

Jill Quadagno

Aging and the Life Course

An Introduction to Social Gerontology

Second Edition



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Jill Quadagno

Pepper Institute on Aging and Public Policy
Florida State University



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AGING AND THE LIFE COURSE: AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL GERONTOLOGY

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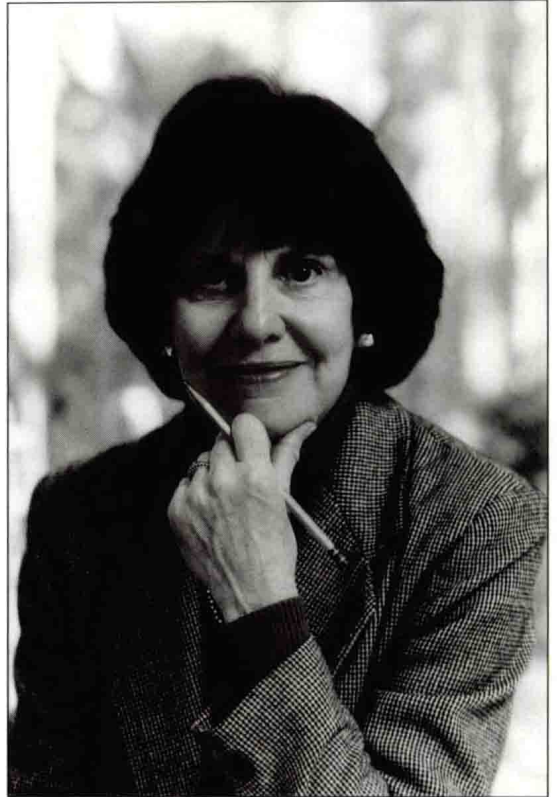
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About the Author

Jill Quadagno is Professor of Sociology at Florida State University where she holds the Mildred and Claude Pepper Eminent Scholar Chair in Social Gerontology. She has been teaching courses on aging for more than 20 years. She received her B.A. from Pennsylvania State University in 1964, her M.A. from the University of California at Berkeley in 1966, and her Ph.D. from the University of Kansas in 1976. She also received a Postdoctoral Fellowship from the National Science Foundation to do research at the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure in Cambridge, England, in 1979.

In 1992 she received the University Teaching Award from Florida State University and became a Fellow of the Gerontological Society of America. She has also been the recipient of the Distinguished Scholar Award from the Section on Aging of the American Sociological Association and has been awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship and an American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship. In 1994 she served as Senior Policy Advisor on the President's Bipartisan Commission on Entitlement and Tax Reform. She is the author or co-author of ten books on aging and social policy issues, including *The Transformation of Old Age Security*, *Social Bonds in Later Life: Aging and Inter-dependence*, *States, Labor Markets and the Future of Old Age Policy*, *From Nursing Homes to Home Care*, *Ending a Career in the Auto Industry: 30 and Out*, and *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty*. She served as President of the American



Sociological Association from 1997 to 1998. She has recently received an Investigator Award in Health Policy Research from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to conduct historical research on U.S. health care policy and to write a book entitled *One Nation, Uninsured: How Americans' Distrust of Government Derailed National Health Care*.

Preface



I taught my first course in Social Gerontology in 1978. Would anyone sign up, I wondered? Why would 18-year-old students be interested in aging? I marched into the classroom and laid out my notes that August day, perspiring from nervousness as much as from the heat. I couldn't help but notice the tall, broad-shouldered guy sitting in the front row. His name, I learned when I called the roll, was Kirby Criswell, an Iowa farm boy transplanted to Kansas to play football. Oh, great luck, I thought, echoing the prejudice college professors sometimes hold against football players. To my surprise, Kirby earned a gentlemanly C+ as well as my abiding affection and respect. I hope his life is going well. He not only laid to rest my stereotype of football players but also taught me why my Social Gerontology classes have filled every semester that I have taught them.

Kirby wrote his required paper on grandparenting, a topic that interested him because of his close relationship to his own grandmother. Much as he loved her, he also witnessed the tensions that arose when she moved in with his parents, into his brother's old bedroom. Aging interested Kirby, as it does most students, because it was so close to his own life. Of course, most college students are not yet worried about growing old themselves. But all young people are members of families, and the dilemmas their parents and grandparents face affect them too. So, it's natural that they are drawn to the subject. Then, too, an increasing number of students these days are returning to school after having worked full-time for many years and raised families. These older students have an immediate interest in the topic of aging. The challenge for the instructor is to demonstrate

how these personal concerns are linked to larger structural issues, such as how, for example, familial care of the frail elderly is influenced by population aging and by political decisions about the just distribution of societal resources. It was my interest in demonstrating to students how the subject matter of their lives is shaped by larger societal forces that led me to write this text.

Organization

This text is divided into five parts and 17 chapters, plus an appendix. The chapters in Part 1 (Defining the Field) provide the student with a firm grounding in core methodological and theoretical issues and document key trends in population aging. Part 2 (Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Aging) reflects the fact that social gerontology is an inherently interdisciplinary field. It provides a detailed look at the contributions of history, biology, and psychology to the study of aging.

