

# **ANNUAL REVIEW OF GERONTOLOGY AND GERIATRICS**

**Volume 13, 1993**

---

**FOCUS ON  
KINSHIP, AGING,  
AND  
SOCIAL CHANGE**

---

**George L. Maddox, PhD**

**M. Powell Lawton, PhD**

*Volume Editors*



**SPRINGER PUBLISHING COMPANY**

# ANNUAL REVIEW OF GERONTOLOGY AND GERIATRICS

---

Volume 13, 1993



*Editor-in-Chief*

**M. Powell Lawton, Ph.D.**  
Philadelphia Geriatric Center  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

*Associate Editors*

**Richard W. Besdine, M.D.**  
University of Connecticut  
School of Medicine  
Farmington, Connecticut

**John W. Rowe, M.D.**  
President and Chief  
Executive Officer  
Mount Sinai Medical Center  
New York, New York

**Vincent Cristofalo, Ph.D.**  
Wistar Institute  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**George L. Maddox, Ph.D.**  
Duke University  
Durham, North Carolina

**K. Warner Schaie, Ph.D.**  
The Pennsylvania State University  
University Park, Pennsylvania

*Managing Editor*

**Bernard D. Starr, Ph.D.**  
Marymount Manhattan College  
New York, New York

*Founding Editor*

**Carl Eisdorfer, Ph.D., M.D.**  
University of Miami  
School of Medicine  
Miami, Florida

# **ANNUAL REVIEW OF Gerontology and Geriatrics**

---

**Volume 13, 1993**

## **Focus on Kinship, Aging, and Social Change**

**George L. Maddox, Ph.D.  
M. Powell Lawton, Ph.D.**

*VOLUME EDITORS*



**SPRINGER PUBLISHING COMPANY**  
New York

Copyright © 1993 by Springer Publishing Company, Inc.

All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of Springer Publishing Company, Inc.

Springer Publishing Company, Inc.  
536 Broadway  
New York, NY 10012-3955

94 95 96 97 / 5 4 3 2

ISBN 0-8261-6495-1  
ISSN 0198-8794

Printed in the United States of America

---

# Contents

<i>Contributors</i>	vii
<i>Forthcoming Contents, Volume 14</i>	ix

Chapter 1	Introduction	1
	GEORGE L. MADDOX and M. POWELL LAWTON	

## **Part I An Overview of Theory and Research**

Chapter 2	Families, Aging, and Social Change: Seven Agendas for 21st Century Researchers	15
	VERN L. BENGTON and MERRIL SILVERSTEIN	
Chapter 3	Elusiveness of Family Life: A Challenge for the Sociology of Aging	39
	VICTOR W. MARSHALL, SARAH H. MATTHEWS, and CAROLYN J. ROSENTHAL	

## **Part II The Changing Balance of Work and Family**

Chapter 4	Kin Reciprocities, the Familial Corporation, and Other Moral Economies: Workplace, Family and Kin in the Modern Global Context	75
	ANGELA M. O'RAND and EMILY M. AGREE	

- Chapter 5     Balancing Work and Family in an Aging Society:     96  
                     The Canadian Experience  
                     ANNE MARTIN MATTHEWS and CAROLYN J. ROSENTHAL

**Part III   Comparative Ethnographic Accounts  
                     of Kinship and Social Change**

- Chapter 6     Chinese Kinship and the State: Shaping     123  
                     of Policy for the Elderly  
                     CHARLOTTE IKELS
- Chapter 7     Aging and Intergenerational Relations in Spain     147  
                     and Spanish America  
                     STANLEY H. BRANDES

**Part IV   Changing Patterns of Kinship Exchange and Assistance**

- Chapter 8     Kin Structure and Assistance in Aging Societies     169  
                     DENNIS P. HOGAN and LAURA J. SPENCER
- Chapter 9     Intergenerational Transfers: Economic,     187  
                     Demographic, and Social Perspectives  
                     BETH J. SOLDI and MARTHA S. HILL

**Part V   Social Change and the Future of Kin Relationships**

- Chapter 10    Demographic Change and Kin Relationships     219  
                     in Later Life  
                     PETER UHLENBERG
- Chapter 11    Kinship and Family Policy in an Aging Society     239  
                     SANDRA J. TANENBAUM

- Index*     259

---

## Contributors

**Emily M. Agree**

Graduate Student  
Department of Sociology  
Duke University  
Durham, NC 27706

**Vern L. Bengtson, Ph.D.**

AARP/University Professor of  
Gerontology and Professor of Sociology  
University of Southern California  
Los Angeles, CA 90089

**Stanley H. Brandes, Ph.D.**

Professor and Chair  
Department of Anthropology  
University of California at Berkeley  
Berkeley, CA 94720

**Martha S. Hill, Ph.D.**

Associate Research Scientist  
Institute for Social Research  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109

**Dennis P. Hogan, Ph.D.**

Director of the Population Research  
Institute and Professor of Sociology  
The Pennsylvania State University  
University Park, PA 16802

