CHAPTER NINETEEN

Social Responsibility to Family and Community

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How healthy are we? A national study of well-being at midlife. (2004) Brim, OG, Ryff, CD, & Kessler, RC (eds). Chicago, IL The University of Chicago Press, 550-585

For more than a decade now, there have been pronouncements to the effect that American society is undergoing a fundamental process of social breakdown and alienation. Such alarms have been prevalent in academe, politics, and the media. Within academe, scholars across a wide spectrum of disciplines—sociology, political science, and moral philosophy, in particular—have written much about the presumed breakdown of the family, the alienation of the public from the political process, the decline of civic participation in voluntary associations, the loss of civility in public encounters with each other.[1]

A major example of such a critique is Robert Putnam's research on the decline of civic virtue and participation, which first came to public attention in journal articles (Putnam 1995a, 1995b), especially "Bowling Alone," and subsequently greatly expanded in a book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Renewal of American Community* (Putnam 2000). The title of this volume is misleading because for all but a few pages in the last chapter, the book focuses on the collapse, not the renewal, of American community. At the heart of Putnam's book is an empirical re-analysis of three national surveys repeated over the years from the 1970s to the mid-1990s. These data permitted Putnam to demonstrate cohort change in support of his thesis of long-term decline in social trust and social-political values during the last quarter of the twentieth century. For example, compared with young adults surveyed in the 1970s, young adults in the 1990s are less trustful of major social institutions or individuals encountered during their daily rounds, less engaged in civic affairs, and more highly focused on their own private pursuits in life rather than on the common good. The chief culprit, according to Putnam's analysis of these trends, is a turning away from social engagement into excessive amounts of time devoted to television and Internet scanning. The effects of such "thin" social networks and withdrawal into solitary pursuits are illustrated, he claims, by the rising rates of suicide and depression among young people today compared with young adults of twenty-five years ago.

Indeed, exposure to these alarmist articles and books gives the impression that there are hardly any social indicators suggesting that life is good in America or that Americans are good people. If we were to take personally all the bad news and faults one hears and reads about, we should all be in a state of deep depression. Americans are berated in almost every aspect of their lives: for being too individualistic and neglectful of their civic and family responsibilities; for spending too much and saving too little; for either neglecting or overindulging their children; for not taking their marriage vows seriously enough or bypassing marriage all together in preference for cohabiting; for eating too much of the wrong foods and being overweight if not obese.

A wide array of reasons for the presumed social and moral breakdown has been argued: excessive individualism with its attendant overemphasis on individual rights and downplaying of social responsibility; the residue of counterculture lifestyles from the 1960s; the loss of religious faith (or attraction to deviant religious cults); overdependence on a bloated federal bureaucracy; excessive stridency of the feminist movement; the pervasive focus on sex and violence on television; the fragility of families as a consequence of premarital cohabitation, births outside marriage, and the high divorce rate; the breakdown of social networks and stable communities; and as illustrated by Putnam's work discussed above, the withdrawal from social interaction in favor of countless hours of TV viewing and Web surfing.

There is evidence to support some but not all of these explanations. From opinion polls conducted over the past twenty-five years, it is indeed the case that increasing numbers of Americans have little confidence and trust in major institutions in society, in particular the legislative and executive branches of government and the press, a trend consistent with Putnam's cohort analysis (Rossi 2001). Americans vote in elections at much lower rates than do citizens of any western European nation. It is also true that the American diet has deteriorated as a consequence of the vast increase in the consumption of sugar, salt, and fat combined with the sedentary lifestyle that goes with sitting before a TV screen or computer for so many hours every week, with the result that very large numbers of Americans are overweight from puberty through late midlife.[2]

On the other hand, there are important points that are missed or given insufficient attention in these alarmist criticisms and explanations. An important but neglected fact is that there have been numerous times in our history when contemporary critics claimed the social fabric was being

frayed irrevocably, that people were losing trust in social institutions, that alienation was on the increase, crime rampant, behavior in public crude. In the 1934 final report of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends in the United States, editor William Ogburn and his contributing authors took note of trends during the period 1900–1930, trends that would be familiar to us today: declining parental supervision of children; increasing sexual freedom; declining membership in churches; and a sharply declining percentage of eligible voters who actually voted in presidential elections (Ogburn 1934). There were similar cycles of change during the nineteenth century in American history, as illustrated by the steady rise in the serious crime rate from the beginning of the 1800s, peaking in the 1840s, and gradually declining by the end of the nineteenth century. Drunkenness was far more prevalent in the nineteenth century than it is today, and time spent in saloons or taverns exceeded time spent at church services, at least among men if not women (Fukuyama 1999).

The more recent past is often viewed through a rosy lens. Today's social critics who look back with nostalgia to the 1950s forget many things that marked that decade: the pervasive fear that the United States would become involved in a nuclear war or would plunge back into another depression like that of the 1930s; the world population explosion, and the early warnings of dire consequences for quality of life that attend the doubling of huge human populations every thirty years (air and water pollution and acute competition for dwindling natural resources); the "problem that has no name" among suburban women, as Betty Friedan described the 1950s scene in the early 1960s (Friedan 1963); and the still unresolved issues of civil rights for minorities. As Alan Ehrenhalt (1995, 259) reminds us, "there is a pendulum at work in the manners and values of a society, and . . . it can swing when no one expects it to." Such a pendulum is likely to swing again in the decades ahead, much as it did throughout our history.

Two important factors are commonly neglected when this diverse array of contemporary alarmist criticisms is touted. One factor, perhaps the most important and conspicuous by its absence, is any criticism of Americans as workers and rarely any reference to the changes taking place in the American economy and the effect those changes have on other aspects of employed adults' lives. Any assessment of the cohesiveness of a society must surely take into account how well or poorly people are performing in their work roles. On this score, Americans show a high and positive profile: they are hard-working, committed workers, rarely absent from their jobs, and for the most part, loyal to the firms, farms, or bureaus

they work for. In light of the pressures and requirements of the jobs Americans hold, this is a very significant point. Americans work longer hours with less vacation time than workers in any other Western nation, and at a pace that has sharply increased over the past several decades as a result of the demands for ever-greater productivity per worker (Robinson and Godbey 1997; Schor 1992). Just as the transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy involved as much hardship as potential gains, the transition in our time to an information and service economy affects workers at all levels of society, and such transitions involve human tolls not just gains. At the bottom of the occupational hierarchy, workers are being displaced from good-paying manufacturing jobs to lower pay, nonunion jobs in the service sector; at the top rungs of the occupational hierarchy, trained workers in the high-tech computer and telecommunications industries hold down jobs that absorb great amounts of time and energy against ever-shorter deadlines, leaving little time for other domains of life.

A second neglected factor in the contemporary debate about American civic and social responsibility is the consequences that flow from the rapid increase in labor force participation of women over the past several decades. Women rarely move in and out of the workplace today, as they did in the past while rearing young children: with only one or two children and short maternity leaves after each birth, most women today have work histories increasingly more like those of men. Co-breadwinning is the most prevalent pattern in American families. Further, more women work full time just as their husbands do, and increasing numbers work in occupations with high demands on time and energy. Time is one of the most precious commodities in the lives of both women and men. Is it any wonder that priorities center on work and family obligations, or surprising that after exhausting days there is little energy or motivation left for attending community meetings or formal get-togethers with friends and neighbors? As seen in the analysis in this chapter, what is surprising in our findings is how deeply involved most adults are in both family and community, despite the severe constraints imposed by long hours of work and commuting.

Design Considerations in the Development of the MIDUS National Survey

Earlier Work on Community Participation

Earlier studies of community involvement and participation that have been published and widely discussed in recent years have been excellent sources for tracing aggregate-level changes in voting, volunteer service,

political values, and judgments of confidence in major social institutions, particularly when repeat surveys using the same questions appear in a sequence of years. A good example is provided by the Independent Sector on the extent of volunteer work reported by adults 18 years or older. From such reports we learn that in 1995, 93 million adults served as volunteers, a number that represents 49 percent of the adult population; that they served an average of 4.2 hours a week; that the total amount of adult volunteer time in 1995 totaled 20.3 billion hours, with a dollar value of $202 billion (Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1996). The Gallup Organization surveys over the years since 1977 show a steady increase in the proportion of adults who say they have been involved in some "charity or social service activities," from 26 percent in 1977, to 39 percent in 1987, to a high of 46 percent in 1991 (Wuthnow 1998).[3] This trend alone puts in question Putnam's thesis of widespread withdrawal from public life and neglect of communal responsibility.