Part 3 (Social Aspects of Aging) examines changes in social roles, relationships, living arrangements, and work that occur as people age. Although everyone experiences the biological and psychological changes that are inherent in the aging process, the nature of that experience varies widely from person to person. The chapters in Part 4 (Care of the Aging) look at the health and health care needs of older people as well as the societal response to those needs. Part 5 (Aging and Society) examines aspects of aging at the societal level. The three chapters in this section discuss the economic and political aspects of aging. Finally, the appendix introduces students to career opportunities in social gerontology.

Distinctive Chapters

This book includes all the topics typically covered in a social gerontology text and contains three distinctive chapters. One of these is a separate chapter on the life course (Chapter 8, *Life Course Transitions*). I include this topic because of the growing emphasis in the field of social gerontology on the relationship between the quality of life in old age and an individual's cumulative experiences, choices, constraints, and opportunities over the life course. Indeed, members of the Section on Aging of the American Sociological Association recently voted to change the section name to Aging and the Life Course.

Another distinctive chapter focuses on the long-term care of the frail elderly (Chapter 13, *Caring for the Frail Elderly*). There is now a substantial body of research on this subject, which examines the burdens and satisfactions family members experience in caring for their aging kin, the problems associated with nursing home care, and the advantages and disadvantages of various alternative living arrangements. This chapter provides a complete portrait of the range of long-term care options and of the policy choices facing an aging society. It also includes the fascinating qualitative research on daily life in nursing homes that students find so interesting.

Each semester that I have taught this course, I have found that students were confused by the vast array of social programs for income support, health care, social services, and long-term care in the United States. Most texts scatter explanations of these programs within various chapters. This book includes a separate chapter on the welfare state that explains the differences in how these programs are funded, who is eligible for benefits, what benefits are provided, and the relationship of the programs to each other (Chapter 4, *Old Age and the Welfare State*). It is intended to

serve as a ready reference for students as they read about these programs at appropriate points elsewhere in the text.

Pedagogy

Chapter Outline

Each chapter opens with an outline that introduces the student to the topics covered in the chapter.

Looking Ahead Questions

The **Looking Ahead** questions, a new feature in this edition, provide students with four or five questions to keep in mind when reading the chapter.

Chapter Opener

Each chapter features a lively introduction, designed to engage students' interest in the subject matter and set the stage for the material that follows.

Key Terms

Key terms and concepts used in the text are highlighted in bold when they are introduced. A list of key terms—with page references—follows at the end of the chapter. The Glossary at the end of the book provides a definition of each key term used in the text.

Illustrations

Chapters are enlivened by figures, tables, cartoons, and photos that summarize key trends and highlight important issues.

Theme Boxes

Many instructors have told me they and their students found timely, informative, and helpful the two theme boxes, **In Their Own Words**, which provide first-person accounts of the aging experience, and **An Issue for Public Policy**, which examines the policy implications

of key social issues. The Second Edition continues these two theme boxes from the first edition and also contains two new theme boxes. **Aging Around the World** boxes feature cross-cultural research on aging in other cultures. **Diversity in the Aging Experience** boxes describe variations in how people age in the United States, depending on their gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, and cultural background. In the Second Edition, most boxes now conclude with discussion questions.

Chapter Resources

Each chapter ends with the following set of learning aids to help students review and extend their knowledge—Looking Back Questions with Summary, Thinking about Aging Questions, Key Terms list with page reference, and Exploring the Internet Exercises.

Looking Back Questions

The questions raised at the beginning of the chapter are answered at the end of the chapter in the new section **Looking Back**. These questions and short discussions help students to summarize the main points of each chapter.

Thinking about Aging Questions

Another new section at the end of each chapter, **Thinking about Aging**, consists of a series of questions designed to stimulate critical thinking. These questions raise thought-provoking issues that are helpful in stimulating class discussion.

Exploring the Internet Exercises

The World Wide Web has become an important source of information for students and their instructors. Each chapter concludes with a new section called **Exploring the Internet**, which tells students about websites related to the chapter content and provides a series of questions students can answer using materials found on the Internet sites.

What's New in the Second Edition

New Features

As described in the preceding section, the Second Edition contains several new features designed to enhance student learning and retention: Looking Ahead questions, which preview key topics, Looking Back questions, around which chapter summaries are organized, Thinking about Aging questions to stimulate critical thinking, and Exploring the Internet exercises. There are two new boxed features, Diversity in the Aging Experience and Aging Around the World with concluding discussion questions found in all chapters.

New Content

In addition to the new features described above, the Second Edition has a substantial amount of new text material. All tables, figures, and charts have been updated, and some exciting new topics have been added to every chapter. The most significant change is a new chapter on living arrangements, which was recommended by several instructors who used the first edition of this text. This chapter (Chapter 10) discusses variations in household structure, patterns of home ownership, and alternative living environments among the aged.

