

Sears, Huddy
May 1986

Interest Group Behavior Among Older People

The existence of interest group behavior among older Americans is unclear. On the one hand policy makers have increasingly paid heed to the demands of older people over the last twenty years, and have enacted medicare, the supplemental security program, and introduced cost of living adjustments for social security payments (Binstock, 1981). On the other hand public opinion polls fail to consistently demonstrate solidary support among the aged for such policies, or politicians who advocate them. In some cases older people are more supportive than younger people of increased government spending on health insurance and other policies helping older people (Campbell and Strate, 1981; Weaver, 1976). In other cases the old and young are equally supportive (Klemmack and Roff, 1981), and in still others the old demonstrate less support (Clemente, 1975). This absence of interest group behavior among older people is replicated by findings in the 1985 pilot. There are no age differences in support for increased government spending on older issues (social security, medicare, helping older people), nor in liking for either of the 1984 presidential candidates or reported 1984 vote (Table 1).

Table 1

Age Differences in Policy and Candidate Support

	18-29	30-39	40-59	60+
% (N)	17 (74)	24 (102)	27 (109)	32 (136)
Older Issues	2.6	2.6	2.5	2.5
Reagan	67.0	66.0	66.0	68.0
Mondale	52.0	51.0	53.0	51.0
1984 Reagan vote	60	60	64	65

Note: Over 60's include oversample

a. Spending on social security, medicare, helping older people. Standardized scale $X=5$, $SD=3$.

b. Thermometer rating 0-100 scale.

Our current goal is to explore the existence of political divisions among older people as an explanation for the absence of overall group solidarity. This notion of political disunity among the aged is not new. Previous NES studies have documented the divisive political ramifications of group identification (Gurin, Miller and Gurin, 1980?) which are replicated in the 1985 pilot. Older people feeling close to the elderly-- feeling they are similar to them in terms of their ideas, interests, and feelings and things--are more supportive of older issues, like Reagan less and were less inclined to vote for him in 1984 (Table 2). While not identifying with older people may signify a simple absence of shared interests, it could also mask an antipathy between those identifying themselves with the young as opposed to the old. This, however, does not seem to be the case in the 1985 pilot. Older people feeling close to those younger were, if anything, more supportive of issues and candidates benefitting the elderly than those not identified with the young (Table 2). There thus appears to be no intergroup conflict between those subjectively identifying, on the one hand, with the young, and on the other hand with the old.

Table 2

Political Consequences of Group Identification:
Older People (60+)

	Close to Elderly	Not Close	Close to Young	Not Close
% (N)	70 (94)	30 (40)	10 (13)	90 (121)
Older Issues	2.6	2.4	2.7	2.5
Reagan	64.0	77.0	37.0	71.0
Mondale	54.0	47.0	75.0	49.0
1984 Reagan vote	59	81	9	71

Note: entries include oversample

As noted earlier the problem with the group identification approach is its lack of theoretical specificity. There are a variety of plausible explanations for the political effects of feeling close to the elderly and our aim is to explore social identity theory as one such alternative. In developing this approach two potential sources of cleavage will be investigated. One simply involves holding or not holding an identity as older. The other captures a distinction between workers and the retired.

The old/not old distinction is parallel to the absence or presence of group identification. Furthermore this distinction exists at the level of personal identities. Some older people prefer to categorize themselves as young or middle aged rather than old (Bultena and Powers, 1978). This denial of old age may thus provide

a basis for political cleavage lines among older people.

Alternately a simple identity as old or young may be insufficient grounds for political disunity. Rather interests may differ between these two groups. Social identity theory suggests that status is at stake, and there is certainly sufficient evidence of pervasive negative stereotypes about older people (Lutsky, 1980) to warrant such an assumption. Older people also share economic interests vis a vis age based income maintenance and health care programs. In either case older people are sufficiently heterogeneous to speculate about a split within the aged in terms of their status and economic interests. Our hypothesis is that having such interest in common with older people corresponds to holding an identity as older. Our goal here will be to determine the existence of such a split in identities and contrast a social identity theory explanation for its political consequences, with that offered by an economic group interest approach.

