Attitudes of Filial Obligation toward Aging Parents: A Greek-American Perspective

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All societies for which we have records have had some concept of the nature of old age. Biologically, the stages of development over the life span, from birth to death, are similar for past and present generations, yet, the way in which the life cycle has been articulated, both culturally and institutionaly, has differed significantly, among different groups and in different periods of history. "Certainly, there are biological imperatives, but what is truly remarkable," writes Bengston, "is that these imperatives are handled in quite different ways by various cultural socioeconomic and ethnic groups. There appear to be wide variations in attitudes, values, and practices concerning aging which are social not biological in nature."[1] To better understand the process of aging and related attitudinal and behavioral variations, it is important to focus on the sociocultural context in which aging occurs. The interplay of aging and ethnicity allows us to look intensively on the basic elements that bind families together and the types of assistance and relationships between generations that are most important in family continuity.

The family has always played an important role in determining the status and security of older people. With all the structural and functional changes of the family in the past few decades, however, the impact on the aged has been extensively addressed in the context of the question of family decline, whether this decline be reality or myth. Proponents of family decline [2] have argued that modernization, urbanization, mass education,

[1] V.L.Bergston, "Ethnicity and Aging: Problems and Issues in Current Social Science Inquiry," in D.E. Gelfand and A.J. Kurzik (eds.), *Ethnicity and Aging* (New York, 1979) p. 12.

[2] See D.O. Cowill, "Aging and Modernization: A Revision of the Theory," in J.

and suburban exodus have created residential mobility and status inversion (children acquiring higher status than the parents) resulting in a decrease in family-based assistance to the aged and greater reliance in formal institutions of elderly care. Demographic increases in the elderly population, both in absolute numbers and in proportions of such cohorts as the very old, socioeconomic trends relating to entry of women in the labor force, high divorce rates, lower marriage rates, decrease in the fertility rate diminishing the pool of filial providers, all point, according to this view, to a reluctance on the part of the young adults to support aged parents and to a change in the norm of filial responsibility, a "life for the young" attitude, and a shifting away from familism as a cultural value.

The issue of family decline, however is far from being settled, and continues to be debatable. The prevailing position among family researches appears to be one which considers any consistency of the theme of family decline as a "myth" and takes the position that the family today emerges in strength, not declining but changing. Adherents to this position[3] report that the family continues to be a viable social institution manifesting itself in a "modified extended family" form, in an intimacy at a distance" form reflecting that although families are less likely to live together, they maintain regular contact, remain in substantial proximity to each other, exhibit positive concern for the welfare of family members, with considerable aid and services-money, shopping, illness assistance, child care, emotional support, ritual and activity sharing -flowing with a degree of reciprocity in operation. Commitment to the norm of filial obligation is reported by some studies as intensified, and the aged as more integrated to the modern society than previously thought.

IL, 1974); R. Dinkel, "Attitudes of Children Toward Supporting Aged Parents, *American Sociological Review* 9 (1944) 370-79; L. J. Martin, "The Status of South Asia's Growing Elderly Population," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 5 (1990) 93-117; S.B. Wake and M.J. Sporakowski, "An International Comparison of Attitudes Toward Supporting Aged Parents," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 34 (1972) 42-48.

³ E.M. Brody, "Parent Care as Women's Normative Stress," *The Gerontologist* 25(1985)19-29; E.M. Brody, P.T. Johnson, M.C. Fulcomer, and A.M. Lang, "Women's Changing Roles and Help to Elderly Parents: Attitudes of Three Generations of Women," *Journal of Gerontology*, 38 (1983)597-607; V.G. Cicirell, "Adult Children's Attachment and Helping Behavior to Elderly Parents: A Path Model" *Journal of Marriage and the Family,* 45 (1983) 815-24; S. Coontz, *The Way We Never Were* (New York, 1992); S.M. Dornbusch & M.H. Strober (eds.),

The above mentioned debate, nonetheless, has not focused on ethnic families as such, and relatively little is known about the composition, needs, and potential resources of ethnic elderly. The state of knowledge relating to aging, ethnicity, and family is rather limited, especially as pertains to support systems in ethnic families.[4] Few studies have actually dealt and have analyzed changes in ethnic families, and the effects that they might have on the well being of grandparents, parents and grandchildren.[5] This is more so with specific ethnic groups such as Greek Americans, the group under consideration.

The literature is scanty with regard to aging and Greek ethnicity. Review of existing literature reveals writings focusing on the Greek family and intergenerational relations.[6] A study specifically focusing on the aged was conducted in Chicago by Kathryn Kozaitis examining the influence the "common heritage," collective identity, shared history, traditional rituals and customs, common language and similar styles has on how elderly Greeks perceive and experience aging, what expectations they have from the community, and what strategies they employ to resolve problems intrinsic to aging."[7] Kozaitis segmented her sample into three groups, *the Americanized Greeks,* those either born in the United States or immigrated at the turn of the century as youths or adolescents, *the Greek Americans,* individuals who immigrated before World War II, and *Recent Migrants* individuals who immigrated in the late 1950s, the 1960s and 1970s to join their children in America.

