media. First, research from many countries state that population aging is increasingly being discussed as a political economic problem featuring rising costs for social program and depicting seniors as becoming a burden (Lundgren & Ljuslinder, 2011; Rozanova, Northcott, & McDaniel, 2006). Thus, we would expect a large number of articles emphasizing how seniors are producing a burden on caregivers having difficulties navigating maintaining their status on the labour market. Based on the literature on the welfare state described above, differences in treatment should be noticeable between France and Belgium on the one hand, and Canada on the other. For the continental European countries, discussions should centre on the difficulties of reconciling traditional gender role with a transforming economy where public services remain marginal while Canadian articles should focus on the lack of public services and their costs. Second, with caregiving performed primarily by women and with media representa-

tion of women typically emphasizing domestic work (Collins, 2011), we expect a large number of articles discussing gender in articles focused on caregiving for older adults. However, these discussions should differ in the European and Canadian context. In the former, we expect articles to question or debate the traditional role given to family members, and most notably women, when it comes to caregiving. In Canada, the focus is likely to be on how the lack of governmental services triggers rising demands onto informal caregivers with those more likely to be performed by women.

The Invisible Women: Caregiving as a Genderless Activity

In order to test these arguments, we sought articles featuring caregivers for older adults published between 1994 and 2014 in five highly popular dailies in Belgium (*Le Soir*), France (*Le Figaro*, *Libération*) and Canada (*La Presse*, *Le Devoir*). Relying on the Eureka database, we searched for all newspaper contributions, including letters to the editors, devoted to the issue of caregiving for older adults. This includes a word search on the various ways to describe older adults (such as *personnes âgées* and *retraités*) and caregivers (such as *aidants*, *proche aidant*, and *aidants naturels*). This was followed by a close reading of all articles to ensure that, at the very least, a portion of each individual articles related to the subject of our inquiry. Among the 254 articles addressing caregiving for older adults, which in itself is quite surprising given the rising importance of population aging as a policy issue and the emphasis placed on aging at home, we first sought contributions featuring gender issues (forty-nine articles). Finally, after a first analysis, we kept those that devoted more than one line to this issue leaving us with small sample of eighteen articles.

A first screening of the articles reveals that nine articles were published in each decade under review, but we also noticed that there is no article on the intersection between gender and caregiving for older adults published in ten of the twenty-one years analysed (1994-2014). In addition, there is no article discussing the increasing role assumed by migrant workers or issues related to visible minorities performing caregiving roles. Finally, almost all articles are from Canada (sixteen out of eighteen) with only two from Belgium and none from France. In all the titles, only one makes explicit reference to gender. These results add support to comparative welfare studies cited earlier that place and assume large familial responsibilities when it comes to caregiving in Continental Europe. One of the two Belgian articles, published in 2011, is particularly revealing since it aims to provide a legal status to caregivers to protect their social rights, but fails to discuss how this might entrench women further onto an impossible reconciliation between caregiving and other realities, including participation onto the labour market. The lack of media consideration on the growing difficulties to conciliate work and caregiving for older adults, to name one of the most pressing issues, is shockingly surprising. As expected, however, Canadian articles focused strongly on the lack of public services and on the difficulties to find alternative solutions.

A further analysis of the context within which these articles feature in the newspaper provides also interesting insights. First, the International Women's Day (March 8th) prompted some discussion on the caregiving role assumed by many women. As such, it is not surprising that this event would trigger a broader discussion on gender and public policy. For example, a short article summarizes a speech given by the Premier during an electoral campaign event:

“Coinciding with the International Women’s Day yesterday, André Boisclair opted to reveal electoral promises to seduce women’s voters. If he is elected, the leader of the Parti Québécois will invest \$211 millions during his mandate, most notably, to tackle women’s abuse and to supplement the assistance given to caregivers (75% of them are women)” (author translation) (La Presse, March 9 2007).

Second, five articles consist of op-ed or letters to the editors. They are mostly contributions made by professionals working with older adults, women’s non-profit organizations or families deploring the lack of support to cater to their needs. An Open letter to Pauline Marois (Quebec’s Premier) from Jean-Pierre Lavoie, a researcher at a public health agency, is representative of this sample:

“The priorities of the minister are actually conspicuously missing when it comes to offering support to the *aidantes* (caregiving women) since 75% of caregivers are in fact women. Will they continue to be utilized as a free human resource to reach the budgetary targets of the government?” (Le Devoir, 6 July 2000) (author translation).

Finally, the last thirteen articles originate from what we would call “traditional journalism” where a reporter decides to pursue a news story featuring a change in legislation or an event related to caregiving. Yet, gender issues are treated very superficially, often simply by stating that most caregivers are women. For example, Marc Tison, a journalist, completed a special report on informal caregivers emphasizing that “77% of caregivers are women. This figure reaches 82% for those aged 45 and below” (La Presse, 8 August 2004) (author translation).

Canada generates the overwhelming majority of articles. The shift to ambulatory care (*virage ambulatoire*), enacted by the provincial government in Québec, features prominently since it is the core subject in eight of the eighteen articles. This ambulatory shift represents a new policy orientation introduced in 1995, which aims to shorten hospital stays and develop medical and nursing services at home (Lavoie et Guberman, 2005). So far, the necessary resources to deploy this strategy are sorely lacking resulting in a loss of services to seniors and even a transfer of nursing responsibilities to caregivers. With women representing the vast majority of caregivers, they are the ones being hurt the most by the lack of financial and human resources to implement of this new policy. The articles from the sample tend to be highly critical of the government and on how it ignores caregivers.

This coverage on the consequences of the ambulatory shift began in earnest in 1996:

“Due to a lack of funds, the state relies increasingly on family members to care for a rising number of individuals with chronic conditions. Quite often, this added responsibility falls on a single person: a woman most of the time. Those working in the field call her an “*aidante naturelle*” (“natural” caregiving women) (La Presse, 19 May 1996) (author translation).

The use of the term “*aidante naturelle*” is particularly revealing since it assumes that women are the default caregivers. Another article on the ambulatory shift stresses the negative impact of the reform on women with the title “the ambulatory shift represents a step backward for women” (La Presse, 26 August 1996) (author translation). Other articles written to commemorate the International Women’s day stresses the “mirage” of the ambulatory shift in 1999 and the drift it creates for women in 2000. In 1998, in the same vein, a journalist in La Presse reports that “the ambulatory shift, by allowing patients to leave hospitals earlier, adds a burden to carers – *most frequently women, it should be noted* – despite the assistance

provided by CLSCs (local health authorities) and non-profit community groups” (author translation, emphasis added).

Conclusion

This comparative analysis of newspaper coverage of caregiving for older adults, with a lens on gender dynamics, reveals that women face a double invisibility. The first invisibility stems from the simple fact that they are clearly absent from francophone newspapers. When newspapers report their difficult conditions, it is precisely because they are the forgotten ones facing the consequences of policy choices – or lack thereof – made by governmental authorities. Hence, their invisibility extends also to the political arena.

More specifically, this article features three other notable findings. First, regardless of the country under study, there is an important gap between findings from research and what is being portrayed in newspaper. Research demonstrates that informal caregivers are predominantly women and they experience important challenges fulfilling this role alongside other family responsibilities and professional obligations. These can result in substantive and negative health and socio-economic consequences for caregivers with researchers raising alarm bells for changes in policies to address these ongoing challenges. Yet, this sense of urgency is sorely lacking in the news media; there is, in fact, hardly any coverage of this issue with only 18 articles out of 254 articles on caregiving for older adults – and even less once we remove letters to the editors - devoting more than one line to issues related to gender.

Second, within this near absentia in coverage, one would suspect difficulties to present any conclusion on the basis of the comparative analysis. Surprisingly, this is not the case since both countries with a familialist tradition (Belgium and France), where women are expected to fulfil informal caregiving role despite increasing pressures to participate more fully onto the labour market, stand out by having only two articles – from Belgium - on issues surrounding gender and caregiving issues for older adults over a period of 21 years! As in Sherlock Holmes’ famous investigation in *Silver Blaze*, this is a case where there is a lot to learn from the dog that does not bark at night. For example, no article challenges the underlying assumption that informal care for older adults is systematically assigned to women.

Finally, it is the enactment of a strategy – the so-called ambulatory shift - without the necessary resources to fulfil it that is at the origin of most newspaper coverage surrounding the issue of informal caregiving and gender in Canada. This is aligned with theoretical expectations derived from the comparative welfare state literature that criticism would be occurring mostly at the lack of private solutions to compensate for the lack of public services. However, it remains an open question whether a similar amount of coverage would have been found without the elaboration of a new strategy and the promise of a shift in emphasis on the part of governmental authorities.

With a growing number of industrialised societies facing the prospect of an aging population, often within the context of budgetary constraints preventing an expansion of social services, informal caregiving is likely to play an even more important role regardless of the welfare regime in place. These challenges are even more acute in a country like Romania, which also faces the consequences of an important emigration that is accelerating the process of population aging, and important financial challenges surrounding its pension and health insurance (Bodogai & Cutler, 2014). Hopefully, these issues will gain further prominence in the media,

which represent a typical first step to gather the needed attention to bring forth policy change. The public acknowledgment of the gender dimension of informal caregiving and its socio-economic consequences represents a pre-requisite to improve the well being of older adults while producing conditions allowing better conditions for caregivers.

