Rewriting age to overcome misaligned age and gender norms in later life

Jeremiah C. Morelock *,1, Jeffrey E. Stokes 2, Sara M. Moorman 3

Boston College United States

Abstract

In this paper we suggest that older adults undergo a misalignment between societal age norms and personal lived experience, and attempt reconciliation through discursive strategies: They rewrite how they frame chronological age as well as their subjective relations to it. Using a sample of 4041 midlife and older adults from the 2004–2006 wave of the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS II), we explore associations of age and gender with subjective age and at what age respondents felt people enter later life. Our results confirm that as men and women age, they push up the age at which they think people enter later life, and slow down subjective aging (there is a growing gap between subjective and chronological age). Relations between a person’s age and at what age they think people enter later life were stronger for men than for women. For every year they get older get older, men push up when they think people enter later life by 0.24 years, women by 0.16 years. Age norms surrounding the transition to later life may be more prominent for men than for women, and the difference in their tendencies to push up when they mark entry into later life may be a reflection of this greater prominence.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.
We further investigate whether there are gender differences in these associations. We expect that men more than women will rely on raising the ages at which they feel people enter later life, because it pertains to age norms regarding timing of life transitions – namely out of the able workforce – which prior research have shown to be more pressing for men (Settersten and Hägestad, 1996b). While relative narrative flexibility in subjective age has been studied rather extensively, our analysis is novel in relating this issue to how men and women may shift their definitions of when people enter later life, which has not received the same attention in prior literature.

Age and gender

Scholars studying aging from a social constructionist point of view often highlight the fluidity of the concept of age (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). From a life course perspective, the meaning of aging varies for different people according to a variety of external factors over time, surrounding participation in institutions such as education, work and family (Settersten & Hägestad, 1996b, 1996a). Other researchers show the creativity and agency which older adults often display in narrating age in ways that work for their specific circumstances, overcoming negative age stereotypes in the process (Kaufman, 1986). The fluidity in how individuals narrate age and aging, as well as the influence of both external factors and their own agency in shaping these narratives, provide great insight into the many possibilities of how people can orient toward their own aging processes. Kaufman presented first person accounts from a small sample of older adults on how they understood and creatively narrated themselves and their life trajectories. Rosenfeld and colleagues used a critical approach to the life course which surrounds their concept of “lifecoursing,” which denotes how people use a normative model of the life course as an “interpretive resource” (Rosenfeld et al., 2016; Rosenfeld & Gallagher, 2002). Yet less attention has been paid to seeing on a broad scale which demographic categories of people tend to use which narrative mechanisms. In other words, research is scant that approaches what they consider to be “later life,” yet they do not feel “old,” the misalignment can be helped by raising the age at which they consider “later life” to start.

Hypotheses

We expect that as adults get older, they will use age rewriting strategies more. They will define later life as beginning comparatively later and slow down subjective aging, increasing the gap between subjective and chronological age. Men have more normative timelines over the life course than do women, specifically concerning education and work (Settersten & Hägestad, 1996a). Because the transition into “later life” is a milestone in the life course, and may specifically relate to employment as it may signify retirement in particular, we suspect men more than women may grapple with this change and misalignments between norms and lived experience that have to do with it. Hence, we expect men more than women will be drawn to pushing up when they mark the start of later life, but not more drawn to decreasing subjective age relative to chronological age.

H1. Chronological age will be positively associated with definition of when people enter later life by men and women (i.e. as men and women age, they will tend to define later life as beginning comparatively later).

H2. The association between chronological age and definition of when people enter later life will be stronger for men.

H3. Subjective age will be positively associated with chronological age, yet the gap between the two will increase over time.

H4. The association between chronological age and subjective age will not be stronger for men.

Methods

Data and sample

We used data from MIDUS II, the second wave of the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States. The MIDUS study began in 1995. A national probability sample was taken from the lower 48 states of the U.S., limited to non-institutionalized English-speaking residents from ages 24–74. The primary method of recruitment participants was random digit dial (RDD). Additional participants were selected from an urban oversample, a sample of siblings of main RDD participants, and a national RDD sample of twins (Ryff et al., 2012). A total of 4963 MIDUS I participants (75% of those living) also responded to MIDUS II, with interviews conducted from 2004 to 2006. Key items of interest...
دریافت فوری متن کامل مقاله

امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات