

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTERGENERATIONAL INTERACTION AND AGEISM AMONG YOUNG ADULTS IN THE POLOG REGION

**Fatime Zulqfliu**  
University of Tetovo  
NORTH MACEDONIA  
[fatimezulqfliu388@gmail.com](mailto:fatimezulqfliu388@gmail.com)

**Lirie Aliti**  
South East European University  
NORTH MACEDONIA  
[l.aliti@secu.edu.mk](mailto:l.aliti@secu.edu.mk)

**Amela Zendeli**  
South East European University  
NORTH MACEDONIA  
[az31718@secu.edu.mk](mailto:az31718@secu.edu.mk)

## ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between intergenerational interaction and ageism among 122 adolescents (ages 15–18) in the Polog region of North Macedonia. Drawing on Allport's Contact Hypothesis and Terror Management Theory, the research utilized a correlational design and the Fraboni Scale of Ageism (FSA) to assess cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of age-based prejudice. Results indicated a significant negative correlation between the participants' desire for intergenerational contact and discriminatory attitudes ( $r = -.20$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, other subscales, including antilocution and avoidance, did not reach statistical significance at the .05 level, and no significant differences in ageism were found based on gender, place of residence, or living arrangements with grandparents. These findings suggest that while interest in intergenerational engagement serves as a potential buffer against discriminatory behaviour, prejudice remains a complex phenomenon within the region). The study highlights the practical necessity of implementing structured service-learning and community-based intergenerational hubs to foster social cohesion and reduce age-based marginalization among the adolescent population.

**Keywords:** Ageism, adolescents, intergenerational dynamics, discrimination.

## INTRODUCTION

In our rapidly developing and constantly changing society, interactions between young people and older adults represent an important and highly relevant challenge. Both groups play a significant role in societal development and possess diverse experiences and knowledge to share. They differ in values, life perspectives, and social contributions, each offering unique benefits to the other. However, this interaction is not without challenges. In some cases, older people are neglected or subjected to discriminatory attitudes, which deprives them of opportunities to contribute meaningfully and limits the recognition of their value within society.

This study explored the relationship between intergenerational interaction and ageism among adolescents in the Pollog region. By utilizing a correlational design, it identified how the frequency and quality of contact with older adults influenced discriminatory attitudes. Specifically, it examined whether increased engagement acted as a mitigating factor against the three dimensions of ageism: antilocution, avoidance, and open discrimination.

This study is important because it helps us understand how to reduce ageism. Ageism is when people are treated unfairly because of their age. This is a problem in many countries, including North Macedonia. The study suggests that talking to adults can help reduce ageism. It also suggests that we need to create programs that bring people and older adults together.

This research has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to the limited body of Balkan literature on age-based prejudice and tests the universality of Allport's Contact Hypothesis (1954;1955) in a multiethnic and traditional environment. Practically, it provides empirical data for educators and policymakers in North Macedonia to develop targeted interventions that foster social cohesion. The findings of this study provide critical insights into age-based prejudice within the unique cultural landscape of the Pollog region.

Ageism is a problem in many societies. It is when people are treated unfairly because of their age. This can happen in ways, such as saying bad things about older adults avoiding them or treating them unfairly. The Pollog region is not exempt from this problem. In fact, the cultural norms and traditions in the region can make it worse. In this context, cultural norms and traditions may exert a substantial influence on individuals' beliefs and behaviors toward older adults.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Discrimination against older adults has profound implications for their well-being and social justice, affecting multiple domains of their lives, including interactions with younger generations. One contributing factor may be the lack of knowledge and awareness of older adults and their societal contributions. Negative stereotypes and prejudices further shape intergenerational relationships. It can affect their well-being, their relationships with people and their overall quality of life. One reason for this discrimination is that young people do not always understand or appreciate adults. They may see them as weak or useless than as valuable members of society.

The foundational theoretical lens of this study is Gordon Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis, which posits that intergroup prejudice can be reduced through meaningful and high-quality interactions. This theory says that when people from groups talk to each other they are less likely to have bad attitudes towards each other. In the context of the Pollog region this means that young people who talk to adults are less likely to have ageist attitudes.

