

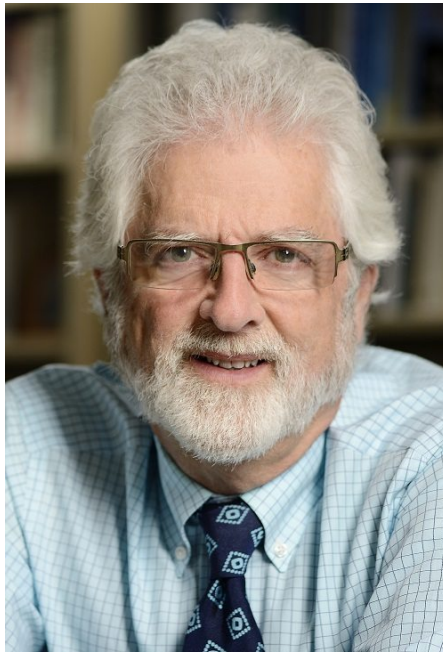
DEMOGRAPHIC DESTINIES

**Interviews with Past Presidents of the Population Association of America
A Project of the PAA History Committee**

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**Interview with Andrew Cherlin
PAA President in 1999**

**Interviewed by Karen Hardee and Dennis Hodgson
at the Hilton Hotel, 720 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL, April 27, 2017**



Dr. Andrew Cherlin is the Benjamin H. Griswold III Professor of Sociology and Public Policy at John Hopkins University, where he has spent his entire academic career. He received his B.S. in Engineering and Applied Science from Yale University in 1970, and his M.S. and Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of California, Los Angeles in 1974 and 1976, respectively. He is an award-winning family demographer.

HODGSON: We're here at the 2017 PAA meetings and this is part of the PAA Oral History Project in which we've been interviewing past presidents of the PAA. We go all the way back to 1948. Today, we have the great pleasure of interviewing Andrew Cherlin, our president of the PAA in 1999. Currently, if I've got it right, you're the Benjamin H. Griswold III Professor of Sociology and Public Policy at Johns Hopkins University.

What we'd like to do is start off with a series of biographical-type [questions], in terms of how you got interested in the field and a description of how your career progressed in the context of your interests. So can you tell us a little bit about, say, where you grew up and how you got into an interest in—particularly in your case—family issues?

CHERLIN: I was actually an engineering major as an undergraduate. And I realized just too late to switch my major that I really didn't want to be an engineer. I got interested in city problems and urban issues. I taught high school for a couple of years, thinking about what I might want to do, and then decided that sociology would be a good way to pursue my interests.

So I went to UCLA for my graduate work in sociology and I got an interest in family issues. They were overlapping with city issues, of course. I worked with Valerie Oppenheimer, my advisor at UCLA, who was later a PAA president. But I never took a demography course. I never really thought of myself as a demographer. I can now admit that I've never actually calculated a life table myself. I've looked at many of them—or a Lexis diagram, which to me is, you know, opaque. So why am I then a demographer?

Well, after I finished my Ph.D., I was interested still in family issues and I was looking around for an intellectual approach that fit the way I was thinking about the issues. I went to the meetings of the family studies association that is called the National Council on Family Relations, and didn't really find anything that I particularly grabbed onto, intellectually. So I wandered into the PAA annual meeting

once, and suddenly found a very good group of people, many of them junior people like myself, who were interested in family issues and approached them from what I saw then was a demographic perspective. And I thought, this is for me. Those people were people like Linda Waite and Arland Thornton, who were then also assistant professors who became presidents of PAA afterwards, people like Suzanne Bianchi and Sara McLanahan [both of whom also subsequently became PAA Presidents]. So I found a number of people who were interested in all that. Now, I can continue more but, you know, you can—

HODGSON: Well, can I just go back a speck?

CHERLIN: Yes.

HODGSON: It's kind of interesting, that you graduate from Yale, and then you actually are a high school teacher for several years.

CHERLIN: Right.

HODGSON: Can you come up with why you picked UCLA as your graduate school?

CHERLIN: Yes. I picked UCLA as my graduate school because my wife wanted to go to California, and I was rejected at Stanford and Berkeley. I think I looked very strange. I was an engineering major who was teaching high school, had no background in demography. I think I looked like a big risk to admissions committees. So I went to UCLA, which worked out well because it was the Bill Walton years, and the basketball team was great. And I got to work with Valerie Oppenheimer. So it was a good decision, in retrospect.

HODGSON: Now, Valerie Oppenheimer, she was a young junior faculty at that time. I mean, she wasn't one of the big names in the field at UCLA.

CHERLIN: Yes.

HODGSON: You had Rob Turner, and you had—

CHERLIN: Right.