What's New in Each Chapter

Chapter 1 The Field of Social Gerontology

- New opening vignette on living to age 100
- New section on successful aging
- New *Aging Around the World* box on successful aging in the Israeli kibbutz
- New *In Their Own Words* box on “the greatest generation” (those who fought in World War II)
- Expanded coverage of the “echo boomers”
- Expanded explanation of the age, period, and cohort effects

- New coverage of the AHEAD longitudinal study
- Updated *Issue for Public Policy* box on age discrimination in employment
- New *Diversity in the Aging Experience* box on gender and the double standard of aging

Chapter 2 Theories of Aging

- Updated *In Their Own Words* box on engagement and disengagement
- New *Diversity in the Aging Experience* box on religion and personal well-being
- New *Aging Around the World* box on cross-cultural variations in the treatment of the aged
- New section on age integration theory, with figure comparing age-differentiated and age-integrated social structures
- New *Issue for Public Policy* box on whether government should encourage citizens to pursue an age-integrated life course

Chapter 3 Demography of Aging

- New opening vignette on the echo boom
- New *Aging Around the World* box on international variations in population aging
- New *Issue for Public Policy* box on the fiscal effect of the baby boomers' retirement
- New *Diversity in the Aging Experience* box on race and gender differences in life expectancy
- New graph showing comparative population pyramids for three Asian countries
- New graph showing projected growth of the oldest-old population in the United States
- New table showing median income in United States by age and sex

Chapter 4 Old Age and the Welfare State

- Updated statistics on payroll taxes, Social Security benefits, effect of Social Security on the poverty level, distribution of Social Security benefits, Medicare benefits and out-of-pocket costs, and Medicaid expenditures

- Coverage of recent changes in welfare programs, such as elimination of the earnings test for recipients of Social Security benefits
- New graph showing the role of Social Security in reducing poverty
- New graph showing the distribution of Social Security benefits
- New historical background on Medicare
- New *In Their Own Words* box on health care before Medicare
- New *Diversity in the Aging Experience* box on elderly Korean Americans' use of community long-term care services
- New *Aging Around the World* box on long-term care in Denmark

Chapter 5 Historical Perspectives on Aging

- New discussion of views of the aged in ancient and medieval societies
- New section on the aged as a social problem, 1920–1970
- New section on “the tyranny of the aged”
- New section on independent living arrangements in the twentieth century
- New section on retirement as a tool of labor market management, 1920–1970
- New section on the growth of the nursing home industry, 1920–1970

Chapter 6 Biological Perspectives on Aging

- Discussion of the difference between normal aging and pathological aging
- New section on sensory aging and its social consequences
- New *Issue for Public Policy* box on proposed restrictions for older drivers
- New *Aging Around the World* box on “active life expectancy,” with graph
- New Aging of the Reproductive System section, including coverage of menopause, the aging male, and erectile dysfunction

- New *Diversity in the Aging Experience* box on women's health and hormone replacement therapy

Chapter 7 Psychological Perspectives on Aging

- Updated coverage of fluid intelligence and aging
- New *Aging Around the World* box on a Swedish study of genetic factors in intelligence
- Updated coverage of crystallized intelligence, including a figure showing vocabulary and general knowledge by age
- New *In Their Own Words* box by a writer with Alzheimer's disease
- New *Diversity in the Aging Experience* box on gender differences in rates of depression, including a figure showing depression by age and gender
- Expanded and updated discussion of the self-concept

Chapter 8 Life Course Transitions

- Entire chapter devoted to the life course
- Simplified exposition of the life course framework and role transitions
- Updated discussion of age-graded social systems
- Expanded and updated discussion of middle age
- New *In Their Own Words* box by a grandmother in her eighties
- New *Aging Around the World* box on the effect of military service on German veterans of World War II
- Expanded discussion of state intervention in the life course
- New *Diversity in the Aging Experience* box on "sent-down" youth in the Chinese Cultural Revolution

Chapter 9 Family Relationships and Social Support Systems

- New *In Their Own Words* box on an aged couple's reminiscences about their courtship

- New section on marriage and sexual activity
- New section on retirement satisfaction and marriage
- New discussion of conflict in parent-child relationships
- New *Aging Around the World* box on intergenerational solidarity in France
- Expanded discussion of the unmarried elderly, including cross-cultural comparison of social support networks in the United States and Canada
- New section on grandparents raising grandchildren
- Updated *Issue for Public Policy* box on grandparents' visitation rights
- Expanded section on the families of older gay men and women

Chapter 10 Living Arrangements

- Household structure, aging in place, and alternative living arrangements
- *Aging Around the World* box on living arrangements of the aged in other cultures
- Graph showing home ownership among the elderly in the United States by racial/ethnic group, gender, and income
- *Issue for Public Policy* box on programs to improve the quality of housing for the aged
- *Diversity in the Aging Experience* box on the residents of single-room occupancy hotels
- *In Their Own Words* box on the experience of moving into a continuing care retirement community

Chapter 11 Work and Retirement

- New opening vignette on two different patterns of retirement, featuring former President Jimmy Carter
- New *Diversity in the Aging Experience* box on Mexican American farmworkers
- New *Issue for Public Policy* box on the elimination of the Social Security earnings test
- New *In Their Own Words* box on a retired lab technician's transition to retirement