The segmented acculturation continuum strongly correlated with how aging was perceived and how relating problems of life and aging are confronted with the acculturated group exhibiting security satisfaction with life and a comfortable orientation to American mainstream values. It became evident in the interviews conducted, writes Kozatis, that ethnic aging must be conceptualized not only by the membership of elderly persons in a given ethnic group but also by the significant intracultural variation within

⁴ D.J. Rosenthal,"Family Support in Later Life: Does Ethnicity Make a Difference," *The Gerontologist* 26 (1986) 19-24.

⁵ C.E. Woehrer, "Cultural Pluralism in American Families: The Influence of Ethnicity on Social Aspects of Aging," *The Family Coordinator,* 27 (19) 329-38.

⁶ S.T. Constantinou, "Dominant Themes in Intergenerational Differences in Ethnicity: The Greek Americans," *Sociological Focus,* 22 (1989) 99-117; C.M. Costantakos, *The American-Greek Subculture:* Processes of Continuity (New York,1980); G.A. Kourvetaris, "The Greek American Family" in C.H. Mindel and R.W. Habenstein (eds.), *Ethnic Families in America: Patterns and Variations* (New York, 1988) pp. 76-107; C. Moskos, *Greek Americans; Struggle and Success* (2nd.

a given ethnic population of elderly. Kozatis recommends strategies intended to close the marginal gap by teaching skills conducive to "bi-culturalism" that is adaptive capabilities for Greek American elderly (example, language facility and travel capabilities such as driving) so that they can function comfortably both within the ethnic subcommunity and the larger society. Kozaitis stresses that "bi-culturalism" does not mean to promote assimilation of Greek Americans and exchange of Greek values, but a degree of preparation for the middle aged cohorts and a situational acculturation for the more elderly, a state where an individual possesses a comfortable bicultural accommodation enjoying an integrative participation in society while maintaining the uniqueness of an ethnic heritage secure in the sense that knowledge possessed is important and secure in a status with fewer role shifts, extended family networking, a role continuity through the life cycle, a life where useful and valued functions are continued as long as possible in a fluid participation of the two worlds, that of the ethnic subcommunity and the larger culture. This is presented as a recommendation to ethnic families as well as the Greek American subcommunity.

The discussion that follows proposes to examine attitudes of filial obligation and/or responsibility in three generations of Greek Americans. It will be focusing on possible changes in value orientation and the implications they might hold for the future care of elderly Greek Americans. It is hypothesized that the norm of filial responsibility though it might be decreasing in non-immigrant generations, is expected to emerges in considerable strength, at least at the attitudinal level, lagging behind demographic and sociocultural changes in this group. In qualitative terms, the decline is perceived as change and not disappearance of the value.

The concept of filial obligation implies obligations on the part of adult offspring to meet the needs of the aging parents. It emphasizes duty and is associated, usually, with notions of economic support protection and care for aging parents.[8] Filial obligation is central in societies of familiistic orientation, the belief "in a strong sense of family identification and loyalty, mutual assistance among family members, a concern for the perpetuation of the family unit and the subordination of the interests and personality of individual family members to the interests and welfare of the family group."[9]

[7] K. Kozaitis, "Being Old and Greek in America," in D.E. Gelfand & C.M. Barresi, *Ethnic Dimensions of Aging*. Springer Series on Adulthoood and Aging. (New York, 1987) p.160.

[8] A. Schorr, *Filial Responsibility in the Modern American Family* (Washington, D.C., 1960).

Regardless of personal motivation, societal prescriptions of obligations and sanctions for non-compliance encouraged the development of attitudes of obligation. These attitudes were dictated by cultural influences.

Coming from many different cultures, Americans vary in their conceptualization of familism, filial obligations, and social lifestyles. American families of diverse backgrounds have passed to their children different values, expectations, family interaction patterns, and ways of participating in the larger society. Filial responsibility is a value pertaining to other ethnic elderly of similar traditional and familistic backgrounds. This paper posits that "ethnicity is an important dimension of differentiation among older people and may be expected to have an impact on their family relationships and supports."[10] Within this interplay of ethnicity and aging, the attitudes of filial responsibility of three generations of Greek Americans in the metropolitan New York City area are put to the test.