HODGSON: How quick was it, your finding Valerie Oppenheimer?

CHERLIN: It took me a year or two. There was another professor named Robert W. Hodge, who moved to Chicago, who I worked with. I took a wide variety of courses with the very broad UCLA department but gravitated toward Valerie Oppenheimer, who hired me as a research assistant. She was at that time a junior faculty member. She was not getting a lot of respect from the department or even yet the profession. As a woman, she had a very hard time converting her non-tenure track position into a tenure-track position and then getting tenure. So she was pretty junior at that point. Judith Treas, another demographer, and I were her first graduate advisees.

HODGSON: And she was just coming out with her big book on the women's labor force.

CHERLIN: She had actually just come out with her big book called *The Female Labor Force in the United States*. It was a hard-to-get monograph published by the Institute for International Studies at Berkeley, but a lot of people in the field were reading it.

HODGSON: Right. And did she teach a family course at UCLA?

CHERLIN: She taught a family demography course, which I did take, yes. She was interested in the labor force, of course. Women's roles in the labor force was the most interesting thing she was into. So that's where I gravitated toward all this.

HODGSON: And how about your dissertation?

CHERLIN: My dissertation was on economic factors in divorce—here again, you know, taking off from Oppenheimer's interest in women's labor force participation and how it affected families. So that was my dissertation. It came out of my interest in what was happening in cities, the rise of single-parent families and so forth.

HODGSON: Right. And that was your first publication I think in *Demography*.

CHERLIN: Right.

HODGSON: It was on kids and divorce.

CHERLIN: Yes. That's right.

HODGSON: What do kids do vis-à-vis divorce. I thought that was interesting. And so there was really one big mentor, Valerie Oppenheimer, that really got you going.

CHERLIN: Yes. And I think to some extent, the PAA was my mentor after I graduated. Because when I started going to the meetings in 1976, my perspective really had not gelled. And as I said, I didn't think of myself as a demographer. But by going to the meetings and keeping in touch with and exchanging information with other people there, I think it helped a lot.

HODGSON: We interviewed Arland Thornton yesterday. And he came up with a very similar story, how he got interested in the family. And he was saying, well, he went to a PAA meeting. And he happened to sit in on a session that Paul Glick gave. And he said, Oh, my God, this is what I really like. And it was that one session that really turned his interest to family [demography]. And you're coming up with kind of a similar type story, except you did have Valerie Oppenheimer.

CHERLIN: Well, here is what was happening with the PAA. In the 1960s and early '70s, the PAA was still about the population problem, how to reduce the birth rates. And a huge proportion of all the people who attended the meeting or were presenting papers were presenting on fertility—some on mortality, because we wanted to get death rates down. Fields like family and household demography and also migration were very underdeveloped. There were a lot of changes happening right at that time in the American family. And so there was a good group of people who were interested in these changes. And I think that group attracted people like Arland Thornton and me at the time.

HARDEE: And you mentioned those several young academics at the time. How important has that network been to you throughout your career? Have you all stayed in touch, even being in different places, and worked together and exchanged ideas?

CHERLIN: Oh, definitely we have. And the group of family and household demographers has expanded greatly. That is my network. That's why I am a PAA member. And that network has expanded greatly since the early '70s, so that there have been many PAA presidents now who would do family and household demography, and there are lots of sessions on it.

It was not always like this. It was very much dominated by fertility, for very good reasons in the '60s and '70s. It's really only as the huge family changes happened and as the American birth rate declined that the PAA diversified a bit into family and household demography. And I have stayed in touch with these various people who I have known for thirty or forty years and who are my main intellectual colleagues.

HODGSON: Now, if you think about population centers and the funding for population centers, you could see in the context of—particularly when you're doing your graduate school, that you had major population centers. They all had an international focus and they all had a family planning/fertility focus. And you went to UCLA, so in some ways, that's probably nice for you because you weren't funneled into a particular area that wasn't of great interest to you.

CHERLIN: Right.

HODGSON: You were lucky.

CHERLIN: UCLA did not have a population center at that time. They didn't see themselves as population people. I didn't see myself as a demographer. When I got to Johns Hopkins, I started teaching a course in demography. Had to do a lot of reading but did it well. And when people asked me if I was a demographer, for the first couple years, I said no. And then I got tired of saying no, so I said

yes. And then several years after that, I realized I *was* a demographer. Exactly how that happened, I'm not sure, but it was a transformation that did occur.

HODGSON: Now, I think from the first time you appeared in Johns Hopkins, you had a joint appointment, so you were in their public health/population/reproductive health department.

CHERLIN: Yes.

HODGSON: Is that where you taught the demography course?