In addition to pitting the social identity approach against a group interest perspective, it will also will be tested against hypotheses derived from symbolic politics theory. Distinctions between those placing themselves inside and outside the in-group may reflect nothing more than feelings about older people in general. Evidence is mixed as to whether older people actually have negative feelings about their age peers. Some studies report that older people share younger people's negative stereotypes about the aged. Other people demonstrate that older people's views are more positive (Lutsky, 1980). The political consequences of feelings about older people will be contrasted with identities as old and young, and with shared group interests.

The politically relevant cleavage among older people may not, however, be based on thinking of oneself as old so much as thinking of oneself as belonging to a subcategory of the larger group. Working is an obvious distinction among older people that has implications for both personal status and finances, and as such serves as a potential schism within those identified as older. For example older people that view retirement as a drop in status more strongly support government intervention on the behalf of the aged (Cutler, 1973). Along the same lines older worker's immediate economic interests are at odds with those of retired workers. Short term increases in social security benefits will benefit recipients while potentially depleting resources for future beneficiaries.

The existence of identities as worker and retired worker will be assessed, as will their political implications. Any observed political intra-group conflict over policies or candidates will be

analyzed for its possible basis in either shared status or economic interests.

Sample The study is based on the 1985 National Election Studies Pilot study and is concerned with both the national sample (N=380) and the oversample of older people (N=49). Items are largely drawn from the 1985 pilot but in a few cases 1984 pre and post-election items are also used. Appropriate references will be made in these cases.

Dependent Variables

Dependent variables are of two kinds: a) support or opposition to candidates furthering the group's interests and b) support for policies doing likewise. While Reagan and Mondale both pledged, prior to the 1984 election, not to make cuts in social security payments or cost of living adjustments, there is some reason to view Reagan's behavior over the previous four years as contrary to the interests of older people. The incumbent president had attempted to drastically cut social security benefits in 1981, and managed to delay cost of living adjustments in 1983. Ted Kennedy, on the other hand, is associated with the promotion of older people's interests via the a 1983/84? bill designed to maintain the viability of the medicare system. Support for Kennedy was assessed by 1985 feeling thermometer ratings. Support for Reagan was assessed by two items in 1985--thermometer ratings and evaluations of Reagan's handling of the presidency ($r=.77$) (see Sears and Huddy pilot report on women for more details).

Support for older issues was based on 1985 support for increased government spending on social security, medicare, and generally helping older people. A majority of older people (60+) in both the national sample and oversample wanted increased spending on all three policies with somewhat greater support for helping older people (67% national), than for social security (57%), or medicare (67%). A single dimension underlied all three variables accounting for 67% of the shared variance and items were additively combined to form a single scale.

Social Identity Theory

Old versus Non-Old

Identities. We explored the existence of category and sub-category identities by asking those over 60 how often they thought of themselves as old, elderly, middle aged, young, older worker, and

retired (Table 3).

Table 3

Age Linked Social Identities

People think of themselves in different ways at different times. Take age, for example. Sometimes a person might think of herself as old, sometimes as middle aged, sometimes young, and sometimes she might not think about her age at all. Do you think of yourself as _____ most of the time, some of the time, occasionally or never?

National sample (N=87)

	most	some	occasion- ally	never
Older	19	24	32	25
Elderly	5	24	27	44
Middle Aged	20	19	16	45
Young	10	15	19	56
Older Worker	18	24	10	48

Combined Older Sample (N=133)

	most	some	occasion- ally	never
Older	17	27	30	26
Elderly	5	26	25	44
Middle Aged	19	21	19	41
Young	8	13	21	58
Older Worker	16	25	14	44
Retired	43	11	17	29

The frequency distributions for each identity are virtually identical in the national and combined national and oversample. Identities as older and retired are by far the most frequent, with almost three quarters of the national sample thinking of themselves in these ways at least occasionally. Identities as elderly, middle

aged, young, and older worker more evenly divide older people. Just under a half of the national sample never think of themselves in any of these ways.

Our hypothesis about the structure of such identities is that they embody two potential sources of cleavage--old vs young, and worker vs retired. Factor analyses do reveal two orthogonal factors, but these represent a young and an old dimension. Identities as old, elderly, and retired load on the old dimension whereas middle aged, young and older worker load on the young dimension (Table 4). This suggests that feeling young and feeling old are not mutually exclusive and argues for an exploration of those who do and do not feel old, and those who do and do not feel young rather than treating old and young as polar opposites.

