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THREE

Domains and Dimensions of Social Responsibility

A Sociodemographic Profile

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Introduction

This chapter provides a sociodemographic profile of three dimensions of social responsibility—normative obligations, time commitments, and financial contributions—in two of the three major domains, family and community. The domain of work is incorporated into the analysis in only two respects: in a comparison of the level of obligation to work with the levels of obligation toward family and community as they vary by age, sex, and education, and as a control variable in the analysis of time and money contributions to either family or community. The hours spent on the job are a fundamental characteristic of daily life around which other activities are organized, and hence are a necessary consideration for the analytic focus of this chapter. The impact of job characteristics on family and community participation is dealt with explicitly in chapter 11.

Social responsibility in both the family and the community domains has been a focus of attention in recent years by politicians and policymakers, media pundits, and social scientists in a variety of disciplines. We hear endlessly about family breakdown, the decline of civic virtue, and loss of community cohesion. But political and media discourse about either family breakdown or the decline of civic virtue is skimpy or misleading in terms of empirical facts. I reviewed much of this literature in chapter 1, but it is important in setting the context for the analysis to follow to emphasize several assumptions underpinning the design of the MIDMAC national survey. Below, I briefly summarize my reading of the evidence in each of the two domains.

Family Structure

The social statistics used to defend the view that American families are breaking down focus on the following trends: earlier sexual initiation, high rates of teenage pregnancy and births out of wedlock, a continuing high divorce rate, deadbeat dads who neglect child support

payments, and welfare dependency that undermines individual responsibility and weakens the work ethic. A more careful inspection of the historic trends suggests numerous qualifications. For one, there is no evidence that teenage pregnancies are unique to our era: historically, young women under twenty years of age have produced children at about the same rate for most of this century (Luker 1996), and the vast majority of these teenage mothers are not thirteen- to fifteen-year-old girls, but eighteen- and nineteen-year-old women. What *has* changed over time is the proportion of births to never-married women: at the turn of the century only 1 in 100 births involved never-married women; in more recent years, from 1970 to 1995, the proportion of births to never-married women more than doubled. But out-of-wedlock births are not restricted to teenagers: such births have gone up at every age, and the majority are births to white women, not black women in urban ghettos. Furthermore, although such women are not married, many are cohabiting with the infant's father (Bumpass 1994), and many noncohabiting fathers remain in close contact with the child.[1]

The most significant change supportive of the family breakdown thesis is the change in attitudes toward marriage as an institution. The majority of both women and men now acquire sexual experience prior to marriage, but how could this be otherwise in an era when the age at sexual maturation has dropped to an average of twelve, schooling has been extended by many years, and the prospects for stable marriages are brighter when the marriages are contracted after schooling is completed and economic independence assured? Under such circumstances, there is little likelihood that young men and women will live a celibate life for a decade or more before marriage. What flows from such circumstances is increasing acceptance of cohabitation, which itself is an index of the erosion of marriage norms, as Larry Bumpass and Minya Choe (1996) have pointed out in their comparison of attitudes toward marriage in the United States, Japan, and Korea. The belief has become widespread across all Western societies that it is not necessary to marry or to have children in order to enjoy a happy fulfilled life, a finding confirmed by the majority of both men and women in our MIDUS survey of 1995. Last, the increasing rate and persistence of even young mothers in the labor force adds further to weakened marriage norms, because there is less pressure on women to enter or remain in marriages out of sheer economic dependence on men.

If one's conception of "family" is restricted to a couple with dependent children, then it is indeed the case that from that perspective, the family has undergone major and perhaps irreversible change. But if one's conception of family is of a three-generational lineage, the prospects are quite different. With adults living longer, and with no need for either child labor or economic support of the elderly, there has been an intensification of the bonds between parents and grown children. The less family members must depend on each other for material benefits, the more they can enjoy the potential for emotional and social rewards. As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi put it, "the modern family, with all its problems, opens up new possibilities for optimal experiences that were much more difficult to come by in previous times" (Csikszentmihalyi 1997, 85). The strengthened bond between the generations is particularly striking between women and their children, and between women and their parents and other kin (Rossi and Rossi 1990). Our MIDUS survey found two-thirds of our respondents reported contact (by phone, visit, letter, or e-mail) with relatives (parents, grown children, siblings) *at least several times a week,* a mere 7% only once a month or less, a level of contact even higher than that with friends.

The lesson we drew from these considerations was the need to empirically define family obligations, caregiving support, and financial assistance not merely with reference to spouses and children, but to the broader array of kin and close friends, including cohabiting partners, parents, in-laws, grandchildren, and other relatives.

The Community Domain

On the issue of declining civic virtue and communal participation, about which so much has been written in recent years, the evidence is mixed. There is firm evidence that voting has declined among registered voters; and increasing numbers of adults have no party affiliation, instead defining themselves as politically independent. As reported in chapter 1, trust in the executive and legislative branches of government has undergone a continuous decline over the past thirty years. The ranks of volunteers are reported to have thinned. Indeed Robert Putnam's essays (1995a, 1995b, 1996) have focused on what he views as the "strange disappearance of civil America." Perhaps best known is Putnam's metaphor to the effect that Americans are now "bowling alone" rather than bowling in leagues (1995b).[2]

Numerous explanations have been offered for the presumed decline of civic participation. As early as 1985, Robert Bellah and his associates attributed such decline to excessive individualism encouraged by polit-

ical alienation, increased consumerism, the decline in formal religious affiliations, occupational advances contingent on geographic relocation, and the anonymity of living in declining city centers or suburban sprawls. Women's continuing transition from homemakers to paid employees has been offered as an explanation for the assumed decline in volunteerism. Passive entertainment at home, now increasingly possible thanks to the expanding number of TV channels and rental movies and the widespread availability of the Internet, has been cited by Putnam and others as responsible for withdrawal into private pleasures rather than responsible citizenship and social involvement in community affairs.

In light of the fact that the majority of couples who have preschool- or school-age children are now dual-earners, it is a reasonable expectation that time management is a critical issue for them. Time may be the "ultimate scarce resource," as Csikscentmihalyi claims (1997, 8). As Juliet Schor states in her book, aptly titled *The Overworked American* (1992), Americans work longer hours with less vacation time or family leave than workers in any other Western society. But is it the case that dual-earning couples therefore provide less social-emotional support to close kin and friends and engage less frequently in community service? We took this to be a question eminently worthy of special attention in the design of our survey.

There were also other bits of evidence to support some degree of skepticism toward the claim of declining civic participation. There is reason to believe that there has been a subtle change in the kinds of institutions adults form or affiliate with. Rather than belonging to formal organizations, clubs, or teams as often as former generations did, contemporary adults are innovating a set of smaller institutions of a more flexible nature: small groups sharing similar tastes, problems, or lifestyles. Such small groups are less socially visible because they carry no identifiable labels, occupy no permanent sites, and engage in little self-promoting publicity, but they *do* represent vital connecting threads in the social fabric. Robert Wuthnow's *Sharing the Journey* (1994) is an excellent account of such small groups and their quest for a new sense of community. Churches and synagogues actively sponsor and house many of these groups, which often involve youth and adults who are not even members of the congregation: 6 in 10 congregations report such usage (Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1993a, 1993b). In fact in 1991 congregations offered as many programs in human services as they did religious services and religious education programs. Participation in

such groups associated with a religious congregation paves the way to volunteer service and participation in community activities, which explains the title of the Independent Sector's report—*From Belief to Commitment* (Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1993b).

Another quiet development less often noted is the great expansion that has taken place over the past few decades in the services provided by private charities, often with religious affiliations, such as Catholic Charities, the Jewish Federation, the Lutheran Social Services, and the Salvation Army, an expansion largely attributable to the fact that more states and municipalities are now contracting with such private agencies to provide, more cheaply and with less inefficiency than public agencies, such services as job training, foster care, homeless shelters, day care, and drug rehabilitation. The changes taking place under recent welfare reform add to this growth of private charities, blurring still further the line between the private and public spheres, as public funds are directed to private agencies for program implementation. Such religiously affiliated charities draw on volunteers to provide some part of such services.