CHERLIN: Yes. I taught a demography course that had graduate students in public health and some undergraduates in it. It was a social demography course. I taught it with John F. Kantner, who was studying adolescent fertility. And at Hopkins, as everywhere, there was a big emphasis on fertility and bringing down the growth rate.

HODGSON: Phyllis Piotrow was there at the time I think.

CHERLIN: Yes, yes.

HODGSON: And USAID contracts.

CHERLIN: Yes. Definitely.

HODGSON: Some interesting stuff going on at Johns Hopkins. And you were there from the beginning, but it sounds like you were more focused on the sociology department and family, and this was an additional add-on that you got to teach the demography/population course?

CHERLIN: Right. Well, most of the demographers at Johns Hopkins were in the School of Public Health at the time. And I certainly identified with all of them. I didn't do any research on fertility but did care about it, and taught about it.

HODGSON: Right.

CHERLIN: Yes, being in the arts and sciences school in sociology has been more important to me, but I still retain a joint appointment in public health.

HODGSON: Now, if you think about progression, in terms of topics that really interest you over time, we can look at your books and see a lot of continuity. So that that first one, *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*, and I think you did a joint one with Frank Furstenberg on marriage and divorce [*Divided Families: What Happens to Children when Parents Part*]. *The Marriage-Go-Round* is more comprehensive, but [there are] a lot of similarities. And then you've got some new ones, the grandparent book with Frank Furstenberg, too. How did that combination—you and Frank writing on these topics—come about?

CHERLIN: As a graduate student, I had read some work that Frank Furstenberg was doing. I think he's eight years older than me.

HODGSON: Right.

CHERLIN: He was probably an associate professor by the time I met him. I wrote him a letter, which I still have a copy.

HODGSON: So he was at Penn?

CHERLIN: He was at Penn. And I wrote him a letter in '76 or '77. And I said, We really ought to talk. And we arranged to meet at the 1977 or '78 American Sociological Association meetings, found that we had a lot in common, and collaborated for many years after that. This was somebody I identified as doing work I was interested in, and sent a letter to, and things worked out well.

HODGSON: The grandparent book was so interesting because nobody had actually really written much on that particular family role, grandparent. Who thought of that one—let's do a book on grandparents.

CHERLIN: Frank Furstenberg had the idea of doing a book on grandparents. He had done a national survey of children. And he said, Why don't we see if we can get funds to interview the grandparents of the children that I've just surveyed and write a book about it? So we applied and did get some funds from the National Institute on Aging to interview the grandparents of the children, interviewed them and

wrote a book. It was Furstenberg's idea to do that. And he invited me to collaborate with him, which I was happy to do.

HODGSON: And if you think about your long-term interest in marriage and I'd say divorce and remarriage as well—at the time you began, the domestic big policy issue was a dramatic increase in divorce that was occurring. There was a lot of publicity about that, a lot of concern about that. Now you've been looking at these trends over a long period of time. Here we are in 2017. What's changed in the context of not just your writing, but your thinking about divorce and marriage in the U.S. that has motivated you—

CHERLIN: Here's what's changed about divorce and remarriage in the U.S. In the '60s and '70s when I was in graduate school and an assistant professor, the divorce rate was rising very heavily, very much across the board in the U.S. And I was interested in it in part because the biggest increases were among people with the least education and least income.

In about 1980, the divorce rate peaked. I predicted wrongly, Furstenberg predicted wrongly, that those increases would not be reversed. But in fact the divorce rate has declined. And the heaviest decline has been among the well educated, so that among people with college degrees, the divorce rate is probably now back to what it was in the 1960s.

What we've seen since 1980, what I did not anticipate in my early career, which I think no demographer anticipated well, was the strong class division that we're now seeing in family life, with lower divorce rates, more children being born in marriage to the college educated, and almost a different pattern of family life among people without a four-year college degree. That's a huge change that nobody really anticipated during the time when I was in grad school and was a young professor.

HODGSON: Okay. Now, if you think about your most recent book [*Labor's Love Lost: The Rise and Fall of the Working-Class Family in America*], where it's basically a history of the working-class

family, you can almost see this increasing relevance of social class in your thinking, particularly as it applies to the family. It's obviously present there in the context of divorce. But is that what's driving you a little bit in terms of that new focus on, Well, we've got to take a look at what's going on, particularly in the context of working-class families in the U.S. and—well, I'll let it go at that.

CHERLIN: When I first got interested in families, it was in the context of my interest in low-income people and in urban issues. But then I got very interested in issues that were happening to all classes: the decline in marriage, the rise in divorce. I kind of dropped the cities in the class part for fifteen, twenty years without really thinking about it.