At the onset, a definitional issue concerning the term ethnicity as it relates to aging is here addressed. For the purposes of this discussion, the definition views an ethnic group as a group with a sense of peoplehood, set off from the rest of American society by national origin. It is expanded to incorporate the element of perception [11] according to which an ethnic group consists of individuals who conceive of themselves as being alike by virtue of their common ancestry or are so regarded by others. The definition is here distinguished from the term "minority" which also includes non-ethnic populations with the focus on inequality rather than cultural continuity.[12] Ethnicity is seen as a living reality built from episodes and experiences over a lifetime and based on group membership, shared values which are part of a tradition, feelings, practices and behavior that arise from historical roots in the family of origin, and through common cultural religious, national, and or linguistic background, culminate in a symbol system that is shared in the sense of a shared identity.[13] The above mentioned underpinnings of ethnicity can and are affected by changing social, economic, and political conditions. Ethnicity emerges as a complex, dynamic variable that changes in response to changes in the individual's or the group's life.

[10] J.D. Rosenthal, "Family Supports in Later Life: Does Ethnicity Make a Difference," *The Gerontologist* 26 (1986) 19-24.

[11] T.Shibutani and K. Kwan, *Ethnic Stratification* (New York, 1965).

[12] D.E. Gelfand, *Aging: The Ethnic Factor* (Boston, 1982).

[13] R.A. Kalish, "The Meaning of Ethnicity," in C.L. Hayes, R.A.Kalish, and D. Guttman (eds.), *European American Elderly: A Guide for Practlce* (New York,

A discussion of ethnic families in the context of aging and ethnicity will not be complete without the consideration of the ways ethnic families have changed and are changing and the effect such changes might have on the elderly members and intergenerational relations. Immigrant families from traditional societies frequently attempted to recreate in this country the value systems of their homeland. Many froze the ethnic culture in their memory attempting to keep and pass it intact to younger generations. Despite efforts, however, the value systems have undergone change especially as one moves along the generational continuum of successive generations, and have progressively become integrated into distinctive entities in a pluralistic society, more home grown than imported, while simultaneously significant changes have and are occurring in the country of origin. It is, thus, important to broaden the definition of ethnicity recognizing the heterogeneity of ethnic communities, such as the Greek American subcommunity comprised of migrant and native-born groups of varying degrees of acculturation.

Within the framework of definitional considerations relating to ethnicity, aging is addressed as a process of human development, with the underlying notion of aging health as functionality in all components of well being, the physical emotional/psychological, spiritual and cultural. The nature of the aging experience is shaped by the cultural and social context at the time at which aging occurs. The life-course perspective [14] provides the means of tracking the development of the person through his or her lifetime to determine the quality of life at different stages." The life-course perspective is the result of biological, psychological as well as sociological influences with ethnicity intertwining throughout the life stages. Aging within the life-course perspective affords understanding of role transitions and differences in role adjustment during the aging process. The process of aging itself has changed over time in terms of the ages at which roles are assumed and relinquished, and in terms of income status, health and self definitions. When is one old? How does one behave as an older person, an older ethnic person? What are family expectations of aid and filial piety? Later life is characterized by transitions. Generations may be undergoing difficult transitions simultaneously as when a parent reaches retirement and an adult child faces an empty nest or some other role change or transition.

Within the life-course perspective, ethnic group membership is seen as a major shaping force in the development of the life course, and ethnicity as

[14] C.M. Barresi, "Ethnic Aging and the Life Course," *In Ethnic Demensions* (New York, 1987) p. 19.

a variable that affects the life course and the relationship between the individual, the group and cultural factors, with the ethnic group serving as the immediate reference group for the person in defining the life course process. Inevitably, the ethnic group is more or less influenced by the cultural norms of the host society, the measure of influence depending on factors such as early socialization, opportunities for ethnic contact and strength of adherence to traditional values and norms.[15] Age, generational status, education, and immigration experience in the host country are additional influences on cultural norms.

Refocusing on aging in ethnic families from the perspective of ethnicity as culture, recognizes the model of ethnicity as tradition with an emphasis on the dynamic nature of culture and views it in terms that go beyond the immigrant culture. Thus, ethnic culture may reflect change rather than simply the loss of cultural characteristics transplanted from the ancestral country. This conception of ethnicity allows for variations in the salience of ethnicity in individuals depending on the particular life-course phase. It accommodates the possibility that cultural meanings regarding intergenerational relationships may remain distinctive among non-immigrant group members with such meanings guiding but not necessary determining behavior. Therefore, the possibility exists that ethnic group differences in such "areas as norms of filial obligation may not be matched by corresponding differences in actual behavior."[16]

An individual is born into, shaped by, and nurtured in a particular environment, his/her family, peer groups, community and certain significant conditions such as religion, that is itself a function of certain cultural values, traditions, practices, and world views. For the traditional Greek culture with its strong familistic orientation, the family provided the introductory vehicle for relationships, and through it the individual was socially located into the kinship system, the community, and the church. It was within the context of the family that young Greek children developed their sense of being, their self-identity. Such identity, especially in the context of the ethnic community, was closely related to the individual's membership in a certain family. Self-identity was intimately tied to family identification. The individual was known and knew himself/herself as a member of a particular family. The traditional Greek family was viewed as a life-long system of emotional support and, if need be, of economic assistance. A strong cultural value inherent in this familistic orientation was that of mu-