- New section on daily activities and health in retirement
- New *Aging Around the World* box on everyday activities among German elders, including graphs of daily activities and the physical and social context of activities
- New section on volunteering among the retired, including graphs of the effect of volunteering on life satisfaction and self-rated health
- New section on religious participation among the retired

Chapter 12 Health and Health Care

- New chapter opening contrasting health in the young and old and linking the two through lifestyle decisions
- New *In Their Own Words* box by poet-novelist May Sarton on her recovery from a stroke
- New *Diversity in the Aging Experience* box on hypertension among African Americans, including a discussion of a cross-cultural study on Americans, Nigerians, and Jamaicans
- Discussion of cultural barriers in the doctor-patient relationship, including the different communication styles of traditional healers
- New *Issue for Public Policy* box on the Medicare HMO crisis
- Updated discussion of proposals for reducing Medicare costs
- New statistics on Medigap insurance by racial/ethnic group
- New *Aging Around the World* box on the crisis in the Canadian health care system

Chapter 13 Caring for the Frail Elderly

- Updated statistics on the gender of primary caregivers, number of beds, and nursing homes in the United States, and the share of nursing home costs paid by Medicaid
- New discussion of sons as caregivers
- New *In Their Own Words* box by a man who cares for his mother at home

- New section on race, ethnicity, and long-term care
- New *Diversity in the Aging Experience* box on long-term care of the American Indian aged
- New *Issue for Public Policy* box on staff levels and quality of care in nursing homes
- New *Aging Around the World* box on nursing home chains in Canada
- New discussion of differential access to nursing home care for Medicaid patients and private payers

Chapter 14 Dying, Death, and Bereavement

- New *In Their Own Words* box on final moments with Morrie Schwartz (from the book *Tuesdays with Morrie*)
- New *Diversity in the Aging Experience* box on racial differences in attitudes toward end-of-life care
- New coverage of physician-assisted suicide in Oregon
- New *Aging Around the World* box on assisted suicide in the Netherlands
- New data on suicide among the aged
- New *Issue for Public Policy* box on who pays for hospice care
- New coverage of the effect of marital quality on depression and anxiety among widows and widowers

Chapter 15 The Economics of Aging

- New chapter opening on the decline of poverty among the aged
- New section on the improving economic status of the aged, with tables showing median income by age and marital status and a graph showing changes in sources of income over time
- New *Diversity in the Aging Experience* box on racial disparities in income and wealth, with tables showing poverty and wealth among the aged by race, ethnicity, and gender

- Updated graph showing number of workers per Social Security beneficiary over time
- Updated discussion of the global trend toward raising the early retirement age
- New *Aging Around the World* box on the means-tested old age pension in Australia
- Updated discussion of privatization
- New *Issue for Public Policy* box on evaluating privatization proposals
- New table showing pension plan participation rates by age, earnings, and gender

Chapter 16 Aging and Inequality

- New chapter-opening vignette on the value of an African American couple's home versus home values in white neighborhoods
- Updated statistics on income, poverty rates, pension benefits, home ownership, and unemployment rates by racial/ethnic group, and on country of origin and racial/ethnic composition of the aged population
- Expanded discussion of how the Social Security survivor's benefit is calculated, including new summary table
- New *Issue for Public Policy* box on Social Security and divorce
- New table showing race and ancestry items in the 2000 census
- New graph showing racial and ethnic composition of the aged population
- New *In Their Own Words* box on African American domestic servants
- New *Aging Around the World* box on inequality in pension income in Great Britain

Chapter 17 The Politics of Aging

- Updated table showing voter turnout by racial/ethnic group, gender, and education
- Updated table showing voter registration by age group
- Comparative data on voter turnout by age in Germany and the Netherlands
- Updated statistics on support for Social Security among young Americans

- New *Issue for Public Policy* box on the debate over Social Security reform in the 2000 presidential election
- New *Aging Around the World* box on political involvement among older Europeans
- New *In Their Own Words* box by a lifelong political activist
- Updated coverage of the generational equity crisis, including a cross-cultural comparison to Canada, Great Britain, and New Zealand

Supplements

Instructor's Manual

The instructor's manual, prepared by Jan Abushakrah of Portland Community College and Gretchen J. Hill of Arkansas State University, provides several types of exam questions for each chapter, including multiple choice, true-false, and essay questions. The instructor's manual also provides a detailed chapter outline, suggestions for lecture material, class exercises, and discussion topics and suggestions for films and videos to help stimulate class discussion.

Online Learning Center Website

Instructors and students are invited to log onto the book's Online Learning Center website at www.mhhe.com/quadagno. This text-specific website is designed as an extension of the classroom for both students and professors. Here, students can test their knowledge with quizzes and crossword puzzles, or challenge themselves with interactive activities and Internet exercises created for each chapter. A variety of resources is available for instructors as well, including PowerPoint slides, discussion topics, links to professional resources online, and more. In addition, any of the material from the Online Learning Center may be used in a course website that instructors create using PageOut, McGraw-Hill's template-driven website creation tool.

PageOut

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Visual Preview

Presenting a Life Course Perspective

Chapter 8 Life Course Transitions 211

Looking Ahead

1. How did demographic change create a new phase of the life course called middle age?
2. Do people attempt to time the major events in their lives?
3. Can the sequencing of major life events create role conflict?
4. Can major historical events affect the life course of a whole generation?
5. How can government affect the life course?

