

“To write my autobiography and get myself in focus genetically”: G. Stanley Hall’s *Senescence* (1922)

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In this paper, we analyze G. Stanley Hall’s *Senescence: The Last Half of Life* (1922) as a personal narrative and scientific account of aging in the long nineteenth century. We approach the text with a critical perspective on the decline narrative in aging studies, but also by engaging with Hall’s narrative in the form of life review. Our analysis is contextualized by a historical perspective on Hall’s academic career, his views on women, and his Social Darwinism. We focus on three main narratives—embodied aging and delaying decline, old age as personal experience and a category for social analysis, and the emergence of retirement as a socioeconomic institution. In doing so, we contextualize Hall’s work by attending to the social and intellectual currents of this time. We observe the enduring influence of narratives of aging in the nineteenth century, particularly the underlying assumption of *Senescence*—that aging equals decline and loss, which still holds sway in mainstream gerontology research today. We argue that *Senescence* offers the reader a complex and often meandering narrative which reveals the experience of male aging in the long nineteenth century as well as scientific thinking on aging at the time. We conclude that Hall shows us that old age (and death) are part of life, and that as much can be learned from the *experience* of living through old age as can be gleaned from academic studies of social statistics or physiological decline.

This article analyzes the writing of American psychologist, G. Stanley Hall (1846-1924), on the subject of his own old age in his last major academic work: *Senescence*, which was published in 1922. A strong element of Hall’s narrative documents the decline associated with old age, a resilient component

of studies of aging across disciplines to the present day (Charise, *Aesthetics* xxv; Oro-Piqueras and Falcus 2). We approach the text with a critical perspective on the decline narrative in aging studies but also by engaging with Hall's narrative in the form of life story or life review (Butler). Whilst *Senescence* presents scholarship on aging from a diverse range of disciplines, from literature to biology, it also contains two chapters of more personal reflection. As a recently retired professor and university president with a distinguished career behind him, Hall used this book to locate meaning and purpose in his last stage of life. The writing is of its time and intellectual context, reflecting the nineteenth-century life and gender of its author, the emergence of new social sciences in academia, and the cultural concerns of inter-war America. We have read the text with the particular and changing circumstances of its scholarly and societal backdrop in mind.

Of the nine chapters in Hall's work, the penultimate is dedicated to "Some Conclusions" and the book is prefaced by an Introduction which is part personal reflection, part plea for the future study of old age. The other chapters cover the history and literature of old age, statistical, medical, and biological studies, and a report on survey data concerning aging. The final chapter is reserved for the "psychology of death," appearing after his conclusions, this chapter might be viewed as an extension beyond his main topic (Hall 439-518). Here, we will focus our analysis on the Introduction and Conclusions, as they are particularly driven by Hall's own experience.

Our reading of *Senescence* reveals an observable intersection of the personal experience of aging with the emergent concept of old age as a sociopolitical category. For us, as twenty-first century feminists, these categories are wholly compatible. The personal *is* political in the lexicon of second wave feminism (Carney). This was not the case in Hall's intellectual milieu of nineteenth-century science, which was male dominated and where rationality and objectivity were central tenets. In his efforts to rise above the blind acceptance of religion into the objectivity and inquiry of science (Kemp), Hall struggles to find acceptable explanations for his personal experiences of aging. Yet, these personal experiences run through *Senescence* and unpacking the dissonance

between the personal and the scientific in the book is the major contribution of our article. As such, the article sets out to achieve a double objective. First, we wish to offer a historically contextualized view of Hall's persona as a controversial and famous intellectual who struggled to reconcile his religious upbringing with his scientific career, a struggle that comes to the fore in old age (Goodchild 69-72). Second, we aim to help present-day readers understand the significance of *Senescence* for gerontology, particularly in terms of how age and gender intersect in both personal and public experiences of aging. This two-pronged approach allows us to avoid the pitfalls of analyzes of Hall's work which are highly critical of his masculine privilege but lack contextual understanding of the confines of intellectual life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Lepore).

Senescence could be viewed as Hall's life review, a process described by Robert Butler as "a naturally occurring, universal mental process characterized by the progressive return to consciousness of past experiences, and, particularly, the resurgence of unresolved conflicts" (487). By locating Hall as a scientist engaged in life review within the intellectual, political, and social context of the turn of the twentieth century, we share a critical but empathetic reading of Hall which sheds new light on this famous pioneer of social science (Kemp 2). In this way, our review of Hall's last work emerges from the critical gerontology school, where "weaving together the personal and the social" is a central goal (Katz, "Critical Gerontology" 397). Gender roles and Hall's unconscious enjoyment of omnipotent male privilege provide a consistent foundation throughout this article.