[15] W. W. Hartup, "Peer Relations and the Growth of Social Competence," in M. W. Kent and J. E. Rolf (eds.), *Primary Prevention of Psychopathology: Social Competence in Children* (Hanover, NH, 1979

tual aid within the family. The group has been characterized, at least on the ideal level, by respect for elderly members, familism, intergenerational cohesion, subcultural continuity, and high levels of support for older people. This was true with regard to the expected obligation toward the parents, especially in their later years. Another related characteristic was that of the age hierarchy, the status associated with age. In the traditional Greek culture adults and especially elderly were always to be respected. To a large extent, respect was associated with the authority that rested in the older person, but also the continuing functional role that the elders played in the extended family.[17]

With respect to the norm of filial obligation in a three-generational group of Greek Americans, the expectations of old age support from children will be examined within a normative perspective focusing on normative shifts and using generational status as a dimension of continuity. It is recognized that like other norms, norms of care for the elderly tend to be rooted in the condition of every day life, and they tend to change as the underlying socioeconomic conditions change .[18] On the other hand, it is to be accepted that norms have a life of their own, especially if they are anchored in tradition, as is indeed the case filial responsibility, which in addition bears the burden of social disapproval if it is not honored. Although second and third generation descendants of ethnic groups may have moved away from an involvement in ethnic culture, do they carry on a tradition of respect and assistance for the elderly family members? Are those traditions so strongly internalized that they resist the changes that occur among succeeding generations? Within a normative life course perspective, differentiating behaviors which are normative and non-normative for developmental phases in the life cycle and with the awareness of the other contexts within which the family operates (cultural, environmental, socio-economic, political) the discussion that follows will argue that in spite of generational changes, the value of fillial responsibility emerges in strength in the three generations of Greek Americans under consideration, rejected in responses to permanent statements in reflected two studies conducted in a time span of over two decades.

In an earlier study,[19] looking into the processes of continuity of the American Greek subculture, the attitudes toward the aged parents were explored in a three-generational sample of Greek Americans in the metropolitan New

[17] Costantakos, *The American-Greek Subculture*.

[18] R.D. Rotherford, "A Theory of Marital Fertility Transition," *Population Studies* 39 (1985) 249-68.

York area. Responses to a sociocultural questionnaire as well as in-depth interviews touched upon dimensions of intergenerational solidarity expressed in terms of attitudes toward filial responsibility. A description of ths demograhic data, the distribution of responses and some insights from qualitative data are included for comparative purposes, as the current study, to a large extent repeating the earlier one, attempted to test the present state of attitudes and any changes toward this stongly held value in the Greek American family.

Early Study: Sample Description

This exploratory study, stressing "hypothesis generation" rather than "hypothesis testing"[20] drew from the resources of the metropolitan New York Greek American community. The sample was derived from several sources, social and religious organizations and was fixed by circumstance. Two hundred and eleven Greek Americans who responded to a questionnaire constituted the broad sample of the study. Forty respondents, a subsample, were interviewed in depth. The research instruments consisted of the above mentioned questionnaire, a section of which dealt with attitudes toward aged parents, in a filial responsibility context, and a semi-structured, open-ended interview guide of similar question content. Complementarity in instrument use was emphasized, the interviews substantiating trends indicated in the statistical analysis of the responses to the questionnaire.

The sample of the 211 respondents consisted of 44.5% males and 55.5% females, 66.5% of the total were born in the United States, 28.6% in Greece and 4.9% in areas occupied by Greece in the past and still maintaining large Greek populations. Approximately three-fourths (74.5%) of respondents were of urban origin as contrasted to 24.5% of rural. 0f the total number of respondents, 34.1% were first generation Greek Americans. Those who arrived in the United States before 1940, designated as "old migrants" comprised 15.6% of the total sample. Those who arrived after 1940, the "recent migrants" accounted for 18.7% while second generation Greek Americans made up 42.5% of the sample, and third generation 19.0%. The remaining 4.3% were children of intermarriages, categorized as "other." With regard to formal socialization experiences, 69.7% of them were educated only in the United States, 14.9% only in Greece, and 15.4% in both countries. The respective educational levels reached included 65.4% no

[20] B.G. Glaser & A.L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Quantitative Research* (Chicago, 1967).

education in Greece, 10.4% some or grammar school, 8.1% some high school 9.5 high school graduates, 4.7% had some college in Greece, and 1.9% were college graduates and beyond. The educational level in the United States was reported as none by 15.9%, some or grammar school by 2.4% some high school by 18.5% high school graduates 19.0%, 21.8% some college and 23.2% college graduates or more.