The book I've written recently on the working-class family in a sense gets me back to the perspective on family life I wanted to take as a graduate student, which is a class-based perspective. And the reason I was drawn to it is because there were huge changes in the family lives of working-class Americans, which are making them look more and more like Americans with the least education, making them look less like the college educated. That got me interested in writing a book about what's happened to the working-class family.

HODGSON: Okay.

HARDEE: Can I ask a question?

HODGSON: Sure. Go ahead.

HARDEE: The issues that you've been working on have such policy salience, and continue to have. What role do you feel like you have as an academic to promote evidence-based policy? And you've been interviewed so many times and quoted so many times. Have you testified on the Hill? What do you feel like is the role of an academic?

CHERLIN: I think it's important for academics who work in fields that most demographers work in to make their findings known, to try to influence policy really by informing policy[makers] rather than

crafting specific policies. I have a joint appointment as a professor of public policy. And I like to say the kind of research I do is good, important background research for policymakers.

Throughout my career, I've tried to keep one foot or at least one toe in the policy world and one in the academic world. It's kind of a balancing act. It's a bit difficult to do, but it's something that I pursued from the start, and I'm very glad I did. I feel as though my work is taken seriously by people who are in the policy world. That's what I want to do. But I want to always do it from the perspective of an academic researcher, a demographic researcher, and not overstep the boundaries of that, which is the balancing act that I've tried to maintain through the decades.

HODGSON: Now, I noticed that since the beginning, you make a point of doing two or three op-ed type pieces [per year] in either a magazine or newspapers. And that really is unusual, I mean particularly for someone at the early stages in their career, to take the time out, as opposed to trying to get your academic publications and tenure and all that. But you made a real effort right from the beginning. I'm going to inform people about big trends.

I really enjoyed your last one, on the increase in white death rates, in the *Times* [February 22, 2016]. That was last year, I think. And this must have been something that you consciously did: I'm not just going to write articles for my academic colleagues, I'm going to make an effort to more broadly distribute what's going on here.

CHERLIN: Yes. From the start, I have tried to write some general audience pieces. I thought that was important. I did a fellowship year, which was my last year before my Ph.D., at the Russell Sage Foundation in New York City.

One of the other fellows was a man named Victor Navasky, who was an editor of *The Nation* for several years after that. And I talked with him about writing. I decided I would like to try writing. I was not a born writer. English was my weakest subject. I had to teach myself to write. He gave me the name

of some good writing books and writing guides and suggested things I ought to read, columnists who wrote well, magazine pieces that were good. And I did. I studied those. I thought about how to write. I did drafts. I worked on writing clearly and then submitted some pieces to various magazines and newspapers.

When I told a senior colleague of mine at Johns Hopkins that I was going to do that, she said, “I think writing for popular places is a great thing. *Scientific American* is a wonderful publication.” I said, No, no. That’s not really what I’m interested in. I think they were a little scared at Johns Hopkins that I would not concentrate on academic writing or that writing for a general-interest audience would somehow hurt my chances and my career. In fact, it has helped my career, because part of that general audience in settings like the *New York Times* is every demography professor in the country who reads your work.

HODGSON: Exactly.

CHERLIN: And, in fact, it gets your name out there. So I would say to a junior colleague, within limits, you can spend time on this without hurting your career and possibly even helping it.

HODGSON: Now, I’ve got a related question because you decided to write a textbook on the family. I think it was 1995. We’re up to Edition 8. And I’ve used it in all my family courses right from the beginning.

CHERLIN: Oh, thank you.

HODGSON: It’s by far the best textbook on the family.

CHERLIN: Thank you.

HODGSON: What’s neat about it is that it does have a definite policy component. The title of it, *Public and Private Families*, sort of sets you—oh, this is going to be intriguing.

CHERLIN: Yes.

HODGSON: Now, you've invested a lot in the context of—it takes a lot of time and effort particularly to keep that updated.

CHERLIN: Yeah. Right.

HODGSON: How did you come up with that way of framing your general textbook on the family—because nobody else has that clear policy-type outlook.

CHERLIN: In the early 1990s, the McGraw-Hill Publishing Company got in touch with me. An editor there asked if I'd like to write a textbook on the sociology of the family. And I thought about it. I thought about the fact that at that time, I had two children who would go to college some day, and I had very little in my banking account. I was very unhappy with all the textbooks that I saw on the sociology of the family, which are all about, at that time, how to have a happy marriage, the secrets of courtship and how to pick a partner—almost nothing on any public issues.

So I said to the McGraw-Hill people, Listen, I'll write a book for you if you let me write one that also has a more policy-oriented focus. I want to have a chapter on family policy. I want to talk about social issues like non-marital childbearing and divorce. I want to have a focus on what policymakers ought to think about that, in addition to the parts about emotion and romance and marriage. And they said okay, so I did that.