The association between holding an identity as retired and old, and older worker and young is somewhat surprising given our expectations that the two would be distinct. But this does not preclude their investigation as a separate source of cleavage and is additionally encouraged by findings that older worker and retired identities are the least well accounted for by the two factor solution. Both have final communalities of less than .4, whereas all other identities contribute a greater amount of their variance to the final solution. Investigation of this worker/ retired distinction will be pursued in a later section of this report.

Table 4

Structure of Age Linked Social Identities

	Correlations					
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Old						
2. Elderly	.37**					
3. Middle Aged	.02	-.17				
4. Young	-.27*	-.10	.13			
5. Older Worker	.11	.17	.20*	.05		
6. Retired	.25*	.24*	.13	.00	.02	

* p < .05

** p < .01

Factor Analysis

	Factor I "old"	Factor II "young"
Old	.77	-.10
Elderly	.75	-.07
Middle Aged	-.03	.77
Young	-.35	.55
Older Worker	.31	.55
Retired	.54	.29

‡ Shared Variance= 50%

An identity as old was constructed by combining an identity as elderly with old. The older sample was then divided into an old / not-old group by differentiating those thinking of themselves as old or elderly more than occasionally. Surprisingly this distinction does not correspond to older people's background characteristics, not even age (Table 5). The old group is no different from the non-old in terms of their age, marital status, work status, occupational background, and gender composition. They are slightly less well educated but this difference does not reach significance.

Treating identities as young and middle aged as a separate source of distinctiveness from old not-old results in a similarly absent demographic basis for this split. Those thinking of themselves as young or middle aged more than occasionally are no different than those who do not in terms of their background characteristics, although women are slightly more likely to think of themselves as young (Table 5). Even when identities as old are pitted against those as young or middle aged (by subtracting one from the other and forming old, young, both, and neither categories) no demographic basis for this distinction is found. In other words identities as old and young appear to have a subjective basis not reflected in objective characteristics such as actual age, working status, education or occupation.

Table 5

Demographic Determinants of Age Linked Identities

	Old/ Elderly	Not	Young/ Mid Aged	Not
% (N)	54 (72)	46 (61)	53 (70)	47 (63)
Age	70	70	69	71
Married	55	45	48	52
Single	52	48	57	43
Working	55	45	48	52
Not Working	51	49	57	43
Retired	53	47	57	43
Not Retired	49	51	52	48
Professional	60	40	39	61
Sales/technical	48	52	53	47
Service/laborer	63	37	61	39
< high school	60	40	42	58
High school	51	49	65	35
College +	50	50	50	50
< half old	55	45	52	48
> half old in neighborhood	48	52	57	43
Male	57	43	45	55
Female	52	48	57	43

Note: entries are row percentages and include national and oversample.

Holding an identity as older or elderly has predictable political consequences. Such identities are associated with significantly greater opposition to Reagan in 1985 (4.4 vs 5.6, $p < .05$), and lower levels of reported votes for Reagan in 1984 (58% vs 71%). No differences are observed, however, in support for older issues (2.5 vs 2.5). Surprisingly holding an identity as young or

middle aged has similar political effects, and results in greater opposition to Reagan in 1985, although this does not quite reach significance (4.7 vs 5.4).

Status Interdependence. Status interdependence was assessed by asking respondents whether the respect they received from others would increase, decrease, or stay the same if a) older people were more actively involved in running the country and b) older people were treated with more respect (Table 6). The latter item is assessed for a smaller number of respondents (102 compared to 127) because of attrition between waves I and II.

Table 6

Status Interdependence Items

If older people were more actively involved in running the affairs of this country, do you think this would increase the respect you personally receive from others, decrease it, or wouldn't it have any effect on you? Would this increase the respect you personally receive a lot, or just a little?

	National	National & Oversample (N=127)
No effect	60	65
Increase little	16	14
Increase a lot	24	20

If older people in this country received greater respect would this increase the respect you personally receive from others, decrease it, or wouldn't it have any effect on you? Would this increase the respect you personally receive a lot or just a little?