What adults take to be their "community" may also have undergone very great change. When we were a rural society, community clearly referred to a defined physical locale. Limited to the slow pace of a horse and wagon, early nineteenth-century Americans had little social contact beyond their closest neighbors, with at most a weekly trek to town to attend church services or to purchase needed supplies.[3] A shuttle flight between Boston and Washington now takes less than an hour; early in the nineteenth century, it would take more than a week by stagecoach; only a few decades ago, it took a good part of a day by railroad or bus. Through phone calls, letters, and e-mail, we can and do remain in contact with close kin and friends on a very frequent basis, and thanks to air travel, sharing holidays and special family events is possible even for a short weekend visit between kin separated by a continent, at least for the relatively affluent members of society.

But "community" has still other new meanings. As Émile Durkheim predicted long ago in his *The Division of Labor in Society* (1964), belonging to a national union or professional association may hold more meaning for many adults than residence in a particular neighborhood or town. So too, membership in organizations may link individuals not to their local residential communities, but to national communities, whether or not such organizations have city or state chapters. A growing source even of political funding comes not from local constituents,

but from like-minded citizens in other states. Many of us contribute more money to congressional campaigns in other states than to campaigns in our own state. Increasingly, the pool of contributors to many social and political causes, for example, numerous organizations and special interest groups concerned with environmental issues, abortion, health, drug addiction, the disabled, and so forth, span the nation. A contemporary equivalent to Alexis de Tocqueville would clearly have to be concerned not merely with *local* voluntary associations, but the infinitely more complex and far-ranging organizations and causes to which Americans now contribute time and money.

The conclusion we drew from such trends in the design of the MIDUS module on social responsibility was that we should *not* limit questions to those measuring participation in the local residential community through meeting attendance or volunteer service, both of which imply geographic proximity, but that we should include questions on financial contributions to organizations, causes, or charities that may not be local at all. So too, in the family domain, we asked not only about direct caregiving that requires local access, such as help with household chores or child care, but social-emotional support in the form of advice, providing comfort to another person, or sheer listening, all of which can be done by phone or letter. We also asked about financial as well as time contributions to family members because close relatives in need of help may live miles away. Telephone wires and letter carriers are now crucial though invisible links that bind us to close kin and to distant like-minded fellow citizens.

One last consideration in our formulation of social responsibility bears special emphasis. A longstanding tradition in both sociology and political science has been to define social responsibility very narrowly, in terms of voluntary associations in local politics (e.g, Putnam 1995a, 1995b, 1996; Seligman 1992). That we have broadened the conception of social responsibility to include the domains of family and work stems from our assumption that role competence in these domains is as vital a social and personal measure of a successful life as involvement in community organizations, however extensively defined. To think of social responsibility otherwise is to do particular disservice to those of limited social status and financial means whose productive labor and heavy home responsibilities take so great a toll that there is neither time, nor energy, nor the financial means to involve themselves directly in community affairs. Most people in most societies today, as in the past, contribute to their communities and nations through their primary ties to children, parents, siblings, and friends, through the work they do to earn their way in life, and though involuntary, through the taxes they pay, which provide needed services to the poor, the sick and disabled, and the elderly. From this perspective, men and women who hold down jobs, actively rear their children, and spend leisure time only with close friends and kin are no less responsible citizens than those who attend a dozen meetings of community organizations or contribute thirty hours of volunteer service to a hospital or youth group each month.

Data and Methodology

The analysis to follow is restricted to the 3,032 respondents in the 1995 MIDUS survey, aged twenty-five to seventy-four, who participated in the initial telephone interview and returned the two self-administered booklets questionnaires sent to them following the interview. This sample was stratified by age and sex, with oversampling of males between sixty-five and seventy-four, and undersampling of young adults twenty-five to thirty-nine. Compared to the proportions of adults in numerous social demographic categories shown in the October 1995 Current Population Survey, the unweighted MIDUS sample has *fewer* less well educated, young, and married adults, and *fewer* racial and ethnic minority members. (For more detail on the sample and response rate, see the appendix.) All components of the weighting variables (age, sex, education) are major independent variables in the analysis to follow. As a result multivariate analyses based on the unweighted sample are largely unbiased and efficient (Winship and Radbill 1994). The multivariate regression analyses we report did not differ when weights were used; hence we report analyses of the unweighted sample.

Table 3.1 provides descriptions of our major measures of social responsibility, organized in terms of the domains and dimensions of the empirical scales, scores, and ratings, with illustrative items from the survey instruments where appropriate. Time and money measures are estimates of hours per month or dollar contributions per month, summated across specific categories of persons or organizations. Normative obligation scales (family, work, and civic obligation, and altruism) consist of self-assessments of the degree of obligation respondents feel in a variety of situations depicted in the items (or *would* feel were they confronted by such a situation). As noted in the descriptive detail column, the scales have good to excellent reliability (alphas from .68 to

TABLE 3.1 Domains and Dimensions Tapped by Major Social Responsibility Measures

Domain	Dimension	Measure	Descriptive Detail
Family	Norms	Family obligation	Eight-item scale of eleven-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).
	Time	Social-emotional support	Summated score of hours per month providing emotional and social support, e.g., comforting, listening to, advising) to five types of recipients: spouse, parents, in-laws, children/grandchildren, other family or close friends.
		Hands-on caregiving	Summated score of hours per month providing unpaid assistance, e.g., help around the house, transportation, child care, to four types of recipients: parents, in-laws, children/grandchildren, other family or close friends.
	Money	Financial contribution	Summated score of dollars per month 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/grown children, other family members or close friends.
Work	Norms	Work obligation	Three-item scale of eleven-point ratings of degree of obligation felt toward job, from 0 = no obligation to 10 = very great obligation, e.g., "to do more than most people would do on your kind of job" (0–30 scale range, alpha = .68, mean = 22.9, SD = 5.2).
Community	Norms	Civic obligation	Four-item scale of eleven-point ratings of degree of obligation felt toward civic participation, e.g., "to serve on a jury if called" or "to vote in local or national elections" (0–40 scale range, alpha = .78, mean = 30.7, SD = 7.8).
		Altruism	Four-item scale of eleven-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).
	Time	Volunteer service	Summated score of hours per month doing volunteer work to four types of organizations/causes/charities: hospital/health-related, school/youth-related, political, and other.
		Meeting attendance	Summated score of number of meetings attended involving four types of organizations/causes/charities: religious, sports or social, union or other professional, and other.
	Money	Financial contribution	Summated score of dollars per month contributed to three types of organizations/causes/charities: religious, political, and other.
Overall Self-Rating		Contribution to others	Single-item rating of contribution to welfare and well-being of others, eleven-point rating from 0 = worst to 10 = best.

.82) and considerable variation in range. The last measure shown in table 3.1 is an overall self-rating of the extent to which respondents feel they contribute to the welfare and well-being of "others" (not specified in terms of life domain). This is the general self-rating analyzed by William Fleeson in chapter 2.

Table 3.2 shows the matrix of correlation coefficients between all pairs of fifteen 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). Also included in the matrix are measures on work and home life. The job pride and home pride scales are based on the extent to which respondents take *pride* from the work they do on their jobs (or in their homes), and the *respect* others show for the work they do on their jobs or at home. Time devoted to household chores is included as well (domestic care) because time is one of the major dimensions of the measures of social responsibility in both the family and community domains.

Of the 105 coefficients in the matrix, 21 (italic in the table) do not reach statistical significance and 40 show significant but low correlations (under .10); only 14 coefficients are .20 or higher, and 7 of them are above .30. Closer inspection suggests several points of substantive interest:

1. The highest correlation in the matrix, .48, is between hands-on caregiving and social-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, though it is not necessarily the case that those to whom we provide social-emotional support require hands-on care as well.