**Charlotte Ikels, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor  
Department of Anthropology  
Case Western Reserve University  
Cleveland, OH 44106

**Victor W. Marshall, Ph.D.**

Director, Centre for Studies of Aging  
University of Toronto  
Toronto, ON  
Canada M5S 2G8

**Anne Martin Matthews, Ph.D.**

Professor, Department of Family Studies  
Director, Gerontology Research Centre  
University of Guelph  
Guelph, ON  
Canada N1G 2W1

**Sarah H. Matthews, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor  
Department of Sociology  
Cleveland State University  
Cleveland, OH 44115

**Angela M. O'Rand, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor  
Department of Sociology  
Duke University  
Durham, NC 27706



**Carolyn J. Rosenthal, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor  
Department of Rehabilitative Medicine  
and Associate Member, Centre for  
Studies of Aging  
University of Toronto  
Toronto, ON  
Canada M5S 2G8

**Merril Silverstein, Ph.D.**

Assistant Research Professor  
Department of Population Studies  
Brown University  
Providence, RI 02912

**Beth J. Soldo, Ph.D.**

Chair and Professor  
Department of Demography  
Georgetown University  
Washington, DC 20057

**Laura J. Spencer**

Graduate Student  
Population Research Institute and  
Department of Sociology  
The Pennsylvania State University  
University Park, PA 16802

**Sandra J. Tanenbaum, Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor  
Division of Hospital and Health  
Services Administration  
College of Medicine  
Ohio State University  
Columbus, OH 43215

**Peter Uhlenberg, Ph.D.**

Professor of Sociology  
Carolina Population Center  
University of North Carolina  
Chapel Hill, NC 27516-3997

---

# FORTHCOMING

## ANNUAL REVIEW OF GERONTOLOGY AND GERIATRICS Volume 14

**M. Powell Lawton**  
**Jeanne Teresi**  
Editors

### Assessment Techniques

#### Introduction

M. POWELL LAWTON AND  
JEANNE TERESI

#### Physical Health

M. POWELL LAWTON AND  
RENÉE LAWRENCE

#### Social Behavior

#### Personality

CAROLYN ALDWIN AND  
MICHAEL LEVINSON

#### Affect

RICHARD SCHULZ

#### Leisure and Productive Activity

ROGER MANNELL

#### Life Events

ALEX ZAUTRA

#### Environment

FRANCES CARP

#### Cognitive and Memory Function

MARILYN ALBERT

#### Activities of Daily Living

MARY GRACE KOVAR AND  
JACK GURALNICK

#### Depression

LARRY THOMPSON AND  
DOLORES GALLAGHER THOMPSON

#### Behavioral Functioning

LINDA TERI

#### Range of Motion, Gait, Biomechanics

#### Pain

PATRICIA PARMELEE

#### Service Use

LAURENCE BRANCH

#### Caregiver Functions

GARY DEIMLING

#### Multidimensional Assessment

LINDA GEORGE

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Introduction

GEORGE L. MADDOX  
DUKE UNIVERSITY

M. POWELL LAWTON  
PHILADELPHIA GERIATRIC CENTER

This volume intends to highlight for research investigators and scholars current developments and advances in theory and research about aging, kinship, and social change. The volume will do that and, we hope, much more. Kinship and family are two of the most fundamental and persistent interests of the social and behavioral sciences and, understandably, generate a lot of descriptive material. We intend for this volume to be more than just another collection of descriptive reports illustrating differential expressions of different and changing kinship and family patterns across societies. Our interest is in understanding the relationship between social change and the changing structure of kin relationships. We want to understand better the consequences of observed social change on kinship arrangements in aging societies, as well as the causes.

Beyond an updating of theory and research on social change and kinship, we intend to illustrate the complementarity of different disciplinary perspectives and their styles of research in enhancing our understanding of kinship and social change. We have consciously included among our authors some newer names from a variety of disciplines along with some well-known gerontologists. We have included some experienced performers who can summarize decades of their own experience and recommend with some confidence what is likely to be on the research agenda for the next decade. We have juxtaposed investigators who are comfortable with survey research data characterizing large national populations, and those who insist gerontologists should concentrate more on the interior of family relationships in which meaning and the possibility of human agency in daily living as revealed in intimate observations of families. Field studies, some argue, are where the action ought to be in research on kinship and families. In response, we have juxtaposed ethnographic studies of single societies with comparative sociological studies of many societies. The potential contributions of sociologists, anthropologists, demographers, economists, and

policy analysts are displayed and their contributions to our understanding can be assessed.

We also encouraged our authors to consider, if they were inclined, the implications of their findings for social policy analysis, formation and evaluation. Several of the chapters explore explicitly the relevance of social and behavioral research for understanding policy issues and options. The consequences of existing social policy, explicit or implicit, and better understanding of how policies for an aging society might be changed beneficially are also insightfully explored.

## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT SOCIAL CHANGE AND KINSHIP

Almost three decades have passed since Ethel Shanas and Gordon Streib edited their notable volume *Social Structure and the Family* (1965). The authors, writing in that volume, were quite aware that persistent and rather rapid social change was continuing to differentiate the ways in which kinship institutions and families were structured and how they functioned. Although noting the extensive differentiation of family form and generational relationships three decades ago, these scholars dismissed the common predictions that existed then about diminishing kinship bonds or the decreased importance of families in everyday life of older adults in aging societies. Rather, they stressed evidence of creative individual and societal coping and adaptation as reflected in several useful concepts that are still in use today—*revokable detachment* and *intimacy at a distance*. Older members of families in all observed societies can, to a remarkable degree, depend on the bonds of kinship to ensure reliable emotional and instrumental support, even when social change is extensive and rapid.

A decade later Ethel Shanas (1979) noted, contrary to commonsense prediction, the persistence of the mythology of abandonment of older kin by families. The explanation of this persistence is not found in empirical evidence from any society, Shanas reaffirmed, even those societies experiencing rapid social change and often described in an earlier literature as *modernized*. The authors of this *Annual Review* clearly perceive that, although the venerable myth of abandonment is encountered occasionally, it is no longer interesting to scholars and research investigators. Current interest is not on whether groups bonded by kinship persist but how and why they adapt as effectively as they do in response to societal change.

## THE COMPLEMENTARITY OF DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

For this volume we sought authors who do not publish exclusively or even primarily in gerontological journals. We have noted in the past a tendency of behavioral and social scientist who publish in gerontological journals not to

reference research on aging published in disciplinary journals (Maddox, 1978). The explanation of this cannot be that relevant research is not published elsewhere. Similarly, when one reads research on aging issues published in non-gerontological journals, disciplinary authors return the favor; few references to gerontological journals are observed. Test this generalization in your own experience. Begin by noting the distribution of the references to recognizable gerontological and other publications in the disciplinary journals you read most often. Then note the references in the chapters of this volume which, we hope, will broaden your horizons a bit.

## **A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

Fair comparisons are the essence of scientific and scholarly inquiry. A comparative perspective is clearly featured in this volume in a variety of ways. This perspective is illustrated by attention to social change and kinship issues variously in the Americas, in Europe, and, to a more limited degree, in the Pacific Rim. The volume does not promise full geographic coverage of kinship and social change but rather enough breadth to establish that some of the effects of social change on institutions of kinship are worldwide. Although some convergence in adaptation to social change is documented in the comparative analyses reported in this volume, differential responses are evident across societies. This is an important observation. We have known for a long time that a variety of observed familial arrangements and forms of kin networking apparently provide or facilitate workable arrangement of essential support and services for older adults. Contemporary research continues to document that a variety of kinship arrangements still appear to be tolerably effective in affirming intergenerational solidarity and essential intergenerational support.

## **DIFFERENTIATION, MODIFIABILITY, AND PUBLIC POLICY**

Social and behavioral gerontology have historically been deliberately multidisciplinary and activist (Maddox & Wiley, 1976). This characterization probably has a relatively simple explanation. Astute observers of older people in naturalistic community settings a half-century ago could not take seriously the proposition that the observed varieties of older people and of the experience of aging was reducible to biology or, more generally, reducible to the theory of any particular scientific discipline for that matter. The observed differentiation of aging processes and outcomes both within and between societies required explanation, and an obvious explanation was that differential opportunity and access to essential social resources are associated with differential longevity and the experience of well-being. An obvious inference follows such an observation. One should expect that some aspects of aging processes and the experi-

ence of aging are modifiable through purposive interventions as obvious as income maintenance, access to health care, access to housing, and opportunities for education. Social policies in aging societies, explicit or implicit, are expressions of politically consensual notions about the appropriateness of purposive interventions intended to facilitate aging well among adults as they grow older (Maddox, 1987).

In this volume the different social policies of societies with aging populations are implicitly, sometimes explicitly, factored into comparative analysis of kinship and families and their consequences. Several chapters address policy issues and the uses of research evidence to assist in policy formation or policy evaluation. The assumption that aging processes are modifiable and perhaps so through social policy and purposive interventions is explicit in several chapters of this volume.

## CLARIFYING CONCEPTS

In various chapters the importance of conceptual clarity in discussions of kinship is stressed and illustrated. When we decided to focus this volume on kinship, social change, and aging, we deliberately chose *kinship* over *family* as a key word. *Kinship*, we thought, evoked a notion of the structure of a particular type of human bond in a broader more emotionally neutral way than *family*, which we felt was more likely to evoke the stereotypic notion of the nuclear family (mother, father, and minor children) familiar in the United States. We reckoned without the powerful linguistic preference of our authors, who insisted on referring in chapter titles and discussion to *family*. Understanding what authors mean by *family* or *kinship* and how they operationalize these concepts in research is essential for readers.

As editors we let discretion rule and have allowed authors to discuss family and kinship as though they are interchangeable. We remind readers, however, that kinship refers fundamentally to a complex, but pervasive, type of human bonding related to lineages across generations that has taken many different forms historically and continues to do so across contemporary societies. We do warn readers against assuming we can refer to *the family* as though there has ever been or is now a universal expression of a single form of bonding among kin in aging societies or in any other.