References

1. Bacchi, C. L. (1999). *Women, Policy and Politics: The Construction of Policy Problems*. London: Sage.
2. Bambra, C. (2007). Defamilisation and welfare state regimes: a cluster analysis. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 16, 326-338. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2397.2007.00486.x
3. Bashevkin, S. B. (2002). *Welfare Hot Buttons: Women, Work, and Social Policy Reform*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
4. Bettio, F., & Plantenga, J. (2004). Comparing Care Regimes in Europe. *Feminist Economics*, 10(1), 85-113. DOI:10.1080/1354570042000198245
5. Bogogai, S. & Cutler, S. J. (2014). Aging in Romania: Research and Public Policy. *The Gerontologist*, 54(2), 147-152. DOI: 10.1093/geront/gnt080
6. Chappell, N. L. (2011). Population Aging and the Evolving Care Needs of Older Canadians: An Overview of the Policy Challenges, IRPP Study no 21, Montréal, Institut de recherche en politiques publiques.
7. Chappell, N. L., & Hollander, M. J. (2013). *Aging in Canada*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
8. Coleman, D., & Rowthorn, R. (2011). Who's afraid of population decline? A critical examination of its consequences. *Population and Development Review*, 37(s1), 217-248. DOI: 10.1111/j.1728-4457.2011.00385.x
9. Collins, R. L. (2011). Content Analysis of Gender Roles in Media: Where Are We Now and Where Should We Go? *Sex Roles*, 64(3-4), 290-298. DOI: 10.1007/s11199-010-9929-5
10. Déchaux, J.-H. (1996). Les services dans la parenté : fonctions, régulation, effets. In Kaufmann, Jean-Claude (dir.), *Faire ou faire-faire. Familles et services* (pp. 39-54). Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes.
11. Disney, R. (2007). Population ageing and the size of the welfare state: Is there a puzzle to explain? *European Journal of Political Economy*, 23, 542-553. DOI:10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2006.02.005
12. Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
13. Esping-Andersen, G. (1999). *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
14. Fast, J., Lero, D., Duncan, K., Dunlop, C., Eales, J., Keating, N. & Yoshino, S. (2011). Employment Consequences of Family/Friend Caregiving in Canada, *Facts, Research on Aging Policies and Practice*, Edmonton, University of Alberta.
15. Ferrer, I. (forthcoming). Aging Filipino domestic workers and the (in)adequacy of retirement in Canada. *Canadian Journal on Aging*.
16. Fraser, N. (1994). After the Family Wage: Gender Equity and the Welfare State. *Political Theory*, 22(4), 591-618. DOI: 10.1177/0090591794022004003
17. Gamson, W. A., Croteau, D., Hoynes, W., & Sasson, T. (1992). Media Images and the Social Construction of Reality. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 18(1), 373-393. DOI: 10.1146/annurev.so.18.080192.002105
18. Gee, E. M., & Gutman, G. M. (2000). *The Overselling of Population Aging: Apocalyptic demography, intergenerational challenges, and social policy*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
19. Gentzkow, M., & Shapiro, J. M. (2010). What Drives Media Slant? Evidence From U.S. Daily Newspapers. *Econometrica*, 78(1), 35-71. DOI: 10.3982/ECTA7195
20. Guberman, N., Maheu, P. & Maillé, C. (1991). *Et si l'amour ne suffisait pas... Femmes, familles et adultes dépendants*. Montréal, Les Éditions du Remue-Ménage.
21. Guberman, Nancy, Jean-Pierre Lavoie, Laure Blein and Ignace Olazabal (2012). Baby boom caregivers: Care in the age of individualization. *The Gerontologist*, 52(2), 210-218. DOI: 10.1093/geront/gnr140

22. Guo, J., & Gilbert, N. (2007). Welfare state regimes and family policy: a longitudinal analysis. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 16(4), 307-313. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2397.2006.00480.x
23. Harwood, J., & Roy, A. (1999). The Portrayal of Older Adults in Indian and U.S. Magazine Advertisements. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 10(4), 269-280. DOI:10.1080/106461799246753
24. Jones, B. D., & Baumgartner, F. R. (2004). Representation and Agenda Setting. *The Policy Studies Journal*, 32(1), 1-24. DOI: 10.1111/j.0190-292X.2004.00050.x
25. Kempeneers, M. & Van Pevenage, I. (2011). Les espaces de la solidarité familiale, *Recherches sociographiques*, 52 (1) : 105-119.
26. Kingdon, J. W. (2003). *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (Second edition ed.). New York: Longman.
27. Kotlikoff, L. J., & Burns, S. (2005). *The Coming Generational Storms: What You Need to Know About America's Future*. Boston: MIT Press.
28. Koven, S., & Michel, S. (1990). Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, and the United States *American Historical Review*, 95 1076-1108.
29. Lagacé, M., Laplante, J., & Davignon, A. (2011). Construction sociale du vieillir dans les médias écrits canadiens: de la lourdeur de la vulnérabilité à l'insoutenable légèreté de l'être. *Communication et organisation*, 40, 87-101. Retrieved from <http://communicationorganisation.revues.org/3553>
30. Lee, M. M., Carpenter, B., & Meyers, L. S. (2007). Representations of older adults in television advertisements. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 21(1), 23-30. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2006.04.001>
31. Lavoie, J.-P., Guberman, N. & Marier, P. (2014). La responsabilité des soins aux aînés au Québec. Du secteur public au secteur privé. IRPP, 48, Montréal, Institut de recherche en politiques publiques.
32. Lavoie, J.-P., Alain Grand, Nancy Guberman et Sandrine Andrieu (2005). L'Etat face aux solidarités familiales à l'égard des parents âgés fragilisés : substitution, soutien ou responsabilisation ?. In S. Clément & J.-P. Lavoie (Eds.), *Prendre soin d'un proche âgé. Les enseignements de la France et du Québec* (pp. 21-83). Ramonville Saint-Agne (France), Éditions Érès.
33. Lavoie, J.-P. & Guberman, N. (2005). Prendre soin des personnes âgées ayant des incapacités. Quel partage de responsabilité entre les familles et l'État? *Informations sociales*, 143 : 76-86.
34. Lewis, J. (1992). Gender and the development of welfare regimes. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 2(3), 159. DOI: 10.1177/095892879200200301
35. Lewis, J. (2001). The Decline of the Male Breadwinner Model: Implications for Work and Care. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 8(2), 152-169. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/sp/8.2.152>
36. Lundgren, A. S., & Ljuslinder, K. (2011). Problematic Demography: Representations of Population Ageing in the Swedish Daily Press. *Journal of Population Ageing*, 4(3), 165-183. DOI: 10.1007/s12062-011-9048-2
37. Marier, P., & Skinner, S. (2008). Orienting the Private/Public Mix of Pensions. In D. Béland & B. Gran (Eds.), *Public and Private Social Policy: Health and Pension Policies in a New Era* (pp. 45-69). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
38. Martin, C. (2003). Les solidarités familiales : bon ou mauvais objet sociologique ? In Debordeaux, D. & Strobel, P. (Eds.), *Les solidarités familiales en question* (pp. 41-71). Paris, L.G.D.J.
39. Masuy, A. J. (2010). Les politiques de soutien aux aidants proches en Belgique : Un développement typiquement belge. *Revue belge de sécurité sociale*, (1), 58-80.
40. Nancu, D. V., Guran-Nica, L., & Persu, M. (2010). Demographic Ageing in Romania's Rural Area. *Human Geographies*, 4(1), 33-42.
41. O'Connor, J. (1993). Gender, Class, and Citizenship in the Comparative Analysis of Welfare State Regimes: Theoretical and Methodological Issues *British Journal of Sociology*, 44(3), 501-518. DOI: 10.2307/591814
42. O'Connor, J., Orloff, A. S., & Shaver, S. (1999). *States, markets, families : gender, liberalism, and social policy in Australia, Canada, Great Britain, and the United States*. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press.

43. OECD. (1999). *Maintaining prosperity in an ageing society*. Paris: OECD.
44. OECD. (2000). *Reforms for an ageing society*. Paris: OECD.
45. Orloff, A. S. (1993). Gender and the Social Rights of Citizenship: The Comparative Analysis of Gender Relations and Welfare State. *American Sociological Review*, 58(3), 303-328.
46. Palier, B. (Ed.) (2010). *A Long Goodbye to Bismarck? The Politics of Welfare Reform in Continental Europe*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
47. Pfau-Effinger, B. (2005). Welfare State Policies and the Development of Care Arrangements. *European societies*, 7(2), 321-347. DOI:10.1080/14616690500083592
48. Pierson, P. (2000). Three Worlds of Welfare State Research *Comparative Political Studies*, 33(6/7), 791-821. DOI: 10.1177/001041400003300605
49. Quadagno, J. (1989). Generational Equity and the Politics of the Welfare State. *Politics & Society*, 17(3), 353-376. DOI:10.1177/003232928901700303
50. Razin, A., Sadka, E., & Swagel, P. (2002). The Aging Population and the Size of the Welfare State. *Journal of Political Economy*, 110(4), 900-918. DOI: 10.1086/340780
51. Rozanova, J. (2010). Discourse of successful aging in The Globe & Mail: Insights from critical gerontology. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 24(4), 213-222. DOI: 10.1016/j.jaging.2010.05.001
52. Rozanova, J., Northcott, H. C., & McDaniel, S. A. (2006). Seniors and Portrayals of Intra-generational and Inter-generational Inequality in the Globe and Mail. *Canadian Journal on Aging/La Revue canadienne du vieillissement*, 25(04), 373-386. DOI: 10.1353/cja.2007.0024
53. Sainsbury, D. (1994). Women's and Men's Social Rights: Gendering Dimension of Welfare States In D. Sainsbury (Ed.), *Gendering Welfare States* (pp. 150-169). London: Sage.
54. Sainsbury, D. (Ed.) (1999). *Gender and welfare state regimes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
55. Schneider, A. L., & Ingram, H. (1993). Social Construction of Target Populations: Implications for Politics and Policy. *American Political Science Review*, 87(2), 334-347. DOI: 10.2307/2939044
56. Taylor-Gooby, P. (Ed.) (2004). *New Risk, New Welfare: The Transformation of the European Welfare State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
57. Tepe, M., & Vanhuysse, P. (2009). Are Aging OECD Welfare States on the Path to Gerontocracy? *Journal of Public Policy*, 29(01), 1-28. DOI: 10.1017/S0143814X0900097X
58. Turcotte, M. (2013). Être aidant familial : quelles sont les conséquences ? *Regards sur la société canadienne*, Statistique Canada, no 75-006-X, Ottawa.
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-006-x/2013001/article/11858-fra.htm>
59. Vitaliano, P.P., Zhang, J. & Scanlan, J. M. (2003). Is Caregiving Hazardous to One's Physical Health? A Meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin* 129 (6): 946-972. DOI:10.1037/0033-2909.129.6.946
60. Weiss, J. A., & Tschirhart, M. (1994). Public Information Campaigns as Policy Instruments. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 13(1), 82-119. DOI: 10.2307/3325092