In our reflections, we discuss how Hall's disgust with his failing older body is tied clearly to the masculine norms which gave his life shape and direction. Hegemonic masculinity in particular resists the change in social role brought on by retirement. The stark contrast between masculine gender roles and retirement is well documented as "retirement is initiated as a social substitute for death" (Quadagno 85). The public life of the man is ended by the institution of retirement—in Hall's case, a high-status job as President of Clark University in the USA. In the final analysis, we agree with John Macnicol that the view of

aging established in this period represents a masculinist narrative and so must be judged with all the skepticism and skill that is available to a pair of twenty-first-century feminists (35).

We begin by sketching a brief biography of Hall's life and work. Next, we offer an overview of senescence in the context of narratives of aging in the long nineteenth century. The remainder of the article delivers our analysis of Hall's text, focusing on three main narratives—embodied aging and delaying decline, old age as a personal experience and a category for social analysis, and the emergence of retirement as a socioeconomic institution. We conclude by drawing together separate strands of our analysis—Hall's personal decline narrative around death, his masculinist narrative, and his difficulty in moving from the public sphere of work to the private sphere of retirement. Next, we offer a contextualized discussion of *Senescence* as a narrative reflective of Hall's life, which was dominated by his academic career.

HALL'S *SENESCENCE* AS A NARRATIVE OF HIS LIFE AND WORK

G. Stanley Hall was a towering, if controversial, figure in the development of the discipline of psychology and his legacy includes the development of childhood studies and gerontology as distinct fields of research (Kemp 3; Schofer 194; Young 195). His first secure academic position was held in the philosophy department of Johns Hopkins University where he spent six years (1882-1888) and opened a psychology laboratory, the first of its kind in America (Ross 186). Hall was the first President of the American Psychological Association and established a new University—Clark—of which he was also President (Parry 1161). Hall was involved as editor in several important academic journals, including the *Pedagogical Seminary*, a journal of educational and child development (renamed the *Journal of Genetic Psychology* in 1924), which published some of the prevalent eugenic thinking of the early twentieth century (Kohlman 15). Describing himself as a “genetic psychologist,” Hall was intellectually enmeshed with the American Progressive Era's exponents of behavioral genetics and eugenics (Chynoweth Burnham 464-65). Like many Social Darwinists of this period, his scholarship aimed not only to describe

human psychology, but also to shape human behaviors for the betterment—as he saw it—of society as a whole (Goodchild 69).

Hall published two great works, the best-known being *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relation to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education* in 1904 and *Senescence* towards the end of his life in 1922. The former has received substantial scholarly attention, especially around the centenary of its publication (for example, see Arnett and Cravens). However, Hall's *Senescence* is comparatively under-studied, despite its role in defining a new field of inquiry—"gerontology" (Morley 1133).

Senescence is often cited as the first major work to consider aging as a field worthy of study in its own right (Parry 1161). Hall combines reflection on personal experience with scholarship, admittedly separated by chapters, revealing an inability to disentangle the "self" from his professional role, which had strongly shaped his personal identity. We might also infer that Hall viewed his own reflections as a valid form of data in his exploration of old age, as they take up a good deal of words in his final "great work." This facet of the work reveals the strong emerging influence of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis in this period, as is evidenced by the fact that Hall's invitation to Freud and Carl Jung to give a series of lectures at Clark University in 1909 was widely reported (Ross 389). Hall's writing is deeply personal in tone, the text itself serving as a meditation on the meaning, or lack of it, in his own life's experiences. However, the book reaches far beyond the personal in its recommendations for society in an age of "modernity." As Thomas Cole has emphasized, Hall's thinking was inflected by the "religiously sanctioned virtues of independence, self-denial and work," underpinning his upbringing in rural New England but, over his lifetime, "this Protestant, bourgeois ethos was slowly giving way to a secular, scientifically sanctioned culture of health, self-fulfillment and consumption" (361). D. Ross links Hall's lifelong struggle to reconcile the divine with natural sciences to his exposure to "transcendental literature" at a young age (45). We now conclude that this struggle was to his advantage in writing *Senescence* as science and religion can both be of use in understanding old age and end of life.

