Переводы

Cheryl Laz
University of Southern Maine, USA

Introduction to "Act Your Age"

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On December 3, 2018, Dutch courts rejected a request by Emile Ratelband to change his birthdate to 20 years later than his actual birthdate in 1949. According to the BBC, "Mr Ratelband argues he feels discriminated against because of his age, and that it was affecting his employment chances and his success rate on the dating app, Tinder"[1]. The judges granted that "Mr Ratelband is at liberty to feel 20 years younger than his real age and to act accordingly", but concluded that changing his legal documents would have "undesirable legal and societal implications"[2]. The court observed that changing age is unlike changing one's name or gender because rights and obligations are attached to age and that granting the request would cause all kinds of legal problems.

The case illustrates some of the claims articulated in "Act Your Age": age is a contested concept involving, but not reducible to, chronology; individuals exercise agency as they accomplish their age; the accomplishment of age is not only individual but also collective; age is constituted in interaction; age is organized, patterned, and constrained within and by institutions (like the law) and relations of power.

This theoretical framework developed in "Act Your Age" has held up quite well in the twenty years since its publication. In lieu of a comprehensive review of the field of age studies, I briefly offer two lines of reasoning.

In 1998, I imagined "a sociology of age, roughly analogous to the sociology of gender, in which we theorize and study empirically how age as a concept and institution is created, maintained, challenged, and transformed; how assumptions and beliefs about age in general and about particular age categories inform and are reinforced by social statuses,

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Шерил Лаз — профессор социологического факультета Университета Южного Мэна, Портленд, США.
Cheryl Laz — Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Southern Maine, Portland, Maine, USA.

1 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46133262

2 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46425774

norms, roles, institutions and social structures; and how age patterns individual lives and experiences even as individuals accomplish age" [Laz 1998: 90]. Twenty years later, that theory and analysis of age exists, though it is not, as I anticipated, mainly in the discipline of sociology. The view of age as accomplished, as both the process and outcome of interactional work, and "as situated, contingent, and negotiated, and as continually constituted in interaction" has proven useful to scholars in an array of fields (sociology, social work, gerontology, criminology, geography, anthropology, gender studies, nursing, and physiotherapy to name a few) and national settings (UK, US, Scandinavia). Scholars have used the framework developed in "Act Your Age" to analyze, for instance, the fear of crime [Rypi 2012], adult cannabis use [Dahl, Demant 2017], experiences of older transgender people [Siverskog 2015], cosmetic surgery [Brooks 2017] and grandfathering [Tarrant 2013].

A second piece of evidence focuses on a shift in gerontology. "Act Your Age" appeared concurrent with a critical mass of similar work in various disciplines. Collectively, this body of work and its fundamentally sociological conception of age has given birth to cultural gerontology. As described by Twigg and Martin [2015], cultural gerontology brings together insights from "the cultural turn" with those from political economy and critical gerontology. The result is sensitivity to culture, meaning, and agency and a deepened structural understanding of power, inequality, and oppression. With these as its distinguishing features, cultural gerontology is what I imagined for a new sociology of age.

Much excellent work across disciplines, topics, national contexts has deepened and enriched the conception of age-as-accomplished. There is, nonetheless, more to do. For instance, in the US and western Europe age is analyzed in relation to multiple axes of identity and experience (for example, gender and sexual identity); class and race, however, remain conspicuously absent from many of these analyses. I am grateful for the opportunity to share the essay with Russian scholars and look forward to new work exploring age-as-accomplished in connection with other axes of identity and in other national contexts and institutional settings.

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