Unique Advantages of the MIDUS Research Design

Such aggregate-level trend data do not inform us about who does volunteer service and who does not, or whether volunteer service varies by any individual characteristics such as sex, age, income level, or educational attainment, much less more interesting factors that compete for the time adults can contribute to volunteer service. The MacArthur Research Network on Midlife had as its major interest an understanding of individual lives, and to study, within the same individuals, such major characteristics as their health, well-being, and the social roles that define the contours of those lives on a daily basis. This required crossing the barriers among the medical, psychological, and social sciences, which led to a study design centered on three major outcome criteria: physical and mental health, psychological well-being, and social responsibility. This chapter represents a sampler of the work we have done on social responsibility. The larger work is available in the book I was privileged to edit, *Caring and Doing for Others: Social Responsibility in the Domains of Work, Family, and Community* (Rossi 2001).

A second major concern in all the research we have conducted as life-course analysts with a special concern for midlife was to collect a representative sample that permitted us to place midlife in this larger life-course context. Any analysis worth its salt is premised on a comparative method: what is unique to women cannot be established without a comparison with men. So too, this criterion required being able to compare midlife adults with adults both younger and older, and guided by

the question of what, if anything, is unique to midlife, and what is similar in earlier and later phases of the life course. Hence the MIDUS survey included adults 25–74 years of age, providing us with young adults old enough to be fairly well settled into major adult roles and old adults still young enough to be healthy and active.

Many of the major social-demographic variables are interrelated, and only with a large representative sample and multivariate analysis can we assess the net effect of one variable, controlling for all others. An interesting example of this is our finding that it is not employment per se that affects the amount of time that women spend performing volunteer service but how satisfied they are with their jobs. It may come as a surprise to learn that it is women with low ratings of job satisfaction who are most likely to engage in volunteer work. A moment's reflection suggests a likely explanation for this finding: with volunteers in high demand and tasks of a very varied nature to choose among, combined with the fact that most women work in routinized clerical, retail, and factory occupations, many women seek in volunteer work the gratifications they do not experience in the work they do to support themselves and their families (reported in Rossi 2001, chap. 11). An example from my own work and volunteer experience is the contrast between a very dull routinized job I held as an adolescent in a bookbinding firm repairing thousands of school textbooks by erasing or scotch-taping page after damaged page, compared with the intense gratification I experienced serving as a volunteer in a community library reading stories to young children.

Another advantage of the multidimensional content of the MIDUS survey is the delightful surprise of serendipitous discoveries, which is more likely to occur in studies designed by researchers from diverse fields. A good example of this was the inclusion in MIDUS by my medical colleagues of a scale on sensitivity to internal body sensations (known as somatic amplification), familiar to medical and psychiatric researchers concerned with chronic diseases but a construct I was not familiar with. Yet the scale turned out to be a major predictor of elevated menopausal symptoms, a variable not previously considered in research on menstrual and menopausal discomfort and pain. It was also of interest to learn that women show higher scores on this scale than men do, which no doubt reflects women's many years of experiencing cyclic changes of body sensation and mood associated with the female menstrual cycle. Another example of serendipity stemmed from having comparable measures of normative obligations to family and community: midlife has long been associated with a peaking of multiple role responsibilities, but

in a broader life-course framework we found that during midlife, as family responsibilities decline, civic obligations and participation increase, suggesting that midlife is a watershed period of significant change from being turned inward to private family affairs to turning outward to more public involvement. This is strikingly the case for better-educated midlife adults but less so for the less well educated, who tend to remain within the confines of family and parish or congregation throughout their lives.

The Life Domains Covered in the Module on Social Responsibility

A major decision guiding the design of the module on social responsibility in the 1995 national survey flowed from our conviction that little was to be gained by following in the footsteps of earlier work in sociology and political science that focused narrowly on research on voluntary associations and political participation, the two dimensions on which the contemporary dialogue about the decline of social and community cohesion has concentrated. The level of felt obligation and actual behavior as responsible adults cannot be judged merely in terms of voting behavior or community participation. The most vital roles adults fulfill are those involving the two primary functions of providing goods and services for self and others, and bearing and rearing the young. From this perspective, work and family roles are of equal if not greater significance than any roles adults play in the larger community because they assure the maintenance and continuity of society and of the human species itself.

A very special focus in approaching the design of modules on family roles is of particular importance. Almost all the criticism about family "breakdown" is premised on a narrow conception of family; marriage and divorce rates, cohabitation, and out-of-wedlock birth rates all refer only to adults as married or cohabiting partners, and as mothers or fathers. This neglects the fact that throughout the human life span we live a "three-generational life." That is, the emotional and social life for most people is lived out within such three-generation units, which change in composition as each generation moves from one stage of life to the next, from the youngest of three generations in childhood, to the middle or "sandwich" generation in midlife, to the elderly stratum in old age, when grown children and grandchildren round out the three-generational kindred (Riley, Abeles, and Teitelbaum 1982; Riley and Riley 1993, 1994). Hence, in the design of the survey instruments, our concern was not merely with the marital and parental roles of our subjects but also with their obligations, interaction, and support to adult children and siblings, parents, in-laws, grandchildren, and other kin.

If one thinks of the age pyramid used by demographers to describe the age and sex distribution of the U.S. population, today's distribution is not that of a pyramid but of a slim tall beanpole, as compared with the squat, wide-bottomed triangle of the age pyramid earlier in the last century, in which there were many more young children at the base than elderly adults at the top. In human contact terms, this means that as family size has declined from four or more children to one or two in each generation, with each generation living longer, adults may have fewer siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles compared with adults in the past, but they have a much enlarged kindred composed of as many as four or five generations of older or younger kinfolk, depending on their generational position. Let a crisis strike in the life of a young or old member of such kindreds and a wide array of concerned relatives are available to provide social and emotional support. Studies repeatedly show that family members provide 70 percent to 80 percent of long-term care to the elderly (Stone, Cafferata, and Sangl 1987). As hospital stays have been severely curtailed and outpatient care more common, much caregiving of convalescent young and middle-aged individuals is also provided by family members—spouses, adult children, and parents (Fisher and Tronto 1990). For young people, the presence of relatives two or three generations older is an important new source for acquiring a deeper understanding of what lies ahead in their own lives: all the trials and joys confronted by a grandparent or great grandparent become known within intimate relationships that reach the heart in a way not matched by any amount of reading about the "problems of the elderly" or political debates about prescription drugs and Social Security policies.

The Dimensions Measured in the Domains of Family, Work, and Community

After we decided to give major attention to the three domains of work, family, and community, our next question was what about each of these domains shall we investigate, and to what extent can we develop measures that are appropriate to and preferably equivalent on all three of these domains? The very differences among the three domains impose limitations on the development of equivalent measures, because these domains vary in the degree to which there are restraints on individual choice and preference. What one does on a job is in large measure determined not by employees but by employers: tasks, hours, and one's co-workers tend to be givens, not subject to choice by workers beyond the selection of one job over another. The higher the qualifications of a job applicant, the

greater the latitude of job choice; an adult with limited training or skills has very little choice, often no greater than choosing between working for MacDonald's or Taco Bell.

By contrast, in the domain of community participation, volunteers find great leeway in choice: we can join and participate in clubs, organizations, and political parties congenial to our own preferences, interests, and skills. No one is forced to work as a volunteer, and one can choose the kind of setting of interest to us, whether a hospital, church, cub scouts, parent-teacher organization, or political party.