Soldo and Hill's view of exchange currencies between generations (time, space, and money) suggests further amplification, for example, with affective exchange as a fourth currency. Affective exchange and affective solidarity are mentioned in several of the chapters and are important issues for anthropologists and other scholars who emphasize the qualitative outcomes of exchange relationships. The currency of affective exchange may elude simple measurement but the importance of operationalizing the concept is evident.

## **THE SOCIOCULTURAL EMBEDDEDNESS OF FAMILY AND KINSHIP**

The interconnectedness of kinship structures, the workplace, and the practical politics of resource allocation through public policy is a recurrent theme in this volume. The theme is as prominent in the chapters written both by anthropologists and those written by social scientists. The chapter by Tannenbaum features the dimensions of this institutional interconnectedness in her discussion of policy development in aging societies.

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CHAPTERS**

When a topic such as kinship is addressed by a group as diverse as that of the authors of this volume, one of the rewards is the many views of similar phenomena portrayed in the chapters. Although a sociological perspective is dominant in the volume, the perspectives of demographers, economists, anthropologists, and political scientists are evident as well. Although each chapter has a unique message, cumulatively the chapters provide complementary insights from research illustrating different contexts in which authors assess similar data. An overview of highlights in the volume will focus on the chapters in each section. Within this overview a number of cross-cutting themes will be evident.

### **Theory and Research**

Vern Bengtson and Merrill Silverstein provide a traditional characterization of developmental phases in the study of social change, kinship, and aging. In this characterization the aged are described as traditionally revered in premodern societies; with the social changes that produce modern technological societies, the putatively isolated elderly, and the vulnerable care-receiving frail aged are increasingly at risk. Aging, however, does not produce homogeneity. Current scientific emphasis is clearly on diversity of families with elders and on the differential "family values" of elders. Development in ways of thinking about families found in academic publications in recent decades are presented in some detail in the next chapter by Victor Marshall, Sarah Matthews, and Carolyn Rosenthal.

The bulk of Bengtson and Silverstein's chapter portrays several themes that have preoccupied and will continue to preoccupy contemporary gerontologists. These themes begin with highlighting the heterogeneity and diversity of families in aging societies illustrated variously by age distributions, gender, ethnicity, marital status, migration, fertility, and intergenerational co-residence. Other major themes are the diversity and reciprocity of social support across generations; changing patterns of health, illness, and longevity in aging populations;



the political and policy conflicts generated by the issue of intergenerational equity and justice. These themes reappear in the chapters that follow.

Bengtson and Silverstein show how each of these themes relates to social issues of the present and they suggest new theory and methods to be applied to each. For example, heterogeneity in family structure illustrated by gender, ethnicity, and generational differentiation have only very recently been recognized as a dominant focus for the emerging agenda for research in aging in the decade ahead. Future changes in population aging forecasts by present demographic data will demand an increase in research that recognizes heterogeneity of aging populations. Other topics in need of much more probing inquiry include social support, which although certainly an overdone topic, is nonetheless strangely lacking in research that probes the dynamic processes underlying alternative strategies of support. Bengtson and Silverstein's conclusions regarding key issues on the research agenda are confirmed substantially by the chapters that follow.

Chapter 2 presents a theoretical and methodological critique of overdependence on social survey research in research on kinship and families in aging societies. Marshall, Matthews, and Rosenthal argue persuasively in favor of the use of structural concepts, of treating families as social groups, and of using new methodologies that go beyond survey questions to explore the interpersonal interiors of kin groupings. Their very clear distinctions among related concepts of social structure, social systems, culture, and personal meaning illustrate the focus of their conceptual and methodological interests. Despite the fact that families and kinship groups are social aggregates, most of the relevant literature has applied the methods of study that focus on individuals, to the detriment of our ability to learn about the special properties of families as dynamic social groups. Research on personal meaning in later life requires that one know the individuals; yet even here, one must understand how personal meaning arises from and is shaped through social interaction. Such an approach, which places individuals in the context of families, has the best chance of displaying the complex patterns by which the individual and the aggregate interact in everyday life, these authors argue. This chapter ends with some concrete suggestions about how typologies of families may assist in studies of whole families.

## **The Changing Balance of Work and Family**

This section focuses explicitly on work and family, beginning in Chapter 3 with Angela O'Rand and Emily Agree's analysis of work and family as objects of social policy and their reflections on social change studied comparatively in a broad range of contemporary industrial societies. History and current research both reveal a major change in the relation between work and the family. The

change has occurred at many levels, including that of gender stratification. The prototype model early in this century (the “Fordist—Henry, that is”—model) produced in the long-term dependence of families on the workplace; further, it increased the likelihood that such dependence would be accompanied by an extended, perhaps lifelong, employment for males. Gaps in such continuity for males, if they occurred, were often filled by support from the extended family. In the present, in contrast, women are increasingly in the workplace, there is less dependable assistance from an extended family, and careers and the implied commitments of the workplace to workers have decreased. The costs of such changes are perhaps compensated in part by growing gender equity and the beginning of greater flexibility in working conditions of both males and females. Just how one assesses the balance of these changes is debatable and debated.