At the time I wrote that textbook, there was not a textbook out there that had a chapter on public policy. There was no textbook that had a chapter on aging, even. There wasn't much focus on other social issues like non-marital childbearing and the growth of single-parent families. It was all kind of help for you in figuring out your life—

HODGSON: And welfare changes. Everything really happened just at that time.

CHERLIN: That's right. And there wasn't much focus on government social policy that affects families. So I wrote the first edition and kept true to my frame. As you noticed, the textbook title, *Public*

and Private Families, was a statement that the textbook was going to be about the public dimension of families.

HODGSON: Right.

CHERLIN: That was very unusual at the time I started to write this. But McGraw-Hill, to their credit, let me do it, and it turned out very well. It's been a big success in terms of the number of students who have used it. I'm pleased to see that you have. It's been used in more than 200 colleges and universities. And I found that I liked it more than I thought. I did it at first in part, as I said, because I would like my children to go to college and I didn't have anything in my banking account. So there were some economic reasons at the start, and I didn't know how much I'd like it, but I found I did like it.

After the first edition, it's much less of a job to revise the textbook. And I found I enjoyed the task every three years, of reading through the literature, deciding what students ought to know, and rewriting parts of the textbook. Because I liked it more than I thought, I have kept up with it. Most of the material in that textbook now was not in the first edition 20 years ago, but the perspective is still very much the same, which is, family is something that's about you, your private world, your kinship, your marriage, your partners, but it's also about public issues that affect us all. And we need to study both of them if we're going to have a well-rounded view on the family. That was not the perspective of the family field when I started this.

HODGSON: I did notice, since I used all these editions up to the 7th, that you were able to introduce into the textbook, almost right away, your new, more academic areas of interest. The findings, in terms of significant differences by social class, snuck their way in there and became more and more prominent. The textbook is actually an easy way of finding out what you're really doing with very up-to-date information. It should be more than just undergraduates reading this.

CHERLIN: Oh, thanks very much. You know, looking through all of those editions is a way to see how the field has evolved, because I was drawing on the field and embracing things. In 1996, there was a major reform of the welfare laws. I brought that into the last chapter. And as other issues have waxed and waned, they have been in there.

The textbook editions are now my judgment of what's new that we ought to know and what did we know a little bit too much of and could now be cut as we think about the field from really a social demographic perspective. I mean, I'm at heart a family demographer. And that textbook is at heart a book by a family demographer, looking at U.S. families.

HODGSON: Now, so far, we've only focused on your domestic interest. You do have a more international set of publications as well. Can you tell us a little bit about that? You're not just a U.S. family scholar. I particularly like "A Happy Ending to a Half-Century of Family Change?" that came out in *Population and Development Review* [2016] as a commentary piece about a half century of family change that really questioned what was a very optimistic perception of what's happening. That was all basically international [research] that you were talking about in that context. And you had done continually some international work. Can you tell us how that came about, how that happened?

CHERLIN: In the early 1980s, I had a fellowship at the East-West Center at the University of Hawaii in Honolulu and met demographers doing very interesting work from many Asian countries—turned my attention to that area a bit, did a bit of traveling, wrote some articles, including one in *Demography*, but then really focused on the U.S. for the next maybe twenty to twenty-five years.

But then I increasingly became interested again in what's happened around the world, because there have been enormous changes in family life, not just in the U.S., but elsewhere, as other

demographers have shown. So there is increasingly a lot of good work on what had happened to families around the world. And I became interested in saying something about it.

In 1963, William J. Goode, the leading family sociologist at the time, attempted to synthesize all of the changes in the world and family life into a book called *World Revolution and Family Patterns*. He was actually Frank Furstenberg's mentor. No one had really done too much with that book. And as it approached the fifty-year mark, I thought it would be a good idea to take a look at it and see how well its predictions had held, and why they hadn't done well, in cases where they had failed. So I did a lot of reading while on leave one semester in international family change and wrote an article on looking back fifty years at family change, where did we [predict] we were heading and where did we go wrong and why. That turned me more toward the interesting area of international family change.

In Europe now, the big change, supposedly, is that a new egalitarian family bargain is being formed, which is a happy ending to a half century of family change. In the U.S., that may be true for college-educated people, but not so much for people without college degrees. But in any case, I am turning more now and have turned more in the last five or ten years to family change in Europe and other developed countries, but also in the fascinating changes in East Asia, the fascinating mixture of continuity and change in India, the lack of change in some ways in Africa, the variety of changes in Latin America that should be of interest to all of us who are interested in family and household demography.