2. The four scales on normative obligations (items 1, 7, 10, and 11 in the matrix) are highly correlated with each other, with six correlations ranging between .26 and .46, as shown in boldface in table 3.2. The common latent factor illustrated here is a general predisposition for helpfulness toward others. The highest correlation in the matrix (.48, also shown in boldface) is between social-emotional support and hands-on caregiving, hardly surprising because time spent giving hands-on care is itself a measure of giving social support; that the correlation is not higher reflects the fact that giving social support does not necessarily involve any hands-on care but may consist merely of such things as listening to a relative's problems on the phone or during a visit. Modest correlations (.24, .26, .28, and .33) hold between the four

TABLE 3.2 Correlation Coefficients between Social Responsibility Measures

Domain	Dimension	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Family	1. Family obligation	—														
	2. Social-emotional support	.14	—													
	3. Hands-on caregiving	.08	.48	—		Family										
	4. Financial contribution	.08	.05	.13	—											
Home	5. Home pride	.13	.05	.05	.02	—										
	6. Domestic care	.14	.22	.15	*−.01*	*.01*	—									
Work	7. Work obligation	**.42**	.07	.04	.07	.17	.06	—								
	8. Job pride	.09	*.02*	*.02*	*.04*	*.27*	*−.01*	.24	—							
	9. Hours	*−.02*	*.00*	*−.02*	.07	.03	*−.24*	.09	*−.04*	—	Work					
Community	10. Civic obligation	**.36**	*−.01*	*−.02*	.05	.16	.07	**.46**	.17	*.00*	—					
	11. Altruism	**.46**	.04	.04	.07	.12	.06	**.40**	.11	*.00*	**.45**	—				
	12. Volunteer service	.08	.07	*.02*	.08	.06	.07	.09	.06	*−.02*	.13	.19	—			
	13. Meeting attendance	.05	.04	*0.2*	.08	.05	*.01*	.04	.06	*.03*	.11	.12	.35	—		
	14. Financial contribution	.05	*−.02*	*−.03*	.18	.04	*.00*	.07	.09	*.04*	.14	.09	.24	.21	—	
Overall Self-Rating	15. Contribution to others	.28	.10	.09	.11	.15	.07	.26	.16	−.05	.24	.33	.22	.11	.14	—

Note: Italic coefficients are not statistically significant; all others are significant at $p < .05$ to $p < .001$. Boldface coefficients indicate normative obligation scales across the three major domains of family, work, and community.

obligation scales and the overall self-rating on contribution to the welfare of others.[4]

3. Normative obligations and social behavior are only modestly correlated, and only *within domains,* with correlations ranging from .08 to .14 in the family domain and somewhat higher in the community domain, .09 to .19. Norms indicate predispositions to help or participate, but clearly existential circumstances in the lives of donors and recipients dictate whether such norms are acted upon or not.

4. Among the behavioral measures themselves, only one coefficient 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 shown below, money contributions are far more dependent on educational attainment and household financial resources than are caregiving or providing informal social 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. We infer that general normative obligations may be rooted in early socialization and parental modeling, whereas behavioral manifestations of social responsibility are more affected by the existential circumstances in the individual lives of our subjects and of their kin and friends. We begin our analysis by detailing the extent of variation by age, sex, and education in the several behavioral indicators of social responsibility in the family and community domains.

Social Demography of Socially Responsible Behavior

Tables 3.3 through 3.6 provide the full detail on all the major behavioral dimensions of social responsibility: table 3.3 pertains to the three dimensions in the family domain (social-emotional support, hands-on caregiving, and financial contribution), and table 3.4, the two dimensions in the community domain (volunteer service and financial contribution). In both tables, we show two major measures: the *percentage* of each age-sex-education subgroup that contributes *any* time or money; and the *average amount* of time or money per month given to family members or to community organizations or causes among those who give *some* support or money. For those interested only in the major findings shown in these detailed tables, table 3.5 summarizes the statistically significant differences by age, sex, and education, and

TABLE 3.3 Contributions to the Dimensions of Social Responsibility in the Family Domain, by Age, Sex, and Education

	Men			Women		
Dimension and Education	25–39	40–59	60–74	25–39	40–59	60–74
A. Social-emotional support						
Percentage giving any						
Low education	96.2	91.7	84.0	95.7	96.5	87.7
High education	96.1	97.5	95.6	99.8	99.5	96.8
Average amount given per month (hours)[a]						
Low education	73.4	56.8	48.4	117.6	69.6	52.3
High education	60.2	44.9	37.9	84.0	66.6	42.1
B. Hands-on caregiving						
Percentage giving any						
Low education	79.0	74.3	67.9	78.5	80.7	63.1
High education	74.4	74.3	72.2	74.3	75.7	78.2
Average amount given per month (hours)[a]						
Low education	28.3	28.5	24.2	48.3	38.9	29.6
High education	27.6	22.9	24.5	34.9	31.5	26.9
C. Financial contribution						
Percentage giving any						
Low education	40.1	55.2	49.6	43.6	55.1	45.8
High education	37.1	54.1	67.1	38.7	58.3	55.1
Average amount given per month ($)[a]						
Low education	144	147	206	137	142	85
High education	143	227	215	125	205	173
Percentage of total household income given						
Low education	2.5	3.0	3.9	4.1	5.7	8.9
High education	1.8	2.4	2.8	3.4	2.8	2.7

Note: See table 3.5 for a summary of the statistical significance (and its direction) of age, sex, and educational differences on the dimensions of social responsibility shown in this table.

[a]Among those who gave some.

table 3.6 specifies the particular sex-age-education subgroups with the *highest* and *lowest* degree of help provided in the family or community domains.

We recognize three major points of interest from the presented data:

1. Age differences. Age is *negatively* related to providing social-emotional support and caregiving, but *positively* related to providing financial assistance and volunteers service in the community: young adults are most heavily invested in the primary world of family, while older adults show expanded horizons involving the larger world of the community and have the financial wherewithal to provide financial assistance in both the family and community domains. One cannot help but wonder to what extent the greatly improved financial condition of the middle-aged and elderly in our time is a major explanation of this latter finding. Compared to their parents and grandparents, younger adults at the end of the twentieth century are less secure financially, experience greater financial strain, show higher levels of debt and bankruptcy, higher rates of employment for married women with very young children, and lesser ability to purchase a home than their parents or grandparents at comparable ages. These days, young adults are sub-

TABLE 3.4 Contributions to the Dimensions of Social Responsibility in the Community Domain, by Age, Sex, and Education

	Men			Women		
Dimension and Education	25–39	40–59	60–74	25–39	40–59	60–74
A. Volunteer service						
Percentage doing any						
Low education	26.8	29.5	35.1	38.2	36.8	31.3
High education	39.8	49.1	51.9	46.8	57.4	54.5
Average amount done per month (hours)[a]						
Low education	14.1	9.8	14.8	13.3	10.1	11.8
High education	12.3	10.7	12.3	12.6	12.5	15.7
B. Financial contribution						
Percentage giving any						
Low education	54.8	63.1	74.1	57.5	59.7	60.3
High education	68.1	82.5	82.9	71.5	81.9	80.1
Average amount given per month ($)[a]						
Low education	88	83	110	61	91	68
High education	97	145	190	86	118	146
Percentage of total household income given						
Low education	1.8	1.7	2.8	1.5	2.0	4.7
High education	1.9	2.0	3.1	2.2	2.5	4.3

Note: See table 3.5 for a summary of the statistical significance (and its direction) of age, sex, and educational differences on dimensions of social responsibility shown in this table.

[a]Among those who gave some.

TABLE 3.5 Summary of Statistically Significant Differences, by Dimensions of Social Responsibility in Family and Community Domains, by Age, Sex, and Education (*F* statistics on ANOVA)

Domain	Dimension	Age	Sex	Education
Family	Social-emotional support	46.8*** (yg > mid > old)	50.1*** (women > men)	17.2*** (low > high)
	Hands-on caregiving	2.9* (yg > mid > old)	16.5*** (women > men)	7.6** (low > high)
	Financial assistance	6.9** (mid > old > yg)	7.3** (men > women)	15.5*** (high > low)
	Percentage of income	—	6.7** (women > men)	9.5** (low > high)
Community	Volunteer service	4.0* (old > yg > mid)	—	—
	Financial contribution	11.1*** (old > mid > yg)	10.9*** (men > women)	27.6*** (high > low)
	Percentage of income	16.2*** (old > mid > yg)	4.8* (women > men)	—

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

jected to very conflicting messages: they are criticized for not saving enough but tempted by advertisers to buy and consume more products, torn between the choice of accepting more credit cards than they need (and thus more debt) or gambling on high returns on stock market investments. It is an open question whether today's young adults and their parents will enjoy the level of financial security in their old age that the elderly of the last two decades have enjoyed.