	National	National & Oversample (N=102)
No effect	63	61
Increase little	12	14
Increase a lot	25	25

Both status interdependence items were combined to form a single scale and a distinction forged between older people reporting that the respect they received would increase a lot to at least one of the two items, or both versus those reporting no effect to both

items of a little to just one. This divided older people into a status interdependent (35% of the combined national and oversample), and non-interdependent group (65%). As for age linked identities, there were no demographic correlates of status interdependence. Women were slightly more inclined to feel status interdependence (41% vs 27% of men), as were those working in service and laboring occupations, but none of these differences reached significance (Table 7). A similar finding holds when status interdependence is defined more liberally to include those reporting their status would increase a little on only one of the items. This implies that perceptions of status interdependence largely have a subjective foundation.

Table 7

Demographic Determinants of Status Interdependence

	Interdep- endent	Non-Interdep- endent
% (N)	35 (48)	65 (88)
Age (X)	68	70
Married	35	65
Single	36	64
Working	38	62
Not Working	33	67
Retired	27	73
Not Retired	45	55
Professional	33	67
Sales/technical	30	70
Service/laborer	42	58
< High school	35	65
High school	44	56
College +	27	73
< half old	31	69
> half old in neighborhood	39	61
Male	27	73
Female	41	59

Note: entries are row percentages. Includes national and oversample

Status interdependence had significant effects on political support in the direction predicted by social identity theory. Status interdependence resulted in lesser support for Reagan in 1984 (53% vs 71% Reagan vote), but not in 1985 (5.0 vs 5.0), and greater

support for old-age programs (2.6 vs 2.4; $p < .05$).

Group Status

The status of various groups and sub-groups of older people was assessed by asking respondents to rate the social standing of older people, the elderly, older workers, and the retired on a 1 to 10 status ladder (Table 8). All groups were rated by the national sample at either just below (older and elderly), or just above (older worker and retired) 6 on the scale. These ratings remain unaffected when the national and oversamples are combined (Table 8).

Table 8

Group Ratings on Status Ladder

Some groups of people in our society enjoy higher social status than others. By this I mean they are thought of by others more favorably, are treated with greater respect and work in higher ranking positions. Please imagine a status ladder with ten rungs or steps. The top or tenth rung or step represents the highest social status, the bottom or first rung or step represents the lowest. What rung on this imaginary ladder do you think represents the status of

	national sample									
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
Older people	2	6	8	15	24	16	13	12	1	2
Elderly	2	6	10	21	23	14	11	9	1	2
Older Worker	0	1	3	11	22	24	19	13	3	5
Retired	1	2	7	11	28	18	15	12	3	5

	Over 60's (National and oversample)									
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
Older (97)	1	3	4	12	30	12	19	15	0	3
Elderly (96)	1	0	5	15	33	16	11	15	2	2
Older Worker (100)	0	2	1	9	18	24	21	16	6	3
Retired (99)	1	0	4	5	24	21	19	21	1	3

	18-29	30-39	40-59	60+
% (N)	17 (74)	24 (102)	27 (117)	31 (136)
Older	5.0	5.1	5.6	5.8
Elderly	4.6	4.8	5.2	5.7*
Older Worker	5.9	6.1	6.1	6.4
Retired	5.2	5.3	5.9	6.3*

Note: entries are mean ratings on 1 to 10 status ladder
 *p<.05

While the 60 and over age group rated the status of all four categories of older people more highly than those under 60 this discrepancy was most pronounced for ratings of the elderly and the retired. Both younger groups (18-29, 30-39) gave the elderly an average rating of less than 5, the midpoint on the 1 to 10 status ladder. This differed significantly from the average 5.7 rating given the elderly by those over 60. A similar trend is observed for the retired although all age groups perceived retired people as having higher status. Status ratings for the elderly and older people's were combined ($r=.72$) to form a single scale reflecting the perceived status of older people in general. This scale was used in analyses examining a potential cleavage between those having an identity as old and those who do not. Status ratings of older workers and retired are treated in separate analyses exploring a

potential cleavage between both subcategories of older people.

Expectations derived from social identity theory predict a negative relationship between ratings of older people's status and support for old-age linked group interests. In other words older people who view their cohort as having lower societal standing should support old-age policies that help redress this. However, while status ratings for older people and the elderly result in greater support for old-age programs ($r=-.10$, $r=-.12$), and less support for Reagan ($r=.13$, $r=.16$) none of these reach significance.

