

International Seminar on the New History of Kinship
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REPORT

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Program Committee: Tommy Bengtsson, chair (Lund University), James Z Lee (University of Michigan), Geri Mineau (University of Utah) and Paul-André Rosental (École des hautes études en sciences sociales/INED).

The historical demographic study of kinship has experienced tremendous change over the last fifteen years. Historians of population have demonstrated the importance of kinship networks in understanding demographic and social processes. Studies of extended kinship have stimulated new analytical approaches and have produced findings that are among the most innovative and productive lines of inquiry in population and social history. Historical demographers, economic historians and sociologists have identified the social and demographic consequences of familial and kin networks in the past and in so doing have expanded the databases of familial and demographic information to include notarial archives, taxes records, land registers, and especially genealogical information. Anthropologists have used similar historical genealogical and social information to expand research in their field. In addition, extended kinships are used by geneticists and others to identify the presence of disease aggregation in families and to study the association of consanguinity and health outcomes. In Quebec, Sweden, Utah and other populations, the same research resources are used by different disciplines.

The aim of this seminar was to bring together international specialists in the field of historical kinship studies to assess each other's findings; begin discussion on the new issues raised, the ideas, concepts and tools to be developed, and lines of research to be encouraged; and promote integrated multidisciplinary research. The seminar was attended by historical demographers, economic historians, sociologists, anthropologists, geneticists, and scholars from other disciplines interested in exchanging the latest scientific knowledge on forms of kinship and their effects on demographic and social behavior.

Papers were sought that:

- * were based on new research and findings;
- * employed non-conventional data sources;
- * applied and assessed familial-linkage methods developed by geneticists.

Fourteen papers were presented in sessions on health; kinship and fertility; generations and social history; and kinship and social stratification.

Health

It has long been recognized that health outcomes and life expectancies of related individuals are highly correlated, through both genetic inheritance and shared environment. Genealogical data can be used to produce family histories of disease and longevity and allow research on the “heritability” of morbidity and mortality.

Marc Tremblay’s presentation focused on ascending genealogies established for a sample of Quebecers married 1945–1965. The research found that 98 per cent of Quebecers of French descent share at least one common ancestor, one per cent of founders contribute ten per cent of the gene pool and nine per cent of founders contribute 50 per cent of the gene pool. This study of the origins and genealogical structure emphasizes that the early founder effects are still in many ways strongly perceptible.

The next two papers considered the impact of familial longevity on an individual’s life expectancy. Using detailed genealogies for Utah, Geraldine Mineau studied a cohort born from 1830 to 1947 to determine the familial aggregation of cause of death for persons living to age 65 or older and concluded that family histories of death from particular causes greatly increase an individual’s risk of dying from the same cause. More generally, individuals with a family history of longevity are associated with lowered risk of multiple chronic diseases of the elderly. Göran Broström and Tommy Bengtsson found for nineteenth-century southern Sweden, that a mother’s longevity was highly correlated with the longevity of daughters but not sons, while the longevity of fathers had no effect on either the life expectancy of sons or daughters.

Discussion centered on the utility of this research, with the discussant, Daniel Courgeau, declaring that molecular and genetic science is a better option than genealogical studies, and that most so-called “genetical” processes cannot be proved to be so, and may simply be explained by environmental mechanisms. He has stressed the biases and dangers of genetical explanations, both in terms of scientific precision and ethics. Hélène Vézina, a coauthor of the first paper, pointed out that their research provided precise information on the homogeneity of the population and that its usefulness related to genetic epidemiology in addition to historical demography. Genealogies can help explain today’s genetic information. Geraldine Mineau added that for studies of particular diseases, such as cancer, a familial approach has proven to be more effective than a purely molecular approach and can be used to find pedigrees that have higher disease propensities. These familial studies compare both close and distant relatives to address environmental issues. Alan Bittles noted that he was wary of conclusions based solely on current genetic information, given multiple gene–environment interactions.

Kinship and Fertility

The papers in this session emphasized the importance of kin, and kin relationships, in determining fertility and early-childhood mortality outcomes, either directly through kin help or competition, or indirectly through genetic transmission.