O’Rand and Agree see emerging a “new moral economy” and an evolving “familial corporation,” that intertwine familial and work processes in new ways reflecting the evolving contemporary social order. They conclude that the central government probably must play a role in maintaining quality control to enhance satisfaction of both private-corporate and individual needs as new work and family arrangements emerge. Hope for satisfaction of both corporate and individual needs will be facilitated by a “communitarianism” perspective regarding public-private interaction as a new moral economy emerges.

The same basic topic is treated from a Canadian perspective by Anne Martin Matthews and Carolyn Rosenthal in Chapter 4. Compared to O’Rand and Agree’s social historical and comparative approach, Martin Matthews and Rosenthal review current research in Canada bearing on the way work and family interact, with special emphasis on family responsibility for caregiving. The demographic forces reviewed in the two chapters affirm the similarity of experience in North America. New survey data from the authors’ own work and other Canadian sources document many of the structural features noted by O’Rand and Agree about how work and family roles are combined.

Martin Matthews and Rosenthal make a useful distinction between job problems and personal problems, reminding us of the generality of, and therefore the social policy relevance of, some of the potential conflicts between work and family roles. They point up particularly the disadvantages faced by women and the very limited benefits yet experienced by women in the workplace. As do other authors in this volume, Matthews and Rosenthal conclude that the joint prevalence of high levels of multigenerational responsibility of women for caregiving to both an older and a younger generation is, fortunately, low. Problem solving on a national level through public policy, thus, must concentrate on a small but highly needy group of women coping with very high multigenerational caregiving demands and work-related decisions. No single, simple, effective solutions for such problems are evident currently.

## Comparative Ethnographic Accounts of Kinship and Social Change

The Canadian experience in balancing changing patterns of work and family responsibilities is followed by two other chapters with a comparative international focus, this time from an anthropological perspective. Charlotte Ikels (Chapter 5) writes about how older Chinese fare differently in China, Hong Kong, and in the United States. Like the authors of the preceding chapters, Ikels emphasizes the fluid nature of the relationship between work and family and different perspectives on the responsibility of families and of the state for older members. Like O'Rand and Agree, she finds a close relationship between how the members of families fare and the political goals of the state. Very different support practices occur in urban as compared to rural areas of China, and observed practices exhibit a clear connection with the policies and the perceived expense of services the state is willing to support. For example, because of the Chinese central government's debt to its worker constituency, most centralized benefits go to retired urban workers. But, because of their policy position on limiting birth, the state in China must take special pain to provide for childless elders. In this context, traditional values regarding intrafamilial exchange have been modified and applied differently in urban and rural areas. By contrast, most social policy involving older adults in Hong Kong has emphasized independence, minimized state assistance, and sought to amplify the felt compulsion of families to provide the safety net for members. One expects that the experience of Chinese in the United States will progressively become similar to the experience of Chinese in Hong Kong.

Stanley Brandes, writing about aging and intergenerational relations in Spain and Spanish America (Mexico), focuses on poor, peasant-economy towns in two countries as a *locii* in Chapter 6. As an ethnographer, Brandes has experienced living in the communities he described, thus provides first-hand knowledge of the processes and the affective aspects of intergenerational exchanges in kin groups experiencing social change. He notes a central aspect of obscure intergenerational exchange: It is impossible, he writes, to overlook that people who love one another also calculate more or less openly the tangible benefits to be derived from their kinship ties. Differences in exchange practices are particularly notable within a household. In the Mexican town he describes, Brandes notes rules of inheritance that specify a succession of coresidences beginning with the first-to-marry son, replaced by those who marry later, until the youngest son, who bears ultimate and often longest responsibility for the parents, inherits the home on the parents' death. In the Spanish town, elders live empty-nest style after children marry; but when assistance becomes necessary, a rotational system is established requiring children actually to move to the parents' home, sharing care responsibilities successively over a year. Brandes concludes that, even as the state begins to assume greater responsibility for the aged and some of the mechanics of family assistance change, the result will nevertheless

be one in which family cohesiveness is likely to remain greater in Mexico and Spain than in the United States.

### **Changing Patterns of Kinship Exchange and Assistance**

The theme of change continues in the chapters by Dennis Hogan and Laura Spencer (Chapter 7) and by Beth Soldo and Martha Hill (Chapter 8). Hogan and Spencer provide a demographic overview relevant to their topic using a recently available new dataset. The newness of the 1986–1987 supplements to the International Social Survey Program's (ISSP) national surveys justifies the space given to the original data analysis in this chapter. Similarity of demographic changes—especially ones toward decreased mortality and decreased fertility—are the basis for choosing the United States, Australia, West Germany, Great Britain, Austria, Hungary, and Italy to study comparatively. These data provide additional confirmation of many of the traditional conclusions about the continuing importance and availability of family interaction as populations age.