Ioana SCHIAU*

Humor, Loneliness and Interpersonal Communication: A Quantitative Study of Romanian Older Adults

Abstract

This quantitative study examines the correlations between humor, loneliness, gender and aging by presenting the results from a sample of eighty-three older Romanian adults, aged sixty and above. The first section of the paper is a comprehensive review of the social-psychological literature on aging, gender and humor. The second section assesses the findings generated from a study that uses the Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale (Thorson & Powell, 1993) and the Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults – short version, (diTomaso, Brannen & Best, 2004). Building on Robert Weiss's (1973) reflections on the differences between feelings of loneliness because of social isolation or emotional isolation, the research findings nuance –and in some cases challenge several assumptions on gender, age, and emotional and social loneliness. The findings also point to the correlation between feelings of social loneliness and the use of humor in interpersonal communications. The data collected suggests that while Romanian men may value the use of humor more than women when self-reporting, that older Romanian women tend to use humor in interpersonal situations and that there is a significant correlation between the use of this type of humor and a reduced sense of social loneliness.

Keywords: age; humor; Romania; emotional loneliness; social loneliness; gender; interpersonal communication.

Introduction

There is a robust literature concerned with documenting and addressing the adverse effects of loneliness and social isolation on older adults in the social psychology of communication and interpersonal communications. One way to understand these issues is to investigate the ways in which older adults communicate, form and maintain social bonds, in a society where we are all aging. This paper contributes to the growing research and interest in both loneliness and the uses of humor by older adults, men and women. In the first part of the paper, the existing literature on aging, humor, gender and loneliness is examined to present a comprehensive overview and assessment of the results to date. In the second part of the paper, the findings of a questionnaire that sampled responses from eighty-three older Romanian adults are presented. Using the Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale (Thorson & Powell, 1993) and the Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults – short version

* National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Romania,
ioana.schiau@comunicare.ro

(diTomaso, Brannen & Best, 2004), the findings are assessed to show where positive and negative correlations exist and to answer the question: *Do older adults who report valuing a sense of humor feel less lonely?*

1. A Survey of the Literature: Loneliness in the field of Communications Studies

Within the broader field of communication studies, researchers in interpersonal communication have taken up the question of loneliness and its role within relationships (DeVito, 2015). Indeed, as Rokach suggests, one of the primary benefits of relationships seems to be the fact that they lessen loneliness (Rokach, 1998). Within the existing literature, Robert Weiss's (1973) classic study on loneliness makes a key distinction between the loneliness brought about by feeling of either social or emotional isolation. In *Loneliness: The Experience of Social and Emotional Isolation*, Weiss discusses the differences between "the loneliness of social isolation" and "the loneliness of emotional isolation", suggesting that, accordingly, they are responsive to different "remedies" (1973, pp.18-19). Both types of loneliness can be understood as a mismatch between the individual's desired relationships and the relationships available to them (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). As Weiss points out, these two conditions or forms of loneliness differ in terms of the nature of the desired relationship. While emotional loneliness is defined by the *absence of a close attachment*, and can only be remedied by forging another such close relationship, social loneliness is the *absence of an engaging network* and can only be remedied by access to a group of individuals who may provide support and companionship. In line with this proposition, Walton, Schulz, Beck, and Walls (1991) examine the occurrence of loneliness in older adults and note that age-related losses may lead to increasing occurrences of discrepancies between desired available relationships and actual experiences.

Studies on loneliness indicate that although loneliness is experienced amongst individuals of all ages, older adults are particularly vulnerable to social loneliness (Donaldson & Watson, 1996). There are several contributing factors highlighted in the literature. Reduced social activity (Aartsen & Jylhä, 2011), an absence of friends and family (Savikko, 2008; Drennan et al., 2008), and demographic factors such as living alone, bereavement and widowhood (Tilvis et al. 2011, Aartsen & Jylhä, 2011) have been correlated with increased incidences of high levels of loneliness. In a 2011 study conducted in Finland, Tilvis and colleagues found that loneliness in older adult participants was, among other factors, significantly associated with lower levels of education, a perspective that hints at the possible emotional effects of economic and educational inequality in society. Finally, Proyer and colleagues (2010), who researched aging in Germany, hypothesized that the impact of reduced social contacts for humorous people could be difficult for individuals who value having a sense of humor, as they are more likely to want to share it with others. As such, a number of sub-themes will be taken into account, including the relation between possessing a sense of humor, loneliness, and the frequency of interaction with friends and family.

Gender, Age and Loneliness

Another body of literature connects gender to social loneliness in older adults (Savikko, 2008). Tilvis et al. (2011) found that loneliness was more common in women than men. In a survey conducted on older adults in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Victor (2005) found expressions of loneliness to be most probable in particular sub-groups of older adults, including older women and the very old. These findings deserve further investigation as they could lead to a better understanding of the complex mechanisms that lead to feelings of loneliness. Relationship status is also found to be relevant in the research literature on loneliness, as widowhood seems to correlate with higher levels of loneliness (Tilvis et al, 2011), a finding that is relevant to our Romania sample, too, since 10% of the total population of Romania self-reports to be widowed (Romanian National Census, 2011).

Despite research indicating that loneliness carries social stigma (Donaldson & Watson, 1996), which might make people self-conscious about reporting it, previous research has found high self-reported levels of loneliness for Eastern Europe, compared to other regions of Europe. A 2011 study that looked at loneliness levels in 25 European countries using the European Social Survey showed that the reported level of loneliness is consistently higher in Eastern Europe than for Western European and Northern European countries, across all age groups. Ukraine, Russia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and Latvia (all former communist states) are countries where researchers find the highest reported levels of loneliness (Yang & Victor, 2011). To explain the findings, Yang and Victor discuss the existence of nationally specific conditions that cause loneliness. In the case of Eastern European countries, the authors point out that the political and economic transformations that have occurred since 1989 (the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall, marking the end of communism in several Eastern European Countries) have forced people, especially the young and middle-aged, to move away from their social relations in pursuit of a better material life elsewhere (Yang & Victor, 2011, p.1383). Romania (with a total population of 20.121.641) has over 725.000 adults living abroad (i.e. 3.6% of the total population) primarily younger adults of working age (46,2% aged 20-34 and 24,8% aged 35-44), according to the full census report issued by the Romanian National Statistical Institute in 2011. This means that many older adults may have limited direct contact with their immediate family members.

Although loneliness can affect all individuals, irrespective of gender and age, the research literature indicates that there are specific differences related to gender. Research by Holmen (1994) and Jylhä (2004) shows that in Scandinavia older women report higher levels of loneliness than older men. Victor et al (2005) also report loneliness to be most likely to manifest in older women. Tijhuis and colleagues (1999) propose that in Finland it is culturally more acceptable for women to express their emotional states than it is for men. The authors also suggest that this might be connected to the fact that women live longer and they are thus more likely to experience widowhood and other losses. However, other studies find the opposite to be the case. Mullins, Elkins and Gutkowski (1996) report that in the United States older men experience loneliness more often than women. These researchers provide several potential explanations for this, surmising that men may be less outgoing or may find it more difficult to create close social ties compared to women. The authors also propose that men may be more wary of expressing their emotions and that they run a higher chance of not having children or friends than women (Mullins et. al, 1996). Despite these different conclusions, it is clear that, when investigating loneliness in different cultural contexts, attention to different gender roles is relevant. For these reasons, the current research project *pays attention to*

the possible ways that gender differences play a role in the experience of loneliness by older adults in Romania and to the role that humor might play in alleviating these feelings of loneliness.

Humor, Interpersonal Communication and Older Adults

Humor is fundamentally a communicative activity. The field of interpersonal communication looks at how humor works within a social context, analyzing the role it plays in our daily communication strategies and the ways it can contribute to success in group or social communication (Lynch, 2002). It is, therefore, worth looking at the literature that investigates the potential role of humor as a mechanism for coping with the changes that growing old brings. Research in interpersonal communication suggests that an appreciation of humor can play a relevant role in maintaining a feeling of well-being during the aging process (Dami-anakis & Marziali, 2011) and a number of studies indicate that older adults use humor to cope with the psychological effects of the aging process (Berk 2001; Capps 2006; Dziegielewski et al. 2004). Davis (2008) suggested that having a sense of humor implies having a more profound, wiser, and light-hearted view of life in general, which can assist people in coping with circumstances as varied as moments of joy, or of suffering, or tragedy. Cohen and Wills (1985) remark that humorous persons can more easily form and keep friendships and develop a social support network, while Peterson and Seligman (2004) argue that humor can “sustain good cheer in the face of despair, build social bonds and lubricate social interactions” (2004, p. 530). Ruch, Proyer and Weber (2010b) propose that these findings on the use of humor for older adults could enable practitioners and professionals working with this age group to enrich daily communication).