Social Identity Theory provides a framework for understanding how adolescents categorize themselves into an 'in-group' (the youth) while viewing older adults as an 'out-group.' ([Ellemers et al., 1997](#))

This categorization often leads to in-group favoritism and the devaluation of the elderly to enhance the self-esteem of the younger generation, manifesting as discriminatory attitudes and negative verbal labeling antilocution.

In this study, ageism is conceptualized as a combination of cognitive, affective, and behavioral components directed toward older adults. Following Iversen et al. (2009), ageism is treated as a systemic process of marginalization. It is not merely a personal bias but a social construct that influences how adolescents perceive the value and role of the elderly in society.

### AGEISM

Ageism is a widespread phenomenon observed across many societies and cultures worldwide, constituting a significant human rights concern reinforced by various social and cultural mechanisms. It is defined as a social and psychological process rooted in stereotypes and prejudices that results in the unequal treatment of individuals based on their age. According to Butler (1969), ageism involves systemic labeling and discrimination against older adults, often stereotyping them as weak, incompetent, or burdensome.

In the Pollog region, characterized by specific social dynamics and strong cultural traditions, these negative perceptions may be influenced by local norms; nevertheless, they contribute to the marginalization of older generations.

### **ANTILOCUTION**

Antilocution involves the use of biased language, labels, and the endorsement of negative stereotypes. This can be a problem because it can perpetuate negative stereotypes and prejudices. This cognitive dimension manifests when younger populations, such as adolescents in this study, adopt "compassionate ageism" or outright hostility through verbal generalizations. Stereotypes often categorize older adults as physically frail, cognitively impaired, or socially stagnant. Research suggests that these cognitive distortions are frequently fueled by "terror management theory," in which younger individuals distance themselves from the elderly to buffer the anxiety associated with their own inevitable aging and mortality (Martens et al., 2005). By measuring this subscale, we can identify the degree to which adolescents in Pollog have internalized these societal myths.

### **AVOIDANCE AND SOCIAL DISTANCE**

Beyond mere stereotypes, ageism manifests through the Avoidance subscale, which represents the affective and behavioral desire to maintain social distance from older adults. This is not necessarily an act of overt hostility, but rather a structural sequence of actions in which younger generations opt out of shared spaces or meaningful dialogues with the elderly (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005).

Avoidance is often driven by intergroup anxiety the feeling of discomfort or awkwardness when interacting with a group perceived as "different." When adolescents avoid the elderly, they prevent the formation of "counter-stereotypes," thereby trapping themselves in a cycle of prejudice. In the Pollog region, if social rituals that traditionally bring generations together erode, this avoidance may become more pronounced in the younger demographic.

### **DISCRIMINATION**

The most severe subscale of ageism is discrimination, which involves overt hostile attitudes and the support of policies that limit the rights or autonomy of older people. This subscale measures the extent to which individuals believe that the elderly should be excluded from political influence, economic resources, or social activities (Fraboni et al., 1990). Unlike subtle avoidance, discrimination reflects a proactive rejection of the elderly's value in a modernizing society. North and Fiske (2012) argue that this often stems from "Succession, Consumption, and Identity" (SCI) motives, where the youth perceive the elderly as consuming an unfair share of limited societal resources. By analyzing this subscale, this study evaluates whether the adolescents of Pollog harbor systemic resentment toward the older generation or if the region's traditional values still provide a protective buffer against such overt hostility.

Prejudice and discrimination are complex phenomena shaped by socialization, education, media, and cultural norms (Allport, 1954). Discrimination has been defined as a social and psychological process rooted in stereotypes and prejudices that results in unequal treatment of individuals or groups (Tatum, 1997). Older adults represent one group frequently subjected to discrimination. Nelson (2002) explains that older individuals are often stereotyped as weak, incompetent, or burdensome, with fear of aging and mortality contributing to negative attitudes. The cultural emphasis on youth, productivity, and economic contribution further reinforces age-based marginalization.