HODGSON: And how about why you question the happy ending?

CHERLIN: In Europe, with its generous social welfare programs, there is not as much of an impoverished population or financially challenged population as there is here. And one can make generalizations about society as a whole. One can point to positive trends among the well educated and

assume that the rest of the population will follow along. In Europe, as well as in the U.S., well-educated people are still waiting until after they marry to have children.

In Europe, that looks like it might also work for the less educated. But in the United States, where there's strong class divisions and much less generous social welfare programs, it's harder for people at the bottom to get to the point of the happy, two-income, two-earner family bargain that is the center of this new family life.

It seems to me that if we're going to have the new bargain, if it's going to work anywhere, it's going to work for people who have a decent shot at a good job in the labor force, which is increasingly people with college degrees. So as I look ahead, I see perhaps a neo-traditionalist movement occurring among the well educated, but much less of that among the not so well educated in the United States. In fact, if there is a social class line, a class division in the United States in 2017, it's between people with a four-year college degree and everybody else. Whether that sticks, I'm not sure. But in the U.S., that's the way our economy, our social welfare system seem to be setting up what is a strong class division in family life.

HODGSON: With a lot of negative consequences.

CHERLIN: Yes.

HODGSON: I do remember that back in 1980, you and Frank Furstenberg made predictions about what was going to happen with divorce. So here we are in 2017. You gave us a little bit of a vision of what you think is likely to happen. You're presenting a future that is somewhat pessimistic, particularly for working-class people. From a policy point of view, what should we as a nation be doing if we want to rectify this somewhat? After looking at these trends for fifty years and studying them closely, are there things we can possibly do to make things better?

CHERLIN: Yes. You know, there has been both economic and cultural change. The recent development that I see as most productive among policy people is an agreement among conservatives and liberals that both economics and culture make a difference.

In the economic realm, people with college degrees are the winners in our globalized and automated economy. And they're the ones who have a marriage-based, stable family life these days. What we need to do is help the people who are not the winners, help them by getting them better educated, not necessarily college degrees for all, but community college training and other apprenticeship-based programs. That's what we need to do.

On the cultural level, I do think there is a role for stressing the importance of stability in family life. And there is nothing wrong with the liberals doing that. So we need to think about both economic and cultural ways to lessen the class divide that in 2017 seems so strong among American families.

HODGSON: Do you see your future research direction going in any particular way?

CHERLIN: I will continue to be concerned about less fortunate families. I'm working up a project on children in very poor families. I'm also very interested still in the working-class family. The election of Donald Trump has focused everyone's attention on this working class because so much of his support was centered among the white working class.

I thought I'd give up on the working class and move elsewhere, but it's certainly still a topic of great interest. And I'm still doing research on that.

HODGSON: Now, can we switch gears—we have some time left—and talk a little bit about the Population Association of America? You already mentioned something interesting, that your initial arrival at a PAA meeting gave you great direction [in terms of] how you would like your career to go. Can you recall when that was? What was that? About when was that first PAA meeting you attended?

CHERLIN: The first PAA meeting was either in 1975 or 1976. I got my Ph.D. in '76.

HODGSON: Right.

CHERLIN: And I wandered into it, not really knowing what to expect, and found a very attractive framework. It was really a social demographic framework on family change. And that's what I found intellectually exciting. That's where I gravitated.

So the PAA for me was really the center of my intellectual growth during my early career, as it was for many people. And at the time, we family and household demographers were a minority in a fertility-oriented PAA, but we grew in numbers and in research output. It's become very important for me. I think the PAA has been very influential and remains very influential in deciding the direction that young people's research will go in. I think it still has a reputation of a place to go to as a grad student or early faculty member to find out intellectually what's interesting that's happening.

HODGSON: So here we are, 2017. Your first PAA meeting was 1976. You've been going forty-one years. In the middle, you're president of the PAA, in 1999.

CHERLIN: Yeah.

HODGSON: You've got topical changes that you've mentioned, that we've lost our fertility-control type focus that was quite clearly there, and we broadened a bit. Anything else that's most noticeable to you over that course of forty-one years in which you've been looking at this association? Gender composition—if I remember back then, it was a lot more male than it is today. When you take a look at who comes to a PAA meeting, particularly new arrivals, we seem to have shifted significantly, in terms of sort of the gender composition of who we are as PAA members. Anything that you've noticed along those lines?

CHERLIN: Well, certainly, the gender composition has shifted, but in the part of the PAA I was interested in, which was family and household demography, there were always strong women

researchers like Linda Waite early on, Sara McLanahan, Suzanne Bianchi. I could mention many. We've always been I think a bit more gender-balanced. And now that's true throughout the association.