At the remarkable age of 50, Bette-Jane Raphael gave birth to her second child. Having a baby at the same time she approached menopause had not been part of her life plan, but she was almost 35 when she met her husband, nearly 40 when she had her first child, a son. Rose was born 10 years later. Bette-Jane worries that Rose, when she reaches her teenage years, may be embarrassed for having a wrinkled and gray-haired mother. And Bette-Jane fears doing and leaving Rose without a mother at a time when she may need one most. Sadly, however, Bette-Jane is humble for being allowed such blessings at this stage of life (Raphael, 1995).

When people hear of Bette-Jane Raphael's late-life birth, they are surprised and often disapprove. The disapproval reflects the uneasy sense that she has violated societal expectations about the proper timing for such an event. Social gerontologists refer to these expectations as age norms. Age norms are informal rules that specify age-appropriate roles and behavior and, in so doing, provide a road map for traversing the course of life. These rules often remain unspoken until they are violated, and then we recognize that they do exist.

Age norms help to determine when people marry, how many children they have, and how

they balance work and leisure. Yet life's road map is constantly being redrawn, because of changes in demography, the economy, and government policy. These deep transformations reorganize social life and alter individual patterns of growth and development. Social gerontologists who study this road map adopt what is called the **life course** approach. The life course approach recognizes that developmental changes based on biological processes mold human behavior from birth until death, but that human development is also influenced by an array of psychological, social, historical, and economic factors (Featherman, 1983).

In the first section of this chapter we consider how the timing, duration, and order of life's major events are shaped by demographic change and individual experiences and opportunities as well as large-scale social, economic, and political events, such as wars, periods of depression or prosperity, and government policy changes. Then we learn about the causes of inequality in later life. Finally, we discuss the role government policy plays in shaping the way people move through the life course.

THE LIFE COURSE FRAMEWORK

In Chapter 1 we learned that the **life course framework** is an approach to the study of aging that emphasizes the interaction of historical events, individual decisions and opportunities, and the effect of early life experiences in determining later life outcomes (Elder, 1994). As people age, they move through different social roles that provide them with different identities—student, husband or wife, worker, parent. Sociologists call these role changes **transitions**. People also experience **countertransitions**, which are produced by others' role changes. When you marry, your mother automatically becomes a mother-in-law. When you have a child, your father automatically becomes a grandfather. Should your spouse die, you will

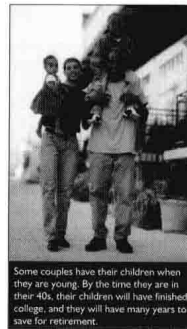
Exploring Life Course Transitions

Beginning with Chapter 1, this text explores the life course perspective, which examines the relationship between the quality of one's life in old age and one's cumulative experiences, earlier choices, opportunities, and constraints. Chapter 8, "Life Course Transitions," looks closely at the social factors that influence peoples as they move into and out of various roles associated with the family and the workplace.

Explaining Age, Period, and Cohort Effects

Chapter 1, "The Field of Social Gerontology," explains how social gerontologists distinguish between age, period, and cohort effects—concepts that are central to the life course approach.

14 Part 1: Defining the Field



Some couples have their children when they are young. By the time they are in their 40s, their children will have finished college, and they will have many years to save for retirement.

reflect biological and physiological developments that are independent of specific times, places, or events. The clearest example of an age effect is declining health. For instance, aging is accompanied by an increasing risk of high blood pressure.

A **period effect** refers to the impact of a historical event on the entire society. For example, in 1965, when police in Birmingham, Alabama, turned fire hoses on black children who were demonstrating peacefully for the integration of lunch counters, buses and stores, public opinion across the nation swung in favor of civil rights (Schuman, Stebbins, Belles, and Krysan, 1997). At the individual level, this type of change is called **attitude conversion**. Have you experienced memorable events that created a period effect?

A **cohort effect** is the social change that occurs as one cohort replaces another. For example, when members of an older cohort who hold one set of attitudes die, they are replaced by younger people who hold different attitudes. The attitudes of the population as a whole will shift as a result of this cohort replacement. For instance, southerners who were raised during an era when racial segregation was legal held more conservative racial attitudes than their grandchildren, who grew up after segregation was outlawed (Schuman, Stebbins, Belles, and Krysan, 1997).

Although the concepts of age, period, and cohort effects sound simple, they can be quite difficult to measure. For example, older people are more likely to vote than younger people. Is this disparity in voting patterns caused by an age effect, meaning that people become better citizens as they grow old? Or is it caused by a cohort effect? The people who are currently old may always have voted in large numbers. We explain this problem in more detail below. Social gerontologists frequently use **cross-sectional research** to distinguish age, period, and cohort effects, but **longitudinal research** is a better approach.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN RESEARCH ON AGING

Distinguishing Age, Period, and Cohort Effects

Research on aging not only poses conceptual challenges but also methodological puzzles. A central methodological issue in gerontological research is how to distinguish between age effects, period effects, and cohort effects. An **age effect** is a change that occurs as a result of advancing age. The basic assumption in measuring age effects is that changes due to aging

Offering Four Types of Theme Boxes

Aging in the United States

“Diversity in the Aging Experience” boxes that are new to this edition describe variations in how people age in the United States, based on gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, and cultural background.