2. Sex differences. In the family domain, the data show a distinct difference between women and men, similar to that shown in previous studies (e.g., Rossi and Rossi 1990): women exceed men in the time committed to providing social-emotional support and hands-on caregiving, and men exceed women in financial contributions in both the family and the community domains. Although the measure used is total household income, the fact that, among dual-earning couples, the men have considerably higher earnings than the women may provide the rationale for the men to handle budget matters and hence to give more financially than the women do to both family members and community organizations. Note, however, that an important qualification is called for when attention is given not to the total *amount* of money contributed, but to the *proportion* of total income. On this measure the pattern reverses: women give a larger proportion of their income than do men. This is most dramatically shown among older, lesser-educated

TABLE 3.6 Summary of Lowest and Highest Contributions to Social Responsibility Dimensions in Family and Community Domains, by Age, Sex, and Education

	Young (25–39)	Middle-Aged (40–59)	Old (60–74)
A. Men			
Low education	Lowest percentage doing any volunteer service (26.8) Lowest percentage giving any money to the community (55)	Lowest number of hours per month of volunteer service (10)	Lowest percentage giving any social-emotional support (84)
High education	Lowest percentage giving any money to family (37)	Lowest number of hours per month of hands-on caregiving (23)	Highest percentage giving some money to the community (83)
	Lowest percentage of income given to family (1.8)	Highest amount per month given to family ($227)	Highest percentage giving some money to family (67) Highest amount per month given to the community (190)
B. Women			
Low education	Highest number of hours per month giving social-emotional support (118) Highest number of hours per month of hands-on caregiving (48)	Highest percentage doing some hands-on caregiving (81)	Lowest percentage doing some hands-on caregiving (63) Lowest amount per month given to family ($85) Lowest amount per month given to the community ($68) Highest percentage of income given to family (8.9) and the community (4.7)
High education		Highest percentage doing some volunteer service (54.7) Highest percentage giving some social-emotional support (99.5)	Highest number of hours per month of volunteer service (16) Lowest number of hours per month giving social-emotional support (42)

adults: as seen in table 3.3, older, lesser-educated women give 8.9% of their income to family members, whereas men in the same category give only half that proportion—3.9%. Table 3.4 shows a similar sex difference in the community domain: older, lesser-educated women give 4.7% of their income to community organizations or charities, compared to only 2.8% among men in this category.

3. Educational differences. A major distinction between lesser- and well-educated adults is the difference between time and money contributions, similar to the sex differences noted above: lesser-educated adults exceed well-educated adults in the *time* contributed to both family members and community organizations, whereas *money* contributions are greater from well-educated adults than from lesser-educated adults. Note, however, that here too the proportion of income contributed to family members reverses on education, at least in the family domain: as seen in table 3.3 compared to table 3.4, lesser-educated adults contribute a larger proportion of their income to family members than do the well educated (e.g., among older women, those less well educated contribute 8.9%, but well-educated older women only give 2.7% of their income to family members). No comparable education differences are found in proportion of income contributed to organizations.[5]

Our next step in analysis is to include additional sociodemographic variables relevant to the level of time and money contributions, and to test whether age, sex, or educational attainment have direct or indirect effects on the behavioral indicators of social responsibility. The results are shown in table 3.7, which consists of six regression analyses, three measures each for the family and community domains. The new variables round out the *resources* of adults (income and employment hours in addition to education), and *family status* (married or not, and the number of children). Marriage and childrearing enlarge the kinship network and heighten 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).[6] Long hours of employment were expected to place restraints on the time adults have available for community participation as volunteers, and perhaps on the time available for caregiving and social-emotional support of family members as well.

Table 3.7 shows several significant differences in the pattern of predictors by both domain and dimension of social responsibility, as follows:

TABLE 3.7 Regressions of Behavioral Dimensions of Social Responsibility in the Family and Community Domains on Social-Demographic Characteristics (beta coefficients)

	Family[a]			Community[b]		
Predictor variable	Hands-on caregiving	Social-emotional support	Financial contribution	Frequent meeting attendance	Volunteer service	Financial contribution
Resources						
Education	−.086***	−.090***	.042*	.159***	.158***	.162***
Total household income	−.012	−.024	.211***	.021	.014	.210***
Hours of work per week	−.027	−.004	.038	.010	−.070**	−.035
Family status						
Marital status[c]	.008	.168***	−.063***	.011	.051**	.068***
Number of children	.111***	−.114**	.116***	.018	.073***	.037***
Age	−.117***	−.250***	.064***	.020	−.008	.092***
Sex[d]	.058**	.149***	−.017	.018	.047*	−.020
R^2	.032***	.113***	.068***	.030***	.036***	.117***
N	2,966	2,966	2,966	2,966	2,966	2,966

[a] Includes family members and close friends.
[b] Includes organizations, causes, and charities.
[c] Married = 1; not married = 0.
[d] Men = 1; women = 2.
$^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.

1. Time versus money contributions. The results of the multivariate analysis show that in the family domain, all three core sociodemographic characteristics—age, sex, and education—have direct net effects on the three measures in the family domain. Being young, less well educated, and female are all conducive to providing social-emotional support and caregiving; in addition, being married and having several children predicts more social-emotional support to family members. On financial assistance to family members, income counts for more than education, and it is unmarried adults who give more money than do married adults. Time spent in paid employment shows no significant direct effect on any behavioral measure in the family domain, though the *direction* of effect is for fewer hours at work to be associated with more rather than less caregiving.

Major predictors of time and money contributions are less sharply differentiated in the community domain: the major contributors of both time and money are well-educated, married adults with a number of children. Unique to volunteer service are both sex and hours at work: women and those who are either not employed or put in fewer hours on the job are more likely to contribute time to volunteer service.

2. Age as a predictor of social responsibility. The largest single standardized coefficient in table 3.7 is the negative relationship of age and giving social support to family members (−.250, significant at the .001 level): young adults are very much more active in this regard than older adults. An important qualification must be noted: young adults not only *provide* more caregiving and social-emotional support than older adults, they also *get* more help from family members and close friends. The beta coefficient of age in identical equations predicting *getting* social support is −.172 (significant at the .01 level; data not shown). Thus in personal support involving time contributions in the family domain, reciprocity rules: those who *give* help to others also *get* support from others. This is not the case when comparing *giving* with *getting* financial help: table 3.7 shows older adults report giving more money than young adults (.064, significant at the .001 level), but analysis of the amount of money received from family members shows a negative sign on age (−.172, significant at the .001 level). Older adults *give* financial support, young adults *get* financial help.

From the perspective of social structure, note how different the interpretation of social responsibility would be if we were only analyzing community level participation as the exclusive domain of social responsibility, which would suggest that well-educated, higher income,

married adults are the most socially responsible members of society. Such an interpretation is clearly qualified by the different profile shown for socially responsible behavior in the family domain, in which it is the less well educated, lower income, young adults who show a greater degree of personal caregiving and social support than do well-educated, higher income adults.

It is important to note that lower income families, particularly in urban areas, have a far more difficult task as parents than higher income families have. They often must combat dangerous, disorganized neighborhoods and poor schools rife with danger and temptations for young children and adolescents. Working-poor parents also have less job security and work long hours at tedious and often physically exhausting jobs. Money management is difficult, child care often unreliable, child supervision more necessary to protect youngsters from harm and social deviance. To find higher levels of social support and caregiving to elderly parents, siblings, and grown children after an early adulthood of more complex childrearing is a tribute to their endurance and stamina. In sum, it takes far greater parental investment for the working-poor adult than for the upper-middle-class adult to achieve the same outcomes in child health, character, and competence. As my colleague Larry Bumpass notes, "taking care of one's own" may also be the most cost-effective involvement from which the society at large benefits. When such involvement and investment in families are *not* made by the working poor, the consequences for society are very great indeed. In chapter 5, Kathy Newman reports that the working poor she interviewed in New York City consider the care and supervision of their children to be their major contribution to the *community.*

Enriching the Scope of Predictor Variables of Social Responsibility

The sociodemographic variables in the analysis to this point provide only a bare-bones profile of what prompts socially responsible behavior. Human motivation draws upon more than existential pressures and resources; we act out of many longstanding values and personality predispositions not captured by factors such as income, age, or sex. Sociodemographic variables are often proxies for deeper qualities motivating human action. So too, to define family status simply in terms of marital status and family size is to neglect the larger kindred from which and within which family life develops. To enrich and expand the analysis, we add a variety of additional variables to the multivariate

analysis. First, we draw on the normative obligation scales described in table 3.1. As will be shown in chapter 7, such normative obligations have roots in earlier phases of the life course and are therefore assumed to be predictors of the time and money contributions measured here.