When contributing to individuals and groups, people find that the domain of family falls between work and community in the latitude of choice. Feelings of indebtedness and obligation are internalized, while we are growing up, toward parents, siblings, and close kin. As we know, the occasions of family gatherings may not be all fun and games; many of us bring ambivalent feelings to such occasions. But let a serious crisis develop or a special celebratory event be announced, and family members rally around. By contrast, the frequency with which we phone or e-mail family members and the extent to which we provide them with social and emotional support have a higher quotient of preference over obligation. I attended the weddings of both my siblings, but I had very frequent contact with my brother and very little contact with my sister.[4]

Our decision in the design of the social responsibility module in MIDUS was to measure the degree of obligation adults feel in all three domains. Social norms where work and family are concerned are assumed to be laid down during youth, in part from parental modeling of a work ethic and childrearing values, to say nothing of the numerous occasions during which children observe their parents interacting with relatives. Children pick up subtle cues from their parents to differences in feelings toward kin of various degrees of relatedness; to a surprising extent, those differences are retained in adulthood when respondents rank the degree of obligation they feel toward different kin as a function of degree of relatedness (Rossi and Rossi 1990). School and church contribute further to the laying down of primary social norms. For those exposed to religious beliefs at home or through religious affiliations, there are opportunities during childhood to develop deeply felt obligations toward not only family and friends but extended to the wider community and the common good. The significance of early family and religious beliefs for adult social responsibility is illustrated in this chapter, but fuller detail on how characteristics of respondents' families of origin relate to their

adult norms and behavior is covered in our book on social responsibility (Rossi 2001).

Pilot surveys helped in the selection of items that yielded meaningful scales on normative obligations.[5] Norms can be measured on a very general level, independent of whether or not an individual has actually confronted the situations posed in an item. The question series was therefore prefaced with the statement "If the situation does not apply to you, please think about how much obligation you would feel if you *were* in this situation." This enabled respondents who were not in the work force to rate an item asking how much obligation they *would* feel "to work hard even if you didn't like or respect your employer or supervisor?" or for adults with only preschool children to say how much obligation they *would* feel "to call, write, or visit your adult children on a regular basis."

Whether social norms are invoked and relied on in actual behavior is subject to numerous existential circumstances not only in the lives of respondents but in those of kin and friends as well. You can feel high levels of obligation to elderly parents, but whether you see them once a week or only a few times a year depends on the geographic distance between your home and theirs, and the array of other obligations both generations carry that may preclude frequent visits. As I report later in the chapter, poorly educated adults tend to give of their time and social support to family members more than well-educated adults do, who rely to a greater extent on financial assistance in helping other family members. This contrast by education or social class is to a large extent a reflection of the greater geographic scope of the labor market for the highly educated.

Implicit in these illustrations is the fact that we focused on two types of behavioral measures in designing the dimensions of family and community domains that we would cover; one measure was of time, the other of financial contributions. Hence, we asked about the amount of time given to family, close friends, and kin, as measured by how many hours per month a respondent provided hands-on assistance (e.g., help around the house, transportation, or child are) and how many hours per month he or she spent giving informal emotional support (e.g., comforting, listening to problems, or giving advice) to spouse, parents, in-laws, children or grandchildren, or any other family members or close friends. Summary scores on time given over to caregiving and emotional support are the two behavioral measures in the family domain used in the empirical analysis reported in this chapter.

The analogue in the community domain are two measures of time contributions: the hours per month devoted to doing formal volunteer

work (summed across specified types of volunteer work: health-related, school or youth-related, political organizations or causes, and any other), and the times per month respondents attended a variety of meetings (religious groups, unions or professional groups, sports or social groups, or any other group, excluding those required by their jobs).

The second major type of behavioral measure in MIDUS consists of estimates of the amount of money that respondents contributed to the same array of specified family members in the family domain, and in the community domain, the estimated amount of money that respondents contributed to religious groups, political organizations or causes, or any other organizations, causes, or charities (including donations made through monthly payroll deductions).

In the work domain, clearly we only get *from*, we do not give money *to* our employers, and our time is largely determined by job requirements, not our own preferences. For the dimensions analyzed in the work domain, therefore, we rely on normative obligations to work, the reported amount of personal earnings, hours spent at work plus commuting between home and workplace, and what hours of the day and/or night respondents typically spent on the job. A variety of additional measures were included in the instrument, such as the degree of stress at work and at home, and the extent of positive and negative spillover between work and family, but these variables are not included in the analysis reported in this overview chapter on the social-demographic patterning of social responsibility; they are dealt with in detail in the volume on social responsibility (Rossi 2001).

In this chapter I show age trends in normative obligations to family and community, and use characteristics of the jobs that respondents held as control variables, constraining the time available for either help to family members or participation in the larger community.

Descriptive Overview of Social Responsibility Measures

Table 1 provides specific descriptions of the measures of responsibility discussed in the previous section. These scores, scales, and ratings are itemized in the table by domain, dimension, and name of the actual measures, with illustrative items on each. As noted in the column titled "Descriptive Detail," all three normative obligation scales (family obligation, civic obligation, and altruism) have good reliability (alphas from .78 to .82) and considerable variation in scale range. The family obligation scale refers to degree of obligation to family members and close friends; the civic obligation scale refers to civic and political obligations.

TABLE 1 Domains and Dimensions Tapped by Major Social Responsibility Measures

Domain	Dimension	Measures	Descriptive Detail
Family	Time	Hands-on care	Summated score of hours per month providing unpaid assistance (help around the house, transportation, child care) to four types of recipients: parents, in-laws, children/grandchildren, other family or close friends.
		Emotional/social support	Summated score of hours per month providing emotional support (comforting, listening to, advising) to five types of recipients: spouse, parents, in-laws, children/grandchildren, other family or close friends.
	Money	Family financial help	Summated score of dollars per month that respondents, or family living with them, contribute (including dollar value of food, clothing, or other goods) to four types of recipients: parents, in-laws, grandchildren, other family members or close friends.
	Norms	Family obligations	Eight-item scale of 11-point ratings of degree of obligation felt toward children, parents, spouse, friends, from 0 = No obligation to 10 = Very great obligation, (0–80 scale range, alpha = .82, mean = 60, SD = 13.2).
Community	Time	Volunteer work	Summated score of hours per month doing volunteer work to four types of organizations/causes: hospital/health related, school/youth related, political organization/causes, other organizations/causes/charities.
		Meeting attendance	Summated score of number of meetings attended involving four groups: religious groups, unions or other professional groups, sports or social groups, any other groups (not required by job).
	Money	Amount of public contribution	Summated score of dollars per month contributed to three types: religious groups, political organizations/causes, other organizations/causes or charity.
	Norms	Civic obligation	Four-item scale of 11-point ratings of degree of obligation felt toward civic participation, e.g., "to serve on a jury if called" or "to vote in local and national elections" (0–40 scale range, alpha = .78, mean = 30.7, SD = 7.8).
		Altruism	Four-item scale of 11-point ratings of degree of obligation felt in situations involving helping others at expense to self, e.g., "to pay more for your health care so that everyone had access to health care" (0–40 scale range, alpha = .80, mean = 23.4, SD = 8.9).
Overall Self-rating		Contributions to others	Single-item rating of contribution to welfare and well-being of other people, 11-point rating from 0 (worst) to 10 (best).

The altruism scale differs from the civic scale by referring to obligations to be helpful to others but at some expense to oneself.[6] The last measure in table 1 is an overall self-rating of the extent to which respondents felt they contributed to the welfare and well-being of "others" (who are not specified in terms of life domain).

Table 2 shows the matrix of correlation coefficients between all pairs of these ten measures of social responsibility, organized to distinguish between the four family variables (shown in the upper left triangle) and the five community variables (shown in the lower right triangle). Of the 36 coefficients in this matrix, 5 do not reach statistical significance, and 15 show significant but low correlations (<.10); only 5 coefficients are >.20, with 5 of them >.30. Closer inspection suggests several points of substantive interest:

1. The highest correlation in the matrix (.48) is between hands-on caregiving and emotional support given in the family domain—hardly surprising in light of the fact that any caregiving activity almost invariably entails listening to and comforting the recipient of care, although it is not necessarily the case that those to whom we provide emotional support require hands-on care as well.

2. The three measures with the highest intercorrelations are the three measures of normative obligations (.36, .46, and .45), tapping a general predisposition toward helpfulness to others, with no necessary implication that such values are carried into actual behavior. Note, too, that the three highest correlations with the overall self-rating of contributions to others are precisely the three normative obligation scales (.28, .24, and .33), along with the behavioral measure of civic obligation—volunteer work (.22). In a regression analysis of the overall self-rating on contribution to others, eight of the nine normative and behavioral predictor variables make independent contributions to these self-ratings (data not shown). Interestingly, the single exception is frequency of meeting attendance, perhaps because the motivation for such participation may be grounded as much in self-interest and promotion as in concern for the welfare of others, for example, local businessmen and lawyers who find organizational meetings a good opportunity to cultivate contact with potential customers and clients.