Box 12.2 Diversity in the Aging Experience



The Puzzle of Hypertension among African Americans



Not only all Americans experience a steady rise in blood pressure as they grow older. About one-quarter suffer from hypertension, the medical term for chronically high blood pressure. High blood pressure must be controlled, or it can lead to heart attacks, stroke, and kidney failure.

Among African Americans the problem is greater than in the general population: 35 percent have hypertension. The condition accounts for 20 percent of all deaths among blacks—double the figure for whites. One explanation for this racial disparity in mortality rates is that people of African descent have a genetic susceptibility to high blood pressure. Yet race may also be a proxy for other causes, such as socioeconomic status. The problem is how to separate environmental causes from genetic causes.

One ingenious solution to this problem, devised by three researchers, was to compare people of African descent in the United States with people from Nigeria and Jamaica. Many African Americans are descended from Nigerians who were captured by slave traders on the west coast of Africa and forcibly taken to the United States and the Caribbean. The researchers found that just 7 percent of the subjects from Nigeria had high blood pressure, compared to 26 percent of the Jamaicans and 35 percent of the African Americans. Certain risk factors for hypertension, namely obesity and salt intake, were also more prevalent among African Americans than among Nigerians or Jamaicans. The researchers concluded that obesity, a lack of exercise, and poor diet explained 40 to 50 percent of the increased hypertension among African Americans (Cooper, Rotimi, and Ward, 1999).

These findings suggest that environmental factors provide a better explanation of the high rates of hypertension among African Americans. They also suggest that all Americans could reduce their blood pressure by controlling their weight, reducing their salt intake, and exercising regularly.

What Do You Think?

1. If poor health habits accounted for 40 to 50 percent of the increased hypertension among African American participants in this study, what might have accounted for the other 50 to 60 percent?
2. Does anyone in your family suffer from hypertension? If so, does excess weight, lack of exercise, or poor diet contribute to the problem? What is your relative's age?

Source: Cooper, Rotimi, and Ward (1999).

Aging Around the World

“Aging Around the World” boxes that are new to this edition broaden students’ understanding of aging in other countries and cultures.

Box 9.2

Aging Around the World



Intergenerational Solidarity in France



The concept of intergenerational solidarity appears to be a universal element of family life. The French social scientist Claudine Attias-Donfut (2000) interviewed families of three generations—grandparents, parents, and children. The grandparents she interviewed had retired and were beginning to experience health problems; the parents were still active in the workforce. Some members of the youngest generation were in school, while others were working at a first job.

Attias-Donfut noted numerous exchanges between generations, some upward from children to parents, but most downward from parents to children. Financial assistance involved mostly downward transfers: over a third of the grandparents gave money to their adult children, and nearly as many gave money to their grandchildren. Parents also gave money to their children.

Services were exchanged widely, both upward and downward. Most of the parent generation (89 percent) provided some help to the grandparents, and about half (49 percent) also gave their children some type of help. Children also provided various services to their parents, and sometimes to their grandparents.

Although the nature of family life in France is changing, the family remains an enduring institution. Experts think the increase in life expectancy will prolong the duration of exchanges between generations, and increase the opportunities family members have to help each other.

What Do You Think?


1. Do the members of your family extend financial assistance to one another or exchange their services in other ways? If so, does the assistance flow mainly from grandparents to parents, from parents to grandparents, or in both directions?
2. Would you expect intergenerational solidarity to vary much from one culture to another? Why or why not?




French families, like families around the world, engage in numerous exchanges of help and support across the generations.

to Highlight Important Topics and Issues

Box 11.2
An Issue For Public Policy





Elimination of the Earnings Test for Social Security Recipients

Suzanne Somerset runs a thriving real estate business in Apalachicola, Florida. She works out of a cottage in this tiny village, where oystermen still ply their trade, scooping up oysters with long wooden tongs while standing in their boats. The vacation home business has boomed in the past several years, and so has Suzanne's business. She sells cottages and beach houses to tourists, who come for a visit and fall in love with the charming town and its nearby beaches.

Even though her business is prospering, Suzanne almost sold it in 1998, when she turned 65 and found that she either had to give it up or surrender her Social Security benefits. At that time anyone who worked past the normal retirement age of 65 lost \$1 in Social Security benefits for every \$5 earned over the cap of \$17,000. But on April 7, 2000, President Clinton signed into law a bill passed unanimously by both houses of Congress, which eliminated the restrictions on earnings. Now people aged 65 to 69 can work as much as they want without losing any Social Security benefits. In signing the historic measure, President Clinton noted that the income restrictions "made some sense in the Great Depression when the nation was desperate to find jobs for young workers with families," but did not make sense at a time when unemployment was at a 30-year low.