We still have a strong group of people interested in fertility. We still have a strong group of people interested in mortality. What has changed is the growth of family and household demography and migration as those have become big issues.

Migration was a backwater. I remember being on an NIH review panel with Douglas Massey in the early 1980s. He was trying to bring the study of migration and segregation in demography up to the standards of the rest of the field, which he very aptly succeeded in doing. That was a big change from then to now.

HODGSON: Can you remember your presidency at PAA? What were the things you had to deal with back in 1999?

CHERLIN: Yes, I do remember my presidency in the PAA. And here is what I had to deal with. I had a program that I had to put together. There was no computer program for it. I had thirteen pieces of paper for thirteen different sessions at each time point spread around a rug in my living room. And for a day I had to go around to those pieces of paper and decide who was going to be presenting when, avoiding conflicts of interest, making sure that each time slot had a wide range of sessions. That's how it was done. It was very labor-intensive. It was also a bit smaller than today, so it wasn't quite as bad. But it was a hand-operated scoreboard, so to speak. And the president was the person who did that. You did that in addition to writing a talk for the meeting.

HODGSON: And that was it?

CHERLIN: Yeah.

HODGSON: And we didn't have—I don't recall back then—we didn't have a financial crisis at all in the organization.

CHERLIN: No. I think the organization has always been in good shape financially, as far as I know. It's well supported. It keeps its ambitions in line with its finances, which I think is a good thing, and will continue to do that.

HODGSON: So in terms of the future of the organization, any particular challenges you can see? Or you've given a very optimistic perception of where we're at, how we're about to enter into the future.

CHERLIN: Well, I think that the association is healthy and the demographic perspective is healthy, but in an odd sort of way, we are losing our core, which is people who identify strongly as demographers first and other things second.

That core was always about technical training that you needed to understand fertility, basically, to understand the birth rate and why it had been going up or going down. Princeton was a classic example of a place that taught people the techniques of demography. And it's still the case that methodological training in the techniques of demography, the life table and so forth, are at the core of demography, but they're no longer at the core of most of the papers that are presented at the PAA. They're no longer at the core of most of the articles in the journal *Demography*.

So our field has expanded methodologically to encompass economists who are using different methods, geographical information systems people, sociologists who are doing surveys, which has been intellectually very positive and very stimulating for us as a field, but has left us with a bit of a hole in the center that we need to think about. That is to say, what does it mean to be a demographer these days?

I was on a group who did an outside review of a leading population center at a leading university this year. And it was striking that some of the people we thought of as the strongest demography types didn't think of themselves as demographers. A couple of them said that. "I think of myself as a sociologist." "I'm into big data and systems analysis."

Who does think of themselves as a demographer these days? And what does it mean to be a demographer? If it no longer means—does it just mean taking the life table course? I think in some places, it has come to that, that if you take the demographic methods course, you're a demographer. It's almost like anthropology, which has nothing holding it together except the ethnographic method. If you do ethnographic methods and you train in it and you go off to the South Seas for two years, you're an anthropologist.

Is that what demography is? If so, it's not intellectually defined, but rather methodologically defined. And I don't think that's healthy for the field. So while we are healthy and while we are diverse, that brings a challenge of thinking of what does this field mean going forward? How does one think about a demographer? When do you become and how do you become a card-carrying demographer is, I think, an issue for us moving forward. And it will be, of course, very interesting to see how the field deals with that challenge.

HODGSON: Now, you have very nicely segued from PAA to the larger issue of demography. And in some ways, it's interesting because you're taking a perspective that tends to divide past PAA presidents. Some people are very, very optimistic about this trend that you just described. They like the idea that we've moved away from this classic definition of what demography is and we've become what they call a multi-discipline.

And it's perfectly all right if we have a context in which most of the people here today are not thinking of themselves as a demographer. "I'm an economist and this is what I like to study." "I'm a sociologist and this is what I like to study. And there are sessions on it, and I can come." They walk around and don't think about it.

I went to a population center as a grad student, so this is Cornell back in 1969, so kind of similar except it wasn't UCLA. We had that international focus. We weren't presented with demography as a

multi-discipline. We were presented with demography as—you know, it was the study of population. Kind of like sociologists study society and economists study the economy, anthropologists study culture, we've got this thing where we study population. And we have these primary demographic variables and you can see how they're interrelated. You can describe exactly how population might change by looking at fertility and mortality and migration. And you have life table techniques. It was a set of data and a set of techniques, but all around a central core concept that was presented as something real. There really is something called the American population. And you study it with these techniques.