3. Normative obligations and social behavior are only modestly correlated, and only within domains, with correlations only ranging from .08 to .14 in the family domain, and slightly higher in the community domain (.09 to .19). Norms indicate predispositions to help or participate: in family interaction, existential circumstances of donor and recipient

TABLE 2 Correlation Coefficients between Social Responsibility Measures

Measures	Family				Community					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Family										
1. Hands-on care	—									
2. Emotional support	.48	—								
3. Financial help	.13	.13	—							
4. Family obligations	.18	.14	.08	—						
Community										
5. Volunteer work	.02	.07	.08	.08	—					
6. Meeting attendance	.02	.04	.08	.05	.35	—				
7. Financial contribution	−.03	−.02	.18	.05	.24	.21	—			
8. Civic obligations	−.02	−.02	.05	.36	.13	.11	14	—		
9. Altruism	.04	.04	.07	.46	.19	.12	.09	.45	—	
Overall Self-rating										
10. Contribution to others	.09	.10	.11	.28	.22	.11	.14	.24	.33	—

Note: Underlined coefficients are not statistically significant; all others are significant at $p < .05$ to $p < .001$.

dictate whether such norms are acted upon or not; in the community domain, as-yet-unspecified characteristics of respondents' life circumstances are critical factors in giving time or money, independent of normative predispositions to do so. In research on volunteerism, the major reasons given for not doing volunteer work was "lack of time" and "no one asked me to help" (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Wilson and Musick 1999).

4. Among the behavioral measures themselves (highlighted by enclosure in the rectangle to the bottom left of table 2), only one of the nine coefficients is above .10: those who contribute financial aid to family members are also somewhat predisposed to contribute money to community organizations and charities ($r = .18$). As we see in the section to follow, money contributions are far more dependent on educational attainment and financial resources than are caregiving or providing informal emotional support.

The overall profile projected by the correlation matrix implies that our major construct—social responsibility—is highly differentiated by both domain of life and dimension of expression. I assume that general normative obligations are rooted in early socialization, whereas behavioral manifestations of social responsibility are more affected by the circumstances in the individual lives of our respondents, their immediate families, relatives, and friends, and the time and resource constraints imposed by job requirements.

TABLE 3 Regressions of Behavioral Measures of Social Responsibility on

Predictor Variables	Family Domain		
	Hands-on Care	Emotional Support/ Advice	Financial Contribution
Age	−.777***	−.250***	.064***
Sex[a]	.058**	.149***	−.017
Resources			
Education	−.086***	−.090***	.042*
Household income	−.012	−.024	.211***
Constraints			
Hours worked per week	−.027	−.004	.038
Family status			
Marital status[b]	.008	.168***	−.063***
Number of children	.111***	.114**	.116***
R^2	.032***	.113***	.068***
N	(2845)	(2845)	(2845)

[a]Men = 1, women = 2.
[b]Married = 1, not married = 0.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Social Demography of Social Responsibility

I begin the analysis of what predicts level of social responsibility with attention to those characteristics that have the greatest relevance to an individual's predisposition and ability to be of help to others in the family network and to be involved in the larger community. In keeping with the priority given to age and sex in all our research network analysis, these two social-demographic characteristics top the array of major predictors. From earlier research on help exchange among family members, we expect women to play a greater role in caregiving and emotional support, and men in providing financial assistance to family members, but it is not known if this same distinction holds for women's and men's involvement with the community. Marriage and parenthood enlarge the kinship network and intensify both personal desire for and social pressure toward greater involvement with both kin and local organizations in the community (O'Donnell 1983; Rossi and Rossi 1990).

In addition, status position is an expected determinant of the amount of time and financial contributions an individual makes to kin and community. Educational attainment itself is a gateway to higher social status in a community, leading to higher earnings and both a predisposition and

Social-Demographic Characteristics (standardized beta coefficients)

Community Domain		
Meetings Attended	Volunteer Time	Financial Contribution
.020	−.008	.092***
.018	.047*	−.020
.159***	.158***	.162***
.021	.014	.210***
.010	−.070**	−.035
.011	.051**	.068***
.018	.073***	.037***
.030***	.036***	.117***
(2866)	(2866)	(2866)

general social expectation that an individual will contribute to charitable causes and community organizations. Adults today also vary greatly in their time commitments to their jobs. Few professionals and executives work a thirty-five- or forty-hour week; more typical for top professionals is a workweek that approximates the sixty-hour workweek of nineteenth-century factory workers. The variables entered into the regression equations in table 3 therefore include family status (married or not, and number of children), resources (education, household income), constraints (hours worked per week), and our major variables of age and sex.

Table 3 shows several significant differences in the pattern of predictors by both domain and dimension of social responsibility, as follows.

1. *Age.* Age is a significant predictor of socially responsible behavior. The largest single standardized beta coefficient shown in table 3 is the negative relationship between age and giving care and emotional support to family members and friends (−.777 and −.250, significant at $p < .001$): young adults are very much more active in this regard than older adults. This is less surprising than it might seem at first sight, because young adults not only give more caregiving and emotional support than older adults do but they also get more such help from family and friends. In identical equations that predict receiving emotional support, the standardized beta coefficient of age is also negative (−.172) (data not shown).

Thus in personal support involving time contributions in the family domain, reciprocity rules: those who give help to others also get help from others. This is not the case when comparing giving with receiving financial help. Whereas table 3 shows that older adults give more money than younger adults do (.064, significant at $p < .001$), analysis of the amount of money received from others shows a negative sign on age (−.172): older adults give financial support; young adults get financial help from family members.

2. *Time versus money contributions.* This difference is most sharply shown in the family domain: those who are most likely to provide hands-on care and emotional support to others are less well-educated, married, young, and women, whereas those contributing financial aid to family members are better-educated, high-income, older, unmarried adults.

Major predictors of time and money contributions are less sharply differentiated in the community domain: the major predictors of *both* time and money are high education, marriage, and having a number of children. Predictors of volunteer service are somewhat different: women, those who are either not employed or put in fewer hours on the job, are more likely to contribute more time to volunteer service.

From the larger perspective of social structure, note how different the interpretation of social responsibility would be if we were analyzing only community-level participation as the exclusive domain of social responsibility, which would suggest that well-educated, high-income married adults are the most socially responsible members of the community. Such an interpretation is clearly qualified by the very different profile shown for socially responsible behavior in the family domain, in which it is the less well-educated, low-income, young adults who report higher levels of personal caregiving and emotional support than do well-educated, high-income adults. This pattern was a long-familiar one to me; for many years my high-school-graduate brother and his wife were the major caregivers to our mother in her declining years, while I, many hundreds of miles away, consoled myself with a weekly note and an occasional check.

Normative Precursors of Socially Responsible Behavior in Adulthood

The social-demographic variables in the analysis to this point provide only a bare-bones profile of what prompts socially responsible behavior, focusing largely on current family and status characteristics. Human motivation draws on many longstanding values and personality

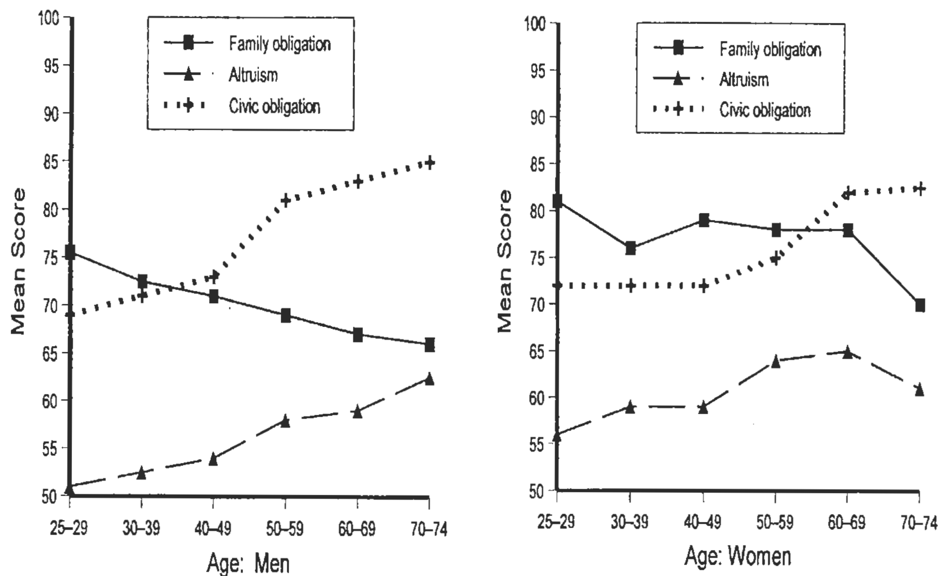

FIGURE 1. Normative obligations by domain, age, and sex (means are converted to a 0–100 range). All age trends are significant at a $p < .01$ or $p < .001$ level. Women scored significantly higher than men on family obligation and altruism, but sex differences on civic obligation scale are not significant.