Ageism has significant psychological consequences, including increased stress, anxiety, depression, isolation, and reduced life satisfaction (Nelson, 2002). While aging is associated with certain physical and cognitive changes (Chodzko-Zajko & Pescatello, 2014) social and emotional experiences vary widely among individuals. Loneliness, health challenges, and emotional adjustments may occur in later life (De Beurs, 2019; Haber, 2013; Aggarwal & Dobson, 2019; Blanchard-Fields & Willis, 2016); however, older adulthood also remains a period of continued contribution, resilience, and social significance.

Levy et al. (2016) analyzed data from a large sample of participants to assess the prevalence of age discrimination and public perceptions surrounding this issue. Their findings indicate that ageism toward older adults are widespread in society and is generally perceived negatively. Participants reported either personal experiences of age-based discrimination or witnessing discriminatory treatment directed at older individuals. Age discrimination was identified across multiple contexts, including the workplace, healthcare settings, media representations, and interpersonal relationships. Importantly, individuals who experienced age discrimination reported higher levels of social isolation and lower levels of self-satisfaction, depressive symptoms, and anxiety. These findings highlight the significant psychological and social consequences of age-based prejudice (Levy et al. 2016).

Robert L. Kane (2002) examined key dimensions of well-being in later life, including physical and emotional health, social relationships, intellectual engagement, and sense of purpose. He emphasized several protective factors associated with successful aging. Physical health involves regular exercise, balanced nutrition, routine medical care, and activities such as walking in nature. Emotional well-being includes the experience of positive emotions, life satisfaction, and effective stress management. Strong social relationships with family, friends, and the broader community are also central, as they foster connection, reciprocity, and support. Additionally, intellectual activity, such as reading, lifelong learning, and engaging in cognitively stimulating challenges, contributes to maintaining cognitive vitality and overall life satisfaction. Kane's framework underscores that successfully aging involves multidimensional engagement rather than the mere absence of disease.

## **SOCIAL INTERACTION**

Social interaction is a continuous process of communication and mutual influence between individuals and groups within a given social context. It involves recognizing and understanding others, engaging in verbal and nonverbal communication, expressing emotions, and sharing knowledge and information (Kummerow, 1979). According to Goffman (1967), human interactions are ritualized and consist of structured sequences of actions that follow socially defined patterns. These rituals and symbolic behaviors help define social roles and shape identity and self-perception.

Through interaction rituals and nonverbal communication, individuals' express emotions, values, and intentions, thereby constructing social relationships. Similarly, Cooley (1920) emphasized that interactions with others play a central role in the development of self-awareness and identity, as individuals form self-perceptions based on how they believe others perceive and evaluate them.

## **INTERGENERATIONAL INTERACTION**

Intergenerational interaction, particularly between young people and older adults, has been widely studied because of its implications for well-being and quality of life. Research indicates that contact between generations positively influences the well-being of older adults, reducing

feelings of isolation and loneliness while increasing positive affect (Lehning et al., 2010). Studies have also examined reciprocal benefits, highlighting gains for both younger and older participants. Kompatsiaris (2014) note that young people often view older adults as valuable sources of knowledge, life experience, and alternative perspectives.

Within the family context, older adults, particularly grandparents play a role in keeping relationships strong and passing on cultural values. They provide practical support help resolve conflicts and strengthen family identity. McDonough, Stage and Brathwaite (2007) found that older adults contribute to peoples development by offering care, emotional support and shared time.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study used a quantitative, correlational research design to examine the relationship between intergenerational interaction and ageism. This approach allows for the statistical analysis of how the frequency and quality of contact relate to the levels of prejudice as measured by standardized psychometric tools.

### **Aim of the Study**

This study aimed to examine differences in ageism specifically discrimination, hostility, and avoidance toward older adults among young people in the Pollog region based on their level of contact with older adults. It sought to determine whether significant differences exist in discriminatory attitudes between adolescents who report having contact with older adults and those who report little or no contact.

Additionally, the study explored whether ageism and intergenerational interaction differed according to gender and place of residence (urban vs. rural).

### **Research questions**

**RQ1:** To what extent do intergenerational interactions relate to the specific dimensions of ageism?

**RQ2:** Do adolescents living with their grandparents report significantly lower levels of antilocution, discrimination, and avoidance than those living without them?