Combined Social Identity Model: Old vs Not-Old

When all four social identity measures (identities as old, young, status interdependence, and status of older) are included as predictors of support for old-age programs, Reagan, and Kennedy, they account for a modest 5-6% of the overall variance (Columns I, V, VII, Table 10). Of the two identity measures, only holding identity as older had any political impact. It resulted in significantly greater opposition to Reagan, greater support for Kennedy, but had no effect on support for greater spending on old-age programs. Holding an identity as younger had no discernible political effects.

Status interdependence with other older people likewise has similar political effects as observed in the bivariate case. It is found again to promote support for old-age programs but its effects on opposition to Reagan and support for Kennedy are subsumed under the positive effects of an identity as older, and perceptions of low group status.

Low perceived group status, while having no significant effects on the dependent variables alone, does result in less support for Reagan, more for Kennedy, and has no effect on support for old-age programs within the regression equations.

Table 10
Social Identity versus Economic Interests

	Old-Age			Reagan			Kennedy		
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
Identities									
Old	-.08	-.09	-.10	-.19*	.00	.04	.18*	.27*	.25*
Young	.05	.06	.03	-.13	-.10	-.08	.08	.10	.07
Status Interdep	.21	.12	.03	-.03	.16	.29**	-.05	.01	-.08
Group Status	-.07	-.14	-.16	.18*	.08	.12	-.18*	-.26*	-.27*
Interactions									
ID*Interdep		.22	.29*		-.27	-.36**		-.04	.02
ID*Low Status		-.18	-.30*		-.18	-.03		-.17	-.27*
Economics									
Income			-.29**			.25**			-.18*
Well-being			-.11			.36**			-.20*
Group Economics			.21*			-.05			.17
R^2	.065	.084	.225	.067	.149	.337	.053	.073	.181

Note: entries are standardized regression coefficients
* p<.05 **p<.01

Thus status interests appear to motivate group interested political behavior among older people, even if their influence is relatively minor. Older people thinking of themselves as old, perceiving status interdependence with older people, and seeing older people as having lower societal status are more likely to support the group's interests. While these findings support social identity theory the model tested should more be accurately contain interactions rather than main effects. In other words within a social identity approach the political effects of status interdependence and low group status should be greater among those who hold identities as old. Because this is the group of individuals personally affected by the status of the group as a whole. Fortunately interactions between the social identity variables can easily be tested because there is relatively little relationship between identities, status interdependence, and group status. Approximately similar percentqges of the old and not-old feel status interdependence with older people (38% and 33%), and rate older groups as having simlar status (5.9 and 5.6).

To test this interactional model two dummy variables were added to the regression equations in Table 10: (1) Those with identities as old/elderly and who feel status interdependence, versus all others, (2) those with identities as old/elderly and perceiving older/elderly to have low status ($X < 6$), versus all others. These two interactional terms account for sightly more variance in support for old-age programs ($\Delta=1.9\%$, see Column II, Table 10), and support for Kennedy ($\Delta=2.0\%$, Column VIII, Table 10), but account for substantially more variance in Reagan support ($\Delta=18.8$, Column V, Table 10).

Interactional effects were only in the expected direction for the interaction between identity and status interdependence. The interaction between identity and low group status was contrary to that predicted by social identity theory. Specifically, support for old-age programs is strongest among those holding an identity as old and feeling status interdependence with older people as expected. Likewise this group is the least supportive of Reagan. Less support is found, however, among those having an identity as old and viewing older people's status as low. It is difficult to interpret this on the basis of status considerations -- this should be the group most motivated to elevate group status. On the other hand the status ratings may actually be a manifestation of group pride, and as such those who view the status of the group as low are those that feel the least warmly about the group, and are therefore the least supportive of group interests. We will return to this point subsequently in discussing the meaning of the status ladder item.

None of these interactions, however, reach significance as predictors of support for old-age programs. This latter finding highlights the problems associated with including closely related terms as predictors in regression equations. Simultaneous estimation of parameters results in few, if any, reaching significance, even though tolerance levels are acceptable. In examining the equations that include these interactional terms their relative sizes, in addition to their significance, will be taken into consideration.