Humor should be investigated not only from a psychological point of view, but also in terms of its cultural specificity. Any study of humor should take into account the specific cultural context that may influence the way humor is used and perceived. Despite the paucity of studies documenting the social and cultural specificity of humor in Romania, there is a distinctly cultural sensibility associated with humor that arguably plays a relevant role in the interpersonal communication of Romanian individuals. For example, there is a culturally coined name for a particular Romanian type of humor, called *a face haz de necaz* (Ghi?ă, 1997; Boia, 2012; Tompea, 2014), which literally translates as *making fun/light of one's troubles*. This saying signifies an individual's ability to reassure oneself or others by displaying good cheer and playfulness in the face of hardship and adversity. This approach is consistent with the use of humor as a coping mechanism (Thorson & Powell, 2009).

Humor, as it has been documented in previous studies, can act as a coping mechanism with the hardships of life and can provide older adults with the ability to adapt to the physical changes that come with age, and to the social and cultural challenges of growing old in contexts where aging is not valued. One of the specific difficulties of ageing is a growing sense of loneliness (Yang & Victor, 2011), due to age-specific events such as the decrease of a social network through widowhood, the loss of friends or the physical/emotional unavailability of family. Overholser (1992) finds that lonely individuals are less likely to use humor as a method of coping. Thus, the primary theoretical assumption of this study is that we will find a *negative* correlation between a heightened sense of humor and a lower sense of loneliness within the sample of the Romanian older adults who participated in this study.

Humor and Loneliness

When reviewing the literature on these two concepts, one may notice that humor and loneliness correlate in a contrasting manner with particular interpersonal communication skills and psychological states. For example, humor was found to be positively correlated with psychological health and resistance to stress, because it enhances perceived social support (Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003). Conversely, lonely individuals (irrespective of age) perceive everyday stress in a more severe manner than individuals who were not lonely (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009).

A similar difference can be highlighted in terms of social competence and social skills. Apparently, individuals with a greater sense of humor seem to be more socially competent (Bell, McGhee, & Duffey, 1986; Kuiper, 2004; Yip & Martin, 2006). Likewise, researchers argue that lonely individuals score low in sociability and social skills, and high in social anxiety (Ernst & Cacioppo, 1999; Cacioppo et al., 2006).

A more recent study investigated the relationship of humor to life satisfaction and found out that, for older adults, high scores on the humor scale used in the study (the scale used in the study was the *Values in Action Inventory of Strengths*, VIA-IS, Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005) correlated positively with high life satisfaction (Ruch, Proyer, & Weber, 2010a). Indeed, other studies showed that loneliness is negatively correlated with life satisfaction across all age groups (Riggio, Watring & Throckmorton, 1993; Goodwin, Cook, & Yung, 2001; Salimi, 2011). The literature drawing from a variety of cultural and national contexts suggests that using humor has social and psychological advantages. Thus, a study whose purpose is to investigate the relationship between humor and the sense of loneliness for Romanian older adults could contribute valuable insights to the research in the field. .

Aging and Humor Styles

Studies that investigate age-specific differences in the use and the appreciation of humor by older adults often state that age is a significant factor in styles and types of humor. Thorson and Powell (1996), for example, found that older subjects generally score lower than younger individuals on affiliative humor, a style of communication that fosters social bonds through the exchange of humorous content and laughter taken as indicators that an individual does not take himself too seriously. Ruch et al. (2010a) observed that German older adults laugh more rarely and less easily than younger German adults, appreciate verbal humor less and show less appreciation for everyday humor (Proyer, Ruch & Müller, 2010). Ruch et al. (2010a) argued that relationship status (being married, single, divorced, separated, etc) is not a predictor of sense of humor scores for those aged 61 and above. The authors remarked that humor is often a means for attracting a romantic partner, an activity that is perhaps not a priority anymore to older adults. Clearly, the connection between humor styles, age and gender deserves further investigation and attention.

Gender, Age and Humor

A cluster of studies explored gender differences in the use and appreciation of humor. Ruch, Proyer and Weber (2010a) found that in Germany women generally score lower than men on humor scales, across all age groups, except the oldest. Grengross (2013) argued that women use humor as a coping mechanism, but men do less so. Yet is also worth asking if hu-

mor has become a concept that is gendered. Is there a popular belief/stereotype that men are funnier than women, which is echoed in scientific studies? For example, one of the explanations given in a 2007 study is that humor depends on testosterone levels, which are naturally higher in men (Shuster, 2007). Given that Romania is a country with relatively traditional gender roles (Arsene, 2012) and high levels of gender inequality (Gender Equality Special Eurobarometer 428, 2015), it is possible that the stereotypical assumption that men are funnier than women might lead to noticeable differences in our study, of the way men and women self-evaluate their sense of humor using the Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale (Thorson & Powell, 1993).

Another set of studies suggested that the principal gender differences in terms of humor are not about quantity, where men simply use or appreciate humor *more* than women do; instead, the differences could be in the *functions* that humor serves. It is suggested that women use humor to create solidarity and intimacy, while men use humor in the pursuit of status (Maltz & Borker, 1983) or as an outlet for aggression (Shuster, 2007). Crawford and Gressley (1991) found that women appreciate humorous conduct that involves hearing and telling stories about everyday events to build a sense of community and solidarity (Coates, 1996; Hay, 2001). These findings dovetail with Martin's (2003) research on humor styles that divides humor into four types: two that are positive and adaptive (affiliative humor, self-enhancing humor), and two that are maladaptive and potentially psychologically harmful (self-defeating and aggressive humor). While exploring the humor styles of older adults could further this line of investigation, this case study only takes into account the four dimensions of the sense of humor contained in the Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale, although we later turn to Martin's research on humor styles at the end of this paper.

2. Humor, Loneliness, Gender and Aging: The Study and Research Questions

A survey of the current state of research on humor, loneliness and aging makes it clear that there are many research questions left that require careful investigation. This case study begins with one main question: *Do older adults who report valuing a sense of humor feel less lonely?* To answer this question, the Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale (MSHS) by Thorson and Powell (1993) is used. The scale proposes a multifaceted understanding of humor with four sub-dimensions that will be detailed later. As a corollary, a number of secondary questions arise: *Do any of the humor dimensions included in the MSHS have a strong positive or negative correlation with social or emotional loneliness? Do we find that humor has a moderating influence on loneliness? Can humor act as a mechanism for coping with loneliness in the case of older adults who only have limited social interactions?*

3. Methodology: Participants and Procedure

Self-administrated questionnaires were used on a sample of people aged 60 and above ($N = 83$). A sample of 25 men (mean age 67.60, $SD = 6.13$) and 58 women (mean age 68.02, $SD = 6.78$) from Bucharest and Braşov filled in the survey, which contained the *Multidimen-*

sional Sense of Humor Scale (Thorson & Powell, 1993) and the *Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults* (diTomaso, Brannen & Best, 2004). Participants also reported the frequency of interactions with family and friends and filled in socio-demographic data such as age, gender, education, household income, occupational and marital/relationship status (single, married, divorced, widowed). Participants were primarily recruited from Senior Clubs in Bucharest and Braşov and all gave their written consent to take part in the survey, after fully understanding the research goals.

Measuring and Analyzing Humor, Loneliness and Social Interactions

Three quantitative research instruments are used to measure or gauge: the use of humor in interpersonal relationships; the participants' sense of loneliness; and the frequency of the social interactions.

Use of humor in interpersonal relationships. In this study the Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale, MSHS, (Thorson & Powell, 1993) is used to assess participants' self-evaluation of the use of humor in interpersonal relationships. The instrument consists of 24 items and comprises four subsets, or categories: 1) *Production and Social Use of Humor* (11 items, sample item: "Other people tell me that I say funny things"); 2) *Adaptive Humor* (7 items, sample item: "Humor helps me cope"); 3) *Attitudes towards Humorous People* (4 item, sample items: "People who tell jokes are a pain in the neck"; 4) *Attitude towards Humor* (2 item, sample items: "I like a good joke"). In the initial development and validation of the MSHS, the instrument was first tested with 29 items, and then 27, and has been subsequently refined by the authors to a 24-item instrument (Thorson and Powell, 1993). The use of MSHS in different cultural contexts indicated that the items could also load on five factors (José et al., 2007). In this paper, we use the initial version of the scale. The instrument was validated for older adults in Romania by pre-testing a back-translated Romanian version of the MSHS scale on a smaller sample of older individuals (aged 60 and above). Participants indicated on a 5-point Likert scale how well each of the statements described them; from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). We have validated the scale for the Romanian sample by doing a principal components factor analysis, thus obtaining four dimensions, which we labelled *Production and Social Use of Humor*, *Adaptive Humor*, *Using Humor in Negotiation*, and *Attitude towards Humor*. High reliability has been obtained for the MSHC total scale (Cronbach's Alpha = .90). If looked at separately, we see that the *Production and Social Use of Humor* and *Adaptive Humor* subscales also have good reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = .91, respectively Cronbach's Alpha = .89). As for the dimension labelled *Using Humor in Negotiation*, Cronbach's Alpha was .75, after discarding one item: "Getting people to lighten up by joking around is useless". The *Attitude towards Humor* subscale is less reliable (Cronbach's Alpha = .63) indicating the possibility of using a five factor model with items loading separately on a *positive attitude towards humor* subscale and *negative attitudes towards humor subscale* in future studies.