Greek language proficiency was reported as fluent by 27.5%, good by 40.0%, fair by 15.0% and poor by 12.5%. Five per cent of the sample reported no knowledge of the Greek language. Sixty-seven and a half per cent was fluent in English, as per self-evaluation, and 12.5% reported their proficiency as good. The rest of the group reported none (2.5%) poor (15.0%) and faair (2.5%). In terms of marital status, the group was almost evenly split, 45.0% were married and 42.5% were single. As for the rest of the group, 7.5% were widowed and 5.0% divorced. From the married group, a low percentage (12.5%) reported intermarriage. The household composition was predominantly nuclear (67.5%) with 26.5% extended families included in the group.

Church membership tilted slightly toward those reporting membership (52.5%) with 47.5% reporting no membership. Church activity was even lower with 37.5% of the sample being active and 47.5% inactive. Some of the respondents indicated activity in the past. Membership and activity in community organizations were even lower (40.0% and 25.0% respectively)

Table 1 depicts responses of three generations of Greek Americans testing attitudes of filial obligation toward aged parents. Statements of no statistical significance are included as they parallel the direction of the interview data.

TABLE 1
Obligations Towards Aged Parents

Statement	Respondent	Percentages			
		Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Total Number
A family should be willing to sacrifice some of the things they want for their children in order to help support their aged parents	Old migrants	74.1	14.8	11.1	27
	Recent migrants	86.7	3.3	10.0	30
	Second generation	86.0	4.7	9.3	86
	Third generation	53.8	20.5	25.6	39
	"Other"	77.8	11.5	11.1	9
X^2=19.16399, D.F.8 $p<0.02$		77.5	9.4	13.1	191
Parents are entitled to some return for any the sacrifices they have made for their children	Old migrants	74.1	0	25.9	27
	Recent migrants	76.7	10.0	13.3	30
	Second generation	64.3	7.1	28.6	84
	Third generation	66.7	7.7	25.6	39
	"Other"	77.8	0	22.2	9
Not significant		68.8	6.3	24.9	189
Aging parents who are incapacitated are best placed in a nursing home	Old migrants	30.8	30.8	38.5	26
	Recent migrants	23.3	26.7	50.0	30
	Second generation	39.5	14.0	46.5	86
	Third generation	30.8	23.1	46.2	39
	"Other"	33.1	22.2	44.4	9
Not significant		33.7	20.5	45.8	190
It is considered a stigma for American children of Greek descent to place their parents in a home of the aged; Parents belong with their children	Old migrants	57.7	19.2	23.1	26
	Recent migrants	73.3	3.3	23.3	30
	Second generation	41.7	21.4	36.9	84
	Third generation	35.9	30.8	33.3	39
	"Other"	22.2	22.2	55.6	9
X^2=17.6709, D.F.8, $p<0.05$		46.8	20.2	33.0	188

Some of the quoted interviewee statements of the three generational groups eloquently capture the spirit of the response distribution adding insights and meaning as to their implications.

The obligations of children towards their parents depend on the values by which they have been socialized. In my opinion, the parents, most of the time, deserve not only the respect but also the appreciation of their children. Moreover, the parents need and deserve the moral support and love as they enter the third phase of the aging course.

To help them have an easier way to live as elderly parents .

In summary, respect, support, if in need, and love for the aged. Support parents, take them in the house. Make their last years happy.

I would try to help aging parents keep self-respect by helping them... If necessary to take in parents, I would do so... If certain ailments (e.g., brain damage, chronic disease, senility, etc.) better to be cared for in an old-age home by professionals. I might consider the alternative.

Children's obligations towards parents vary with the situation... In my case, my obligation is in the event that my mother needs support (as you know, my father is dead) to support her. In the event that I marry, to take her in, and I would never.... My obligations to her would be to keep her happy, and in her own home while she could be in it..... l would never take that away from her and I would never put her in a home, if it came to that....This is how I feel my obligations.

Out of love.... If I could possibly do anything, I would do it and it would not be out of obligation, but love... l Iove my parents, no matter how I object to the things they have done. I come to the conclusion, and I know I love them.... So, I would do it out of love, if I could.... l would, I would take them in my house. I would have to unless I could afford to buy them another home, so they can have their own kind of harmony there. If it were a

question of taking them in, or they could not be anywhere else, I take them in. I could not live by abandoning them, even though I know in my own situation, my husband would object strongly, and I know it would affect our relationship I would have to weigh it out. I would try it. I could not be cold and unfeeling.... I would have to reason it somehow....

Not really as obligation to parents. I see it as obligations to parents as human beings, not really as parents. I would not put my aging parents in an institution, if it could be helped.... If I could take them in, I would, if that is what they wanted (of course it is not fair to ask them that). But, as a person, one should not go out of his way to change his whole life pattern....

