

[i: half-title page]

Families in Later Life

TITLES OF RELATED INTEREST FROM PINE FORGE PRESS

Critical Thinking for Social Workers: A Workbook, rev. ed., by Leonard Gibbs and Eileen Gambrill

Exploring Social Issues Using SPSS for Windows, 2nd ed., by Joseph F. Healey, John Boli, Earl Babbie, and Fred Halley

Dimensions of Human Behavior: The Changing Life Course, by Elizabeth Hutchison

Dimensions of Human Behavior: Person and Environment, by Elizabeth Hutchison

The Social Workout Book: Strength-Building Exercises for the Pre-Professional, by Alice Lieberman

Aging: Concepts and Controversies, 3rd ed., by Harry R. Moody

Aging: The Social Context, by Leslie Morgan and Suzanne Kunkel

Aging, Social Inequality, and Public Policy, by Fred C. Pampel

Worlds of Difference: Inequality in the Aging Experience, 3rd ed., by Eleanor Palo Stoller and Rose Campbell Gibson

Community Resources for Older Adults: Programs and Services in an Era of Change, by Robbyn R. Wacker, Karen A. Roberto, and Linda E. Piper

[iii: title page]

Families in Later Life
Connections and Transitions

by
Alexis J. Walker
Margaret Manoogian-O'Dell
Lori A. McGraw
Diana White



PINE FORGE PRESS
Thousand Oaks, California
London New Delhi

Copyright © 2000 by Pine Forge Press

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

For information, address:



Pine Forge Press

A Sage Publications Company
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320
E-mail: sales@pfp.sagepub.com

Sage Publications Ltd.
6 Bonhill Street
London EC2A 4PU
United Kingdom

Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
M-32 Market
Greater Kailash I
New Delhi 110 048 India

Publisher: Stephen Rutter

Assistant to the Publisher: Ann Makarias

Production Editor: Diana Axelsen

Editorial Assistant: Cindy Bear

Copy Editor: Alison Binder

Typesetter: Lynn Miyata

Printed in the United States of America

00 01 02 03 04 05 06 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Main entry under title:

Families in later life: Connections and transitions /
by Alexis J. Walker . . . [et al.].

p. cm.—

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7619-8702-9 (pbk.: alk. paper)

1. Aged—United States—Family relationships. 2. Aged—United States—Social conditions. I. Walker, Alexis Joan, 1952–

HQ1064.U5 F288 2000

305.26'0973—dc21

00-009551

About the Authors

Alexis J. Walker holds the Jo Anne Leonard Petersen Chair in Gerontology and Family Studies and is Professor of Human Development and Family Sciences at Oregon State University, where she directs the undergraduate certificate program in gerontology. Her research on mother-daughter relationships and family caregiving has been funded by the National Institute on Aging.

Margaret Manoogian-O'Dell is a doctoral student focusing her academic work on family gerontology and women's studies. She has spent the last 15 years working directly with undergraduate and graduate students in cocurricular and advising functions and has taught family studies and adult development and aging courses to undergraduates. Her current research concerns older women and intergenerational relationships.

Lori A. McGraw is a doctoral candidate in human development and family studies at Oregon State University, where she teaches undergraduate courses that focus on individual and family development and the connections among social hierarchies. Her research highlights women's unpaid family labor and their family ties.

Diana White is a human development and family studies doctoral student at Oregon State University. Her research interests involve bereavement and intergenerational responses to family crises. She is Deputy Director of the Oregon Geriatric Education Center at Oregon Health Sciences University, a program that provides professional development opportunities for health care professionals throughout Oregon.

About the Publisher

Pine Forge Press is a new educational publisher, dedicated to publishing innovative books and software throughout the social sciences. On this and any other of our publications, we welcome your comments, ideas, and suggestions.

Please call or write to:

Pine Forge Press

A Sage Publications Company

31 St. James Ave., Suite 510

Boston, MA 02116

617-753-7512

E-mail: sdr@pfp.sagepub.com

Visit our World Wide Web site, your direct link to a multitude of online resources: www.pineforge.com



Contents

Preface xv

Introduction

Understanding the Family Lives of Older Adults

Older adults construct a sense of identity, build positive relationships, and pursue purposeful work within different sociohistorical contexts. 1

1 The Gathering

Lois Tschetter Hjelmstad

This poem celebrates family relationships that endure despite their struggles within and across generations. 12

PART I

Negotiating Ties With Young Adults

Connections with young adult children shape the experiences of parents throughout middle age and later life.