SENESCENCE AND THE STUDY OF OLD AGE AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

The term “senescence” is mentioned by many authors of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and refers to the sense of decline that emerges once the human body has reached physical and sexual maturity, through midlife and into old age. The concept emerged as part of a wave of scientific developments in the treatment of old age around the turn of the century. Elie Metchnikoff is credited with coining the term “gerontology” in 1908 and Ignatz Leo Nascher with “geriatrics” in his 1914 publication, *Geriatrics: The Diseases of Old Age and Their Treatment* (Morley 1134). The concept of senescence allowed scholars to view old age as a dynamic process that was physiological, but also psychological and social, referring to a general accumulation of decline but one which could be managed by good husbandry of depleting resources. As Hall states:

Growing old hygienically is like walking over a bridge that becomes ever narrower so that there is progressively less range between the licet and the non licet, excess and defect. The bridge slowly tapers to a log, then a tight-rope, and finally to a thread. But we must go on till it breaks or we lose balance. Some keep a level head and go farther than others but all will go down sooner or later. (437)

For Hall, old age held great potential but was held back by “the curse of fatigability,” a tiredness that heralded death and could only be stemmed by careful attention to physiological maintenance (382).

Hall was part of a wider school of thought working on how to study old age. As Andrea Charise has discussed, the legacy of Thomas Malthus, the influential cleric and early demographer, is still felt in gerontology and demography to this day. By “introducing the concept of ‘population’ as a character into the cultural landscape in the early years of the [nineteenth] century [Malthus] helped reconceive older age as a biopolitical stage of life” (Charise, *Aesthetics* xxiv). Indeed, she identifies the long nineteenth century as a period that produced a raft of intellectual works that are immediately pertinent to age, the most notable being “Malthus’s *Essay* ... and Charles Darwin’s theorization of natural selection” (Charise, *Aesthetics* 148). By the end of the century, there is a clearer

sense of “the ‘elderly subject’ as a category in medical and sociological research, a late-century effect of the developing discipline of gerontology” (Chase 6).

In nineteenth-century writings, the paradoxes of old age such as increased wisdom and declining health, are presented as something to celebrate, enjoy, but also to dread and to endure. For writers like Hall, the internal struggle between alert mind and failing body offer fertile grounds for scientific self-investigation. Emerging social scientific disciplines brought a new sense of certainty to matters of psychology, economics, and society. These new fields of scholarly inquiry were heavily applied in their emphasis and often led to interventions in social policy (Cravens 185; Kohlman 12; Brown 3-4). Social statistics provided the evidence to produce public policy, as detailed in Chase’s account of Charles Booth and the Pensions Bill in Victorian England (240). In Hall’s work we can trace the categorization of age and old people as “the elderly,” a de-humanizing mass, allowing those in charge of budgets to decide that “we are too many” (Lively 15), at least according to the “decline narrative” (Gullette xviii). The stubborn resilience of these negative categorizations of old age leads us to conclude that to investigate narratives of aging from the past, we must engage with how personal and public concern about old age combine.

So, here we have chosen to focus on three themes in our reading of *Senescence*. We begin with a discussion of Hall’s embodiment of old age and the gendered aspects of his conclusions. Next, we draw out a central paradox of aging in the nineteenth century, the realization that it is both a personal, lived experience but also a category for analysis, of particular interest to social reformers at the time. Finally, we discuss the role of retirement as both a signifier of death and as an emergent socioeconomic institution.

1. EMBODIED AGING: DELAYING DECLINE

In the opening pages of the book, Hall describes a process of self-examination and reflection that he began upon retirement (viii, xiv). To this end, he conducted a “physical inventory,” “visited doctors,” and undertook a “hygienic survey,” but despite the dispassionate language, this was an intensely personal “self-survey.” Hall’s aim was to understand “what age was” but he was

to do so by considering what it “meant for himself” (viii). This research project formed part of his wider “process of reorientation,” part investigation and part acclimatization to the last stage of life (xix). Hall’s narration of his experiences of aging frequently connect personal experience with broader trends determinable by “scientific” scrutiny. For example, he “felt impelled ... to write my autobiography and get myself in focus genetically,” commenting that this urge was “natural enough for a psychologist” (xix). Whilst his findings were not included in *Senescence*, despite being “laid safely away” for possible future publication, this focus on himself and use of the language of genetics as a means of extrapolating to the wider population is a feature of his writing in this volume (xix). Hall further justifies a focus on the self by referencing Socrates’ argument that self-knowledge is the hardest and last knowledge to come by, thus leveraging the weight of Classical thought to justify the distinctively “modern” ideas presented in *Senescence* (xiv).