Obligation to be helpful within context that you are able to.... Parents should help children, but not make it obligatory that they would be repaid. I object to the concept of total obligation characteristic of Greeks. This is wrong. Now that I have a son, I realize....No, unless absolute need.... I support mother with brother. This is not unusual for the group.... I do not like to help mother....

I would not put my parents in a home for the aged.... My feelings of guilt...and external controls in terms of negative sanctions on the part of the community.

Greek young people do those things (burial customs, rituals surrounding death) because they want to please the family and because it is probably expected of them by the community. I cannot see, with my parents' position in the community how we really can avoid it....The community has that strong of a hold. Exactly....When I speak of the community, I speak of the Greek community... of involvement in the community helps to perpetuate some of those things. What is the position in the community What is expected of the family..... I cannot shirk this thing. It is not very easy. If I do, I will have to contend with exclamations...'," What a pity! What did they do? Where did they put him? Damp him...". This would bother me and my brother so much. It would be like selling the name of the family. "What a pity! All those

years in society. And now..." We cannot do that...We will probably do things that we consider hypocritical. We will do it to keep the memory of the parents intact in the eyes of the community....

As projected by the responses and the interview statements, the group as a whole indicated a strong sense of obligation to help parents ranging from extreme willingness to sacrifice to the actual behavior of support with resentment, the latter to a small degree, at least as far as the three generational group of this early study is concerned.

Agreement intergenerationally and intragenerationally concerning the sense of filial obligation was reflected in varying degrees of strength but not in direction. The old migrants, the recent migrants and the second generation respondents projected the highest agreement with regard to this norm. Agreement was strongest among the recent migrants and the second generation respondents. This was of significance in view of the fact that these were the groups where such reality was tested in terms of life course considerations. Greatest ambivalence was projected by the third generation, no doubt a reflection of the distance held by the group for this issue. But, even among this group the sense of obligation was one of the values held in continuity. Kin orientation in the context of filial obligation and responsibility was supported intergenerationally even in the case where the problem presented itself in unusual acuteness such as chronic illness. There was generational continuity with regard to the sense of duty felt, and the idea of placement of parents in a nursing home was not quite acceptable to this group of respondents, not even in the case of parental incapacitation. The migrant groups exhibited the highest ambivalence obviously conflicted with regard to this prospect. With regard to the stigma associated with relegation of filial obligation to formal institutions, the migrant groups agreed most while agreement by the non-immigrant groups was reflected on a descending order as we moved along the generational continuum. There was considerable ambivalence, the highest by the third generation. There was a shift toward the affectional aspect of the norm of filal responsibility rather than the obligatory, and co-residence was still lingering as a duty. There was emphasis for support to maintain independence for the aged parents.

The statistical analysis of the questionnaire responses using the chi square techniques to test the statistical significance of the responses, setting the limit of probability at rejecting the null hypothesis at the 0.05 level revealed that age, place of birth, educational background, where received,

Greek language proficiency, and number of children in the family of orientation are intervening variables of statistical significance. Such variables help explain the direction and intensity of the responses of the intergenerational mix of the sample.

Recent Study: Description of Sample

The second study was conducted in the course of the current year. It employed the same questionnaire as the previous study with the exception of an additional statement, "For the sake of the family happiness, one should help aging parents who are physically able to maintain themselves independently, if this is financially possible. In a second deviation from the first study, two open ended questions were substituted instead of the interviews. They elicited responses to the question "What in your opinion are the obligations of children toward their parents, their aging parents" and "Do Greek Americans see those obligations the same or differently from the larger American culture?" This dual approach to data gathering based on the belief that while quantitative data allow for comparisons across generations of respondents of a sample, the qualitative data assist in the interpretation of responses, and, in a sense, give life to the numbers, a tradition often found in family research. The questionnaire was self-administered, and responded to by first, second and third generation Greek Americans of the metropolitan New York area. The sample was drawn from a variety of sources such as student organizations, chiefly from the campuses of the City University of New York, community and church groups. The sample was fixed by circumstance, and there was no distinction made between old and recent migrants (as in the earlier study) as the older cohort is greatly diminished and difficult to reach. To the extent that it was reached, it was incorporated with the rest of the segment of first generation respondents. It was of interest to note the difficulty experienced in locating third generation respondents among the targeted sources of data collection, possibly the result of the suburban exodus of Greek Americans and the tendency and ability of the younger offspring to attend out of town state or private institutions of learning.