The interactional model works less well in accounting for Kennedy support. Unlike the other two dependent variables, the main effects tend to hold up here. Greater support is observed among those with identities as old, and among those viewing older people as holding lower status (Column VIII, Table 10).

Social Identity versus Economic Interests

Status interests clearly influence support for policies and candidates promoting older people's interests, whether their effects are direct or interact with personal identities. In some cases these effects are moderate, as is the case for spending on old-age programs. In others it is considerable, such as their effects on support for Reagan. But in either case the magnitude of political effects attributable to social identity theory is less than that accounted for by economic considerations.

One alternative explanation for the observed political consequences of status concerns among older people, is that they really reflect economic concerns. To test this possibility respondents were asked a series of items about their personal finances, and about those of older people in general. On the personal finances side information was collected in 1984 about household income, and in the 1985 pilot about subjective financial well-being over the last year (Table 11). Just under a half (49%) of all those 60 or older lived in households that earned less than \$20,000 a year and older respondents were equally split between those viewing their finances as having deteriorated, and those viewing them as having improved (29% vs 31%).

Table 11

Economic Interest Items

Personal Finances

1. Financial Well-Being

We are interested in how people are getting along financially these days. Would you say that you are better off or worse off financially than you were a year ago. Is that much better/worse or somewhat better/worse? (1985 Pilot)

	national	over 60's
much better	3	4
somewhat better	31	27
same	36	27
somewhat worse	25	25
much worse	5	4

2. Economic Interdependence

Sometimes people think about other groups of people in society when they think about their own economic well-being, people who are being helped or hurt by economic matters. What groups of people do you feel close to? (1984 Pre-election)

	national	all over 60's
interdependence with elderly/retired/people on fixed incomes	55%	53%

3. Would you say over the last year the economic position of the elderly has gotten better or worse? Is that much better/worse or somewhat better/worse? (1985 Pilot).

	national	over 60's
much better	0	0
somewhat better	13	9
same	51	52
somewhat worse	29	30
much worse	8	9

Group finances were assessed with two questions. The first concerns economic interdependence with the group as a whole, and is needed to identify real interdependence between the self and the larger group, and distinguish this group interest from more symbolic concerns about the group's welfare. Just over a half of all 60 year olds and over claimed that their finances were linked to those of older people (Table 11). Furthermore more older people saw the finances of the elderly as having deteriorated over the last year (37%) rather than improved (13%). In subsequent regressions analyses these two items were combined so that economically interdependent older people, viewing older people's finances as worse, are singled out from the rest, and thus form an index of group economic interest.

These three economic interest items -- household income, financial well-being and group economic interest -- have a powerful effect on all three dependent variables (Table 10). They sizeably increase variance accounted for in support for spending on old-age programs ($\Delta = 14.1\%$; Column III, Table 10), Reagan support ($\Delta = 18.8\%$; Column VI, Table 10), and Kennedy support ($\Delta = 10.8\%$, Column IX, Table 10), over and above the interactional social identity model. Personal finances have more consistent effects here than do group finances. High household income and financial well-being result in less support for old-age programs, greater support for Reagan, and less support for Kennedy. Group finances, on the other hand, only promote support for old-age programs, and have no influence on support for either politician.

The effects of group finances do not detract from the influence of social identity variables on the dependent variables, and if anything accentuate their impact within regression equations presented in Table 10. Those over 60 who hold an identity as old and feel their status to be interdependence with older people support old-age programs significantly more, and are more opposed to Reagan. Likewise those identifying as older, and viewing older people as having low status oppose old-age programs significantly more. An additional, unexpected effect of combining economic and status considerations as predictors of Reagan support is that status interdependence promotes support, even though it hinders support among those holding an identity as old (Column VI, Table 10). This puzzle requires resolution, and is quite at odds, with all earlier predictions. One possibility is that respondents not identified as old provide positive to the status interdependence item about older people running the country, not because they are actually interdependent, but because they feel Reagan is generally good for them and equate the item with assessment of his leadership qualities.