predispositions not captured by demographic variables. My next step in this analysis is to introduce the normative obligation scales discussed in the previous section and described in table 1. A detailed analysis of a developmental trajectory model, explored in depth in chapter 7 of the comprehensive volume on social responsibility (Rossi 2001), found these normative obligations to be strongly influenced by early family life, in particular the affection and discipline that respondents' parents demonstrated in their childrearing values, the stability of the family of origin, the degree to which religion was important in family life, and the extent to which the parents were models of helpfulness toward people outside the family (a measure of parental models of generativity).

Figure 1 shows the life-course trajectory of our major normative obligation scales, separately for men and women. A major pattern shown in the graphs, which holds for both men and women, is a decline in the mean ratings of obligation toward family and close friends with increasing age (the family obligation scale), and a highly significant increase in the average scores on the civic obligation and altruism scales, a pattern already noted in the relationship of age to the major behavioral measures of current time contributions to family and community in table 3. The implication is that as childrearing is completed in midlife, and fewer

adults have living parents, family obligations subside whereas commitments deepen and expand to the larger world of community and to the welfare of others in need.

Interpreting Age Differences: Maturation versus Cohort

The interpretation of age differences in cross-sectional data must be approached with caution because it is difficult to disentangle cohort from maturational factors. Were we to find that scores on all three normative obligation scales increased with age, we might be tempted to explain the results as a cohort change reflecting the alienation of the young from major social institutions, consistent with the charge of social critics discussed in the introduction. But the fact that young adults espouse higher levels of obligation in the family domain puts a cohort interpretation in question, because it is precisely the family domain that has shown significant demographic change in recent decades as indexed by lower marriage and fertility rates, more cohabitation and births outside marriage, and a higher divorce rate (Bumpass 1990, 1994; Rossi 1993). Indeed, our younger MIDUS respondents themselves report much higher endorsement than older respondents of the view that neither marriage nor having children is important to living a full happy life. But note that here again the family reference is only to marriage and parenting, and that the general attitudinal perspective espoused is for most of us a world apart from the lives we prefer for ourselves; this pattern is analogous to that shown in the political domain, in the frequency with which citizens who hold very low expectations and distrust toward congressional politicians in general have high regard for their own representatives.

Our developmental analysis also showed significant influences of two characteristics of the family of origin that are relevant to further analysis of social responsibility. We asked respondents to rate the extent to which each of their parents showed generosity, helpfulness, and sociability in their relations with people outside their family. This was our effort to measure parents as generativity models, on the hypothesis that such parental modeling would be a significant precursor of the respondent's own development of generativity. Our generativity scale is a modified version of the Loyola generativity scale (McAdams and de St. Aubin 1992) and measures the extent to which adults report that they are sought out for advice, that other people need them, that they have made unique contributions to society, and that they have had a good influence on the lives of many people.

The second important early family characteristic is the extent to which religion was salient in the family in which respondents grew up.[7] Figure 2 shows graphically, the relationship of both measures—religiosity and generativity—to age, separately by sex. For both men and women, religiosity shows a highly significant linear increase over the life course. By contrast, the age profile on generativity shows a peaking in the middle years. The generativity pattern is consistent with Erikson's life-stage developmental task theory, that is, generativity develops with maturity: as skills are acquired, self-confidence builds, particularly but not necessarily through childrearing, and through many occupations such as teaching, counseling, or social work, or through volunteer work to improve the quality of life for future generations (de St. Aubin and McAdams 1995; Erikson 1963, 1964; Ryff and Heincke 1983; Vaillant 1993). It is not clear why generativity declines in old age. One possibility is that in Western societies, the elderly experience either a loss of respected status or their skills are no longer relevant to the young. By contrast, in non-Western societies, the elderly have historically not lost but gained status as major sources of wisdom worthy of high respect, with the result that generativity in such societies may show the same positive linear increase with age that religiosity has. My colleague Carol Ryff suggests that, as Erikson might argue, the later age decline in generativity reflects moving to other developmental tasks, in particular ego integrity. This interpretation is clearly in keeping with a maturational interpretation of the age pattern shown on generativity.

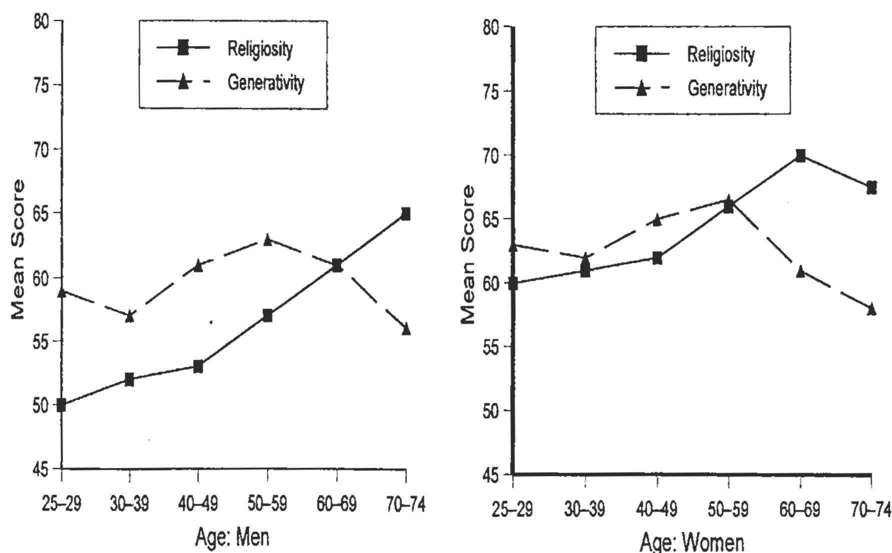

FIGURE 2. Age and sex differences in religiosity and generativity (means converted to a 0–100 range).

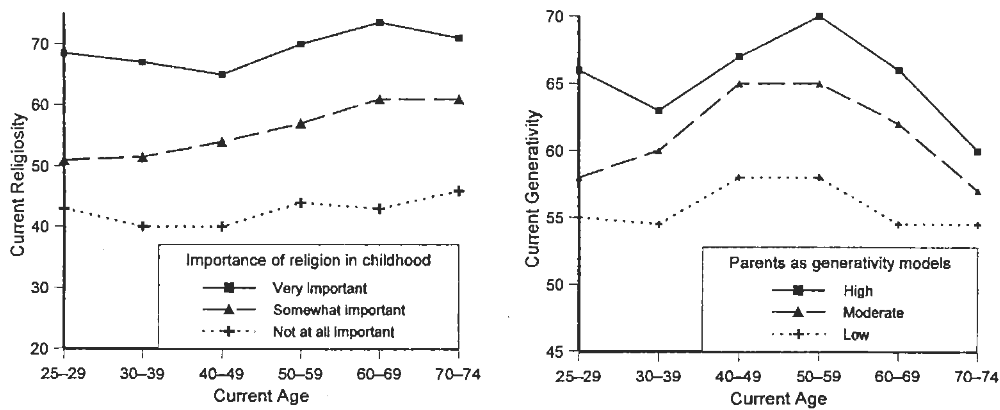

FIGURE 3. Age differences in current religiosity and generativity, by comparable characteristics of parents and family of origin (means converted to a 0–100 range).