Why did Congress take years to eliminate the earnings test? One reason was cost. The old law would have saved the Social Security trust fund over \$8 billion annually by withholding some benefits from people aged 65 to 69 who earned more than the income cap. Another reason was that the elimination of the earnings test would benefit mostly those people with relatively high incomes. People who work at minimum wage jobs in fast-food restaurants or as greeters at Walmart will receive no benefit from the new legislation, but a corporate executive can earn \$100,000 or more a year and still receive full Social Security benefits.

A positive effect of the new law is that it will encourage people to work longer. More older workers will continue to pay payroll taxes, helping to defray some of the cost of the program. But the elimination of the earnings test will have a much more profound effect that cannot be measured in dollars and cents. The new law has permanently changed the nature of Social Security. It is no longer a retirement program, but a benefit granted automatically to any qualified worker age 65 or older.

What Do You Think?

- Has anyone in your family benefited from the elimination of the earnings test? If so, did the change in the law increase your relative's willingness to continue working?
- Do you think it is fair for a corporate executive to earn \$100,000 a year and still draw Social Security benefits? Why do you think Congress wrote the law this way?


Aging and Public Policy


"An Issue for Public Policy" boxes give students a broad background for understanding current policy debates affecting the elderly and society. A unique chapter, "Old Age and the Welfare State" (Chapter 4), introduces students to the various social programs designed for the elderly and serves as a ready reference throughout the course.

Personal Stories About Aging

"In Their Own Words" boxes add human interest through vivid first-person accounts of various aspects of the aging experience.

Box 8.1
In Their Own Words





Time for Myself

A grandmother in her eighties finds she is savoring new experiences.

On my 80th birthday, my family and friends gave me a lovely party. They congratulated me and said with straight faces that I looked 60. I thanked them, but thought to myself, I was no beauty at 60, why would I want to look like that now?

Moreover, why should I want to be young now? As my grandchildren say, "Beem there, doze that." Yet I am being hit from all sides with things I must do, foods I must eat, ways I must think to stay forever young. I get exhausted just thinking about it. Think positive, be upbeat, they say, and this bunch of vitamins will help. Given though after spending your money, you may be told that the rules have changed and you took the wrong ones.

Working out in a gym is a must. I tried it once and was told by a gorgeous 30-year-old woman that my posture was lousy (I knew that) and that a woman my age should be careful on the machines. I was careful not to go back.

There are other ways to search for youth after the age of 70. You can spend lots of money and many hours in a beauty salon changing the color of your hair, and even get lured into wearing short skirts and bubble on high heels to look youthful. You can fund your retirement money over to a plastic surgeon for a few tucks around the eyes or the chin or both. Or buy some magic wrinkle cream that will supposedly erase those wrinkles. Not me. I am rather fond of my wrinkles. They get me a seat on the bus and a discount at the movies.

I want my old age to be different from my youth, not just a continuation of a child age is a new experience. I've never been here before. I have never had the luxury of not having to do anything. No commitment, no demand on my time.

I rather fancy my days, languid stretches of time out of a Gothic southern mood. In the morning I can struggle back under my luxuriant down comforter and get up when I please. I might answer some letters, pay bills, glance at catalogues or write—at the typewriter. No computer here. A sandwich, a cup of tea, a siesta, then a long walk along a nearby lake might round out my day until dinner.

Uneventful? Yes, but taken, in the context of a life that always had a time schedule, always an unending list of things to do, my day is a gift from the gods. Each age has been different and I have enjoyed them all. I am not going to waste this age by trying to skip it.

My life now is my desert, the whipped cream of leisure. I was begging for it, probably sounds empty to many, and not useful, but I am tired of being useful. This is my time to enjoy the quietness of just being, of stopping to look and feel and think, of indulging myself. Time for myself at last.

Source: Goldman (1998: 84).

Providing Effective Learning and Study Tools

Table 1-1 Stereotypes and Facts about Aging

Stereotype	Fact
Most retirees are lonely and depressed.	Most retirees are busy, active and satisfied with their lives. (Chapter 12)
Most older people are poor.	More than 88 percent of people 65 and older have incomes above the poverty level. (Chapter 15)
The aged are isolated from family members.	The vast majority of older people have regular contact with family members and see at least one child once a week. (Chapter 9)
Most older people are disabled.	Older men and women spend more than 80 percent of their lives free of disability. (Chapter 10)
People become more mellow as they grow old.	Personality is stable. It does not change with age. Fewer than 5 percent of people 65 and older are in nursing homes. (Chapter 13)
The aged are politically powerful.	Politicians do take senior citizens' organizations into account when considering what policies to support, but these organizations have rarely been effective in preventing major cuts in Social Security benefits. (Chapter 17)
Most Americans retire at 65.	The majority of men and women are out of the labor force by age 62. (Chapter 11)
In the past, older parents commonly lived with their children and grandchildren.	In the United States it has never been common for three generations to live together in a single household. (Chapter 5)
Welfare is for the poor.	The two largest welfare programs in the United States are Social Security and Medicare. Together they account for more than half of all federal social welfare expenditures. (Chapter 4)

Helpful Summary Tables

Tables summarize important concepts and provide comparisons of key topics. The table pictured here contrasts stereotypes and facts about aging.