The recent study was also conceptualized as exploratory aimed at generation of theory,[21] the focus being the attitudes of the three generations of Greek Americans toward aged parents within the context of filial responsibility. It was undertaken as a comparative study attempting to trace the possibility of any changes of attitudes and normative shifts. At the onset,

[21] Ibid.

there were certain assumptions made based on the demographic and socio-cultural changes which have occurred in the past few decades. It was assumed that with the changing family structure and family functions, this type of traditional cultural value will be weakened, even attitudinally, as it becomes more difficult to implement. The thought was entertained that with the decline of the extended families (only 10% of the one hundred and nineteen respondents of the study compared to 26% in the earlier study lived in extended families), the celebration of nuclear families (almost fifty per cent of the sample reporting family composition indicated two children and approximately twenty per cent three children), mobility patterns, both vertical and horizontal, the increasing participation of women, the predominant care givers, in the labor force the widening socioeconomic differences between generations, and the acculturation and assimilation processes at work, the norm of filial responsibility will perhaps emerge with considerable strength, but with great ambivalence, conflict and guilt, the value maintained in new settings, and new forms, with somewhat decreasing strength as one moved along the generational continuum.

Methodological limitations are acknowledged in view of the inherent weaknesses of the data collection instruments and the difficulties encountered in gaining access to the group for research purposes. There is no claim that the sample chosen represents the whole of the Greek American population, thus making it difficult to say with any degree of accuracy whether information supplied is true or not true about the universe from which the sample was drawn. Interpretations and inferences, therefore, remain tentative allowing us nonetheless to focus on some basic elements that bind families together, the importance of intergenerational relationships, and the status of the norm of filial responsibility. The chi square technique was utilized to assess the statistical significance of responses. Statistical significance was established at the 0,05% as before level of rejecting the null hypothesis regarding the element of chance in the distribution of responses.

TABLE 2
Data Describing the Sample of 119 Respondents of the Written Socio-Cultural Questionnaire (N=119)

Demographic Variables		Number	Percent	Total
Age	12-29	43	38.39	
	30-49	40	35.71	
	50 Plus	29	25.89	112
Sex	Male	43	36.13	
	Female	76	63.87	119
Place of birth	U.S.A.	80	67.23	
	Greece	36	30.25	
	Other	3	2.52	119
Movement prior to migration	Yes	27	23.28	
	No	89	76.72	116
Location	Urban	21	100.00	
	Rular	0	0.00	
	Other	0	0.00	21
Educational background	U.S.A.	91	77.78	
	Greece	6	5.13	
	Both	20	17.09	117
Educational level (Greece)	None	2	7.69	
	Some or grammar school	10	38.46	
	Some high school	5	19.23	
	High school graduate	4	15.38	
	Some college	1	3.35	
	College graduate or more	4	15.38	26
Educational level (U.S.A.)	None	0	0.00	
	Some or grammar school	3	2.73	
	Some high school	17	15.45	
	High school graduate	9	8.18	
	Some college	18	16.36	
	College graduate or more	63	57.27	110

Table 2 continued

Demographic Variables		Number	Percent	Total
Greek language proficiency (respondent's evaluation)	None	1	0.84	
	Poor	9	7.56	
	Fair	19	15.97	
	Good	26	21.85	
	Fluent	64	53.78	119
English language proficiency (respondent's evaluation)	None	1	0.84	
	Poor	1	0.84	
	Fair	4	3.36	
	Good	11	9.24	
	Fluent	102	85.71	119
Occupation	None reported	32	27.83	
	Professional	46	40.00	
	M.O.P. (Managers, officials, proprietors)	6	5.22	
	Clerical and kindred workers, sales workers	6	5.22	
	Small shopkeepers	0		
	Graftsmen. foremen, and kindred workers	2	1.74	
	Unskilled, operative service workers	1	0.87	
	Students	19	16.52	
	Housewives	3	2.61	
	None (retired)	0	0.00	115
Marital status	Not known	2	1.71	
	Single	56	47.86	
	Married	43	36.75	
	Separated	6	5.13	
	Divorced	6	5.13	
	Widowed	4	3.42	115
Number of Children (if married, family of procreation)	0 (single and without children)	3	5.26	
	1	13	22.81	
	2	27	47.37	
	3	11	19.30	
	4	3	5.26	
	5	0	0.00	57
Number of Children in the family (if married, family of orientation)	0	0	0.00	
	1	6	15.79	
	2	23	60.53	
	3	6	15.79	
	4	2	·5.26	
	5	1	2.63	38

Table 2 continued

Demographic Variables		Number	Percent	Total
Household members	No family (Singletons)	2	1.71	
	Nuclear family	103	88.03	
	Extended family	12	10.26	117
Personal generational status	First generation	40	33.90	
	Second generation	48	40.68	
	Third generation	29	24.58	
	Other	1	0.85	118
Church membership	Yes	88	77.19	
	No	26	22.81	114
Church activity	Active	57	61.96	
	Inactive	20	21.74	
	Active in the past	15	16.30	92
Membership in community organizations	Yes	80	70.80	
	No	33	29.20	113
Organizational activity	Active	57	67.06	
	Inactive	15	17.65	
	Active in past	13	15.29	85