The Hogan and Spencer study examines why the structure of kinship (generational kin, lateral kin, other kin, and no kin) and the person's position in the kinship structure are predictors of an individual's expectancy that help will be forthcoming from any number of named kin, friends, formal sources, and others for assistance with household tasks, illness, financial aid, interpersonal problems, depression, and advice. Although the details of the results add much new cross-national information confirming many previous generalizations, the data also reveal differences in kinship support patterns observed among Americans, differences that are understandable in light of differences in policies regarding state-supported financial assistance. Notable among their findings is the relative unimportance of differences in kin structures for either the actual prevalence or even the expectations of older adults about assistance from kin.

Soldo and Hill bring the volume back conceptually to the overviews of Bengtson and Silverstein and especially of Marshall, Matthews, and Rosenthal in their emphasis on clear conceptualization of social support in aging research. Specifically, in their integration of demographic, economic, and social-psychological perspectives on generational exchange, Soldo and Hill provide an extremely useful conceptual framework for differentiating types of assistance that will advance future research. Their chapter title, "Intergenerational Transfers," emphasizes the interrelatedness and reciprocity of three media of transfer—money, time (assistance), and space (housing). They further organize their inquiry into this tripartite view of transfer into questions of the direction of the transfer (giving versus receiving), generation, and time (period of lifespan when transfers occur). In the process they discuss a variety of topics such as theories of transfer, motives for transfer, and many empirical findings on the nature of

different types of transfers. As noted by other authors in this volume, the flow of transfers in all currencies is strongly from parent to child, with moderation of the flow as the family cycle, age, and health change. Throughout their analysis the complexity of the effects and the importance of allowing alternatives to the usual pattern of flow to be considered are stressed. Their conclusion that the attempt to comprehend transfers must always include knowledge of the "needs, resources, and competing claims" on the multiple members of the kinship and related groups is particularly important.

### **The Future of Kin Relationships**

The concluding section appropriately focuses on the future from two very different perspectives. Peter Uhlenberg (Chapter 9) explores predictions of the future of kin relationships using presently available demographic data while Sandra Tannenbaum (Chapter 10) treats recent sociopolitical phenomena as knowledge essential for understanding where future social policy might or is likely to go.

Uhlenberg's use of demographic data emphasizes how some aspects of future kinship structure are already determined, or will be certain to be influenced by past behavior, particularly fertility. Migration, geographic distribution, and kin structure are processes with potential effects on the kin relationships of the future. The major thrust of Uhlenberg's analysis revolves around a contrast between "the standard account" of the changing demography's effect on kin relations and an account revised in terms of more detailed analyses of past behaviors and projections into the future. Demographic data cited by many investigators can be interpreted to suggest a growing scarcity of kin available to older people. Some weaknesses in such a conclusion are identified by Uhlenberg, who suggests on the contrary that mobility is decreasing; that childlessness among elders will decrease for a number of decades; that family forms will become more diverse; that projections based on sheer numbers (for example, number of children available) are more useful than a critical value (for example, having one or two children); that projected changes in proportions of unusual forms (such as five-generation families) cannot be interpreted without reference to their population prevalence. After reading Uhlenberg's chapter one will have a much more accurate picture of the types and the magnitude of expectable changes in kin relationships in the United States. He ends by acknowledging that some likely changes will be problematic. First, the negative, isolating aspects of family diversity, particularly an increasing proportion of aged males only loosely connected to kin groupings, may result in loosened ties with kin generally. Second, Uhlenberg wonders whether the normative expectations of support for parents by children of the baby-boom cohort may be eroded by the sociocultural stresses associated with population age distribution and the changed ratio of supporting and supported family members.

The final chapter, "Kinship and public policy in an aging society" constitutes this volume's most direct treatment of the sociopolitics of kin and caregiving functions. Like Uhlenberg, Tannenbaum begins with the proposition: "family policy is about families first." Much of the caregiving literature reviewed does not reflect this elemental expectation. Public policy tends to focus on individuals, not on families. Our usual concern tends to focus on demonstrating that policy initiatives to assist older individuals do not result in public services that substitute for existing family service exchanges when formal assistance is added. Tannenbaum suggests that most of the literature addressing the issue of substitution is reassuring. The availability of services for elders with problems affects the well-being of both individuals and families favorably. She cautions that this is only one question to be addressed by policy, important as it may be. Adequate policy for an aging society must also consider the social and political institutions that form the context within which family caregiving occurs, particularly issues of work, income, and health.

In addressing the larger issues of how different social policies intersect, Tannenbaum reviews some of the writings from the "critical" school in gerontological policy analysis. This perspective has called attention to family policies as tools of interest groups whose objective may be to reduce the level of governmental and business costs traceable to public programs for older adults. The interests of the aging family as well as the aging individual suffer from having family policy perceived primarily as the means of economic cost reduction rather than the means for improved well being of older adults and their families.

