

Vern L. Bengtson and Ariela Lowenstein, editors.
Global Aging and Challenges to Families.

Aldine de Gruyter, 2003, 387pp.

\$US 27.95 paper (0-202-30687-9), \$US 55.95 hardcover (0-202-30686-0)

This volume brings together the contributions of scholars from a number of countries on current research about aging, families, and social support. The book contains 18 chapters by experts from the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Spain, Norway, Korea, Israel, The Netherlands, Germany, and Japan. Despite its title, this book is not really about population aging. Apart from the introduction and conclusion by the editors, this book does not examine global aging, but it presents an array of papers mainly addressing aspects of intergenerational social support. The analyses presented here consider the implications of cultural and social changes for intergenerational relations and support in later-life families within diverse societies and family structures and under changing family policies.

The chapters are organized into five sections. They are: 1) Theoretical Perspectives: Intergenerational Social Support in Multiple Contexts; 2) Theoretical Perspectives: The Role of Intergenerational Social Support; 3) Intrasociety Diversity in Intergenerational Support; 4) Intrasociety Changes in Intergenerational Support; and, 5) Intra- and Intersociety Differences and Social Change. However, there are some problems in the relationship between the section headings and the contents of the sections. For example, both sections on theoretical perspectives contain papers that are as concerned, or more concerned, with the presentation of data analyses than they are with theory development. These papers are no more theoretical than Aboderin's paper on family in Ghana, which contains a good discussion of modernization theory, but which does not appear in either of the theory sections. Also, the section on Intrasociety Diversity in Intergenerational Support contains a chapter on Israeli attitudes about inter vivos transfers which presents the notable conclusion that intrasociety differences are nonexistent. Ethnic origin appears to play no role in determining transfer attitudes in Israel. It is hard to know why a chapter like this appears in the section on Intrasociety Diversity in Intergenerational Support.

With one exception, the quality of the individual papers is high. However, in general, this is not a well integrated book. The chapters are diverse, and they are not tied together by the introduction. The editors do provide a conclusion that identifies issues that run through the book.

The most important theme in this book concerns the salience of intergenerational ties. The argument is made that the extended family continues to fulfill important functions in contemporary societies (Litwak, Silverstein, Bengtson and Hirst), and the intergenerational dimension of these ties is seen as being of increased importance due to greater longevity and the increased availability of grandparents (Bengtson, Lowenstein, Putney and Gans). Relationships between grandchildren and their grandparents are conceptualized as consisting of five dimensions of intergenerational solidarity (Silverstein, Giarrusso and Bengtson). In contrast, Hazan documents cases in later life in which a shift takes place from filial support to conjugal care giving. Modern old age is seen not as a developmental outcome of intergenerational continuity, but as a reflection of cross-generational schism.

On the positive side of intergenerational relationships, Kohli and Künemund report from a sample of retirees in Germany that unconditional altruism is the dominant motive for giving to family members. Spilerman and Elmelech report considerable support for inter vivos transfers between parents and adult children among Jews in Israel. In contemporary Korea, intergenerational transfers are widespread (Eun). Attias-Donfut reports from France that financial transfers tend to go down the generations, but services are widely distributed between each generation, both downward and upward. On the negative side of intergenerational relationships, Knipscheer and van Tilburg note that some older people are lonely. Also on the negative side of intergenerational relationships, Aboderin discusses the reasons for declining family support for the elderly in Ghana.

A second important theme concerns the effects of social change upon family ties. Demographic change in the form of lower fertility and increased longevity has changed the shape of the extended family from a pyramid structure to a beanpole structure (Bengtson, Lowenstein, Putney and Gans). Also, increased divorce has led to greater complexity of family ties and increased reliance on friends (Phillipson), and has made maintaining ties with grandchildren more difficult for paternal grandparents (Silverstein, Giarrusso and Bengtson). Attias-Donfut reports from a study in France that divorced women or men have less intense relations with their children than married women or men, and relations between grandchildren and grandparents tend to taper off significantly. Another factor of change is increased employment by young women. The effect of this has been that the younger generation has an increased probability of receiving help with childcare from mothers than the older generations had. In this context, Attias-Donfut argues that there is a new contract between generations of women. Eun examines the changing role of the family in caring for the elderly in Korea. Younger generations do not want to give the burden of caregiver to the eldest son, as was done in the past, but most of them regard any children who are able and willing to provide support as the primary caregiver. Furthermore, the living arrangements of the elderly have changed significantly, as the proportion living as dependents in a household headed by a child has been greatly reduced. The frequency of intergenerational coresidence has also fallen in Japan, while that of living alone or living with spouse only has increased (Koyano).

The third important theme is the relationship between the elderly, families and the state. Litwin examines the relationship between a number of variables and receipt of publicly funded home care by older adults in Israel. The findings in this analysis support the contention that older people who belong to weaker network structures make greater use of formal public support. Attias-Donfut notes that private transfers among generations go in the opposite direction to the transfers of public resources that take place through the retirement pension system. A different line of thinking is followed by Biggs and Powell, who discuss how policy discourses about the elderly change with changes in political regime. Eun examines the discourse of Confucianism in Korea, and concludes that the state still relies on the family to provide support for the elderly.

A fourth theme is comparative research on intergenerational relations in five countries with different family and social policy traditions. Katz, Daatland, Lowenstein, Bazo, Ancizu, Herlofson, Mehlhausen-Hassoen and Prilutzky report on family norms and preferences regarding intergenerational relations and the proper expected balance between family and state responsibilities. Motel-Klingebiel, Tesch-Roemer and von Kondratowitz explore the role of family and its contribution to quality of life in old age.

This book will be of interest to social gerontologists as well as sociologists of family.

David Cheal
University of Winnipeg
cheal@io.uwinnipeg.ca

David Cheal is the author of *Sociology of Family Life* (Palgrave) and the editor of *Aging and Demographic Change in Canadian Context* (University of Toronto Press). In the May-June 2000 *CJS Online* he reviewed Rod Beaujot's *Earning and Caring in Canadian Families*.

<http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/cjscopy/reviews/globalaging.html>

March 2004

© Canadian Journal of Sociology Online

CJS Online