Older Workers versus Retired

Contrary to expectations holding an identity as an older worker, and as retired are not at odds with each other. They seem, in fact, to be relatively independent ($r=.02$), with 17% of those over 60 thinking of themselves as both, 14% as neither, 27% as older workers only, and 43% as retired only. The demographic basis for work linked identities were, not surprisingly, based on current work status. An identity as an older worker is more common among those currently working, and less common among those describing themselves as retired (Table 12). Likewise an identity as retired is more common among those not currently working, who describe themselves as retired, and are male. There is a link between an identity as an older worker and having worked in blue collar occupations, but this does not reach significance.

Table 12

Demographic Basis for Older Worker and Retired Identities

	Older Worker	Not	Retired	Not
% (N)	56 (73)	44 (58)	71 (95)	29 (39)
Age	70	70	70	69
Married	55	45	76	69
Single	55	45	65	35
Working	75	25	52	48
Not Working	54	46	75	25
	$\chi^2 = 2.78$		$\chi^2 = 4.22^*$	
Retired	48	52	79	21
Not Retired	74	26	58	43
	$\chi^2 = 6.60^*$		$\chi^2 = 5.43^*$	
Professional	50	50	76	24
Sales/Technical	53	47	75	25
Service/Laborer	73	27	79	21
Less than high	62	38	78	22
High school	57	43	61	39
College +	50	50	75	25
Less half old	57	43	72	28
More half old	59	41	68	32
in neighborhood				
Male	57	43	81	19
Female	55	45	64	36
			$\chi^2 = 4.91^*$	

Note: entries are row percentages

* $p < .05$

There are significant political consequences of holding an identity as an older worker, but not for thinking of oneself as

retired. Older workers are more supportive of spending on old-age programs (2.6 vs 2.4, $p < .05$), less supportive of Reagan in 1985 (4.6 vs 5.6), and like Kennedy more (53 vs 43). The retired, on the other hand, were as equally supportive of old-age programs (2.5 vs 2.6), Reagan (4.9 vs 5.2), and Kennedy (51 vs 52) as those not thinking of themselves as retired. Thus the expected antipathy between older workers and retired over program support did not materialize, and those identified as older workers prove to be more supportive of group interests rather than less.

Status ratings for older workers and the retired had no direct effects on support for old-age programs ($r = -.01$, $r = -.05$), or Reagan ($r = .19$, $r = .18$). Effects on Reagan support are, however, in the expected direction with less support associated with lower status ratings.

Social Identity Model for Worker/Retired Subcategories

A main effects social identity model that includes identities as older workers, retired, status interdependence with older people, and status ratings of both subcategories most adequately accounts for Reagan support ($R = 13\%$), somewhat less adequately explains support for old-age programs ($R = 7\%$), and is least adequate in accounting for Kennedy support ($R = 5\%$) (Table 13). An interactive model accounts for variance in Reagan support even better, but provides little improvement for either of the other two dependent variables.

Status interdependence again accounted for most of the variance in support for old-age programs within the main effects model (Column I, Table 13). Opposition from those holding identities as older workers accounted for most of the opposition to Reagan, with additional opposition coming from those viewing the status of older workers as low (Column IV, Table 13). High status rankings for the retired was the only variable having any substantial effect on liking for Kennedy (Column VII, Table 13). Thus of the subcategory distinctions older worker seems to have the most potent political effects, and these are have their most divisive effects on Reagan support.

In testing the interactional model interactions with older worker, and retired identities were tested separately to reduce multicollinearity problems. Interaction terms included in the model for older workers were (1) Holding an identity as an older worker and feeling status interdependence with older people in general, versus all others, and (2) holding an identity as older and feeling

that older workers have low status ($X < 6$), versus all others. Similar interactions with holding an identity as old were also developed. The older worker and retired interactional models are about equally effective in accounting for support for old-age programs, and Kennedy. The model including interactions with older worker identities is, however, far superior to the model including interactions with a retired identity model in accounting for Reagan support. Specifically older workers oppose Reagan, as do those perceiving older workers to have low status. These both fit with predictions arising from social identity theory but effects of the interaction between identity and status run counter to such predictions. Those identified as older workers, and who view the group's status as low are most supportive of Reagan rather than the least (Column V, Table 13). This finding is reminiscent of the finding that those identified as older, and rating older people's status as low support Reagan more. The implication is that rating older people's status as low results in greater opposition from those outside the group, but greater support from those within. Again this raises the possibility of group status ratings actually reflecting group pride for group members themselves as opposed to objective societal status ratings. While there is some uncertainty of interpretation here the fact remains that identifying with older workers and concerns about their status have substantial political consequences.