Tannenbaum's own position is that the benefits of aging policies are determined partly by the basic philosophy of the program proposed. In *universal* programs (e.g., Social Security and Medicare) the family is benefited. In *means-tested* programs (e.g., Medicaid and SSI), there are frequently disincentives for family care. Home care represents a more ambiguous situation, in which the family is sometimes benefited and sometimes penalized by public policy as conflicting goals of economic and social well-being of the larger society arise. Her suggestions are to turn long-term care into a universal program that mixes formal and informal care according to the needs and preferences of family and elder.

In sum, these chapters reveal instructively the dynamics of kin relationships responding in complex but effective ways to social change as the world's population ages.

## REFERENCES

- Maddox, G. L. (1978). Sociology of later life. In A. Inkeles, J. Coleman, & R. H. Turner (Eds.), *Annual review of sociology*, Vol. 5 (pp. 113-135). Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews.

- Maddox, G. L. (1987). Aging differently. *The Gerontologist*, 27(5), 557-564.
- Maddox, G. L., & Wiley, J. (1976). Scope, context, and methods in the study of aging. In R. H. Binstock & E. Shanas (Eds.), *Handbook of aging and the social sciences*. (pp. 3-34). New York: Von Nostrand Reinhold.
- Shanas, E. (1979). Social myth or hypothesis: the case of the family relations of old people. *The Gerontologist*, 19, 3-9.
- Shanas, E., & Streib, G. F. (Eds.). (1965). *Social structure and the family: Generational relations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

**PART I**

---

**An Overview of Theory  
and Research**



*This page intentionally left blank*

# **Families, Aging, and Social Change: Seven Agendas for 21st-Century Researchers**

VERN L. BENGTSON

AARP/UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

MERRIL SILVERSTEIN

DEPARTMENT OF POPULATION STUDIES, BROWN UNIVERSITY

Gerontology is a relatively young science, and the first empirical studies focusing on family issues associated with aging were published only a half-century ago. In the history of science this is an extremely short time frame in which to develop knowledge concerning specific phenomena. To establish empirical generalizations, develop relevant conceptual groupings, construct and test hypotheses, and suggest theories to explain empirical regularities, each is a crucial step in the process of scientific knowledge-development, and each takes time to develop.

Nevertheless the social changes experienced during recent decades regarding aging—principally demographic, with attendant socioeconomic and policy consequences—have focused attention on the problems of families and aging to an unprecedented degree. First, as Rosow (1965) noted, there were questions of the social integration of the aged—when kin were not the primary source of integration and support, as in “traditional” societies. Second, as Shanas (1979) described it, there was the “hydra-headed” stereotype of American elders isolated from or abandoned by their kin—a stereotype quite unsupported by the accumulating research studies to date. Third, there was the emerging issue of elder caregiving, particularly by the “generation in the middle” (Brody, 1985): females caught up between demands by elderly parents and parents-in-law, and their own children. Fourth, there was the theme of increasing diversity and heterogeneity among America’s aging families (Bengtson, Rosenthal & Burton, 1990), suggesting that more attention be given to alternative forms of family and generational structure reflected in our society’s current demographic composition. Finally, there are the policy and political issues concerning “family values” that briefly became such a partisan focus during the 1992 presidential campaign—until nonpartisan questions about what was meant by “family” and “values” suggested that the framing of this issue was meaningless.

During this period, thoughtful reviews of the relevant research literature on the topic of family and aging were crafted by Troll (1971), Sussman (1976), Streib and Beck (1980), Brubaker (1991a), and Mancini and Blieszner (1989). In addition several books were published that focused on specific themes regarding aging and the family or that were seminal in teaching about the aging family: Troll, Miller, and Atchley (1979); Brubaker (1991b); Mangen, Bengtson, and Landry (1988); Bengtson and Robertson (1985); Mancini and Blieszner (1989).

Any systematic review of the publications cited previously, and of the subsequent chapters of this *Annual Review of Gerontology and Geriatrics* volume, will suggest the following conclusion: Despite the short history of empirical research on families and aging, we have accumulated to date (a) many empirical generalizations; (b) several conceptual groupings of results; (c) some plausible hypotheses; and (d) few theories to explain phenomena.

In this chapter we want to provide both an overview of previous research themes on aging and the family, and a preview of agendas that we suspect future researchers will be addressing in the early decades of the 21st century of gerontological studies about the family. We have organized our review in terms of seven topics that are emerging as scholars turn their attention to problems of families, aging, and social change: (a) heterogeneity and diversity in aging families; (b) the demographic context of aging and families; (c) social supports and aging families; (d) health issues and aging family members; (e) crises and competencies as negotiated by aging families; (f) political and policy conflicts over "generational justice"; and (g) conceptual and theoretical tools needed to develop better knowledge about the aging family.

## HETEROGENEITY AND DIVERSITY AMONG AGING FAMILIES

Although research on families and aging in the 1980s produced many important findings, perhaps the single most important new theme to emerge has been the awareness of the heterogeneity in contemporary American family organization patterns, and the consequent diversity of family supports, problems, and potentials for family elders (see the review by Bengtson, Rosenthal & Burton, 1990). This new awareness of diversity can be seen in four specific areas (summarized subsequently); it constitutes what we believe will be the primary research agenda for the early 21st century of family researchers in aging.