Participants' sense of loneliness. The Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults, SELSA-S, – the short version - (diTomaso, Brannen & Best, 2004) is used to analyze and assess participants' sense of loneliness using the *Social loneliness* subscale (5 items, sample item: "I feel part of a group of friends") and *Emotional Loneliness* subscale (5 items, sample item: "I feel alone when I am with my family"). SELSA-S also contains an *Emotional Loneliness Romantic* subscale (5 items) expressing the sense of loneliness in romantic relation-

ships, which has not been used here, as it is out of the scope of our research. A Romanian back-translated version of SELSA-S was used, after pretesting it on a group of 30 participants aged 60+. Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) and participants were asked to rate their present situation. The reliability values were quite modest (Cronbach's Alpha = .65) for the *Social loneliness* subscale and relatively high for the *Emotional Loneliness* one (Cronbach's Alpha = .81).

Frequency of social interactions. This was assessed by asking participants to rate their frequency of interactions separately for family and friends, with questions such as "How often do you see your family members?", using a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*every day*) to 5 (*once every few months or more rarely than this*). In addition, participants rated the quality of the time spent with family and then friends. For instance, one question asked, "How often do you have positive meaningful interactions with your family – for example, enjoyable conversations, common activities, sharing feelings?" using a similar Likert-type answer scale.

4. Results

Let us first examine the raw data on education, gender, age and marital status. The group of men in our sample ($N=25$) are significantly more educated ($t=3.71$, $df.=79$, $p<.001$) than the group of women ($N=58$) a variable that will be considered in the subsequent analysis. In terms of level of education attained (high school, university etc.) the subgroup of men are more homogeneous compared to the subgroup of women ($F=5.23$, $df.=79$, $p=.02<.05$). These differences in educational level are not only found in this particular sample, but are consistent with the educational situation of this age cohort in Romania, in general.

There are no significant age differences between the group of men and the group of women in our sample. Most of the participants are married (46 out of 83), although the number of widows is significantly higher in the case of women (23) compared to men (1). Overall, there is a relation between gender and marital status in this sample (chi square = 17.50, $df. 3$, $p=.001<.01$): more women are found in the "widow" or "divorced" categories compared to men (21 out of 24 men from our sample declared they are "married").

Table 1 presents the sample structure from a socio-demographic perspective based on data collected from the participants and looks at differences for the two subgroups: men and women.

Table 1. Socio-demographic structure of sample.

Variable	Total sample	Women subgroup	Men Subgroup	Gender Differences	Sig.
Age	M (67.89) SD (6.56) Range (60-82)	M (68) SD (6.78) Range (60-81)	M (67) SD (6.13) Range (60-82)	$t = .24$ ($df. = 81$)	$p = .79$ $> .05$
Marital status	Married (44) Not married (2) Divorced (12) Widowed (24)	Married (23) Not married (1) Divorced (11) Widowed (23)	Married (21) Not married (1) Divorced (1) Widowed (1)	*chi square = 17.50 ($df. = 3$)	$p = .001$ $< .01$
Education ^c	Low (12) Medium (30) High (39)	Low (12) Medium (22) High (22)	Low (0) Medium (8) High (17)	** $t = 3.71$ ($df. = 79$)	$p < .001$
Income ^b	Low (3) Low to medium (24) Medium (20) Medium to high (9) High (11)	Low (3) Low to medium (21) Medium (14) Medium to high (7) High (3)	Low (0) Low to medium (3) Medium (6) Medium to high (2) High (8)	* $t = 3.41$ ($df. = 65$)	$p = .002$ $< .01$
Occupational status ^a	Self-employed (10) Stay-at-home (3) Full-time employed (10) Part-time employed (4) Pensioner (66)	Self-employed (3) Stay-at-home (2) Full-time employed (3) Part-time employed (2) Pensioner (51)	Self-employed (7) Stay-at-home (1) Full-time employed (7) Part-time employed (2) Pensioner (15)	*chi square = 8.36 ($df. = 1$)	$p = .004$ $< .01$
Total	83	58	25		

* Significant gender differences for $p < .01$; ** significant gender differences for $p < .001$

^a categories are non-exclusive

^b low (less than 700 lei); low to medium (701-1500 lei); medium (1501- 2500 lei), medium to high (2501-3500 lei), high (3501 lei and above)

^c lower level of education (0-8 classes); medium level of education (high school graduates); higher education (college graduates)

The largest differences between the women and men subgroups in our sample lie in the levels of education, which correlates with differences in income and occupational status. Women in our sample have received less formal education, are more likely to have lower incomes and also more likely to be widowed or divorced, compared to the men.

Gender Differences, the Use of Humor and Social Loneliness

Gender differences were revealed in three out of the four subscales of the Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale (MSHS): In the *Production and social use of humor* it seems that men use and produce more humor in their relationships than women ($t = 2.72$, $df. = 81$, $p = .008 < .01$). In terms of the use of *Adaptive Humor*, men report using slightly more humor for adapting to different situations (humor for coping). The difference in this sense between the two groups (men and women) is small and rather non-significant ($t = 1.98$, $df. = 81$, $p = .051$); 3) In the category *Using humor in negotiation*, men report using more humor for negotiation and assertive purposes, in comparison to women ($t = 2.00$, $df. = 81$, $p = .04 < .05$). Both groups have a positive attitude towards the use of humor in interpersonal relations and there are no gender differences in this respect ($t = .69$, $df. = 81$, $p = .49 > .05$).

When the variable “level of education” is considered, this reveals that the men who are more educated are more likely to use adaptive humor ($r(25) = .47, p = .01$), whereas the same relation is not significant in the case of women. Also, the younger the people in our sample are, the more likely they are to use humor as a coping mechanism (Adaptive Humor), ($r(83) = -.21, p = .05$.)

No differences are found between the two subgroups (men and women) in terms of perceived Social and Emotional Loneliness category. The level of social loneliness is higher for both men and women ($M = 2.8$ for men and $M = 2.5$ for women, $SD = 1.18$, respectively $SD = 1.05$) in comparison with reported levels of emotional loneliness ($M = 1.9$ for men and $M = 2.1$ for women, $SD = 1.5$ for both groups), however there are no gender differences detected. A positive correlation ($r(83) = .34, p = .001 < .01$) emerges between age and social loneliness. The older the participants are, the more social loneliness they report feeling. This correlation is not indicated in the case of emotional loneliness.

When examining the interaction between gender and marital status (coded as a dummy variable), we find that women without a life partner (whether divorced or widowed) report less emotional loneliness compared to men without a life partner ($t_{\text{men}} = 4.62, df = 21, p < .001$; $t_{\text{women}} = 1.13, df = 33, p = .26 > .05$). No similar differences are found in the case of social loneliness. Overall, it appears that older men without a life partner experience more emotional loneliness than older women without a life partner; however, both genders report similar levels of social loneliness.

When looking at the relationship between the sense of loneliness people reported (both social and emotional) and the frequency/quality of interactions with family and friends (using self-reported measures, see the method section for details), then two predictors prove to have significant import for the feelings of emotional loneliness: the quality of interactions with family ($r(82) = -.47, p < .001$) and the frequency of interactions with friends ($r(82) = -.44, p < .001$). The frequency of interactions with family members and the quality of interactions with friends does not seem to play a role in reducing the sense of loneliness, neither social, nor emotional, for men and women. The two variables, the reported quality of interactions with family members and the frequency of interactions with friends, seem to be more important factors for reducing the sense of emotional loneliness for men ($r(24) = -.74, p < .001, r(24) = -.76, p < .001$) than for women: ($r(58) = -.35, p = .006 < .01, r(58) = -.30, p = .02 < .05$). In other words, the evidence suggests that emotional loneliness is mitigated primarily by the quality of that time spent with family more than the amount of time. The expectation with friends is that you will spend more time with them, without the same expectation of quality. In addition, there is no apparent relation, or significant variation, between the frequency and quality of interactions with family and friends reported by participants and their sense of social loneliness.

The Use of Humor and a Reduced Sense of Loneliness

Although there did not seem to be a relationship, at the aggregate level, between the level of social or emotional loneliness and possessing a sense of humor, one significant correlation in the case of women emerges from the data collected: the more women use humor in their social interactions (*Production and Social Use of Humor subscale*), the less social loneliness they feel ($r(58) = -.26, p = .04 < .05$). This is one significant result, indicating that women who use more humor in interpersonal relationships might indeed experience a re-

duced sense of social loneliness. This becomes particularly intriguing from the point of view of gender and could be followed up with subsequent qualitative research. The findings do not indicate the same relationship between the use of humor in interpersonal relationships and the decrease of a sense of social loneliness in the men in our sample.

Table 2 presents the analysis of variance (ANOVA) demonstrating that the model has significant explanatory power for women, when they are examined as a subgroup within the larger sample.

Table 2. ANOVA for the model explaining the relationship between Production and Social Use of Humor score on the MSHS and Social Loneliness score on the SELSA-S for women.

<i>Df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	
Regression	2	9.356	4.678	4.731	.013(a)
Residual	55	54.388	.989		
Total	57	63.744			

A linear regression analysis can be conducted on the way the production and use of humor influences social loneliness, in the case of women, using social loneliness as a dependent variable, and production and social use of humor and women's age as factors.

Table 3 presents the results of this regression analysis.

Table 3. Regression analysis: explaining perceived social loneliness for women using production and social use of humor and age as factors.