Useful End-of-Chapter Resources

Other Chapter Resources

Other chapter resources include:

- “Looking Ahead” preview questions
- “What Do You Think” questions in boxes
- Boldfaced key terms
- Careers Appendix
- End-of-Book Glossary

Each chapter concludes with a chapter summary organized around key questions raised at the beginning of the chapter, critical thinking questions (“Thinking About Aging”), Key Terms with page references, and Internet activities (“Exploring the Internet”).

54 Part 1 Defining the Field

Chapter Resources

LOOKING BACK

1. Who were the first students of social gerontology, and what did they hope to learn? Social gerontology originated as a distinct field of study during the 1920s. Its first practitioners were sociologists and psychologists who had traditionally studied growth and maturation. They raised the basic task of research as understanding the inevitable decline that occurred in old age. Then during the 1930s researchers became interested in “normal” processes of aging. The basic premise underlying this research was that growing old meant surrendering the social relationships and social roles typical of adulthood. Thus, retirement evidenced the loss of distant goals and plans, and the growing dependence of the elderly on others for support, advice, and management of daily activities.

2. What theories of aging did early gerontologists propose? Gerontologists then theory was the first formal theory of aging. It was based on the premise that normal aging involved a natural and inevitable withdrawal of the individual from society. Life satisfaction was highest among those who successfully disengaged. Subsequent research found that some people did disengage, but that disengagement was neither universal nor inevitable.

Activity theory became an explicit theory of aging in response to disengagement theory, but its core premise—that successful aging was active aging—was implicit in social gerontology. Activity theory asserts that older people have the same psychological and social needs as younger people and that it is neither inevitable nor natural for people to disengage.

3. How did later scholars broaden the scope of the study of aging? Scholars broadened the scope of the study of aging to include how social forces and large-scale social processes influenced individual aging processes. For example, social culture theorists argued that the aged are likely to form a subculture because they share physical limitations and role roles. Another explicitly social theory of aging is age integration theory, which recognizes that societies use chronological age as a criterion for entrance into or participation in social roles.

4. What is the relationship between age and social status, and does it vary from one culture to the next? Modernization theory attempts to understand the relationship between age and social status. Its basic premise is that older people were revered in the past and in preliterate societies and that their status declines with economic development. Yet historical evidence indicates that a “golden age of aging” never existed, while cross-cultural evidence suggests there is great variation in how older people are treated in preliterate societies.

5. Which theories of aging consider how race, gender, and class affect the social status of the aged? Political economy theory is concerned with explaining how and why social resources are unequally distributed. A central focus of research stemming from the political economy tradition is on how public policies reproduce existing forms of inequality. Feminist theory also attempts to illuminate the gendered nature of society. Feminists criticize traditional research for creating spurious models of aging for men and women. For using “male models” to interpret women’s experiences and for failing to recognize how various social welfare programs reinforce gender inequality.

THINKING ABOUT AGING

1. What is the benefit of having a theory of aging? Do gerontologists really need theories?
2. What type of professional might find micro theories of aging particularly useful? Who might prefer to use macro theories?
3. What might be the professional drawbacks of depending on a single theory of aging?
4. If you were an aged person, which theories of aging would you think were most pertinent to your own life circumstances? Which theories might you disagree with?
5. What is the single most useful or important insight you have gained from reading this chapter?

KEY TERMS

- age integration theory 47
- activity theory 53
- age cohort 46
- age stratification theory 44
- continuity theory 55
- disengagement theory 40
- disengagement theory 51
- exchange theory 50
- functional theories 51
- life cycle 46
- macrolevel exchange theories 40
- Kennedy City Study of Adult Life 51
- modernization theory 41
- political economy theories 49
- social constructionism 48
- subculture theory 38

EXPLORING THE INTERNET

Note: While all the URLs listed were current as of the printing of this book, these are often change. Please check our website (www.pearsoned.com) for updates.

Chapter 2 Theories of Aging 55

1. The University of Amsterdam (<http://www.uva.nl/en/gerontologie/gerontologie.html>) has a sociology of aging homepage that focuses on aging and ageing and Alzheimer’s Disease. Although this site is no longer actively maintained, it provides some useful information on aging. Go to the website and link to Aging in a Social Context. Then link to the article “Why Do We Age?” Theories of Aging. Read the second and third paragraphs under the second graph and answer the following questions:
 - a. What do these paragraphs say about longitudinal and cross-sectional studies?
 - b. What is the premise of the programmed theories described in this passage?Now look at the fifth graph, which shows that in addition to age, sex is an important predictor of mortality. Answer the following questions:
 - a. What is the death rate per million people among men and women, age 65–89?
 - b. In general, what does the graph show about male deaths versus female deaths?
2. Go to the University of Amsterdam’s website (<http://www.uva.nl/en/gerontologie/gerontologie.html>) and link to Aging in a Social Context. Select the article “Religion, Aging, and Old Age” and answer the following questions:
 - a. What does the first table indicate about a survey respondent’s age and his or her reported religiosity? Does reported religiosity appear to increase with age? Summarize the findings of this survey in your own words.
 - b. Look at the third table. In general, what does this table show about the relationship between religiosity and the health of older Americans?