

An aerial, high-angle photograph of a dense crowd of people. The majority of the individuals are rendered in grayscale, creating a textured, monochromatic background. Several people are highlighted with bright, solid colors: a blue shirt on the left, a red shirt in the upper right, another red shirt in the lower right, a yellow shirt in the lower right, and a purple shirt in the bottom right. The overall composition is busy and represents a large-scale human gathering.

Stratification by Age

Age stratification varies from culture to culture

- “Being old” is master status that commonly overshadows all others in U.S.
- Once people labeled “old,” this designation has major impact on how others perceive them and how individuals view themselves

Explaining the Aging Process

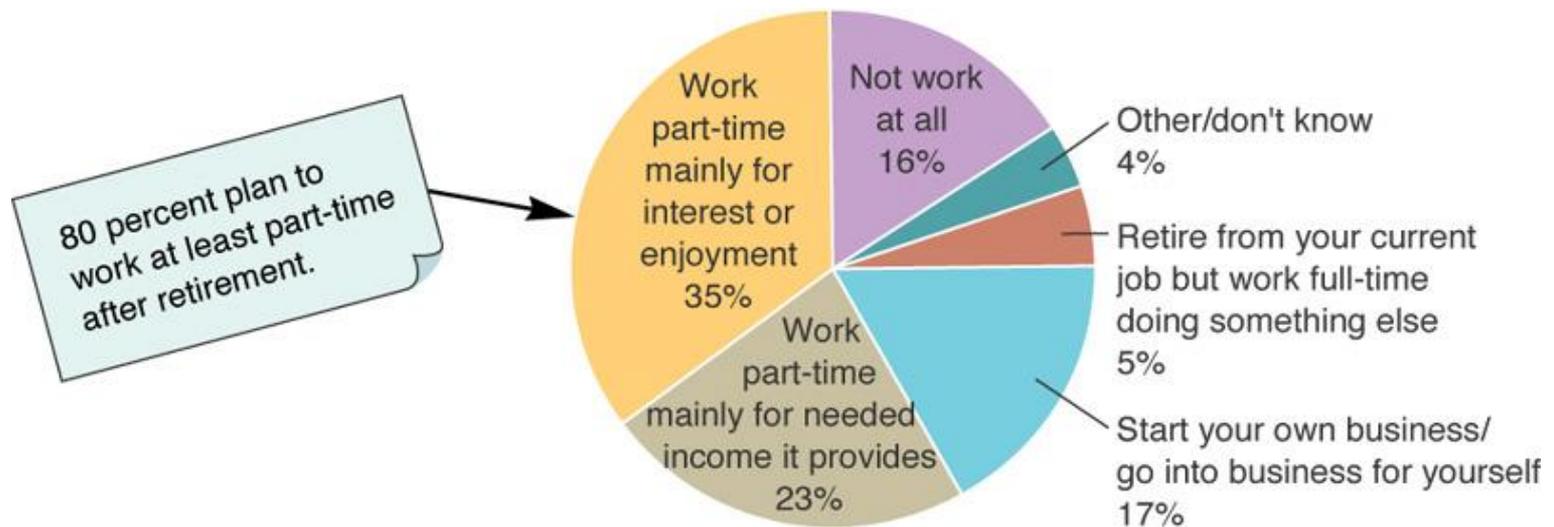
- **Functionalist Approach**
 - **Disengagement Theory**
 - Society and aging individuals mutually sever many of their relationships
- **Interactionist Approach**
 - **Activity Theory**
 - Elderly persons who remain active and socially involved are best-adjusted
- **The Conflict Approach**
 - Elderly victimized by social structure
 - Social roles relatively unchanged but devalued

Role Transitions Throughout the Life Course

- **Midlife Crisis:** A period during which adults realize that they have not achieved basic goals and ambitions and have little time left to do so
- **The Sandwich Generation**
 - Adults who simultaneously try to meet the competing needs of their parents and of their own children