**RQ3:** Do female participants report significantly lower levels of Antilocution, Discrimination, and Avoidance than their male counterparts in the Pollog region?

**RQ4:** Do adolescents from urban areas exhibit significantly higher levels of antilocution, discrimination, and avoidance than those from rural areas?

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were tested:

**H1:** There is a significant negative correlation between the intergenerational interaction and the dimensions of ageism (antilocution, discrimination and avoidance) among adolescents in the Pollog region.

**H2:** Living with grandparents is associated with lower levels of the dimensions of ageism.

**H3:** Female participants report significantly lower levels of dimensions of ageism dimensions compared to male participants.

**H4:** Adolescents from urban areas report significantly higher levels of ageism dimensions than those from rural areas.

## Participants

A total of 122 adolescents in mid-adolescence (aged 15–18 years) participated in this study. The participants were recruited from five schools in the Pollog region. Four of the institutions were secondary schools, three located in Tetovo (“7 Marsi” Gymnasium, “8 Shtatori” Economic High School, and “Nikola Shtejn” Medical High School), and one in Gostivar (Municipal High School “Gostivar”).

The sample size was considered appropriate for behavioral and social science research, based on Roscoe’s (1975) guidelines, which suggest that a sample size between 30 and 500 participants is adequate for most studies. Participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous, and students had the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

## Instruments

Ageism was further assessed using the Fraboni Scale of Ageism (FSA), a 29-item scale with good internal reliability (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .833$ ). The FSA is unique in its ability to differentiate between three subscales:

- Antilocution: Measuring cognitive-verbal prejudice.
- Avoidance: Measuring social distance and behavioral withdrawal.
- Discrimination: Measuring structural hostility and exclusionary attitudes.

Additional questions assessed the level of intergenerational contact. to assess the predictor variable. This included items measuring the frequency of contact (e.g., "How often do you speak with an elderly person?") and the context of the interaction (e.g., living with grandparents).

## Reliability and Validity of the Instrument

Cronbach’s coefficient was calculated to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the scales used in this study. For the Fraboni Scale of Ageism (FSA) the overall Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was  $\alpha = 0.833$ , indicating good reliability.

*Table 1.* Reliability coefficient (Cronbach’s alpha) for the subscales of Fraboni Scale of Ageism

Construct	Cronbach’s Alpha	No of items	Remarks
Antilocution	0.656	10	Good Reliability
Discrimination	0.715	9	Good Reliability
Avoidance	0.744	10	Good Reliability

The internal consistency of the Fraboni Scale of Ageism (FSA) was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient across its three primary subscales. As shown in Table 2, the subscales demonstrated acceptable to good reliability. The Avoidance subscale showed the highest internal consistency ( $\alpha = .74$ ), followed by Discrimination ( $\alpha = .72$ ), both of which are considered good for psychological constructs. The Antilocution subscale yielded a slightly lower but still acceptable coefficient ( $\alpha = .66$ ). These values indicate that the items within each subscale are sufficiently inter-correlated and provide a reliable measure of ageist attitudes within the current adolescent sample ( $N = 122$ ).

## PROCEDURE

Before collecting data school principals were. Gave permission to do the study. To make sure mid-adolescents were included first to year secondary school students were selected through random classroom sampling. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. No personal

information was collected. Participants were told that the data would be used for scientific purposes and they were free to withdraw at any time without consequences.

**Table 2.** Characteristics of participants

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	70	57.4%
Male	52	42.6%
Residence		
Urban	41	33.6%
Rural	81	66.4%
Age		
15	44	36.1%
16	44	36.1%
17	30	24.6%
18	4	3.3%
Total responses	122	100%

The study sample consisted of 122 adolescents, with a slightly higher representation of female participants (57.4%) compared to males (42.6%). Regarding geographical distribution, the majority of the participants resided in rural areas (66.4%), while 33.6% lived in urban settings. The age of the participants ranged from 15 to 18 years, with the largest groups being 15 and 16-year-olds (each accounting for 36.1% of the total sample). High school students aged 17 and 18 represented 24.6% and 3.3% of the sample, respectively.