Variable	Standardized coefficients		Unstandardized coefficients		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
(Constant)	.341	1.451		.235	.815
Production and Social Use of Humor	-.241	.133	-.227	-1.805	.046
Age	.043	.020	.277	2.197	.032
.341	1.451		.235	.815	

a Predictors: (Constant), age, Production and Social Use of Humor

b Dependent Variable: Social loneliness

c Sex = feminine

The model explains 11% of the variance of the dependent variable (social loneliness): $R = \text{Square} = .14$, $R \text{ square adjusted} = .11$, ($F = 4.73$, $df. = 2$, $p = .01 < .05$). When removing age from the model, the explanatory value of R decreases to 5%. This indicates that women within the group who can be described as "younger elders" (60-70 y.o.) benefit from the use of humor in social interactions and that the use of humor in this way contributes to a decreased sense of loneliness.

5. Discussion and Limitations

The data on Romanian older adults presented above suggest several sets of correlations, as well as insights into whether or not humor can attenuate feelings of loneliness brought about by emotional or social isolation. This distinction between feelings of loneliness that are social and those that are emotional is made by Robert Weiss (1973) and acts a theoretical underpinning of this study. As Weiss argues, while emotional loneliness is defined by the *absence of a close attachment*, and can only be remedied by forging another such close relationship, social loneliness is the *absence of an engaging network* and can only be remedied by access to a group of individuals who may provide support and companionship. Can humor act as a kind of remedy for feelings of either social or emotional loneliness?

To summarize the findings, the data collected in this study indicates that both male and females, in our Romanian sample of older adults, have a positive attitude towards the use of humor in interpersonal relations and that there are no gender differences in this respect. Older Romanian men report using humor more often than older Romanian women do, in all the dimensions included in the study (in social interactions, to cope with difficult situations, to negotiate and assert a position). A strong correlation emerges between age and social loneliness; that is, the absence of a network of relations and attachments. The older our participants are, the more social loneliness they are likely to feel. Interestingly, this correlation is not significant in the case of emotional loneliness. The data also suggest that in the Romanian context emotional loneliness is mitigated not by the amount of time spent with family, but by the quality of that time. The expectation with friends is that you will spend more time with them, with less expectations of quality of that time. Other findings from our sample indicate that older Romanian women without a life partner (whether divorced or widowed) report less emotional loneliness compared to men without a life partner.

The most significant finding with respect to the use of humor and loneliness, however, is that older Romanian women who report using more humor in their interpersonal communication also report feeling less social loneliness. The data collected indicate that this probability is most pronounced in the case of Romanian women in the “young elder” category. There is no such correlation with regard to older men. How do we account for these findings? One possible explanation, following the research conducted by Maltz and Borker (1983) in the United States, is that women’s humor in interpersonal communication differs from that of men because it tends to create social bonds and solidarity. Women generally scored lower than men on the humor scales that were used in this case study, indicating that they consider themselves to use humor less than men do. However, the *function* and *style* of humor that older women use may be different in terms of creating empathy, solidarity and potentially reducing social isolation and feelings of loneliness. Again, previous studies find that men use a more aggressive type of humor that is based on the pursuit of status (Maltz & Borker, 1983; Shuster, 2007). This could indicate that women can manage and remedy their sense of loneliness through communicational strategies that foster bonding and empathy, with humor potentially being only one of these strategies. This idea should be examined by further studies.

These findings lend some support to the import of examining humor styles, as proposed by Martin (2003). Martin’s investigations into humor suggests that humor is not all the same and that humor does not always serve the same social purposes. As he argues there are maladaptive styles of humor that may be ‘unhealthy’, such as aggressive humor and self-defeating humor. There are also adaptive styles of humor that can be considered ‘healthy’, such as

self-enhancing humor and affiliative humor (Martin, 2003). Future research on age, gender and humor in Romania could look more deeply into the styles of humor that are used by older men and women. This could help us better understand why older women who use humor in their social interactions tend to experience a reduced sense of social loneliness. Future studies on this topic could also benefit from employing qualitative research methods. Qualitative studies that interview participants, discuss humor with them, use observational analysis, or other forms of narrative and story-telling methods may render explicit these interpersonal dynamics and may bring explanatory value that could help researchers disentangle the interaction between humor and the experience of social isolation and loneliness for older women. Moreover, future research could control for gender interaction: is the use of humor in the interaction between older women and older men different than the type of humor used when interacting with members of their own gender?

Interestingly, and in line with previous studies conducted in Germany (Ruch, Proyer & Weber, 2010a), Romanian men self-report that they produce and use more humor than women did: that is, they score themselves higher than women on the *production and social use of humor*, *adaptive humor*, and *use of humor in negotiation* sub-scales. However, since this is based on self-reporting, we can speculate that these results may be a function of the widely spread gender stereotype that posits that men are funnier than women (Mickes, Walker, Parris, Mankoff, & Christenfeld, 2011), a stereotype that may be augmented by the traditional gender roles that are present in Romania.

The current study did not find that Romanian older women report being more socially or emotionally lonely than men. In fact, we found no significant difference between men and women in our sample in terms of self-reported loneliness. This finding makes a small contribution to the general debate about which gender group reports more loneliness, distinct from the findings of researchers in other contexts, who propose that women generally feel lonelier than men. Indeed our data also indicate that older women without a life partner are less emotionally lonely than older men without a life partner. Not having a life partner is associated with emotional isolation and loneliness in older men, but not in older women and is consistent with the Scandinavian study by Holmén, Ericsson and Winblad (2000), which showed that being a widowed male is a stronger predictor of emotional loneliness than being a widowed female. It is possible that this is because, in Romanian families in the age cohort included in our sample, women are the ones responsible for maintaining close contacts with all family members. This is in line with studies suggesting that men depend on their life partners for emotional support and to create and consolidate family ties and activities (Stevens & Westerhof, 2006), which could explain the rather frequent emotional (family) isolation and loneliness that is reported by widowed men.

The analysis of the data also demonstrates that the quality of interactions with family and the frequency of interactions with friends seem to be linked to reduced feelings of emotional loneliness for the Romanian older adults included in our sample. This correlation is stronger for men than for women (although the relationship is true for both genders, irrespective of marital status). This is noteworthy, although difficult to interpret, taking into account that overall men and women reported almost the same level of loneliness. One interpretation could be that, overall, men are less engaged than women in their close emotional relationships with family (as the previously quoted studies also indicate) and that, therefore, increasing the quality of these interactions is precisely what men need to reduce their emotional loneliness.

Overall, the older Romanian adults in our sample report experiencing more social loneliness, rather than emotional loneliness. Again, research by Yang and Victor (2011) indicated that this may be a condition that is particularly visible in Eastern European countries for a variety of socio-economic reasons.

The theory of loneliness, as proposed by Weiss (1973), suggests that social isolation that creates feelings of loneliness can be remedied by interaction with a social network (such as a group of friends). However, we find no relation between the reported frequency and quality of interactions with family and friends and feelings of social loneliness. More frequent and more meaningful interactions with friends did not lead to a reduced sense of social loneliness in the current study sample, a fact that is worth pursuing by future research. Instead, the most significant finding of this study is that the older Romanian women who report using more humor in their interpersonal communication also report feeling less social loneliness.

The findings of the current study indicate that age plays a significant role for our sample of older adults and that there are differences between our younger and older respondents in terms of social loneliness and use of humor. The younger the older adults are, the more they tend to use an adaptive (coping) style of humor. Moreover, younger women experience a reduced sense of social loneliness, when this is coupled with the use of humor in their interpersonal communication. Also, in general, older respondents are more likely to report social loneliness. This is perhaps self-evident for this age cohort of Romanian older adults, as the size of social networks and the range of social activities decrease with age.

Even though Finnish researchers have found that loneliness is more likely for adults with lower education levels (Tilvis et. al, 2011), we find no such connection in our sample. What the current research project did identify in terms of education is that, overall, men in our sample are more educated than women, and that the more educated the men are, the more likely it is for them to use adaptive humor. It could be that education does not play a role in the case of women in our sample because the production and social use of humor associated with reduced social loneliness (a relation found solely in the case of women) is a more intuitive and instinctive communicational strategy, which would not alter greatly with variations in levels of education.

This study has several limitations. The study is based solely on self-reporting, which presents several disadvantages, including the possibility that participants might not be honest in their answers or might feel it is necessary to answer in a certain way, due to the perceived social desirability to give a particular answer. This could well be the case, as having a sense of humor is seen as socially desirable in Romania. Self-reporting can be subject to cultural bias and stereotypes, such as the idea that men are more humorous than women. Another limitation may stem from its quantitative approach. Although the study identifies some interesting and statistically significant findings and patterns, explaining their exact mechanisms remains, at this stage, subject to theoretical speculation because of the limited explanatory value of simple statistical tests and correlations.

The main finding, the correlation between the production and interpersonal use of humor and social loneliness for older women, should not necessarily be interpreted as a causation. It could be that the findings of this study indicate that the use of humor in the interpersonal interactions of older women is because they are already experiencing social connectedness and, hence, a reduced sense of social loneliness. However, it may also be the case that, for example, older women in the study sample who have social connections may have more opportunities to use humor in these interpersonal interactions.

Despite these caveats, this study identifies several correlations that deserve further investigation, including the significant indication that older women who use more humor in their interpersonal communication report feeling less social loneliness. There is evidence here that suggests that Romanian older men and women differ in the quantity of humor they use, that Romanian older women without a life partner feel less emotional loneliness than men, but also grounds for speculation that the functions and styles of humor differ for each gender. This points to the need for further investigation of each of these findings, including qualitative research on the social and cultural modes of humor and further research on aging, humor and gender.