But what of the pattern shown for religiosity? Many scholars claim that the lower level of religiosity of young adults compared with that of older adults reflects historic change away from religious values (a cohort interpretation) rather than maturational change, that is, older adults become more religious as they age. Andrew Greeley (1995) has provided evidence in favor of a maturational interpretation, showing that when cohorts are followed through the life cycle and measured for church attendance and prayer frequency, such indicators of religiosity did not vary once age was taken into account. Whether surveyed in the 1980s or the 1930s, older adults were more apt to attend church and to pray more frequently than young adults. In fact, frequency of prayer has actually increased, according to a comparison of surveys that had been conducted in the 1980s and the 1930s.[8]

Additional support for a maturational interpretation of the age profile shown in figure 2 can be seen by relating the early family markers of generativity and religiosity to the current ratings of MIDUS respondents, also by age and sex. Figure 3 shows the age profile of current values by three levels of early family religious importance and by three comparable levels of parental generativity. Note, first of all, the high degree to which there is cross-generational continuity on both measures: at any age, respondents from highly religious backgrounds, or whose parents rated high on generativity, are themselves more religious and generative than those from families in which religion was not at all important or whose parents were low in generativity.

Second, the same age profile is found within each of the three levels of early family religiosity or parental generativity: religiosity increases

significantly with age, whereas generativity peaks in midlife.[9] A maturational interpretation of age differences in religiosity is further supported by our finding that women are currently much more religious than men, although the sexes do not differ in the importance of religion in their families of origin, suggesting a greater upturn in religiosity among women during their lifetime than among men. It is also of interest that early family religiosity has no significant correlation with generativity for adults under 40 years of age but that it turns increasingly significant from early midlife on. This pattern implies a sleeper effect of early exposure to religious values and beliefs, re-activated during the middle years by increased concern for the welfare of others, a midlife transition consistent with the shift from higher emphasis on family rather than civic obligations in early adulthood to higher emphasis on civic rather than family obligations during mid and late adulthood, as shown earlier in figure 1.

Cross-sectional data do not allow a definitive interpretation, but from what special analyses we have performed, and in light of the fact that comparable age differences were found in a study of intergenerational relations in data gathered a decade before the MIDUS survey, in the mid-1980s (Rossi and Rossi 1990), we conclude that the age differences reported in this chapter are essentially maturational in nature.

The Relationship of Generativity and Religiosity to Major Social Responsibility Measures

To round out this discussion of generativity and religiosity and pave the way for the next step in the multivariate analysis of social responsibility, table 4 shows the correlation coefficients of religiosity and generativity to each of the ten major measures of social responsibility. Included as well is a measure of frequency of religious service attendance. The reason for the inclusion of the latter is that earlier analysis showed actual participation in religious services was more important than religiosity in an analysis of community participation. One can hold strong religious beliefs without involvement in congregations or parishes; actual attendance provides occasions for interaction with others who share one's faith—neighbors, friends, acquaintances. Beliefs can be held close to the heart; church attendance provides access to extended networks of others.

All but seven of the thirty coefficients in the matrix shown in table 4 are statistically significant. Substantively, however, most of the correlations are modest. Fifteen fall within the range of .09 and .20; six between .21 and .30; only two above .30. Generativity shows the highest correlation with the self-rating of overall contribution to others (.43), hardly

TABLE 4 Correlation Coefficients between Social Responsibility Measures and Generativity, Religiosity and Religious Attendance

Domain	Dimension	Generativity	Religiosity	Religious Attendance
Family				
	Hands-on care	.05	<u>.04</u>	−<u>.00</u>
	Emotional/social support	.09	<u>.01</u>	−<u>.01</u>
	Financial assistance	.11	<u>.02</u>	<u>.01</u>
	Family obligation	.22	.12	.10
Community				
	Volunteer work	.21	.13	.20
	Meeting attendance	.19	.15	.25
	Financial contribution	.14	.27	.35
	Civic obligation	.22	.16	.16
	Altruism	.23	.18	.13
Overall self-rating on helping others		.43	.14	.13

Note: All correlations are significant except those underlined.

surprising because both measures share some common features. That the correlation is not higher is, we believe, due to the fact that the overall self-rating is an assessment based on what respondents are currently doing for others, as measured by all the more specific ratings in the battery of responsibility measures, whereas generativity is more likely to be a predisposition rooted in early family life and reinforced by the gradual development of confidence and experience between early and mid life.

The major contrast between religiosity and religious attendance is shown by the higher correlations between attendance and giving time and money in the community domain than is shown for religiosity, illustrating the point suggested earlier in the section, that actual church attendance opens opportunities, and perhaps introduces some social pressure, to participate in church and community-related projects quite apart from religious services themselves. As Olasky (1996) and Wuthnow (1991, 1994) have noted, many churches today are settings for all manner of activities and projects only peripherally related to the specific theology of a church, with child care and homeless centers, food distribution projects, and mentoring of youngsters high among them.

AN EXPANDED MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

We are now in a position to greatly expand the multivariate analysis of what determines the level of responsible behavior in the domains of

TABLE 5 Regressions of Time and Money Contributions in the Family Domain (standardized beta coefficients)

Predictor Variables	Time Contributions (hours per month of emotional/social support)	Money Contributions ($ amount per month)
Age	−.231***	.091***
Sex	.124***	−.052**
Resources		
Education	−.094***	.038*
Total household income	−.030	.209***
Constraints		
Hours per week on job	−.015	.028
Physical health rating[a]	−.016	−.011
Normative predispositions		
Family obligations	.061***	.089***
Generativity	.088***	.067***
Social embeddedness		
Marital status	.174***	−.059***
Number of children	.093***	.091***
Frequency contact with kin	.086***	.125***
Positive regard of ego by kin	.032	−.074***
Frequency religious attendance	−.041*	−.023
R^2	.133***	.099***
N	(2845)	(2845)

[a] Single-item rating of health: poor = 1 to excellent = 5.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

family and community, from the narrowly social-demographic analysis reported in table 2 to an enlarged set of variables, including normative obligations, generativity, and religious attendance. In addition, I round out the family measures with the frequency of contact with relatives and the extent to which relatives react to respondents in a positive or critical way. (In regressions in the community domain, I include frequency of contact with friends rather than relatives as the more appropriate network measure.) Also included are self-ratings of physical health to test whether poor health constitutes a restraint on helpful behavior. To simplify this expanded analysis, we confine attention to one measure each of time and money contributions in the two domains: emotional support and financial assistance in the family domain, volunteer work and financial contributions in the community domain. Tables 5 and 6 report the results in detail. Table 7 summarizes the significant results from both previous

TABLE 6 Regressions of Time and Money Contributions in the Community Domain (standardized coefficients)

Predictor Variables	Time Contribution (hours per month of volunteer work)	Money Contribution ($ amount per month to organizations/charities)
Age	−.038	.047*
Sex	.002	−.062***
Resources		
Education	.113***	.114***
Total household income	.014	.226***
Constraints		
Hours per week on job	−.081***	−.032
Hours of hands-on caregiving	.008	−.003
Physical health rating	−.010	−.001
Normative predispositions		
Civic obligation	.001	.020
Altruism	.126***	.026
Generativity	.124***	.040*
Social embeddedness		
Marital status	.054**	.040*
Number of children	.058**	.020
Frequency contact with friends	.094***	.049***
Frequency religious attendance	.140***	.323***
R^2	.118***	.235***
N	(2866)	(2866)

$^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.

TABLE 7 Significant Predictors of Social Responsibility by Domain and Dimension (as reported in tables 5 and 6)

DOMAIN OF CONTRIBUTION	DIMENSION OF CONTRIBUTION: Only Time	Both Time and Money	Only Money
Only family	Low-educated Women Low religious attendance	High family obligation Large no. of children High contact with kin	High-educated Not married Kin critical of ego
Both family and community	Married Large no. children	HIGH GENERATIVITY	Old High income Men
Only community	High altruism Low hours work	Married High contact with friends High religious attendance High-educated	

tables, viewed together to pinpoint the variables that significantly predict one or both domains of social responsibility (family and community) and one or both dimensions of social responsibility (time and money).

With the additional predictor variables added to the array of social-demographic variables, the amount of explained variance is increased (as indexed by the larger R^2's in all four equations in tables 5 and 6, compared with those shown previously, in table 3). There is no significant change in the direction of effect or statistical significance of the social-demographic predictors; hence we restrict discussion of these tables to the effect of the new variables, as follows:

1. The most striking finding is that the generativity scale is a significant predictor of all four dependent variables: the higher the score on generativity, the greater the likelihood that adults provide time and money to both the family and the community. As highlighted in table 7, generativity stands alone in this regard.