The main objective of *Senescence* was to argue that an “intelligent and well-conserved senectitude has very important social and anthropological functions in the modern world not hitherto utilized or even recognized” (405). Hall proposed that old, white, male intellectuals such as himself had much wisdom or capacity for “synthesis” at their disposal, capacity that this “very complex age” desperately required (405). Hall saw these older men as having the ability to see the pattern amidst the chaos, to stand back in order to see the whole, and to, ultimately, offer an answer to the questions of the day. Although, tellingly, Hall fails to provide tangible examples of such synthesis, so the concept feels quite abstract in the text. This high-handedness and arrogance of intellect was a trait already recognized by Hall’s critics (Young 201; Ross 51). As such, Hall was not any old man reflecting on his own hopes and fears, he was a high-profile intellectual who dedicated his life to the study of genetic psychology proposing a route to “improving” American society (Young 197; see also Ross).

Illuminating his disgust at his own decline and his wider sense that genetic inheritance held the key to individuals’ societal role and value, the body’s messy functionality comes to the fore in this text. Hall comments that the process of

sorting and shedding personal possessions had “many analogies with those by which the body is rid of waste material,” describing the result as a “dumpage” of his life’s accumulation (xvii). In this way, his throwing away of books, papers, and the most personal of possessions is described as a clarifying process required for mental lucidity, even cleanliness, in the last life stage. His efforts to de-clutter invoke the body and its disciplining through self-control: “This riddance of the residue of superfluous printed matter is not unlike anti-fat regimens, which are disagreeable but strengthening” (xviii). As Cole has argued, Hall’s Victorian moral values of prudence and self-denial form a significant part of this regime of self-cleansing (Cole 364). For Hall, self-denial was a key strategy for successfully occupying the older body:

In all of us oldsters the problem of personal hygiene looms up with new dimensions. In our prime we gave little attention to health. The body responded to most of the demands we made upon it. ... But now our credit at the bank of health begins to run low. We must husband our resources lest we overdraw them. (399-400)

Hall’s conception of the human body as a “bank” with limited resources of health suggests the older body acts as a metaphor for the credit and debit logic of capitalism. Like a bank account, the body contains a limited amount of resources which must be husbanded, disciplined, and conserved by an appropriately masculine lifestyle. If the regimen is adhered to correctly, it ultimately yields the dividend of longevity.

However, for all of Hall’s concern with self-discipline and the avoidance of the increased “individuality” of the aged (his belief that old people become more self-absorbed), his narrative is not without sentiment and, at times, his writing is highly emotional (413). For example, the body—this time after death—makes an appearance in his recollection of disposing of his mother’s letters. His relationship with his mother, Abigail Beals, has been recognized as both influential and problematic (Parry; Ross). Having saved a few of her best letters, he watched the rest “burn in the grate one solitary spring at evening twilight.” Once it was done, Hall “felt that I had completed a filial function of interment of her remains” (xix). In this way, Hall’s narrative faces up to the

bodily change that he believes is required by his retirement, and whilst his first step is to divest himself of personal possessions, ultimately, the process anticipates his own dissolution—hoping to delay that process by maintaining as orderly a body and mind as possible.

Hall's writing appears to search for order in the chaos of his own aging. His discussion of the body—and his allusion to the body—reveals a desperate and urgent need to retain the aging body's integrity in the face of an inevitable unravelling. It seems his efforts to “absorb his religious and philosophical interests into his scientific identity” earlier in the life course have re-emerged in old age in the form of an urge to transcend his failing, physical body (Ross 95). Hall's aging body is gendered. Although it is worth noting that he resists a common trope seen in the work of older male writers described by Lynne Segal as “the narcissistic mortification when the penis ‘let them down’; post-Viagra, ‘erectile dysfunction disorder’ is the ‘illness’ this feeling has spawned” (33). Despite early troubles with guilt related to masturbation (Ross 11), the expectation of a decline in sexual potency does not trouble Hall in *Senescence*. Nevertheless, Hall's work is brimful of gender stereotypes, most notably the nineteenth-century ideal of “True Womanhood” guided by the central tenets of “piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity” (Vickery 384). He contrasts his male experiences with a caricatured description of female experience. In Hall's narrative, women's aging acts as a foil for his own idealized version of productive, intellectual, and male aging:

Thus, woman is older than man in the same sense that the child is older than the adult, because her qualities are more generic and she is nearer to and a better representative of the race than he and also in that she sublimates sex earlier and more completely, entering the outer shadows of senectitude in the thirties. (389)

Hall discusses the advantages and disadvantages of what he regards as women's inherent characteristics (for example, their urge to care for others) in relation to the process of aging. He is concerned that sexual desire ought to diminish for the aging man, and observes that this happens earlier and more naturally for women:

The sexes approximate each other in both traits and features as they grow old and thus if we can no longer love women sensually, we have a new appreciation of the eternally feminine, its intuitive qualities, and its more general and moral interests. Old women acquire a new power of sensing things from man's point of view and hence companionship between old men and women may become a noble surrogate for carnal love. (Hall 394-95)

However, for all the positives possible for companionship, Hall invokes an age-old pejorative in his assertion: "Youth is her glory and she has more comeliness to lose than man, who can, however, never quite rival the hag in ugliness" (387). Thus, in this first work of "science" dedicated to the last half of life, we see the figure of the "hag" make her inevitable appearance.

In more recent times, the trope of the hag has been critiqued by feminists (Sundén and Paasonen). Twenty-first-century writings of older women on the subject of aging are often political and the focus is intersectional exclusion (see Segal 31; Lively 16). The aspirations of these writings are a far cry from the social realities of the nineteenth century where Chase reports that, in England at least, "shutting up old women" in institutions was the norm (14). In literature of the period, the very sight of old women is used to remind readers of the "problem" of old age:

She is the outsider who stays the strong British arm, the ghost who depletes resources, the phantom whose growing numbers ominously swell census reports and warn of a great social problem in the making. (Chase 17)

For Hall, the challenge was to resist a very new form of exclusion, which was his marginalization from a high-status position that had, in hindsight, been more privileged than he realized. In many ways, Hall appears to be suffering from the ill effects of internalized ageism, the tendency for negative views of old age to reflect back onto the viewer, once he is old enough to recognize himself as that frail old man, belonging to the category—"elderly" (Laslett 97).

Much of Hall's commentary places the aged physical body at the center of his understanding of human aging. This facet of his work represents one of the major contributions of gerontology as a discipline and is not something that can

be easily discarded. Though, as feminist gerontologists have shown, old age is, itself, feminized as retirement requires men and women to withdraw into domestic space and failing bodies pose challenges to various forms of masculinity (Hurd Clarke). In Hall's claims for the benefits of an intellectual "synthesis" only possible in old age, he casts a utopian vision of "graybeards" leading the frenetic, youth-obsessed twentieth century to the zenith of its potential:

What the world needs is a kind of higher criticism of life and all its institutions to show their latent beneath their patent value by true supermen who, like Zarathustra, are old, very old, with the sapience that long life alone can give. We need prophets with vision who can inspire and also castigate, to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. ... Otherwise humanity will remain splendid but incomplete. (411)

The uncomfortable relationship that Hall experiences with his own aging body is recognizable in twenty-first-century anti-aging movements, revealing the deep cultural roots of narratives of aged decline. Indeed, Morley (1133) traces anti-aging writings from Cicero right through to Metchnikoff (1908) to debates around cloning in the twenty-first century. The urge to resist senescence has always been with us. We refer to this again later, in the section identifying how retirement and obsolescence of older workers became important aspects of early twentieth-century aging.

Next, we examine the second relevant realization of nineteenth-century scholars—that old age is both a personal experience and a social category.