Acknowledgement

Ioana Schiau is the beneficiary of a scholarship provided through financial support of the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund, under the project number POSDRU/159/1.5/S/134650 with the title "Doctoral and Postdoctoral Fellowships for young researchers in the fields of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences and Sociology."

Bibliography

1. Aartsen, M., & Jylhä, M. (2011). Onset of loneliness in older adults: results of a 28 year prospective study. *Social, Behavioural and Health Perspectives*, 8(1), 31–38.
<http://doi.org/10.1007/s10433-011-0175-7>
2. Arsene, A. (2012) Learning the Roles and Rights of the Romanian Women—between Traditional Patterns and Globalization (Lifelong Learning in the Romania Gender Context). *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 46, 374-378, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.05.125>
3. Bell, N. J., McGhee, P. E., & Duffey, N. S. (1986). Interpersonal competence, social assertiveness and the development of humour. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 4(1), 51–55.
<http://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-835X.1986.tb00997.x>
4. Berk, R. A. 2001. The active ingredients in humor: psychophysiological benefits and risks for older adults. *Educational Gerontology*, 27, 3–4, 323–339. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/036012701750195021>.
5. Boia, L. (20012). *De ce e Romania altfel?* Bucharest: Humanitas
6. Cacioppo, J. T., & Hawkley, L. C. (2009). Loneliness. In M. R. Leary & R. H. Hoyle (Eds.), *Handbook of individual differences in social behavior* (pp. 227-239). New York: Guilford.
7. Cacioppo, J. T., Hawkley, L. C., Ernst, J. M., Burleson, M. H., Berntson, G. G., Nouriani, B., & Spiegel, D. (2006). Loneliness within a nomological net: An evolutionary perspective. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 40, 1054-1085. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2005.11.007>
8. Capps, D. 2006. Religion and humor: estranged bedfellows. *Pastoral Psychology*, 54, 5, 413–38.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11089-005-0008-8>.
9. Carstensen, L. L. (1992). Social and Emotional Patterns in Adulthood: Support for Socioemotional Selectivity Theory. *Psychology and Aging*, 7(3), 331–338. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0882-7974.7.3.331>
10. Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, Social Support, and the Buffering Hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 98(2), 310–357. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.98.2.310>
11. Crawford, M., & Gressley, D. (1991). Creativity, Caring, and Context: Women's and Men's Accounts of Humor Preferences and Practices. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 15(2), 217–231.
<http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1991.tb00793.x>

12. Damianakis, T. & Marziali, E. (2011). Community dwelling older adults' contextual experiencing of humour. *Ageing and Society*, 31, 110–124. doi:10.1017/S0144686X10000759
13. Davis, D. (2008). Communication and Humor. In Raskin, V. (2008). *The primer of humor research* (Humor research; 8). Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
14. DeVito, J. (2015). *Human Communication: The Basic Course* (13th ed.). New York, U.S.A.: Pearson.
15. DiTommaso, E., Brannen, C., & Best, L. A. (2004). Measurement and Validity Characteristics of the Short Version of the Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 64(1), 99–119. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0013164403258450>
16. Donaldson, J. M., & Watson, R. (1996). Loneliness in elderly people: an important area for nursing research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 24(5), 952–959. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.1996.tb02931.x>
17. Drennan, J., Treacy, M., Butler, M., Byrne, A., Fealy, G., Frazer, K., & Irving, K. (2008). The experience of social and emotional loneliness among older people in Ireland. *Ageing and Society*, 28(8), 1113–1132. <http://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X08007526>
18. Dziegielewski, S. F., Jacinto, G. A., Laudadio, A. and Legg-Rodriguez, L. 2004. Humor: an essential communication tool in therapy. *International Journal of Mental Health*, 32, 3, 74-90.
19. Ernst, J. M., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1999). Lonely hearts: Psychological perspectives on loneliness. *Applied and Preventive Psychology*, 8(1), 1–22. [http://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-1849\(99\)80008-0](http://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-1849(99)80008-0)
20. Eurobarometer & European Commission. (2015). *Gender Equality: Special Eurobarometer 428*. Retrieved at March 15, 2016, from the website of the European Comission at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/documents/eurobarometer_report_2015_en.pdf
21. Ghiță. (1997). Use and Possible Mis-Use of Irony in Post–1989 Romania The Case of Print Media Discourse (A Pragmalinguistic Analysis). *New Europe College Yearbook*, (01), 159-200.
22. Goodwin, R., Cook, O., & Yung, Y. (2001). Loneliness & life satisfaction among three cultural groups. *Personal Relationships*, 8, 225-230. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.2001.tb00037.x>
23. Greengross, G. (2013). Humor and aging - a mini-review. *Gerontology*, 59(5), 448–453. <http://doi.org/10.1159/000351005>
24. Hay, J. (2008). The pragmatics of humor support. *Humor – International Journal of Humor Research*, 14(1), 55. <http://doi.org/10.1515/humr.14.1.55>
25. Holmén, K., Ericsson, K., & Winblad, B. (2000). Social and emotional loneliness among non-demented and demented elderly people. *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, 31(3), 177–192. [http://doi.org/10.1016/S0167-4943\(00\)00070-4](http://doi.org/10.1016/S0167-4943(00)00070-4)
26. Jylhä, M. (2004). Old age and loneliness: cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses in the Tampere longitudinal study on aging. *Can J Aging*, 23: 157–168. doi: 10.1353/cja.2004.0023.
27. José, H., Parreira, P., Thorson, J. A., & Allwardt, D. (2007). A factor-analytic study of the multidimensional sense of humor scale with a Portuguese sample. *North American Journal of Psychology*, 9(3), 595–610.
28. Kuiper, N. A., Grimshaw, M., Leite, C., & Kirsh, G. (2004). Humor is not always the best medicine: Specific components of sense of humor and psychological well-being. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, 17, 135–168. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/humr.2004.002>
29. Lynch, O. H. (2002). Humorous Communication: Finding a Place for Humor in Communication Research. *Communication Theory*, 12(4), 423–445. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2002.tb00277.x>
30. Maltz, D. N., & Borker, R. A. (1983). A cultural approach to male–female miscommunication. In J. J. Gumperz (Ed.), *Language and social identity*. Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511620836.013>
31. Martin, R. A. (2003). Sense of humor. In S. J. Lopez & C. R. Snyder, *Positive psychological assessment. A handbook of models and measures*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
32. Martin, R. A., Puhlik-Doris, P., Larsen, G., Gray, J., & Weir, K. (2003). Individual differences in uses of humor and their relation to psychological well-being: Development of the humor styles questionnaire. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 37, 48–75. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0092-6566\(02\)00534-2](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0092-6566(02)00534-2)

33. Mickes, L., Walker, D., Parris, E., Mankoff, J., & Christenfeld, L. (2012). Who's funny: Gender stereotypes, humor production, and memory bias. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 19(1), 108-112. doi: 10.3758/s13423-011-0161-2
34. Mullins, L. C., Elston, C. H., & Gutkowski, S. M. (1996). Social determinants of loneliness among older Americans. *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs*, 122(4), 453-473.
35. Official Population Census. (2011). Romanian National Statistical Institute. Retrieved from http://www.recensamantromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/REZULTATE-DEFINITIVE-RPL_2011.pdf
36. Overholser, J. C. (1992). Sense of humor when coping with life stress. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 13(7), 799-804. [http://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869\(92\)90053-R](http://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869(92)90053-R)
37. Peplau, L. A., Miceli, M., & Morasch, B. (1982). Loneliness and Self-Evaluation. In L. A. Peplau & D. Perlman (Eds.), *Loneliness: A Sourcebook of Current Theory, Research and Therapy* (135-151). New York, U.S.A.: Wiley and Sons.
38. Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
39. Proyer, R., Ruch, W., & Muller, L. (2010). Sense of humor among the elderly Findings using the German version of the SHS. *Z. Gerontol. Geriatr.*, 43(1), 19-24. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s00391-009-0082-0>
40. Riggio, R. E., Watring, K. P., & Throckmorton, B. (1993). Social skills, social support, and psychosocial adjustment. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 15(3), 275-280. [http://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869\(93\)90217-Q](http://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869(93)90217-Q)
41. Rokach, A. (1998). The Relation of Cultural Background to the Causes of Loneliness. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 17(1), 75-88. <http://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.1998.17.1.75>
42. Ruch, W., Proyer, R., & Weber, M. (2010a). Humor as a character strength among the elderly Empirical findings on age-related changes and its contribution to satisfaction with life. *Z. Gerontol. Geriatr.*, 43(1), 13-18. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s00391-009-0090-0>
43. Ruch, W., Proyer, R., & Weber, M. (2010b). Humor as a character strength among the elderly Theoretical considerations. *Z. Gerontol. Geriatr.*, 43(1), 8-12. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s00391-009-0080-2>
44. Salimi, A. (2011). Social-Emotional Loneliness and Life Satisfaction. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 29, 292-295 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.11.241>
45. Savikko, N. (2008). *Loneliness of Older People and Elements of an Intervention for its Alleviation*. University of Turku, Turku.
46. Shuster, S. (2007). Sex, aggression, and humour: Responses to unicycling. *British Medical Journal*, 335(7633), 1320-1322.
47. Stevens, N., & Westerhof, G. J. (2006). Marriage, Social Integration, and Loneliness in the Second Half of Life: A Comparison of Dutch and German Men and Women. *Research on Aging*, 28(6), 713-729. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0164027506291747>
48. Thorson, J. A., & Powell, F. C. (1993). Development and validation of a Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 49(1), 13-23.
49. Thorson, J. A., & Powell, F. C. (2009). Women, aging, and sense of humor. *Humor - International Journal of Humor Research*, 9(2), 169-186, <http://doi.org/10.1515/humr.1996.9.2.169>
50. Thorson, J. A., Powell, F. C., Sarmany-Schuller, I., & Hamps, W. P. (1997). Psychological health and sense of humor. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 53(6), 605-619.
51. Tjihuis, M., De Jong-Gierveld, J., Feskens, E., & Kromhout, D. (1999). Changes in and factors related to loneliness in older men. The Zutphen Elderly Study. *Age Ageing*, 28(5), 491-495.
52. Tilvis, R. S., Laitala, V., Routasalo, P. E., & Pitkälä, K. H. (2011). Suffering from Loneliness Indicates Significant Mortality Risk of Older People. *Journal of Aging Research*, 2011, 1-5. <http://doi.org/10.4061/2011/534781>
53. Tompea, A. (2014). După 25 de ani. Comunismul din Europa de Est (iunie-decembrie 2014). *Polis* 2(44), 77-87.