2. Normative obligation scales are tailored to one or the other of the two domains. Table 5 shows that the family obligation scale predicts time and money contributions to family members. Table 6 shows that high scores on the altruism scale are stimulants for volunteer work, although not significantly so for financial contributions to organizations and charities. By contrast, the civic obligation scale contributes nothing independent of the more general altruism measure, perhaps because the items in the civic obligation scale refer to such things as voting and jury service rather than volunteer work in youth or health-related organizations, the major types of service in the four-item score on volunteer work.

3. Physical health has no significant effect as a constraint against time or money contributions in either domain, although the sign is negative in all four equations. To some extent this reflects the overall skewness of the health self-rating: very few MIDUS respondents report being in poor health; most report good to excellent health. Very seriously ill adults, especially ones in a hospital or convalescent facility, or at home but too ill to participate, would not be in the pool of likely respondents to a survey. The negative sign on the health measure in the regression equations does not mean sick people are high volunteers. There is hardly any difference in volunteer rate between those rating their health as good, very good, or excellent: some 46 percent of all those in the three top categories of health report doing some volunteer work (compared with only 23 percent among those with "poor" health ratings).

What does stand out is the finding that the amount of time devoted to volunteer work is highest among those reporting only "fair" health.

Why should this be? One possibility is that those in very good or excellent health may prefer to spend their leisure hours in more active pursuits, such as jogging, tennis, or golf, rather than in the more sedentary activities of most volunteer work in hospitals, schools, or political groups. Consistent with this interpretation is that we find a linear increase in the amount of vigorous exercise that respondents engage in: a gradual increment in average exercise score from 11 (on a scale range of 4–24) among those in poor health to a high of 20 among those in very good or excellent health.[10] In light of the time bind so many adults experience today, it may well be that an increasing proportion of adults give priority to their own participation in exercise and athletic regimens over time devoted to volunteer service. It remains for future research to establish whether this is an instance of the midlife watershed transition discussed above, involving some shifting from vigorous activity in leisure time to more sedentary service in community organizations and projects.

4. Religious attendance shows a strong effect, but only in the community domain: the more frequent such attendance, the greater the extent of volunteer service, and even more so, the greater the financial contributions to organizations and charities. Indeed, religious attendance has the largest net effect on financial contributions (beta coefficient of .323, significant at the $p < .001$ level) of all the predictors in this regard. As noted earlier, our six-item scale on religiosity contributed only modestly to community service, suggesting that it is actual social participation at services and social interaction with parishioners that stimulate adults to contribute time and money to organizations and charities, rather than religiosity per se. There are echoes in these results of a finding by Wilson and Musick (1999) on persistence in volunteer service over a three-year time span; they found that it was church attendance and not religiosity that predicted such volunteer persistence from first to second contact with survey respondents.

The finding that low religious attendance is associated with providing more emotional support to family members is at first sight surprising, and we can offer only a possible explanation for this finding; it is not something we can pursue with other variables in our MIDUS data set. Our untested hypothesis is that adults who are deeply religious and involved in church affairs can draw on their faith to help them through life's crises, whereas those without such anchoring in faith are more likely to come from families like their own, and therefore both seek solace from and provide solace to close family members of similar low levels of faith. This

is premised on the view that religious faith provides the confidence and lack of fear of death that makes it easier to survive health crises, as recent research has shown in positive surgical outcomes and survival rates when highly religious people are compared with those of little faith (Ellison and Levin 1998; Koenig et al. 1998; Ryff and Singer 2000).

5. Frequency of contact with friends may operate in much the way religious attendance does: the greater the frequency of such contact, the greater are both volunteer service and dollar contributions. It seems likely that friendships are formed in the course of volunteer work in the community, and friendship networks themselves may provide access to and motivation for volunteer service in sports or social clubs, parish, school, or health-related organizations.

6. Worth special note because it was *not* expected is the finding that respondents who report that family members have a high regard for them (that is, who care for and understand them; and with whom they can open up with personal problems) contribute not more but less money to family members. On a parallel scale measuring negative feelings toward ego (that is, kin making too many demands, getting on their nerves, or criticizing them), a comparable pattern is found: respondents reporting high criticism by members of their family give more money than those with low scores on the negative kin affect scale. This pattern may reflect reliance on money to sooth troubled kin relations, or it may involve kin with troubled personalities with whom it is difficult to get along but who nonetheless are in need of financial assistance. Examples would include a depressed hypochondriacal elderly parent or a grown child who cannot hold down a steady job or sustain an intimate peer relationship.

Table 7 helps to distill the findings from tables 5 and 6, allowing us to identify simultaneously the cluster of characteristics associated with one or both domains with the cluster of characteristics associated with one or both time and money dimensions of contributions to others. For example, the upper left of the first row of table 7 contains adults who contribute only time and only in the family domain; they tend to be low-educated, young females who rarely if ever attend religious services. By contrast, the middle cell of the last row of the table contains adults who contribute both time and money but only in the community domain, not the family; they tend to be high-educated, married adults who have frequent contact with friends and high religious attendance.

Close inspection of these profiles of net predictors of adult responsibility suggests a differentiation by both social structure and phase of the life course. Adults of low social status (indexed here by education and

income) are heavy providers of emotional support to family members, as they are of hands-on caregiving as well (data not shown). If they are also married women with a number of children, they contribute time to both family and community. Their social world is densely peopled by family and kin, with infrequent excursions into the larger social world of community organizations. By contrast, it is high-income, well-educated adults who are more apt to limit their contribution in the family domain to financial assistance but provide both time and money in the community domain. Their social world extends away from the family domain to more involvement with friends, parish, and community organizations. These findings intersect nicely with the findings from qualitative analyses by Hazel Markus, Carol Ryff, Katherine Curhan, and Karen Palmersheim (chap. 10, this volume) to the effect that low-education adults define their well-being very much in terms of close proximal relationships, whereas high-education individuals define well-being in much more self-oriented terms involving personal striving and pursuit of goals as well as more concerns about society and larger world issues. This set of findings illustrates important points of convergence in analyses targeted on two of our main outcomes: social responsibility and psychological well-being.[11]

Phase of the life course is a second axis of social differentiation: the family preoccupies young people, whereas older adults show greater involvement in community affairs, a pattern shown both in the multivariate analysis reported in tables 5 and 6, and in the age trajectory of normative obligations shown earlier in figure 1. For both men and women, obligations felt toward family and close friends show a significant decline with age, whereas mean scores on both the civic obligation scale and the altruism scale show significant increases with age.

Conclusion

In concluding this chapter, I summarize the major findings on the social, normative, and resource pressures that predict levels of adult social responsibility in the domains of family and community, and then discuss these findings with special attention to the question of what, if anything, is unique to midlife.

Major Findings

1. Social responsibility is a multidimensional construct and social phenomenon, highly differentiated by life domain—family, work, and community—and by its major dimensions—normative obligations, time, and financial contributions. This alerts us to the caution necessary in

interpreting whether the social fabric is fragmenting or not, and whether individuals within a society are socially responsible or not, because such an assessment depends on whether we rely on a wide or a narrow range of empirical indicators of social responsibility. With a narrow range, one researcher may characterize a nonvoter as low in social responsibility, yet such a person may be a heavy provider of care to an elderly parent who restricts hours of employment in order to do so. Those who devote a great deal of time to local politics may be viewed as highly responsible by one analyst but be found wanting if such politically active adults hardly ever extend a helping hand or sympathetic ear to friends or kin. *A pluralist society seems best served by a great diversity of arenas in which adults show social responsibility tailored to their preferences and abilities.* It is because we defined social responsibility within a broad and multidimensional framework that the results of our analyses project a far more optimistic image of Americans at turn of the twenty-first century than the alarmist voices so critical of their fellow citizens that have dominated public discussion.