In addition, we add a measure of generativity, a modified version of the Loyola Generativity Scale (McAdams and de St. Aubin 1992). This scale measures the extent to which adults feel 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. We further round out family measures with the frequency of contact with *relatives* in the family domain equations (and frequency of contact with *friends* in the community domain equations), and a scale measuring the extent to which relatives react to our respondents in a positive or critical way. Frequency of religious service attendance is added both as a reflection of religious values predisposing to helpfulness to others and as an index of involvement in the larger social context of neighborhood or parish. Self-ratings of physical health are included to test whether poor health constitutes a constraint on helpful behavior. To simplify this expanded step of analysis, we confine attention to one measure each of time and money contributions in the two domains of family and community: social-emotional support and financial contribution in the family domain, volunteer service and financial contribution in the community domain. Table 3.8 shows the results of this expanded regression analysis in the family domain, table 3.9, in the community domain. Table 3.10 summarizes the significant results from both tables viewed simultaneously, to pinpoint the variables that significantly predict one or both *domains* of social responsiblity, and one or both *dimensions* of social responsibility (i.e., time, money, or both).

With the additional predictor variables added to the array of sociodemographic variables, the amount of explained variance is increased (as indexed by the larger R^2s in all four equations in tables 3.8 and 3.9, compared to those in table 3.7), and there is no significant change in the direction of effect or statistical significance of the sociodemographic 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 respondents provide time

TABLE 3.8 Regressions of Time and Money Contributions in the Family Domain (beta coefficients)

Predictor variable	Time Contribution[a]	Financial Contribution[b]
Normative predisposition		
Generativity	.088***	.067***
Family obligation	.061***	.089***
Social embeddedness		
Marital status[c]	.174***	−.059***
Number of children	.093***	.091***
Frequent contact with relatives	.086***	.125***
Positive regard of ego by kin	.032	−.074***
Frequent religious service attendance	−.041*	−.023
Resources		
Education	−.094***	.038*
Total household income	−.030	.209***
Constraints		
Hours of work per week	−.015	.028
Health self-rating[d]	−.016	−.022
Age	−.231***	.091***
Sex[e]	.124***	−.052**
R^2	.133***	.099***
N	2,845	2,845

[a] Hours per month giving social-emotional support.
[b] Amount of money per month given to family members and close friends.
[c] Married = 1; not married = 0.
[d] Poor to excellent.
[e] men = 1; women = 2.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

and money to both the family and community. As highlighted in table 3.10, generativity stands alone in this regard.

2. Normative obligation scales are tailored to one or the other of the two domains: table 3.8 shows that the family obligation scale predicts time and money contributions to family members; similarly, high scores on the altruism scale are stimulants for volunteer service, though not significantly so to financial contributions in the community domain. 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 to volunteer service in youth- or health-related organizations, which are the major types of service in the four-item score on volunteer service.

TABLE 3.9 Regressions of Time and Money Contributions in the Community Domain (beta coefficients)

Predictor Variable	Time Contribution[a]	Financial Contribution[b]
Normative predisposition		
Generativity	.124***	.040*
Civic obligation	.001	.020
Altruism	.126***	.026
Social embeddedness		
Marital status[c]	.054**	.040*
Number of children	.058**	.020
Frequent contact with friends	.094***	.049***
Frequent religious service attendance	.140***	.323***
Resources		
Education	.113***	.114***
Total household income	.014	.226***
Constraints		
Hours of work per week	−.081***	−.032
Hours caregiving	.008	−.003
Health self-rating	−.010	−.001
Age	−.038	.047*
Sex[d]	.002	−.062***
R^2	.118***	.235***
N	2,866	2,866

[a]Hours per month of volunteer service.
[b]Amount of money per month given to organizations, causes, and charities.
[c]Married = 1; not married = 0.
[d]Men = 1; women = 2.
$^*p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.

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. In other analyses we have conducted, health self-rating was consistently *negatively* associated with volunteer service. This does not mean sick people are high volunteers; rather, it is likely that those in truly excellent health may prefer to spend their leisure hours in more active pursuits (e.g., jogging, tennis) than in the more sedentary activities that characterize most volunteer work in hospitals, schools, or political groups. Here is a potentially important factor that works against engaging in volunteer work, reflecting the increasing attention paid to active lifestyles in recent decades: a preference to spend one's leisure hours working out in a gym or running for a couple of miles before or after work, rather than contributing time on a hospital volunteer staff or as a political clerk at election time.

TABLE 3.10 Significant Predictors of Social Responsibility, by Domain and Dimension of Contribution

	Dimension		
Domain	Time	Time and Money	Money
Family	Low education Female Infrequent religious service attendance	High family obligation Large number of children High contact with kin	High education Not married Kin critical of ego
Family and community	Married Large number of children	HIGH GENERATIVITY	Old High income Male
Community	High altruism Low work hours	Married High contact with friends Frequent religious service attendance High education	

Note: Significant predictors in regression analyses as shown in tables 3.8 and 3.9.

4. Religious service 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 contribution to organizations and charities. Indeed, religious service attendance has the *largest* net effect on the latter (beta coefficient of .323, significant at the .001 level) of all the predictors in this regard. This is not the case in the family domain, where infrequent religious service attendance is associated with providing *more* social-emotional support to family members. It may be that families that lack affiliation with a religious institution necessarily rely more on each other than on the social and spiritual support from clergymen or fellow parishioners. The scale on religiosity (based on ratings of the extent to which respondents consider religion important to them, prefer to be with people who share their religious affiliation, and consider it important to marry within their religious preference group) contributes only modestly to community service (data not shown), suggesting it is actual social participation at services and social interaction with fellow parishioners that stimulate adults to contribute time and money to organizations and charities, rather than religious values per se.

5. Frequency of contact with friends may operate in much the way religious service attendance does: the greater the frequency of such contact, the greater are both volunteer service and dollar contributions.

It is likely that friendships are formed in the course of volunteer work as well as friendship networks providing access to and motivation for volunteer service in sports or social clubs, parish, school, or health-related organizations.

6. Worth noting because it was *not* expected is the finding that respondents who report family members have a high regard for them (e.g., who care for and understand them, and with whom they can "open up" about personal problems) contribute not *more* but *less* money to family members. On a parallel scale measuring *negative* feelings toward them (e.g., kin making too many demands or being critical), a comparable pattern was found: respondents reporting high criticism by their family give *more* money than those with low scores on the negative kin affect scale (data not shown). These findings may reflect reliance on money to soothe troubled kin relations or involve kin with troubled personalities with whom it is difficult to get along but toward whom one feels an obligation to provide financial assistance when they are in need, for example, a depressed or ill elderly parent, or a grown child who cannot hold down a steady job or sustain an intimate relationship with a significant other. (Chapter 8 explores the impact of family problems on social responsibility.)

Table 3.10 helps to distill the findings from tables 3.8 and 3.9, permitting one to identify the cluster of characteristics associated with one or both domains simultaneously with one or both time and money dimensions of contributions to others. For example, the upper left cell of table 3.10 contains adults who contribute only time and only in the family domain: they tend to be less educated, young females who rarely if ever attend religious services. By contrast, the middle cell at the bottom of the figure contains adults who contribute both time and money, but only to community organizations, not family: they tend to be highly educated, married adults who are in frequent contact with friends and frequently attend religious services. As noted above, generativity is the one major predictor variable that is strongly associated with both time and money contributions in both domains.

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 social-emotional support to family members and close friends, and also of hands-on caregiving, as seen in table 3.5. 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; they make infrequent excursions into the larger world of neighborhood, church, and 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 to more involvement with friends, parish, and community organizations.