54. Victor, C. R., Scambler, S. J., Bowling, A., & Bond, J. (2005). The prevalence of, and risk factors for, loneliness in later life: a survey of older people in Great Britain. *Ageing and Society*, 25(6), 357–375. <http://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X04003332>
55. Walton, C. G., Shultz, C. M., Beck, C. M., & Walls, R. C. (1991). Psychological correlates of loneliness in the older adult. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 5(3), 165–170. [http://doi.org/10.1016/0883-9417\(91\)90017-Y](http://doi.org/10.1016/0883-9417(91)90017-Y)
56. Weiss, R. S. (1973). *Loneliness: the experience of emotional and social isolation*. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge, Mass.
57. Yang, K., & Victor, C. (2011). Age and loneliness in 25 European nations. *Ageing and Society*, 31(8), 1368–1388. <http://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X1000139X>
58. Yip, J.A., Martin, R.A. (2006). Sense of humor, emotional intelligence, and social competence. *Journal of Research in Personality* 40 1202–1208, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2005.08.005>

Book review

Mălina CIOCEA*

**Book review of *La ruse de la mondialisation. L'assaut contre la puissance américaine* by Paul Dobrescu,
Paris : L'Harmattan, 2015, 362 pages**

Several years after the initial publication (Institutul European, 2010), Paul Dobrescu's book, *Violența globalizării. Asaltul asupra puterii americane* [Globalization's cunningness. The assault on American power] was beautifully translated in French by Denisa Adriana Oprea and published by the prestigious L'Harmattan publishing house. In a field where analyses can rarely keep pace with the events, a book needs more than factual information to stand the test of time. In this particular case, what has made this book a standard reading in Romanian academic field and is now launched on an international market is neither relevant data (although the book abounds in spectacular facts), nor the impressive list of recent bibliography. It is the particular quality of what over the years has grown into a powerful, unapologetic and balanced perspective over contemporary developments in the field of global economy and politics. "A philosopher in the economists' arena", said Adrian Vasilescu in his review (2013) of the other major work of Paul Dobrescu, "A century-old decade. The century of the emerging world", now being translated for the Anglo-Saxon market. It is, indeed, the most visible characteristic of the book: a philosopher's debate on the complex causes that have tipped the balance of power in contemporary world, and, more importantly, a philosopher's ability to discern historical patterns in current developments. An equally poignant trait is the beautiful writing, in an age where efficiency is often placed before the aesthetic pleasures of reading. The author's long career as a journalist has given a nice flow to phrases; the book reads with the passion usually preserved for literature. More importantly, however, it offers a new perspective: a distinct voice coming from the periphery of Europe, who may ask those questions which are relevant to this part of the world. This is an advantage that the author has used throughout the book.

The main focus of the book is the dynamics of the contemporary balance of power. The author debates the various implications of the rise of China and the decline of US as the contemporary superpower. Both actors have a crucial say in shaping the future world. An important question is how they will manage to harmonize their interests in order to take major decisions about the world.

The author builds a strong argument which in the end gives the very title of the book: "Globalization did not serve the interests of its designers, but the interests of those who knew how to meet the demands of the new process and in this way put it to work for their own good.

* National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Romania,
malina.ciocea@comunicare.ro.

Is this the irony of the process or its cunningness?” (my translation, p. 22). The demonstration is developed patiently throughout the book, pointing to the dramatic change in the paradigm of globalization, from the heyday of American exceptionalism to the black age of global crisis. The utopian hype of the early days of globalization has been replaced by the stark realism of recent years. The impressive growth of the West and the rise of multinationals as important global actors widened the gap between developed and developing countries; the crisis revived concerns for the disenfranchised of the world. Yet, with their emphasis on the contentious issue of the social impact of globalization, both visions have lost track of what the author calls the most important trait of globalization: *the relationship between globalization and development*.

The various facets of the crisis (a classic macroeconomic crisis, overlapping a crisis of financial structures and a crisis of development management), together with the decline in the role of elites against the background of shrinking middle class, seem to have severed the very roots of capitalist society as we know it. With it, the trust in its vision on development. In this respect, the confrontation between the established and the rising power will be won by the one power with a valid development model.

For many years, globalization was seen as the process encouraging financial and technological flows from developed to developing countries. For some time now it has become equally important to debate the regional and national answers to these flows, which have changed the face of global economy. Another characteristic of the process is the rise of giants – the emerging economies, with the added advantage of natural data: vast territory, wealth, population, but, equally important, economic and technological breakthroughs, partly explained by investment in educational systems. “What globalization accomplished was the unification of the terrible force of the numbers with that of modern technology” (p. 36). If China and India succeed, says the author, it will be because of economic performance (and the growing confidence it feeds), but also because of their sheer size. In this respect, it is correct to say that with the rise of giants, encouraged by globalization, we are witnessing the return of geopolitics (shedding some light over the current situation of Europe, which betted on “the primacy of geo-economy over geopolitics” – see Robert Kagan, 2008).

The book is divided into three major parts: the first, “America no longer seems to be America”, details the factors that have led to the decrease of America’s influence. Rather than blame the crisis for this downfall, the author points out that the crisis merely accelerated an evolution which was already on the way, mainly fed by the excesses of neoliberalism (the weakening position of the state, the privatization of power, the consequences of financialization and of giving up production, which, in the author’s vision, is the very source of wealth and the fundamental axis of development). In this way, “the US failed to give themselves – and the world – a cause” (p. 49).

The second part, “History returns to China”, proposes to dismiss some of the myths surrounding China’s rise, which was so gradual, that many powers failed to acknowledge it. China’s lesson to the world was the value of flexibility in rethinking development strategies in answer to the context created by globalization. History returns to China, the author reminds us, because for 18 out of the last 20 centuries, this is where (economic) history was made.

The third part, “Energy feeds development, and the population models it”, details the two challenges for the world of tomorrow: the problem of resources, and the problem of demography. The author points to the constraints of sustainable development, which hinder the ambitions of emerging economies. The added dilemma is the course of action to take against

global warming, in the absence of global instruments of intervention. The other challenge is demography, with its irreversible processes and long-term consequences on the very identity of countries and regions.

The book concludes with a meditation on the future face of the world. The role of a development model is to guide economic and social (re)construction. Strategies are needed to translate this model into answers to the challenges of modern world. "The crisis has not sanctioned the model, but the excess of the orientation in recent years, the process of deregulation, accompanied by the underevaluation of the role of the state" (p. 338). In this respect, says the author, we can speak about an "asymmetry of vision": while developed countries took evolution for granted, the emerging countries had a vision. The latter sought innovative solutions and alternatives, the former were caught unawares. "America's historical comfort is that it unlocked globalization and (un)willingly inaugurated a long cycle of historical evolution. What is not known is whether it will continue to be its beacon" (p. 345).

To conclude, we will revisit the first phrase of the book: "it is a privilege to be the contemporary of the rise of a new superpower" (p. 21). So much more of a privilege for someone from the periphery of Europe: it teaches one that powers rise and fall not as much because of an implacable pattern in history, but rather because of the wisdom of their leaders and the viability of their institutions.

References

1. Vasilescu, A. (2013). Un filosof în arena economiştilor [A philosopher in the economists' arena]. *Ziarul Financiar*, 27.11.2013.
2. Kagan, R. (2008). *The return of history*. London: Atlantic Books.

Call for papers

Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations
www.journalofcommunication.ro

The *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations* (RJ CPR) is now seeking manuscripts for its upcoming issues. We welcome scholarly contributions from the broad field of communication studies, from public relations research, as well as from related areas. RJ CPR also accepts relevant contributions for its permanent book review section.

Prospective authors should submit original papers which meet the customary academic standards in the social sciences. These materials should be methodologically sound, thoroughly argued, and well crafted. They must not have been published elsewhere, or be currently under review for any other publication.

All manuscripts are subject to a blind review process before publication. The author(s) name(s) should not appear on any page except the title page of the submitted paper, and electronic identification data should be removed before submission.

Important Dates:

The Journal is issued three times per year, in April, July, and December. Here are the submission deadlines:

- April issue: March 1;
- July issue: May 1;
- December issue: October 1.

Submission

Submissions must follow the Guidelines for Authors, available on the Journal's website (www.journalofcommunication.ro/guidelines). For further inquiries, please contact the editor, dr. Elena Negrea, elena.negrea@comunicare.ro.

More information on the *Journal of Communication and Public Relations* can be found at www.journalofcommunication.ro.