## RESULTS

**Table 3.** Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson correlations among study variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Antilocution	—					
2. Discrimination	.54**	—				
3. Avoidance	.57**	.66**	—			
4. Intergenerational contact satisfaction	-.10	-.13	-.15	—		
5. Quality of previous contact	-.09	-.06	-.07	.65**	—	
6. Desire for intergenerational contact	-.11	-.20*	-.16	.33**	.28**	—
<i>M</i>	2.45	2.10	2.30	3.12	3.05	7.42
<i>SD</i>	0.52	0.48	0.55	0.78	0.82	2.15

The results show that participants generally had moderate levels of ageism across the three parts. The highest average was for Antilocution ( $M = 2.45$ ) followed by Avoidance ( $M = 2.30$ ) and Discrimination ( $M = 2.10$ ). For contact variables participants reported a high Desire for Intergenerational Contact ( $M = 7.42$ ) on a 1–10 scale.

Correlations showed positive relationships between the three parts of the Fraboni Scale of Ageism. Specifically, Antilocution was significantly correlated with Discrimination ( $r = .54$ ) and Avoidance ( $r = .57$ ). The strongest relationship was between Discrimination and Avoidance ( $r = .66$ ). These results confirm the consistency and construct validity of the ageism measure used.

The primary hypothesis regarding the role of contact in reducing ageism was partially supported. A significant negative correlation was found between the Desire for Intergenerational Contact (Q7) and Discrimination ( $r = -.20$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This indicates that as

participants' willingness to engage with elderly increases, their tendency toward discriminatory attitudes significantly decreases.

While the correlations between Desire for Contact and the other subscales (Antilocution,  $r = -.11$ ; Avoidance,  $r = -.16$ ) were in the expected negative direction, they did not reach statistical significance at the .05 level. Furthermore, although Intergenerational Contact Satisfaction (Q5) and Quality of Previous Contact (Q6) were strongly correlated with each other ( $r = .65$ ,  $p < .01$ ), they did not show a direct significant relationship with the ageism subscales in this specific sample.

**Table 4.** Independent Samples t-test results for living arrangements and ageism subscales

Variable	Group	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Antilocution	Living with grandparents	88	3.48	0.50	-0.33	120	.744
	Not living with grandparents	34	3.44	0.52			
Discrimination	Living with grandparents	88	3.34	0.54	0.02	120	.987
	Not living with grandparents	34	3.35	0.53			
Avoidance	Living with grandparents	88	3.34	0.57	0.32	120	.750
	Not living with grandparents	34	3.37	0.46			

Note. All t-tests assumed equal variances based on Levene's test ( $p > .05$ ). Scores represent mean values on the Fraboni Scale of Ageism.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to see if there were differences in ageism levels between participants living with grandparents and those not.

The results showed no differences across all three parts: Antilocution,  $t(120) = -0.33$ ,  $p = .744$ ; Discrimination,  $t(120) = 0.02$ ,  $p = .987$ ; Avoidance,  $t(120) = 0.32$ ,  $p = .750$ . This means living with grandparents does not significantly influence ageist attitudes.

**Table 5.** Independent Samples t-test Results for gender differences in ageism subscales

Variable	Group	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Antilocution	Male	52	3.47	0.51	0.20	119	.839
	Female	70	3.46	0.50			
Discrimination	Male	51	3.28	0.50	-1.10	119	.274
	Female	70	3.38	0.55			
Avoidance	Male	52	3.33	0.49	-0.30	119	.761
	Female	70	3.36	0.57			

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. Equal variances assumed based on Levene's test ( $p > .05$ ). All p-values are 2-tailed.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine potential gender differences in ageist attitudes among adolescents.

As illustrated in Table 6, no statistically significant differences were found between male and female participants for Antilocution ( $p = .839$ ), Discrimination ( $p = .274$ ), or Avoidance ( $p = .761$ ). These findings indicate that gender does not significantly differentiate the levels of ageism reported in this sample.