Role Transitions Throughout the Life Course

Retirement Expectations



Source: AARP 1999

Role Transitions Throughout the Life Course

- Death and Dying
 - Kubler-Ross research greatly encouraged open discussion of the process of dying
 - Functionalists see those who are dying as fulfilling distinct social functions.
 - **Hospice care:** “Good death” by improving dying person’s last days



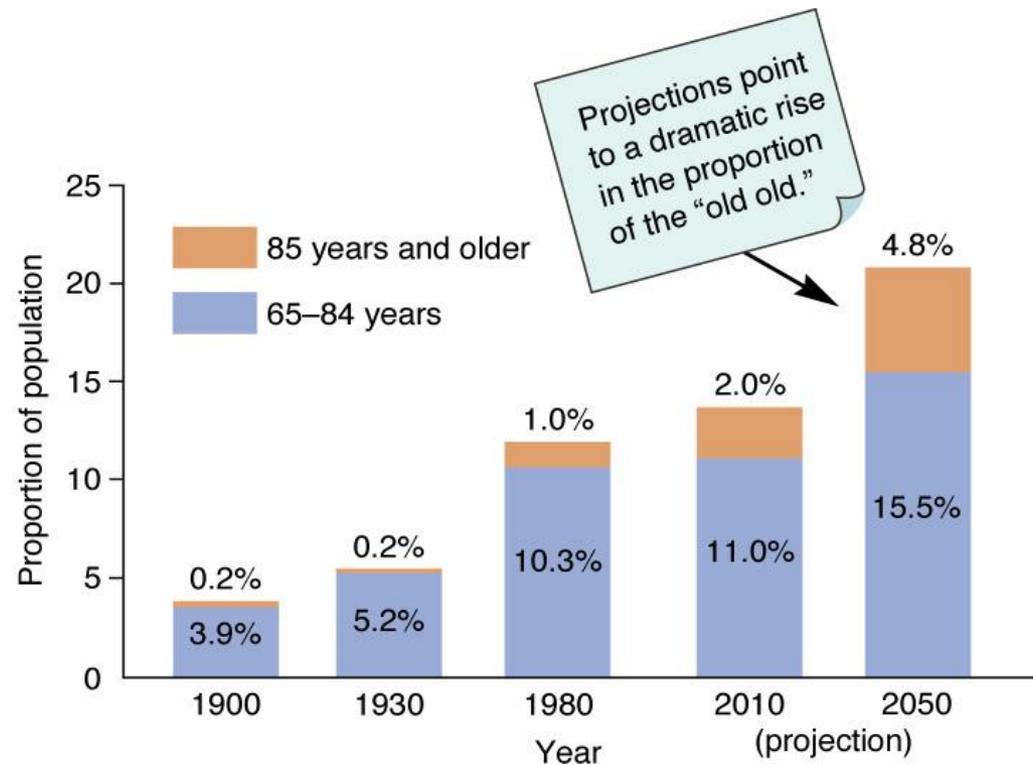
Age Stratification in the United States

The Graying of America

- In 1900, 4.1% of the population of the United States was age 65 or older.
- By 2010, 13% of the population of the United States will be age 65 or older.
 - Highest proportions of older people in Florida, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Iowa, West Virginia, and Arkansas

Age Stratification in the United States

Actual and
Projected Growth of the
Elderly Population of
the United States



Source: Bureau of the Census 1975; 2004a

Age Stratification in the United States

- Ageism
 - Prejudice and discrimination based on a person's age
- Competition in the Labor Force
 - Older workers face discrimination in the labor force

Social Policy and Age Socialization

The Right to Die Worldwide

- Physician-assisted suicide one aspect of larger debate in U.S.
- **Euthanasia**: act of bring about the death of a hopelessly ill and suffering person
- Public opinion on euthanasia divided
- Many societies practiced **senilicide**: killing the old because of extreme difficulties in providing basic necessities