Dilip C. Nath presented results of a survey conducted recently in two Indian villages. The study assessed the contribution of grandmothers (and grandmother-like helpers) in determining reproductive success of their daughters. The study found that the presence of grandmothers leads to shorter birth intervals and a longer reproductive span, probably

directly through grandmotherly support in taking on childcare and other responsibilities of the mother.

Monique Borgerhoff Mulder, using an evolutionary perspective, considered the impact kin presence has on early-childhood survival among the Kipsigi people of Kenya. This investigation considered the effects of both patrilineal and matrilineal kin while taking into account family wealth and whether the kin were in close proximity or living at a distance. For example, in rich families the presence of uncles had no effect on mortality however in poor families the presence of uncles was correlated with increased infant mortality, possibly through increased competition for scarce resources.

Krzysztof Tymicki investigated the effect of kin help on the transition to successive births in Bejsce parish, Poland, 1730–1968, using reproductive histories derived from reconstituted register data. The kin effect was strongest at higher parities and mostly related to the presence of grandparents.

Alan Bittles spoke on results of a study of the Skellefteå region of Sweden, 1720–1899 conducted with Inez Egerbladh. The children of consanguineous couples tended to experience higher rates of stillbirths, infant mortality and early-childhood mortality than the children of non-related couples. The effect was greatest in first-cousin marriages and was probably associated with the expression of detrimental recessive genes.

The discussant, Myron Gutmann, noted that many of the questions addressed in this session were asked, although not answered, 50 years ago. It was known that kinship mattered, however the data were required to determine how it mattered. He suggested that future research might consider the extent to which differential effort by the older generation impacts on demographic outcomes such as fertility and child survival.

Generations and Social History

Using microsimulation, Mike Murphy examined how different patterns of inheritance (of resources and demographic behavior) influence population dynamics. The work was largely exploratory but demonstrated how resources may be included as a factor in microsimulation models of kinship. It also indicates that the effects are likely to be small.

James Lee discussed the role of kin networks in determining individual social and demographic outcomes in northeast China, 1774–1909. The behavior of individuals varied according to their own characteristics but also the characteristics of their close kin, household, household group, descent group and village; at every level, social organization mattered.

The next two papers used the TRA survey to examine migration and kinship in nineteenth-century France. The survey consists of reconstituted patrilineages for surnames beginning with the letters 'Tra'. Lionel Kesztenbaum considered the extent to which kinship influences the decision to migrate and the migration destination. Military records containing continuous recording of place of residence for males aged 20–46 years were added to the TRA survey, allowing detailed analysis of migration patterns by

familial background. It appears that the spatial distribution of kin influenced the decision to migrate, but not the destination.

Noël Bonneuil and Paul-André Rosental used multi-level modeling to answer the same question: to what extent did kin influence the risk to migration in nineteenth-century France? Findings included the tendency to move away from both parents and parents-in-law, and that more literate people were likely to move further away. Their study shows that, for a population taken as a whole, family networks play no role in migratory destinations. This result can be explained by the socially differential use of family networks (poor families have more difficulties to build and activate long distance networks) and by the different ways in which, all things being equal, families have access to environmental resources.

The discussant, George Alter, commented that the papers in this session showed the limits of kinship in influencing behavior.

Kinship and Social Stratification

Steven King drew on English pauper letters and family reconstitutions to delineate notional and functional kinship networks in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England. Notionally, the English poor had extensive and complex proximate kinship networks. The letters indicate that an array of kin were also considered ‘functional’, challenging Laslett’s view of the predominance of nuclear families in England.

Cyril Grange gave an overview of matrimonial networks of the French Jewish elite in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Paris. These networks were widely distributed across Europe. Marital alliances between dynasties were common in the nineteenth century but links weakened in the twentieth century.

Georg Fertig noted that the formation of kinship through marriage may be both a strategy and a random process. Strategy may be inferred from non-random behavior. A detailed database—containing information on family reconstitutions, land and credit transactions, godparentage, inheritance contracts, inventories, household lists, emigration records, occupation and cause of death—was used to analysis kin relationships and strategies in three German parishes.