Parents rework relationships with their young adult children as these children make life choices about identity, long-term partnerships, and commitment to work. 13

2 Four Models of Adolescent Mother-Grandmother Relationships in Black Inner-City Families

Nancy H. Apfel and Victoria Seitz

Beliefs about whether parenting skills are learned shape African American women's involvement with both their adolescent daughters and their grandchildren. 27

3 One Week Until College

Sandi Kahn Shelton

Tensions between a White middle-aged mother and her soon-to-be-adult daughter reflect a relationship on the threshold of change. 36

- 4 The Good Daughter**
Caroline Hwang
A Korean American woman enters adulthood in a world that in her mind bears little resemblance to the way her parents view it. 39
- 5 Forgotten Streams in the Family Life Course: Utilization of Qualitative Retrospective Interviews in the Analysis of Lifelong Single Women's Family Careers**
Katherine R. Allen and Robert S. Pickett
Women's opportunities for marriage in young adulthood are shaped by the broader sociohistorical context and by the needs of the working-class families of which they remain a part. 41
- 6 Social Demography of Contemporary Families and Aging**
Christine L. Himes
Changes throughout the 20th century in life expectancy, fertility, and the rates of marriage and divorce have implications for the family relationships of people in middle age and later life. 47
- 7 The Last Diamond of Summer**
B. K. Loren
Memories of a mother and grandmother help bring a lesbian daughter and her middle-aged mother closer together. 51
- 8 Intergenerational Solidarity and the Structure of Adult Child-Parent Relationships in American Families**
Merril Silverstein and Vern L. Bengtson
Although the family ties of women are stronger than those of men, relationships between parents and their adult children are variable in emotional closeness, attitude similarity, geographic proximity, frequency of contact, and the exchange of aid across the generations. 53

PART II

Connections Across the Generations in Midlife

Caregiving, grandparenthood, and work are intergenerational themes in middle age.

Although partnerships and parent-child relationships remain stable through time, key transitions that mark midlife alter the ways in which family members understand one another. 67

- 9 Dancing With Death**
Camille Peri
Parents share the story of caring for their adult son, his death, and their continuing sorrow. 80
- 10 Historical Perspectives on Caregiving: Documenting Women's Experiences**
Emily K. Abel
The history of women as caregivers provides background for the undervalued work of caregiving. 83
- 11 Only Daughter**
Sandra Cisneros
Upon sharing her short story, a Mexican American daughter delights in recognition and approval from her father. 89
- 12 The Experience of Grandfatherhood**
Sarah Cunningham-Burley
Middle-aged husbands and wives describe the meaning and significance of the grandfather role. 92
- 13 Father's Sorrow, Father's Joy**
Darrell G. H. Schramm
New insights contribute to greater closeness between father and son in middle age. 97
- 14 Last Christmas Gift From a Mother**
Lois F. Lyles
A dying African American mother helps her caregiving daughter develop a new sense of competence and identity. 100
- 15 Extended Kin Networks in Black Families**
Peggye Dilworth-Anderson
The mutual aid system developed in African American families through time is threatened by contemporary challenges. 104
- 16 Looking After: A Son's Memoir**
John Daniel
Although caregiving is most often performed by women, men can and do provide personal care in loving and supportive ways. 107

PART III

The Centrality of Intimacy in Later Midlife

Intimate partnerships and extended kin ties
are key features of late middle age.

Through diverse patterns and styles, intimate partnerships, grandparenthood, and sibling ties anchor the experiences of families in later midlife. 115

17 Marriage and Family Life of Blue-Collar Men

David Halle

The ideology of companionate marriage presents challenges for both blue-collar and white-collar husbands. 127

18 Breathing Lessons

Anne Tyler

Memories of a friend's long-ago wedding evoke emotional connection and sexual intimacy between a wife and her husband. 135

19 Grandparenting Styles: Native American Perspectives

Joan Weibel-Orlando

The grandparenting styles of North American Indians are shaped by culture, gender, and social context. 139

20 Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood

Judith Ortiz Cofer

As remembered by her granddaughter, a Puerto Rican grandmother makes critical decisions about her life course. 146

21 Closeness, Confiding, and Contact Among Siblings in Middle and Late Adulthood

Ingrid Arnet Connidis and Lori D. Campbell

Sisters maintain and enhance sibling connections throughout adulthood. 149

22 Shared Filial Responsibility: The Family as the Primary Caregiver

Sarah H. Matthews and Tena Tarler Rosner

Adult siblings, anchored by sisters, meet their aging parents' needs. 156

23 **What Remains**
Marge Piercy
This poem is a poignant portrayal of a daughter's love and longing for her deceased mother. 163