Combined Category and Subcategory Model

The question remains as to how the political consequences of older worker identities relates to observed political distinctions between those thinking of themselves as old and not-old. Despite our predictions that older workers are a subcategory of those identifying as older, that is not strictly the case. While a substantial number of older respondents thought of themselves as older workers and old more than just occasionally (34%), a substantial percentage thought of themselves as older workers only (22%). While identities as old and older workers appear unrelated, status considerations are not. Older workers are more likely to experience status interdependence with other older people (64% vs 40%) and those identified as old are more inclined to rate the status of older workers more highly (6.7 vs 6.0).

A simultaneous comparison of old not-old status concerns with those of older workers demonstrates that both have political consequences but on different issues. The old not-old distinction has most effect on support for old-age programs whereas the concerns of older workers have their greatest political impact on Reagan support. Those identified as old and who feel status interdependence with other older people support spending on old-age programs (Column I, Table 14). While this same group was found to significantly oppose Reagan in earlier regression analyses (see Table 10) this difference is replaced by the effects of older worker identities and concerns about older worker's status. Older workers oppose Reagan, as do those viewing the status of older people as low. The interaction between older worker identity and low status remains (Column III, Table 14).

Thus the above amply demonstrates the effectiveness of the social identity approach, although effects still need differentiation from competing alternative explanations. Table 14 presents a contrast between the social identity approach and economic interests. Economic interests do not detract, at all, from the political impacts of identities and status concerns. Personal finances have a powerful impact on evaluations of both politicians, and both personal and group finances influence support for old-age programs.

Table 14

Social Identity versus Economic Interests

	Old-Age Programs		Reagan		Kennedy	
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Older						
ID*Interdep	.23*	.24	-.19	-.17	-.04	-.06
ID*Low Status	-.16	-.24	-.16	-.09	.02	-.05
Workers						
ID	.11	.00	-.33**	-.24**	.18	.11
Status	-.06	-.03	.37**	.34**	-.10	-.05
ID*Low Status	.01	.03	.28**	.24**	-.13	-.10
Economics						
Income		-.28**		.19*		-.14
Well-being		-.11		.29**		-.18*
Group economics		.23**		-.04		.18*
R²	.052	.187	.255	.372	.027	.118

Note: entries are standardized regression coefficients

*p<.05

**p<.01

These observed political consequences of identities are not replaced by the effects of ideology or party affiliation. When the two latter variables are added to regression equations containing social identity terms and economic interests the effects on support for old-age issues of status interdependence among those identifying as older remain, as does the effects of the interaction between identity and low group status. Likewise the effects of older worker identities and their interaction with group status exist over and above any impact of partisanship or ideology. If anything, the negative consequences of low income on opposition to Reagan are absorbed by party identification and ideology. Neither does feeling close to older people diminish the effects attributed to social identities. Adding closeness to equations in Table 14 results in additional variance being accounted for in Reagan support, and this has no discernible effect on support old-age programs. Feelings about older people had absolutely no political impact whatsoever when added to the above regression equations.

Recommendations

Identities

Identities as old and elderly had significant main effects, and substantial interactive effects on all dependent variables. Assessing identities as young and middle aged seemed to contribute nothing additional to this. Identities as older workers were far more politically consequential than those as retired. Our recommendation here then is to keep the following identity items: old, elderly, and older worker.

Status Interdependence

Status interdependence had significant bivariate effects on the dependent variables and also interacted with identities sufficiently to warrant its inclusion in subsequent studies. Status interdependence with older workers was not asked in the 1985 pilot, but could profitably be explored in the future given the link between older worker identities, status interdependence, and assessments of Reagan.

Group Status

This series of measures proved to be the most difficult to interpret, although their political effects were considerable in combination with identities. The problem here is that findings ran counter to theoretical expectations and highlights a problem in

current wording. Our aim was to assess societal norms about group status, but it is unclear whether respondents are providing norms or their own beliefs about the group's ideal status. Our suggestion then is to alter question wording so that group norms are actually assessed. question wording