The discussant, Gilles Postel-Vinay, highlighted that the seminar was termed ‘the new history of kinship’, and noted that all three papers in the session were using new sources of data and new approaches to the study of kinship, as had other papers in the seminar. Paul-André Rosental commented that the last two papers emphasized the relationships between kin and alliance and that social history was required to analyze these relationships.

Conclusion

The papers at the seminar generally fell into one of two categories: the development of kinship resources and construction of kinship analysis, or, the effect of kinship on demographic and social outcomes including mortality, fertility, migration and social mobility.

Much discussion throughout the seminar centered on the relative importance of genetics and historical studies of kinship, and the contribution that one can make to the other. Opinions varied widely. At one end of the spectrum was the belief that molecular and genetic science would supplant kinship studies; that there is ‘no future in the past, the future is in the present’. At the other end was the view that the social sciences should remain autonomous and that social-science kinship studies should not incorporate genetics, on ideological and moral grounds.

Further discussion raised a number of issues, for example that terminology such as “familial” rather than “genetic” could be used across disciplines. This allows observations without implying whether the influence is due to inherited factors versus those that are environmental or social.

The middle ground was held by those who believe that each discipline can make important contributions to the other. A demographic basis is required for many disciplines such as population genetics, epidemiology, genetic epidemiology, and cultural evolution. Genealogies can help explain today’s genetic information and provide precise information in terms of the homogeneity of the population. In addition, genetics may be relevant in demographic studies of health and mortality, where biological pathways can be used as explanatory factors.

For other participants there is no such middle ground. Thus the conference displayed a strong opposition, not to say controversy, between two views of dealing with complex kinship forms. One treats it as a partially biological phenomenon, where some patterns (in terms of longevity) may be genetically inherited. The other approach treats kin as a social construction, where strategies and actions to draw resources from the environment, explain demographic and social outcomes. It also considers that statistics, though necessary as a validation tool, is not sufficient to understand the context and meanings associated to family behaviors. According to this view, the conference tends to show that these two approaches will not be easily reconciled in the future.

Papers presented at the International Seminar on the New History of Kinship

“Distant kinship in the Quebec population: an analysis of the founder effects using extended genealogies. Marc Tremblay, H el ene V ezina”, Bertrand Desjardins and Louis Houde

“Familial aggregation of elderly cause-specific mortality in the Utah Population Database, 1904–2002”, Richard Kerber, Elizabeth O'Brien, Ken Smith and Geraldine Mineau

“Effects of mothers on children's mortality in older ages, Southern Sweden, 1829–1894”, Tommy Bengtsson and G oran Brostr om

“The effects of kinship help on reproductive success among two Indian traditional societies”, Dilip C. Nath, Donna L. Leonetti and Natabar S. Hemam.

“Kinship, competition, cooperation, and reproductive outcomes”, Monique Borgerhoff Mulder and Craig Hadley

“When do kinsmen really help? Examination of the cohort and parity specific kin effects on fertility behaviour. Case of the Bejsce parish register reconstitution study, XVII–XX centuries, Poland”, Krzysztof Tymicki

“The influence of consanguineous marriage on fertility and early mortality in Skellefte , Sweden, 1720–1899”, Inez Egerbladh and Alan Bittles

“Microsimulation kinship models for assessing strategies of inheritance”, Mike Murphy

“Place and person in rural Northeast China: the influence of geographic and kin relationships on individual behavior, 1774–1909”, Cameron Campbell and James Lee

“Places of life events as bequestable wealth. Familial territory and migration in France, nineteenth and twentieth centuries”, Lionel Kesztenbaum

“Extended kinship and individual migration in nineteenth-century France: a 5,000 genealogies study”, No el Bonneuil, Arnaud Bring e and Paul-Andr e Rosental

“Notional and functional kinship amongst the English poor 1750–1850”, Steven King

“Matrimonial networks of the French Jewish upper class in Paris, nineteenth century to 1950”, Cyril Grange

“The making of kinship: marriage in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Westphalia”, Georg Fertig