24 **Marriage as Support or Strain? Marital Quality Following the Death of a Parent**
Debra Umberson
The death of a parent can have deleterious effects on a child's marriage when expectations for support are not met. 164

PART IV

Transitions at Work and at Home in Early Old Age **Negotiating work commitments and coping with relationship loss are challenging tasks for older adults.**

Change in paid and unpaid work and the loss of a partner shape identities and family relationships in early old age. 177

25 **Retirement and Marital Satisfaction**
Robert C. Atchley
Retirement has little effect on how middle-class couples view their marriages. 187

26 **U.S. Old-Age Policy and the Family**
Madonna Harrington Meyer and Marcia L. Bellas
Although government programs were intended to ensure the well-being of older family members, in practice, women, the poor and working classes, and people of color experience financial hardships in old age. 191

27 **Elderly Mexican American Men: Work and Family Patterns**
Norma Williams
Without stable work histories, older Mexican American men face poverty and social isolation from their families. 202

28 **The Unexpected Community: Portrait of an Old-Age Subculture**
Arlie Russell Hochschild
White widows in low-income senior housing create strong peer relationships while maintaining close family ties. 208

- 29 Predictors and Outcomes of the End of Co-Resident Caregiving in Aging Families of Adults With Mental Retardation or Mental Illness**
Marsha Mailick Seltzer, Jan S. Greenberg, Marty Wyngaarden Krauss, and Jinkuk Hong
When adult children have disabilities, mothers' caregiving extends well into later life. 212
- 30 Gender and Control Among Spouses of the Cognitively Impaired: A Research Note**
Baila Miller
Gender shapes the caregiving experiences of wives and husbands. 218
- 31 Two-Part Invention: The Story of a Marriage**
Madeleine L'Engle
Shortly after her husband's death, a grieving widow expresses feelings of vulnerability and draws comfort from their long, loving relationship. 224
- 32 Happiness in Cornwall**
Raymond Carver
A widower learns that new love can happen at any age. 226

PART V

Challenges and Possibilities in Later Life

Amid a web of multigenerational family connections, oldest old adults focus their energies and attentions on their most significant social ties.

The quality of later life is influenced by connection to others, health status and mobility, and economic circumstances. 233

- 33 Final Rounds: A Father, a Son, the Golf Journey of a Lifetime**
James Dodson
The centrality of the connection between a dying husband and his aging wife is fully evident to a middle-aged son. 247

- 34 **Manon Reassures Her Lover**
Martha Elizabeth
*Neither the reassurance of love nor the desire for touch
is lost in later life.* 249
- 35 **Starboys**
Elissa Goldberg
*Six years after the death of his wife, a widower maintains
a strong connection to her, while his relationships with others
are forever changed.* 250
- 36 **Divorced and Reconstituted Families:
Effects on the Older Generation**
Colleen L. Johnson
*When younger family members delay marriage,
divorce, or remarry, their demands on older family members
may increase.* 253
- 37 **Understanding Elder Abuse and Neglect**
Rosalie S. Wolf
*Older people who are frail or cognitively impaired
may be especially vulnerable.* 258
- 38 **Obasan in Suburbia**
Susan Ito
*A son and daughter-in-law's wish to be fully American
displaces his 80-year-old Japanese American mother
but not her identity, her love for her son,
or her commitment to paid work.* 262
- 39 **Selectivity Theory:
Social Activity in Life-Span Context**
Laura L. Carstensen
*A sense that time is running out changes priorities so that people
pay closest attention to their most valued social connections.* 265

40	Wallace Nelson, 85, and Juanita Nelson, 70: Deerfield, Massachusetts	
	<i>Studs Terkel</i>	
	<i>An old, poor, African American couple see themselves as well off because their lives reflect commitment to each other and to their beliefs.</i>	276
41	Letters From a Father	
	<i>Mona Van Duyn</i>	
	<i>A gift opens up a new world for an older couple.</i>	278
	<i>Sources and Permissions</i>	287
	<i>References</i>	293
	<i>Index</i>	301

Preface

Several years ago, a publisher suggested to Alexis that a reader for undergraduate students on families in middle and later life would be an important addition to the field. She agreed completely. Too often, gerontological research focuses on individuals without attention to their close connections to others, especially family members. When family issues emerge in the literature, researchers generally focus on dependent older people or on spouses as overburdened caregivers. The depth and richness of their relationships and other aspects of family life are often neglected. Thus, the idea of developing a reader was intriguing—and there was certainly a need for one—but it simmered on a back burner as other tasks took priority.