Phase of the life course is a second axis of differentiation in social responsibility: the family domain preoccupies young people, whereas older adults show greater involvement in community affairs. This finding is consistent with the age profile of scores on the four normative obligation scales. This life course trajectory is shown with a finer classification of age, and separately for men and women in figure 3.1. For both men and women, obligation felt toward family and close friends shows a significant *decline* with age; by contrast, mean scores on both the civic obligation and altruism scales show highly significant *increases* with age. The implication is that as childrearing is completed by midlife, and fewer adults have older living parents, family obligations subside whereas commitments deepen and expand to encompass the larger world of community and to the welfare of others in need.

Special note must also be made of the trajectory of the work obligation scale, which shows a linear increase in felt obligation across the life course, except for the downward dip among older women over seventy, few of whom were ever stable members of the workforce and may as a result feel less obligation even in imagining themselves in such an employed status. That young adults show the *lowest* level of work obligation is surprising. After all, these respondents are not all that young; they are between twenty-five and thirty-nine years of age, hardly newcomers to the labor force. We have reason to believe these young adults, especially the well-educated men among them, are less firmly attached to their work roles than older men are (or were in the past), but we postpone discussion of the possible cohort change to chapter 11.

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 four normative obligation scales *increased* uniformly with age, we might be tempted to explain the results as a cohort change reflecting the alien-

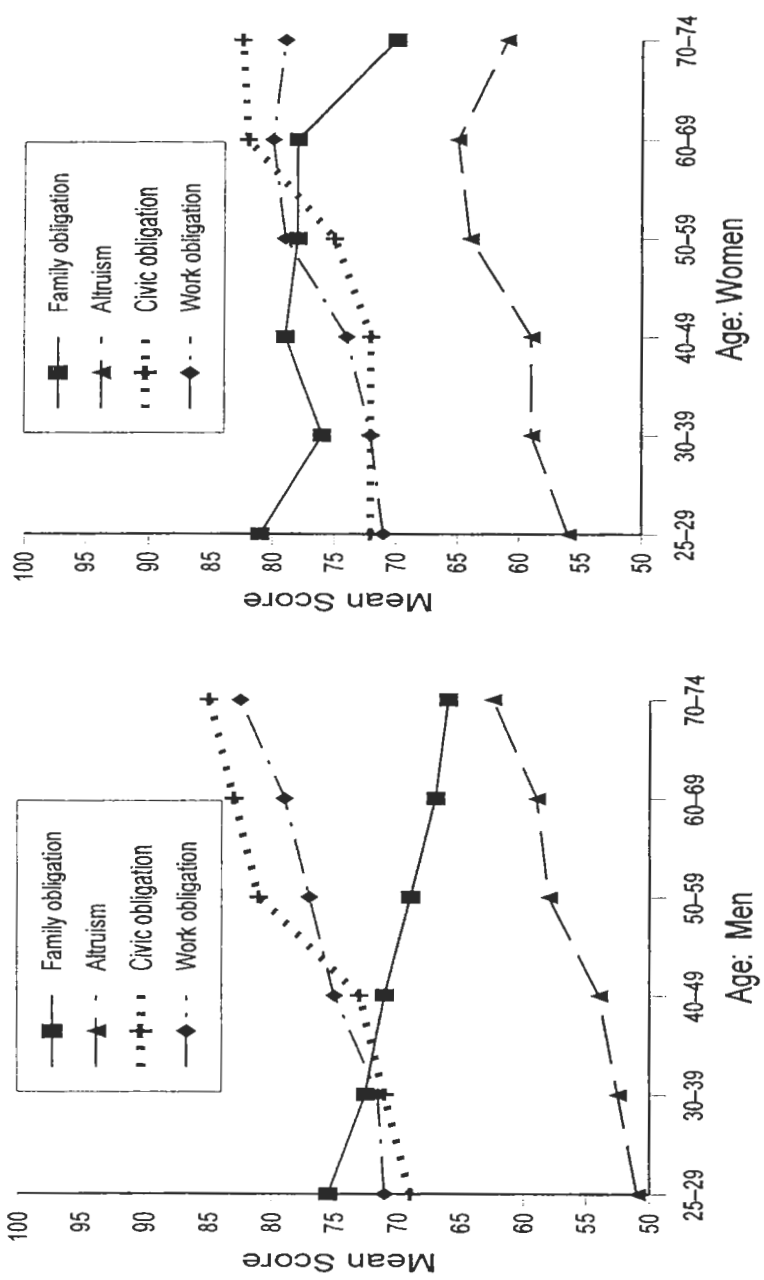

FIGURE 3.1. Normative obligations, by domain, age, and sex. The means are converted to a 0–100 range to permit comparisons across scales. Differences across age groups are significant at $p \leq .01$ or $p \leq .001$. Overall, women score significantly higher than men on the family obligation scale ($p \leq .001$) and the altruism scale ($p \leq .001$), but there are no significant sex differences on the civic and work obligation scales.

ation of the young from major social institutions. The fact that young adults espouse *higher* levels of obligation in the family domain puts a cohort interpretation in question, since 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, more births outside marriage, and a continuing high divorce rate (Bumpass 1990, 1994; Rossi 1993; Thornton 1989). Indeed, our younger MIDUS respondents themselves show much higher endorsement than do older respondents of the view that neither marriage nor having children is important to living a full happy life.[7]

Nonetheless, it is our younger respondents in their late twenties and thirties, whether married or not, or whether they have children or not, who report higher levels of obligation to family and kin than do older respondents. The age profile on family norms mirrors actual behavior, as reported above; that is, young adults both give and get more help from family and friends than do older adults. Note too that the indicators of family breakdown in the demographic literature concern nuclear family formation, stability, and childbearing, whereas our empirical findings refer to the more stable three-generational lineage linking individuals and nuclear families to their larger kindred.

In most of the analysis we have conducted, a maturational interpretation of age differences has had greater credibility and relevance than a cohort interpretation. We illustrate this assessment in the section to follow, in which we analyze two of the major predictors of adult social responsibility: religiosity and generativity.

Interpreting Age Differences: Maturation versus Cohort

Figure 3.2 displays the age profile of mean scores on the religiosity and generativity scales, shown separately for men and women. For both sexes, religiosity shows a highly significant increase over the life course. By contrast, the age profile on generativity shows a peak in the middle years, followed by a decline. The increases in generativity from early adulthood to the peak years of midlife is consistent with Erikson's life stage developmental task theory; that is, that generativity is to a great extent developed with maturity, as knowledge and skills are acquired and honed through practice. The channels for generativity are particularly intense in childbearing and childrearing, but not exclusively so. There are other channels for the expression of generative impulses, for example, through special devotion to nieces and nephews by childless