2. Empirical measures on each of the three domains and their major dimensions contribute independently to an adult's self-perception as someone who contributes a great deal or very little to the welfare of others. The high endorsement of normative obligations to family, work, and community that our respondents show provides a foundation for actual behavior that contributes to the well-being of others. Such norms are in part grounded in religious beliefs and in early family life, when basic personality and values are laid down. Whether adults act in conformity to their sense of obligation depends on a variety of factors: the press of job and family responsibilities, which limits the time and energy available to do well by others outside the immediate family; the needs of potential recipients for support and caregiving by others; their place on life's trajectory from early adulthood to old age; and their sex. There are also many adults in our society whom I call "frustrated altruists," people willing to give more than anyone or any organization wishes to get from them. In this connection, I think of parents more than willing to lend a hand (or send a check) to grown children unwilling to accept help as they struggle to make it on their own; or colleagues more than willing to serve as dean or department chair but who are not acceptable to others; or a neighbor frustrated because we declined his help in struggling to start a gas tiller in the garden.

3. The extent of social responsibility is strongly influenced by social structure and phase of the life course: members of the lower social strata of

society (as indexed by education and income) have higher commitments to hands-on caregiving and social support to primary-group family members and their close friends, whereas members of the higher social strata predominate in the contribution of both time and money to the larger community through a heightened sense of civic obligations, more volunteer work, and financial contributions to organizations and charities. Young adults report higher obligations to family, older adults to broader civic participation. Note, too, that well-educated members of society are more likely to be approached by representatives of community organizations to serve in some capacity in community affairs, whether personally inclined to do so or not. A poorly educated plumber, though a master of his craft, is far less likely to be recruited to serve in a community organization, chair a fund drive, or become a lay deacon of a mainstream church than a successful businessman or professional woman is. Hence social class plays an important role in who is recruited to contribute both time as a volunteer and money.

4. Sex differences remain pervasive and significant in the patterning of social responsibility. Women exceed men in caregiving and social-emotional support to family and friends, and in much of the volunteer work in youth and health-related community groups and institutions. Men exceed women in financial contributions to both family and community. There are echoes here of the distinctions drawn by Joan Tronto between caregiving as "fate" versus caregiving as "opportunity": women's roles as wives, mothers, and daughters predispose them to hands-on caregiving not merely out of personal desire but out of social expectations held by others (Tronto 1993). Men drawn to caregiving may find opportunities for social recognition in the public domain by "taking care of" others' needs in indirect ways, a role differentiation seen, for example in doctors "taking care of" patients while nurses "give care." In this view, fated direct caregiving links women to other lower-status direct providers of care—janitors, servants, slaves. Or as the saying goes, men tend to the important matters like tax policy or foreign affairs, while women attend to the needs of others in direct personal relationships. But women's acts of kindness and sacrifice are at the heart of what provides the lifeblood of continuity to any society.

What Is Unique to Midlife?

A backward look over the terrain covered in this chapter, and drawing on research reported elsewhere, suggests an interesting cluster of findings concerning several important characteristics unique to the middle years.

1. In the family domain, with childrearing largely completed during the middle years, parents undergo a significant transition in their relations with grown children, renegotiating the relationship toward a more peer-like quality that is facilitated by the child's own experience of childbearing and a new appreciation for what trials their own parents underwent in rearing them (Nydegger and Mitteness 1996). Particularly striking is the high degree of reciprocity between the generations, as indexed by the strong relationship between giving and getting social support from family members, undoubtedly facilitated by the high frequency of social contact between members of the kindred. Actual face-to-face visits may be less frequent due to the pressure of work commitments, but the phone lines buzz with frequent conversations between relatives, and as more older adults adapt to the computer and rely on e-mail, these exchanges between the generations become even more frequent and spontaneous. Whatever romantic hopes parents held for their children's future are clearly tempered by reality as adult children's abilities are tested in the job and marriage markets. But most parents are no less concerned for their children when they are grown and living independently than when they were young and members of the household. In an analysis of the problems confronting MIDUS respondents that worry them, we found a steady rise in problems that worry parents about their children the older the respondent, and hence the older the child (Rossi 2001).

2. Other analyses of MIDUS data suggest that the experience of midlife is strongly influenced by the experience of aging: the menopausal transition for women, and the onset of serious illnesses for men and their male friends, involves coming to grips with mortality and the meaning of life, which may be related to the increase in religiosity among those in the middle years. In the chapter on menopause and aging (chap. 6, this volume), I report that midlife adults are very aware of the physical changes they are undergoing in fitness, weight, physique, and energy level: many more adults report that they are "worse off" now than five years ago on these aspects of aging than report "no change" or, much less, "better now."

We can only know for sure what troubles and pleasures we experienced in the past, not whether there are calm waters or a sea of troubles ahead. For most of us, at least some portion of the middle years may be the "prime of life"; for a fortunate few, old age may yield even richer rewards. Few adults wish to be older than they are, but at the same time few wish to be adolescents again. From many points of view, midlife permits many of us to feel on top of the world, in control of our lives, and well enough

pleased with what we have accomplished to seek new outlets of both self-expression and giving back to society some of what we have earned—and learned.

Notes

1. A highly selective number of such critiques includes the following: Ehrenhalt 1995; Fukuyama 1999; Glendon and Blankenhorn 1995; Olasky 1996; Poponoe, Elshtain, and Blankenhorn 1996; Putnam 2000; Seligman 1992; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Wilson 1993; Wolfe 1998; Wright 1994; and Wuthnow 1991, 1994. A review of this work on civil society and social responsibility can be found in chapter 1 of the author's edited volume, *Caring and Doing for Others: Social Responsibility in the Domains of Family, Work, and Community* (Rossi 2001).

2. An interested reader will find evidence of weight characteristics of respondents to the MIDUS survey in chap. 6 on menopause and aging, in this volume.

3. These levels of volunteer work are of roughly the same magnitude in the 1995 MIDUS survey, despite slight differences in the questions used and the restriction of the MIDUS sample to adults 25–74 years of age, thus excluding young adults 18–24, or older adults over 74 who were included in the Gallup surveys.

4. It is more typical to find greater intimacy, social interaction, and help exchanged between women (mother–daughter, sister–sister pairs in particular) than between men (e.g., father–son, brother–brother) or cross-sex pairs (e.g., brother–sister) (Rossi and Rossi 1990).

5. Six pilot surveys of approximately one thousand respondents were conducted in advance of launching the MIDUS survey. Data from these telephone interviews consisted largely of new measures for constructs of importance to the larger research endeavor. A major goal of these pilot surveys was to develop as small a number of items for scales of major constructs as possible, a necessity in a study covering so many domains of life. An example is provided by the pilot survey on social responsibility, in which we included thirteen items as candidates for a revised measure of generativity. Data analysis resulted in a six-item scale that explained more than 90 percent of the variance on the full thirteen-item scale. Similar procedures were followed to produce short but reliable measures of psychological well-being, mastery and control, personality, depression, and anxiety and panic attacks, among others.

6. The altruism items were expected to load on the same construct as the civic obligation items, but factor analysis identified them as a related but separate dimension.

7. Regrettably, this is a single-item rating. We did not foresee how important religiosity and religious attendance would be in our overall analysis of adult social responsibility, much less the extent to which there is a high degree of cross-generational transmission of religious values, a not uncommon oversight on the part of social science research generally. It seems likely that this neglect will be short-lived, as research increasingly shows the importance of faith not only for adult responsibility and social support networks but in contributing to health and longevity (Ellison and Levin 1998; Koenig et al. 1998; Ryff and Singer 2000).

8. Greeley (1995) reports that in the European Study of Values, "belief in life after death" increased from the 1930s to the 1990s; it is most frequently espoused by Americans (78 percent) but much less so by people of other countries, for example, the British (56 percent) and the Germans (54 percent).

9. An interesting example of the emergence of generativity in midlife was offered by Nancy Moses, who explained her career shift from managing partner of a marketing communications firm to director of a Philadelphia museum: "When I was hit by a *midlife urge to give something back to the community,* I sold my interest in the firm and dusted off my master's degree in historic museum management" (Moses 1997, A18, emphasis added).

10. Unfortunately the MIDUS survey did not contain measures on leisure-time activities or preferences apart from the exercise scales to test whether such activities compete or not with volunteer service in the community.

11. The volume on social responsibility reports some similar results in chapters by Diane Hughes and Katherine Newman, who conducted research with largely low-status black, Puerto Rican, and Dominican minority residents in New York City. A dominant finding in their research is that the entire concept of social responsibility is defined narrowly in these communities, centering on a conviction that they make their major contribution to society by doing a reasonably good job in rearing their children.

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