In the meantime, Alexis invited Diana, Lori, and Margaret, who share her interest in exploring intergenerational relationships, to join her in studying these ties. Avid readers all, we formed a weekly study group, reading and discussing both academic writing and fiction devoted to intergenerational relationships in middle and later life. We read many pieces and learned a great deal. We also shared family stories and the importance of our own connections to older family members. Through discussions of the readings and our experiences, we concluded that much about older adult family life is not in the academic literature. This was particularly true for issues facing older women and people of color.

We decided to put our new knowledge to work by taking on the development of this reader. Conceptualized as a companion to more traditional textbooks, the reader is aimed at helping students understand that older people are developing human beings with close connections to others. Furthermore, the reader illustrates how older adults and their family members experience transitions: not always in predictable ways or at predictable times.

We knew that there was no resource like the reader we envisioned. We also knew that such a resource would be increasingly important as the U.S. population ages and becomes more diverse. Most of all, we wanted to share some of the compelling work we had discovered and the energy and excitement we feel in exploring the family connections and transitions of older adults.

We began by developing a framework for selecting readings and identifying types of connections and transitions that are key to understanding family life. We included both same-generation

connections, such as partners and siblings, and cross-generation connections, such as the relationships between parents and adult children and between grandparents and grandchildren. We sought readings that reflected families as sources of both support and strain. We wanted to give attention to transitions and roles such as adult children's leaving home, grandparenthood, retirement, bereavement, caregiving, and the formation of new partnerships.

Our reader includes middle- and later-life families who vary in their racial and ethnic identities, class backgrounds, and sexual orientations. We pay particular attention to how gender shapes family ties. Although we show how family life varies for people in different social positions, we also illustrate similarities in experience. We looked for readings that reflect the life course idea of on-time and off-time family experiences, as well as events that happen to most people and those that are more rare. To provide compelling illustrations of central concepts, we selected a mix of academic writing, fiction, essays, and poetry.

Having developed our framework, we read widely during the next year, and we each brought our favorite readings to the group. In some of our targeted areas, we were disappointed to find little material. In others, we discovered many fine pieces. Because we all loved work that could not be included, the process of making final selections was a painful one. Our framework helped us by highlighting important family issues and experiences and the social context in which they occur. As we agonizingly discarded one piece or another, we consoled ourselves by saying, "We'll address that issue in the framing essay."

We edited the academic articles and many of the essays to meet page limits, always attempting to maintain the integrity of the authors' work. In the end, we are pleased with the breadth and quality of materials included, although we have enough work for another volume!

One of the many challenges we faced was how to organize the readings. We had before us a variety of options: by type of transition, for example, or by type of relationship or connection. Every attempt was messy, however. The lives of individuals and their families occur neither in neat categories nor according to specific timelines. Life experiences are not always efficiently confined to one period of the life span. For example, new love can occur in late life, bereavement can occur at any time within any type of relationship, and grandparenthood extends for decades. In the end, we arranged our volume by age of the person given a central voice in the work. We began with readings focused on parents with young adult children, followed by those focused on early midlife, and continuing on through old age. This developmental structure parallels individual life yet it allows us to demonstrate that change through time and variability with age are key.

Finally, it was time for the framing essays. Although the writing process can be challenging, we were surprised to discover that despite extensive notes and discussion, the hard part in editing this book was

not nearly over. Our framing essays had to convey our main concern that people change and grow through time and in a variety of ways.

Throughout all its phases, however, this project has been enormously satisfying. During a two-year period, we have enjoyed great literature, provocative research, engaging conversation, terrific food, and good humor. We came to know each other well as we shared stories of our own family transitions and connections. Although other projects such as articles and dissertations were put on hold for a while, we are grateful for the opportunity to have worked together on this book. We hope that readers share our pleasure and joy in reading and learning about the social lives of older adults.

From beginning to end, our work was collaborative. Alexis was the team leader and took major responsibility for editing. Lori, Diana, and Margaret contributed equally and chose to be listed alphabetically. We are grateful to Sandra Frye, who helped in the preparation of the final manuscript. We also acknowledge our own intergenerational family connections and those who have inspired us through the years: our parents, Emily and Bob Guion, Rita and Haig Manoogian, Janice and Jeffrey McGraw, and Lois and Bernard Walker; and our grandparents, Carrie and Roy Guion, Cleora and Oattie Firestone, Mafra Lykins Marini, Ruth P. Flanagan, Maria and Ludwig Helmprecht, Satenig and Garabed Manoogian, Lillian and Alex Guadagno, and Lilly and Wilfred Walker.

List of reviewers to come