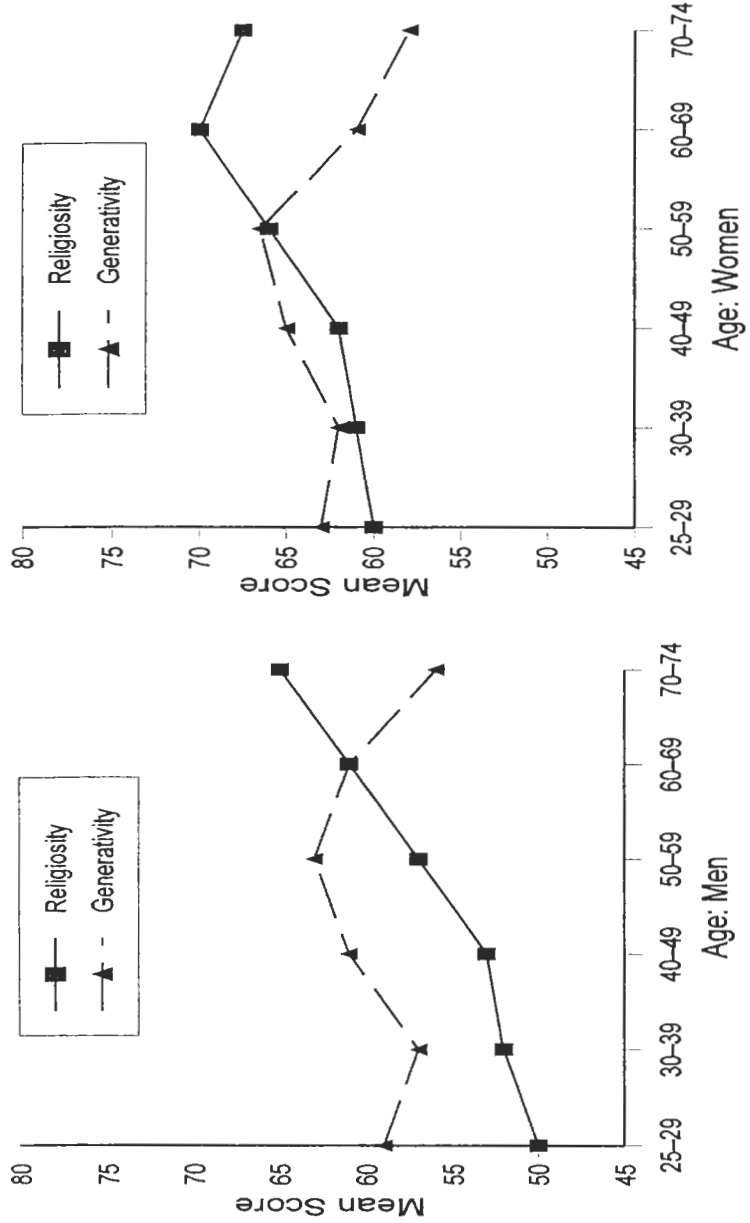

FIGURE 3.2. Age and sex differences in religiosity and generativity. The means are converted to a 0–100 range. Age differences in religiosity are statistically significant at $p \leq .001$.

adults, through many occupations such as teaching 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). But why generativity shows a downturn in the elderly years is an open question. It would be interesting to have cross-cultural data on the life course profiles of generativity. The decline in generativity scores among MIDUS adults in their sixties and seventies may reflect loss of status or relevant skills compared to younger adults in a fast-changing developed society. In nonmodern societies where the elderly are considered stores of wisdom and are recipients of high levels of respect, generativity may show no decline in the years following midlife, but rather a linear positive increase with age.

Many scholars claim that the lower level of religiosity of young adults compared with older adults reflects a historic move away from religious values (a cohort interpretation) rather than people becoming more religious as they age (a maturational interpretation). Andrew Greeley (1995) has provided evidence in favor of a maturational interpretation by following age cohorts across the life span who were measured for church attendance and prayer frequency. He found that whether surveyed in the 1980s or the 1930s, older adults were more apt to attend church and to pray frequently than young adults. In fact, the surveys show that frequency of praying has actually increased in the 1980s compared with the 1930s. In the European Study of Values surveys, Greeley reports that "belief in life after death" increased between the 1930s and the 1980s and is most frequently espoused by Americans (78%), much less so in Britain (56%) and Germany (54%). He concludes that "the massive deterioration of religion in the modern Western world, so dearly beloved by rationalist critics of religion and 'viewers with alarm' in the religious institutions, may reveal more about those who think they are observing deterioration than about the actual religious situation" (Greeley 1995, 87).

Indirect but powerful support for a maturational interpretation can be gleaned from an additional step using MIDUS data. We asked respondents how important religion was in their families while they were growing up, and how sociable, helpful, and generous their parents were to people *outside the family*. This latter measure we view as proxies for parental generativity. In figure 3.3 we show the age profile of respondents' current religiosity by the three levels of early family religious importance, and their current generativity by the three levels of parents as generativity models. Note, first of all, the high degree to which there is

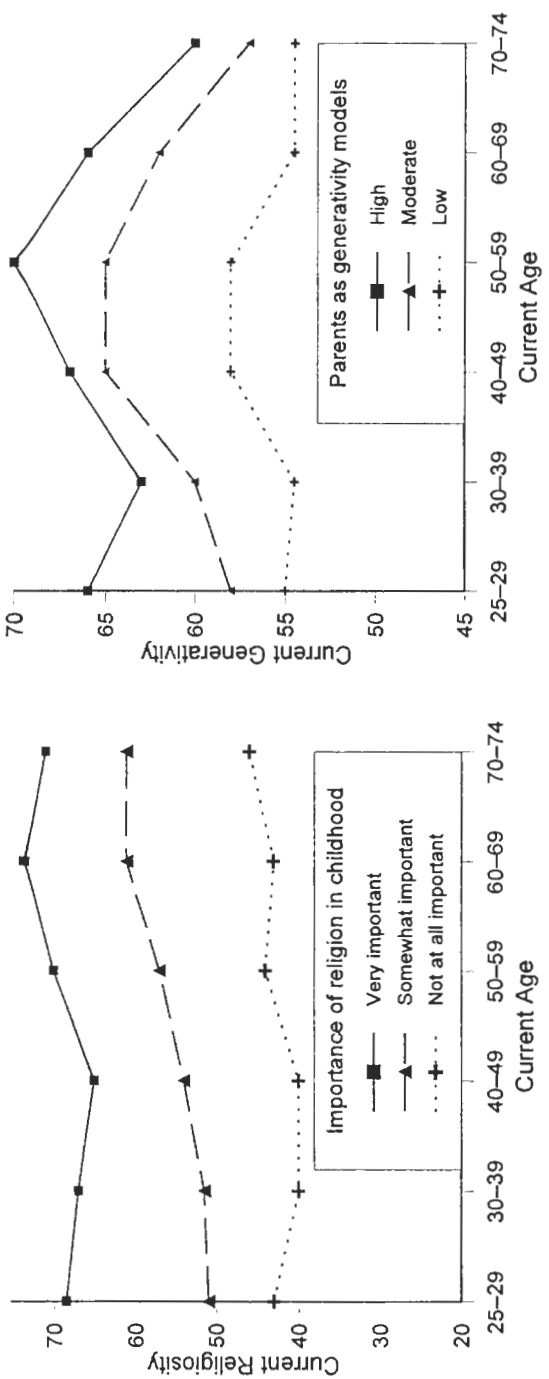

FIGURE 3.3. Age differences in current religiosity (left panel) and generativity (right panel), by comparable characteristics of parents and family of origin during respondents' childhood and adolescence. The means converted to a 0–100 range. All age differences are significant at $p \leq .05$.

cross-generational continuity on both measures: at any age, respondents from highly religious family backgrounds or whose parents were rated as very high in generativity are themselves more religious and more generative than those from families in which religion was not at all important or whose parents were low in generativity. Second, note that 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 the middle years. 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 company 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).

A maturational interpretation of age differences in religiosity is further supported by our finding that women are currently much more religious than men ($\chi^2 = 99.9$, significant at the .001 level), but that the sexes do not differ in the importance of religion in their families of origin ($\chi^2 = 8.6$, not statistically significant), suggesting a greater upturn in religiosity among women during their lifetimes than among men. Also of interest are the correlations between the importance of religion in the family of origin and current religiosity and generativity across the life course: on religiosity, the intergenerational correlation declines from .48 among those in their twenties and thirties to .36 among those in old age. By contrast, early family religiosity has no significant correlation with generativity for those under forty years of age, but turns increasingly significant from early midlife on. The latter pattern implies a "sleeper effect" of early exposure to religious values, activated during the middle years by increased concern for the welfare of others, a midlife transition consistent with the shift from higher endorsement of family than civic obligations in early adulthood to greater emphasis on civic than family obligations during mid- and late adulthood, as shown in figure 3.2.

Conclusion

In concluding this chapter, I cover two topics: first, a brief summary of the major findings on the social demography of social responsibility; and second, a discussion of 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, or community) and by the domain's major dimensions (normative obligations, time and energy, and financial contributions). This alerts us to the caution necessary in interpreting whether or not adults are socially responsible, because such an assessment depends on whether we rely on a wide or 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 elderly parents; those who devote a great deal of time to local politics may be viewed as highly responsible, despite the fact that they hardly ever lend a helping hand or an ear to friends or kin. A pluralist society seems best served by great diversity in the arenas that define social responsibility.

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 the foundation for actual behavior that contributes to the well-being of others. Such norms are in part grounded in religious beliefs, and as will be shown in chapter 7, 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, either the press of job and family responsibilities that limit the time and energy available to do well by others outside their immediate family, or the needs of potential recipients of their support and caregiving.