2. OLD AGE AS A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND A CATEGORY OF ANALYSIS IN SOCIETY AND SCIENCE

The dissonance between old age as a personal, lived experience and old age as a social category emerges in this period. Where previously old people could be viewed as "Guardians of Virtue" who served others (Achenbaum 17-19), they were gradually made redundant. As W. Andrew Achenbaum has noted, in Hall's lifetime, a discourse that posited "solutions" to the "problems" of old age took hold in academic circles (125). Perhaps most interesting is the early

work of the social reformers, Booth and Beatrice Webb, in the British context (see Thane 233) and the early social statistics of William Barton in America. Those works and campaigns established old age as a social category with implications for the rest of society, particularly in terms of economic costs (Chase 10). The dissonance between the general belief of Victorians that “aging now occurred as a mass event that could scarcely be solved one case at a time” allowed the significance of social statistics to emerge (Chase 86). In the British context, Booth’s work made a clear-cut connection between old age and poverty, maintaining that old age, in and of itself, was enough to drive a person into poverty. The result, in Booth’s England of the nineteenth century, was that two thirds of occupants of the workhouse were aged 60 or over (Chase 5). The conclusion could now be reached that some people were poor *because* they were old.

The situation in England contrasted with America where, Achenbaum reports, the century began with Barton using “Tables of Longevity” to demonstrate the longer life expectancy of Americans and to advertise and endorse the “New Land” as healthier than many European countries (Achenbaum 12). In America, there was a particular focus on the role of diet, exercise, and personal ambition in the maintenance of good health through virtuous habits (Achenbaum 15). This later translated into lower numbers of older people making claims for financial aid in America as compared to Europe (Achenbaum 85). Tamara Hareven reports that, towards the end of the nineteenth century, concerns with increasing longevity were replaced with a focus on the physiological changes of aging through the concept of senescence (120). The American paradox of old age as a stage of life to be simultaneously dreaded and admired continued as Hall was writing *Senescence* in the second decade of the twentieth century. Some of the earlier positive views of old age as “the culmination of life,” when mixed with Darwinian notions of the survival of the fittest, produced a confused and contradictory set of messages. Older people were simultaneously admired for their resilience and fortitude while being generally denigrated for the diseases they carried and the obsolescence of their knowledge (Achenbaum 39).

Hall explains that the sudden nature of experiencing decline is felt by both genders, but differently by women. Hall's perception of the human life course is much more rigid, focusing on loss, decline, and even recognizing midlife as a "dangerous age" where hopes can be lost:

Both sexes realize that they face the bankruptcy of some of their youthful hopes, and certain temperaments make a desperate, now-or-never effort to realize their extravagant expectations and are thus led to excesses of many kinds, while others capitulate to fate, lose heart and perhaps even lose the will-to-live. (2)

Losing the will to live is a recurrent theme throughout the book. There are numerous references to suicide (9, 17, 46, 59, 89, 130, 201, 203, 229, 262, 439). Róisín Healy notes that studying nineteenth-century writings on suicide allows us to better understand societies' evolving relationship with God at that time (905). Hall presents suicide as a socially acceptable solution for those who do not wish to face the downfall and obsolescence that is old age. This premise must at least in part be based on the clear belief of Hall and his contemporaries that, in most cases, there is nothing to be achieved, enjoyed, or celebrated past the age of 40, much less past the age of 60. Over Hall's lifetime, he had vacillated between casting off the religious beliefs of his upbringing and adhering to an atheist outlook, though his ultimate goal was to expound a "scientific spirit" that "would see the fundamental unity of both religion and science" (Goodchild 79). The moral perspective that viewed an individual's health status as intimately related to religious virtue never left his work (Kemp 6). This could explain why, when the decline of old age appears to have destroyed his health, the shame at having insufficient religious grace or scientific knowledge to maintain his youthful vigor causes Hall to consider the ultimate solution. His explanation rested in part on his observation that the old experience a lesser distinction between waking and sleeping:

Slumber is not so deep or long, and the dreamy states of reverie invade mentation by day. The great restorer does not quite make losses good and the accumulation of these deficits explains very many of the phenomena of old age, which might be characterized as

sleepiness for death, the rest that is complete and knows no waking.
(Hall 373)

Chapters devoted to the history, literature, medical views, and the biology of old age all include references to the route suicide offered some aged people.