And what you're describing is a rather dramatic move away from that. In some ways, you're down to life tables as your only distinctive methodology. But we've lost our distinctive data sources as well. I mean, most demographers are not analyzing census data anymore. In fact, many European countries have done away with the idea of going around and taking a census. Everything is basically surveys and sampling, in which case our techniques are not unique. Even our methodologies aren't unique. It's widely shared among quantitative social scientists. And you think that's a problem. Is there something we can do about it if that's problematic, because it does seem to be the direction of the change.

CHERLIN: It's very true that thirty, forty years ago, there was a clear definition of what demography was, in method and in substance. In method, it was the set of techniques that allowed you to analyze population change in various aspects. In substance, it was about bringing the birth rate down, getting death rates down, looking at migration. It was very well defined, also limited.

What's happened is the association has broadened out tremendously. Everybody, myself included, thinks that's terrific, okay? It's still a vibrant, intellectual community because it has moved forward and expanded and encompassed new developments. But to what extent is it about demography or about population?

The word “population” in the PAA, what does that mean now? I know [that] when the institution was founded it meant the population problem, population growth, population change, migration. If it means more than that now, why are we still called the Population Association of America? Why not call it the Applied Quantitative Research Association of America, the Microsocial and Microeconomic Association of America? What do we mean then by population?

I’m not suggesting that’s necessarily a problem. It’s certainly not a problem for the PAA meetings. We certainly don’t want to change the name. But there are people who use the term “demography” as well. And as the core has been lost, as those methods have become less central, one thinks about, what is it that makes you a demographer? Is there something distinctive about the field of demography now that deserves support? I think many of us are having some trouble finding that. And I think many of the more interesting people here think of themselves as another label first and demographer second. Maybe that’s okay. But we do have to think about what the core is as we move on.

I think that there still can be and is a core. There are new techniques that are now being used that we need to know about, like geographic information systems, like combining genomic information with social scientific information, with big data and analyzing that. There are new sets of methods around these problems. And we certainly embrace them. But I think we have to realize that the old core demography identification no longer really fits most people, certainly not most younger people. And we might want to pause and consider that at some point as we think about the future of the PAA.

HODGSON: Do you think we need a new population crisis, if we think about environment, climate change, where numbers of people and distribution of people again become a central issue of global concern? We might get refocused on population again?

CHERLIN: We might. We are having a global migration crisis.

HODGSON: Right.

CHERLIN: And that is causing a big increase in migration, which is a traditional subject of the Population Association. So by following the lead of that crisis, we've expanded that. What we *are* doing is responding to the changes in the world around us, that made migration, segregation, family and household issues important. And that's what's happened to the Association, too. It's very healthy.

But it does mean the old core is not any longer at the core, and that the older method sequence, which is really about the kind of fertility-based life table, Lexis diagram, little i_f , little i_g , maximum fertility stuff that the Princeton people always saw, that's becoming less relevant. And I think some places are reluctant to give it up because it's the center of what demography means. But nobody really does much of that anymore after they finish the course. So we have to think then about what is demography or population research these days.

HODGSON: Those are great thoughts. Are there any questions we forgot to ask you that you would like to raise?

CHERLIN: I wanted to get in that last part about the future and what PAA means, because it was striking to go to our review of a department this year and find that the people we thought were best said they weren't demographers.

HODGSON: Now, is there anything, any advice you would give someone just entering the field for whom this is their first PAA meeting and they've got the future, 2030, 2040, 2050 as part of their academic career to look forward to?

CHERLIN: My advice is, first of all, come to the meetings and go to lots of sessions. This is one of the most serious places in terms of people attending sessions, high-quality sessions. You can learn a lot. The second is make some contacts. Contact some senior faculty or senior researchers and ask if they would meet you for a cup of coffee. This is I know hard to do, okay, but I did that when I was a junior faculty member, and nobody ever says no.

There is no senior person who will say no to meeting you for ten minutes or having a cup of coffee. And you can learn a lot from them. And they get to know you. So be more aggressive than you'd like to be. Get a little bit out of your comfort zone, not only come to the meetings, but try to make some contacts. Most of the people in your generation will have the new education and technique mastery that you do, but some of the older faculty members I think you'll find would be pleased to talk to you if you reach out to them.

HODGSON: That's great advice. So I think you did a wonderful job.

CHERLIN: Great.

HARDEE: Thank you. Yes.

HODGSON: Thank you for all the insights. It was really wonderful.

CHERLIN: Sure, sure. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to do this.

HODGSON: Oh, it was great.

HARDEE: And we always enjoy reading about you in the newspaper.

CHERLIN: Oh, thanks. Thanks. I've always tried to—

HARDEE: Thank you for bridging the policy and the academics.

CHERLIN: Thanks. I appreciate it. This was fun.

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