3. The extent of social responsibility is strongly influenced by social structure and phase of the life course: the lower social strata of society (as indexed by education and income) have higher commitments to hands-on caregiving and social-emotional support to primary group family members and close friends, whereas 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. Younger adults report higher obligation to family, older adults, to broader civic participation. Note too that higher status, 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 in the same community is far less likely to be recruited to service in a community organization, on a fund drive, or as a lay deacon of a church. Hence social class differentials play a role in recruitment into service both in time as volunteers and as financial contributors. (See chapter 9 for interesting detail on this point.)

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 volunteer work in youth- and health-related community institutions. Men exceed women in financial contributions to both family and community. There are echoes here of the distinctions drawn by Joan Tronto (1993) between caregiving as fate versus caregiving as opportunity (i.e., that women's roles as wives, mothers, and daughters predispose them to hands-on caregiving not merely out of personal desire but of social expectations by others). 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 in numerous other social domains: doctors "take care of" patients while nurses "give care"; fated direct caregiving links women in this view to other lower status direct providers of care—janitors, servants, slaves. In a less serious vein, as some comedians have noted, men tend to the important matters like tax policy or foreign affairs, while women attend to the needs of others in direct personal relationships.

What is Unique to Midlife?

The terrain covered in this chapter, as well as research reported elsewhere, suggest an interesting cluster of findings concerning several important characteristics unique to the middle years:

1. In the family domain, with childrearing largely completed by midlife, parents undergo a significant transition in their relations with grown children, renegotiating the relationship toward one of a more peer-like quality, which 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 among family members, undoubtedly facilitated by the high frequency of social contact between members of the kindred. We have

yet to learn whether extreme upward mobility from one's parents' social-economic status imposes a barrier to close social contact between the generations, but it is clearly the case that high earning adults in their middle and later years are providing financial assistance to relatives in need, largely children and grandchildren. Whatever romantic hopes parents hold for their children's future is clearly tempered by reality as the adult children's abilities are tested in the job and marriage markets. Most parents are no less concerned for their children's problems when they are grown and living independently than they were when the children were young and members of the household. We will explore this further in chapter 8, which examines the impact of children's problems on the lives of their parents.

2. Another analysis of MIDUS data suggests 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 grip with mortality and searching for the meaning of life, which may be why we noted the increase in religiosity among those in the middle years. For those not disposed to involvement in institutionally grounded religion, other avenues may be pursued: finding meaning in spirituality of a more diffuse nature, showing greater concern for protecting the environment, even resorting to astrology and magic, as Greeley (1995) noted among self-defined atheists in the European Values Study. In the data reported in this chapter, it is relevant to remember that early family religiosity has a sleeper effect on adult generativity, because the importance of religion in the family of origin has no correlation with generativity in adults' twenties and thirties, but becomes increasingly significant from forty to sixty years of age.

3. Time pressures are acute for families rearing young children, particularly now that the modal pattern is for dual-earning parents. Social contact with and social-emotional support of relatives is possible evenings and weekends, but there is little time for scheduled work as volunteers in the larger community, unless one is strongly motivated to seek improvement in schools and other youth-related programs. From our analysis of changes in both norms and behavior, the middle years loom as a watershed phase of life during which family obligations decline and open the way for the acquisition of new interests and concerns, as indexed by the rise in civic obligations and altruism and the peaking of generativity in midlife.

At the same time, however, it is not the case that there is any one narrow point in the long stretch of years from thirty-five to sixty that

constitutes *the* critical years of transition, for the simple reason that there is great individual variation in the timing of major life events like marriage or the first and last births of children, in the timing of biological transitions such as menopause, the age at which adults first experience a serious debilitating illness, or the age at which they reach a plateau in their careers. If this is true of most individual lives, by the same token it is true of other members of the three-generational lineage. For example, some midlifers at forty-five have already lost both parents yet have children still in school, while other midlifers at forty-five are already grandparents and are providing care for a widowed mother. Yet at some point during the middle years, most adults wish to turn back the clock, to be younger than they are, while their children want to push the clock ahead, to be older and more independent than they are, not understanding parental admonitions about life being too short to rush through too quickly. Like survey analysts with cross-sectional data, adults can only know what troubles and pleasures lie behind them, not whether there are calm waters or a sea of troubles ahead.

Notes

1. In a Baltimore sample of birth registrations in 1983, Hardy (1989) studied all men who fathered children by mothers under the age of eighteen. Almost none of the fathers of children born to black mothers were married to the mothers (2% vs. 32% among white teenage mothers), but most of the noncohabiting, nonmarried fathers had frequent contact with the child during its first three months of life: 92% of black mothers, 83% of white mothers reported the father spent time with the child. Over half of the noncohabiting fathers visited the child *daily,* 27% *weekly,* during the first three months; by the time the child was fifteen to eighteen months of age, only 16% of the fathers had no contact with the child whatsoever.

2. After a flurry of press coverage and uncritical acceptance of Putnam's thesis in 1995 (e.g., Sam Roberts's article in the *New York Times* entitled "Alone in the Vast Wasteland"), skepticism set in. Nicholas Lemann (1996) suggests that the really interesting question is *why* Putnam's notion that the bonds of civic association are dissolving was so widely and uncritically accepted. As discussed in chapter 1, the significant point where bowling is concerned is that leagues have indeed declined, but largely because business firms no longer sponsor them as they did in the past; in place of being the men's "night out with the boys," bowling has become more prevalent among dating and married couples and their teenage children.

Putnam's more elaborate recent analysis (2000) of civic participation and public trust is far more persuasive. At the heart of his empirical analysis of trends shown in three national surveys conducted over three decades is the overall finding that today's young adults are less engaged in civic affairs, feel less positive toward public institutions, and have less trust in other citizens than young adults did thirty years ago.

3. It should also be noted that settlement occurred in a very different manner in the United States than in many European countries. Our Homestead Act required settlers to live on and work the land for five years before it became their own. In Italy, by contrast, it was more typical for peasants to reside in small towns and travel each day to the land they tilled. Perhaps American value emphasis on autonomy and independence contributed to the nature of the legislative requirements governing settlement of the West, but there is evidence that the same focus on autonomy and independence characterizes even planned communities in our day. Residents are attracted to such planned communities not out of a desire for close association with their neighbors but for privacy and security, a pattern Blakely and Snyder (1997) found especially in the gated communities in the Sunbelt, replete with guardhouse, electronic surveillance systems, and physical barriers. A contributing factor to the strong desire for security may be that such residents are often on the move, traveling for pleasure, business, or both, hence leaving unattended houses full of very expensive furniture and equipment.

4. In a regression analysis of the overall self-rating on contribution to others, all but one of the major normative and behavioral variables on social responsibility make independent contributions to these self-ratings (data not shown). Interestingly, the single exception is frequency of meeting attendance, perhaps because motivation for such participation is grounded as much in self-interest as in concern for the welfare of others, exemplified by those ambitious to hold public office who find participation in local voluntary associations imperative to advance their political goals.

5. Married adults give a significantly larger proportion of income to both family and community than unmarried adults, with the single exception of young and middle-aged women, among whom the *unmarried* give a much larger proportion than *married* women of comparable ages (7% vs. 1.8%, respectively). This is perhaps a reflection of the fact that unmarried daughters are often in a better position than their married sisters to provide both care and money to elderly or ill parents, because they are not rearing young children or seeing adolescent children through years of higher education. Unmarried women with children may be an emerging category of such providers, perhaps helping to support grown children who have little education and are in need of financial help continuing beyond their adolescence.

6. We emphasize social pressure, not merely personal desire, because there may well be a sizable element of what Alan Walker (1993) calls "compulsory altruism" in the increased involvement of young parents with neighbors, relatives, and youth-oriented activities in the community.

7. In the total sample, fully 69.4% agree that "women can have full and happy lives without having any children"; only 17% disagree; and 13% are ambivalent and express no opinion. It can be noted, however, that our survey data on overall life satisfaction do not lend much support to this view: in all age groups, respondents who are married or who have at least one child report higher scores on overall life satisfaction than unmarried or childless adults do.

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