### Diversity by Age: From "Pyramid" to "Bean-Pole" Family Structure

It must be recognized that today's elderly Americans, particularly those who were born 70, 80, and 90 years ago, are growing older in families that are qualitatively and quantitatively different from those of their grandparents' genera-

tion. This can be seen in terms of both the structure and the duration of family roles and relationships (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Uhlenberg, 1978; Wells, 1982). For example, unlike the two- and three-generation family structure typical of their predecessors, with four or five siblings in each generation, today and tomorrow's elderly are more likely to be part of four- (and occasionally five-) generation families, with many fewer members per generation of siblings.

This new modal pattern of intergenerational structure has been termed the "beanpole family" (Bengtson, Rosenthal, & Burton, 1990). The product of dual demographic changes of declining mortality and declining fertility, it has also been called "verticalization" (Hagestad, 1986; Knipscheer, 1988). Although only one of several intergenerational structures characterizing contemporary families (see later discussion), it is probably the most striking example of the new diversity, by age, of intergenerational forms. Although having fewer children and living longer has many implications for old age, perhaps the most important is the lengthened time spent in intergenerational family roles. The contrast to earlier periods is striking: In 1980, for example, women spent four times the number of years as a daughter with both parents alive than did women more than a century ago (Watkins, Menken, & Bongaarts, 1987). In Canada, about 2% of those older than age 60 in 1960 had living parents; by 2200, when those born in 1960 will themselves be 60, almost 25% will have living parents (Gee, 1987).

### Diversity by Gender

A second aspect of diversity receiving increased attention concerns gender differences in family roles and relationships through life (Rossi, 1984). Women are the primary "kinkeepers" (Rosenthal, 1985) as well as "caregivers" of dependent elders (Gatz, Blum, & Bengtson, 1990). Later in this chapter we comment on gender differences in social support and health behaviors. For now, we wish to point to only those implications of extended life-span for gender contrasts in family roles and relationships.

One gender contrast involves the duration of time spent in parental and grandparental roles. With median age of entry to grandparenthood estimated at 45 years (Sprey & Matthews, 1982) many women today will spend more than half their lives as grandmothers. Because women outlive men by about 7 years, and marry later than women, many men die before they experience durations in family roles comparable with females. Second, widowhood is experienced more frequently, and for longer periods, for women than for men: 46% of women versus 11% of men are widows at age 70 (Sweet & Bumpass, 1987). Third, remarriage—whether after widowhood or following divorce—is more likely for men than women, with the differential by gender becoming greater at each birth-day (Uhlenberg, 1980).

## Diversity by Family Forms and Structure

In addition to the increase in "bean-pole" families and changes in the duration of family roles for women and men, the social and demographic changes in the last half-century have produced several variable patterns in intergenerational family structure and roles. These include the following:

1. *Age-condensed intergenerational patterns*: Teenage pregnancy often occurs across multiple generations, which as Burton (1985) has described can result in age differences of 15 to 18 years between each of five or six generations. Although this may characterize a minority of intergenerational kinships, it is an important and unprecedented development.
2. *Age-gapped intergenerational patterns*: Delayed parenting creates the opposite pattern. In families of professional women the age distance between generations may be 35 to 40 years, as described by Troll (1985).
3. *Childlessness*: The rate of voluntary childlessness appears to be steadily increasing (Parke, 1988), which means the options for receiving care in old age may become quite limited (Bengtson et al., 1990).
4. *Step-parenting and step-grandparenting*: One out of every two Americans will divorce and remarry; of these, one in five will divorce and remarry again (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1987). This has many implications for intergenerational family life (Aldous, 1987; Matthews, 1987), which have only begun to be studied.
5. *Gay and lesbian couplehood*: A growing body of research documents alternative family forms in old age, of which the most common may be same-sex couplehood (Allen, 1989, 1992; Hubbard, 1992). Their consequences for intergenerational and kin relationships across the life course have only begun to be investigated.
6. *Matriarchal family patterns*: Particularly among poverty-level and some ethnic/racial minority groups, the matriarchal intergenerational structure may be the most common family structure. For example, half of all births to black women in 1986 occurred to women who were not married (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1987). Older black women are called on often by their daughters and granddaughters to serve as the "other parent" for their children (Burton, 1990). Older women are more likely to share a household, and to assist with childrearing and economic pressures of single parenthood (Wilson, 1987). The intergenerational consequences of such matriarchal patterns are only beginning to be examined (Burton, Dilworth-Anderson, & Bengtson, 1992).
7. *Sibling-based family patterns*: Among today's cohorts of elderly, almost as many have surviving siblings as have surviving children (Shanas & Hineman, 1982). Their patterns of interaction can be described in terms of family solidarity (see the reviews by Bengtson, Rosenthal, & Burton, 1990; Cicirelli, 1985; Connidis, 1989; Gold, 1989; Martin-Matthews, 1987).