In “Chapter III: Literature By and On the Aged,” Hall cites the novel of Anthony Trollope *The Fixed Period* (1882) which envisages a college of old men who can resort to chloroform as an appropriate solution for those who do not wish to see old age through, a kind of suicidal care home (130-32). There is a deep-seated disdain for old age and older people at the heart of Trollope’s novel which concludes that sexagenarians are not just a harmless drain on resources, but rather, are responsible for great mistakes:

As it can be maintained that all the great advances have come from men under forty, so the history of the world shows that a very large proportion of the evils may be traced to the sexagenarians nearly all the great mistakes politically and socially, all of the worst poems, most of the bad pictures, a majority of the bad novels, and not a few of the bad sermons and speeches. (Trollope in Hall 4)

Hall concedes that Trollope’s plan for compulsory suicide at the age of 67 and a half does not come to fruition because it was never supported by the women and those who maintained the view when young, changed their minds as they aged. Nevertheless, he is certain that “the misery, uselessness, troublesomeness and often obstructiveness of old age still remain” and so “something like this must surely sometime be” (132). Charise sees *The Fixed Period* as a lens offering clarity on the “perceived problems of an aging population and that of the aging writer” (144). Chase is attracted to *The Fixed Period* for its representation of the central paradox of old age in the nineteenth century—the horror at the disease and decline of old age and the subsequent struggle to provide for it (98). Trollope’s novel allows us to see how institutionalized ageism, through the narrative of demographic burdens, can be internalized and acted upon by older people themselves.

The trope of old age as preparing for the ultimate exit begins with the institution of retirement, which for men like Hall, constituted considerable loss of social status, so this is where we now turn our attention.

3. THE BEGINNING OF RETIREMENT AS A SOCIOECONOMIC INSTITUTION

The nineteenth century was a time of important systemic change in social and economic life. In both Britain and America, the century saw the transformation of life from rural to urban, and from agrarian to industrial (Achenbaum 114). Over the course of the century, more people moved from living in multi-generational households in rural areas to smaller family units in urban centers, often over-shadowed by factories. This inexorable, slow, and unfolding shift towards “modernity” affected more than people’s location and type of work; it fundamentally altered the relationship between the people and their labor. Work formerly done by artisans now operated in large-scale factories where the tasks involved in making one chair or basket were fragmented into many smaller jobs, each performed separately. This transformation of the workplace changed the value ascribed to different forms of work and had a direct impact on the status of older people in the workplace. A lifetime’s work experience, previously seen as vital to survival in colonial cultures like America, was no longer valuable. By the end of the century, it was apparent that “firms appreciated the need to establish some sort of policy to remove older workers” (Achenbaum 49).

Having described his experience of extracting himself from his professional and institutional life and roles as a university founder and professor, Hall equates his retirement with social death:

Thus, I am rather summarily divorced from my world, and it might seem at first as if there was little more to be said of me save to record the date of my death—and we all know that men who retire often die soon afterwards. (xii)

The increasing pace and challenge of modern, industrial society permeates Hall’s work. As a scientist, Hall would have seen himself in the forefront of the “progress” brought by this changing, “modern” world. Indeed, ideas about

science, modernity, and progress were inextricably linked in this era and these interconnections permeated cultural production (Bud and Shiach 4-6). Hall writes with a real sense of urgency, as his society moves forward at an ever-faster pace, he worries about where its feet are placed and who decides the direction of travel. In the second decade of this new “modern” American century, Hall feared the worst for old age—that it would suffer the combined insults of a state sanctioned age of retirement and the stigma of poverty and chronic ill-health (Cole 362). He feared that in the poor state of the “elderly,” America might see its own reflection as a maturing but declining civilization.

Retirement looms large in *Senescence* as the text is imbued with the significance of Hall’s career as a “genetic psychologist.” His narrative lacks chronology or structure, perhaps due to the loss of professional status, which provided the narrative structure for his life before retirement. At this juncture in his life, Hall is searching for a narrative to make sense of his own and other people’s aging. As a man of science, who had little empathy for the “graybeards” until joining their ranks, he struggles to make sense of his own obsolescence.

Senescence contains some passages which could be said to identify old age as “obsolescence” (Achenbaum 55). In reviewing his own papers and old lecture notes, Hall bemoans their loss of pertinence and importance:

And how many special themes in my field, once central, have lapsed to secondary importance or become obsolete! Such breaks with the past, which psychology regards as analogues of a catharsis that relieves constipation, have a certain insurance value not only against ultra-conservatism but against the inveterate tendency of the old to hark back to past stages of life. (xix)

Despite his palpable upset at the redundancy of work that was once vivid, exciting, and—crucially—recognized, he tries to understand these “breaks with the past” as important to his discipline but he does so with a less-than-lofty reference to the “catharsis that relieves constipation.” Again, “dumpage” is on Hall’s mind as he prunes a lifetime of material accretion. Hall’s feelings about his retirement are conflicted as his personal experience of being dumped contrasts with his more scientific view that retirement is an important process

for ensuring the continued development of a productive and improved human race. In short, he becomes a victim of the masculine, age-based gender norms that had provided him with the benefits of white, male privilege earlier in the life course (Ross 143).