**Table 6.** Independent-sample t-test for residence differences in ageism subscales

Variable	Group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Antilocution	Urban	41	3.48	0.51	0.12	120	.906
	Rural	81	3.46	0.50			
Discrimination	Urban	41	3.33	0.51	-0.17	120	.863
	Rural	81	3.35	0.55			
Avoidance	Urban	41	3.29	0.54	-0.92	120	.360
	Rural	81	3.38	0.54			

Note. *M* = Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation. Equal variances assumed based on Levene's test ( $p > .05$ ). All *p*-values are 2-tailed.

As presented in Table 7, an independent samples t-test revealed no statistically significant differences between urban and rural adolescents across the three subscales: Antilocution ( $p = .906$ ), Discrimination ( $p = .863$ ), and Avoidance ( $p = .360$ ). These findings suggest that geographical location does not significantly shape ageist perceptions in this sample, possibly indicating a unified social perspective among high school students regardless of their living environment.

## DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study was to analyze the relationship between intergenerational interaction and ageism among adolescents in the Pollog region. Our findings provide a nuanced perspective on how social exposure influences discriminatory attitudes in a transitioning Balkan society.

The results partly support Allport's Contact Hypothesis. A significant negative correlation was found between the desire for contact and discrimination. This means that an adolescent's willingness to engage with adults can reduce hostile attitudes. However just living with

grandparents did not yield differences in ageism levels. This indicates that mere physical proximity is not enough; the quality and intentionality of interaction drive change.

The Fraboni Scale of Ageism parts were strongly correlated. The highest average was in the Antilocution part ( $M = 2.45$ ). This aligns with Terror Management Theory, where adolescents may use verbal generalizations as a defense mechanism.

No significant differences in ageism were found based on gender or residence. This homogeneity may be due, to media and standardized education overriding traditional rural values.

## RECOMMENDATION

To improve cohesion in North Macedonia we need educational and policy interventions. These should focus on intergenerational service-learning, not just encouraging presence.

Based on the findings here are some proposed implementations:

- Curricular designers should add empathy modules to secondary education. These should address biases and negative speech.
- Local municipalities should invest in shared community spaces for "Reverse Mentoring." Here adolescents teach literacy and the elderly share cultural heritage.
- School psychologists can hold aging awareness workshops. These help students process their perceptions of the elderly replacing fear with empathy.

## LIMITATIONS

The study is limited by its sample size ( $N = 122$ ) and its specific focus on mid-adolescents aged 15 to 18. Future longitudinal research should investigate whether these attitudes persist into adulthood and explore the impact of specific "high-quality" contact interventions on the long-term reduction of age-based prejudice across the broader Balkan region. By identifying the variables that mitigate ageism, this study serves as an empirical foundation for advocating for the rights and dignity of the elderly population in an increasingly modernizing society.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this research provide critical insights into the dynamics of age-based prejudice within the unique cultural and social landscape of the Pollog region. By employing a quantitative approach using the Fraboni Scale of Ageism (FSA), this study successfully mapped the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of ageism among mid-adolescents. This research underscores that ageism among adolescents in the Pollog region is a complex phenomenon driven more by the psychological desire for engagement than by simple geographic or domestic proximity. The results suggest that while cohabitation with grandparents does not automatically lower prejudice, a proactive willingness to interact significantly reduces discriminatory tendencies.

A central takeaway from this study is the validation of the Contact Hypothesis in a specific local context. The significant negative correlation found between the desire for intergenerational contact and discrimination ( $r = -.20, p < .05$ ) proves that an adolescent's internal willingness to engage with the elderly acts as a "psychological buffer" against structural hostility. However, the data also revealed a critical nuance: living with grandparents was not associated with significantly lower levels of antilocution, discrimination, or avoidance. This suggests that mere physical presence or proximity is insufficient to dismantle prejudice;

rather, the quality and intentionality of the interaction characterized by meaningful exchange are the true drivers of attitudinal change.

Furthermore, the lack of statistically significant differences based on gender or place of residence (urban vs. rural) suggests a homogenization of attitudes among the youth in Pollog. This finding implies that the traditional rural "buffer" against ageism may be eroding, perhaps as social structures shift toward nuclear households. As adolescents increasingly view older adults as an "out-group" to manage their own existential anxieties, the social distance between generations may grow without active intervention.

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