Next, we draw together separate strands of our analysis into the unifying theme of Hall's struggle to transcend his embodied old age: Hall's personal decline which he narrates as death, the constraining factors of his masculinist narrative, and his difficulty in moving from the public sphere of work to the private sphere of retirement.

CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Hall's *Senescence* offers the reader a complex and, often, meandering narrative which is comprised of personal reflection and public manifesto, thus, it says as much about the experience of male aging in the early twentieth century as it does about the science of aging at the time. Whilst Hall's reflections on his own life are alive with intimate detail, his proposals for society are oddly intangible. It is the underlying assumptions of *Senescence*—his belief that aging equals decline and loss—that still hold sway in most mainstream gerontology research.

In the process of writing this article, we have discussed the reasons why we think the personal is so prominent in the book, drawing on some commentaries on Hall's earlier work *Adolescence*, and on what is known about his personal life at the time of writing (see Young; Arnett; Ross), though a detailed discussion was beyond the scope of this article. We also used our feminist training and our experience of living in a patriarchal society to cast a critical eye on Hall's "masculinist" narrative, asking whether and how it is appropriate for white, middle-class men of this period to speak about "women" or "older people" in generalized terms as if they belong to some undifferentiated mass. We are particularly mindful of the fact that Hall had limited experience of anything other than a life enjoying the many privileges of being a white man of science in the long nineteenth century, which would have been a sharp contrast to the experience of women or people of color at that time. Hall's views and actions

were limited by gender norms which placed men and women in separate spheres but, like so many aspects of Hall's life, his attitudes towards women were problematic (Goodchild 67; see Ross 51).

Despite his lifelong internal struggle to reconcile his spirituality with his status as a scientist, Hall lacked the humility to create a life story as an act of reconciliation (Randall and Khurshid n.p.). The inability to construct a meaningful story of one's life, a life review (Butler) has been identified in other male narratives of older age such as Chase's report on Booth's delusions of omnipotence (Chase 243). The masculinist narrative open to Hall is extremely narrow, there is only one character—Hall himself—with a few grotesques and a reference to his mother representing the entire experience of human aging from the female viewpoint. When we use a man like Hall to discuss issues of identity and subjectivity (Twigg and Martin 353), we recognize that this is an odd thing to do because he is the antithesis of the kind of individual with whom the cultural turn calls on us to engage. He is not marginalized, quite the contrary, but he feels marginalized by his own aging. Hall feels ousted from the high-status milieu of his professional career, into the obscurity of retirement which provides none of the sustenance he needs. There is room for further study of how this experience resonates with Amanda Vickery's claim that the ideal of clearly delineated "public" and "private" spheres, the former masculine and the latter feminine, has been over-stated by historians (Vickery 388-89). By examining Hall's life in the light of historical studies of gender, we recognize the blurred and complex boundary between the "private" and the "public," seeing the potential for further critical engagement with this issue in respect of the later stages of life.

In the final analysis, we conclude that Hall, despite his best efforts at scientific research, rationality, and objective reasoning, fails to convince us of his pitch for a productive old age. Despite his status as a man of science, the call of the divine is omnipresent in *Senescence*. We wonder whether Hall's inadvertent legacy is not the establishment of senescence as the enemy of productive men, but rather a deep insight into the perpetual human battle between aging as a trial of experience, versus aging as a "social problem"

(Achenbaum 5; Charise, *Aesthetics* xxv). In Hall's case, aging is manifest as an internal struggle between the observable (science) and the divine (religion), which only "prophets with vision" (Hall 411) can accomplish. Certainly, since *Senescence* was published, the work of the science of aging (gerontology), has been to view aging as a challenge to be overcome by technology, by medical science, or by some other endeavor, facilitated by humanity's capacity for innovation and adaptation. Hall shows us that old age (and death) is (are) part of life, and that as much can be learned from the *experience* of living through old age as can be learned from the *study* of it as a set of conditions, maladies, or statistics that apply to someone else.

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