Table 2 describes in detail the research sample which ranges in age from 12 to 87 years of age . Thirty-eight per cent were between the ages of 12 and twenty-nine years, approximately thirty-six per cent between the ages of thirty and forty-nine and twenty-six per cent over the age of fifty. The sample therefore fell more toward the young and middle age category. In terms of gender distribution, approximately thirty-six per cent were males and sixty-four per cent females. Most of them were born in the United States (67.23%) and the rest (30.25%) in Greece or other areas under previous Greek control (2.52% If there was any movement prior to migration it was in urban areas. Most of the respondents were educated in the United States (77.78%) with only 5.13% educated in Greece and 17.09% in both countries. The educational level in Greece was mostly on the grammar school level (38.46%) followed by some high school attendance (19.23%) and high school (15.38%). The rest, approximately twenty per cent had some college or were college graduates and beyond. The educational level in the United States was very high reflective of the data sources, with almost seventy-five per cent of the sample reporting some college (16.36%) or college and beyond (57.27%). Interestingly, the self-evaluated Greek language proficiency of the group is quite high with almost 54% reporting fluency and 22% good knowledge of Greek. Only one respondent reported no knowledge with the rest appraising their knowledge as fair or poor in that numerical order. Approximately 86% were fluent in English, 9% reported good knowledge with only one reporting no knowledge and another poor knowledge. Four respondents assessed their knowledge as fair. The group is high on the occupational scale with forty per cent of those reporting being professionals and sixteen per cent students. Six respondents were managers or proprietors and six belonged to the clerical or kindred occupations. On the marital front, the single, separated, divorced and widowed groups exceeded the marrieds (approximately 62% to 38% married). The household composition of the group reflected a low percentage of extended families (approximately 10%) with only grandparental inclusion when it exists. With regard to the intergenerational mix, ths portrait of the group emerges as including 33.90% first generation, 40.68% second and 24.58% third generation respondents. The group in toto reports high church membership (77.19%) as well as church activity (61.96%) adding a 21.74 activity in the past for some of the respondents. The group is also active in community organizations reporting 70.80 membership and 67.06 activity levels.

Table 3 reflects the distribution of responses of the three generations of

within the context of filial responsibility and normative considerations in a life-course perspective.

TABLE 3

Statement	Respondent	Percentages			
		Agree	Disagree	No Opinion	Total number
A family should be willing to sacrifice some of the things they want for their children in order to help support their aged parents	1st generation	82.50	10.00	7.50	40
	2nd generation	91.30	6.52	2.17	46
	3rd generation	71.43	17.86	10.71	28
		83.33 (95)	10.53 (12)	6.14 (7)	114
Parents are entitled to some return for all the sacrifices they have made for their children	1st generation	87.50	7.50	5.00	40
	2nd generation	75.00	12.50	12.50	48
	3rd generation	89.66	0.00	10.35	29
		82.91 (98)	7.69 (9)	9.40 (11)	117
For the sake of the family hapiness, one should help aging parents who are physically able to maintain themselves independently, if this is financially possible	1st generation	90.00	7.50	2.50	40
	2nd generation	89.37	8.51	2.13	47
	3rd generation	85.71	10.71	3.57	28
		88.70 (103)	8.70 (10)	2.61 (3)	115
Aging parents who are incapacitated are best placed in a nursing home	1st generation	15.00	35.00	50.00	40
	2nd generation	20.84	18.75	60.42	48
	3rd generation	24.14	41.38	34.48	29
		19.66 (24)	29.91 (35)	50.43 (59)	117
It is considered a stigma for American children of Greek descent to place their parents in a home of the aged; Parents belong with their children	1st generation	47.37	31.38	21.05	38
	2nd generation	60.41	20.83	18.75	48
	3rd generation	42.31	26.92	30.77	26
		51.74 (58)	25.89 (29)	22.31 (26)	112

Discussion of Findings

Table 3 gives the distribution of responses to the statements addressing attitudes toward filial obligation follow with the table and then narrative.

The possitiveness of attitudes emerged in greater strength than in the earlier study, and certainly beyond expectations. In answer to the statement "A family should be willing to sacrifice some of the things they want for their children in order to help support their aged parents' designed to measure the extent of willingness to help aged parents and whether the extent reaches the proportion of sacrifice, the overall response of the group was projected at the 83.33 level with overall "no opinion" response at 10.53% and 6.14% disagreement. This area of kinship attitude presents a level of strong agreement that cuts across generational barriers. Strongest agreement is projected by the second generation (91.30%) followed by the first generation (82.50%). What is possibly witnessed is the distinction between norms, "socially accepted standards about how people should behave" and expectations "less constrained by what other people think" that is, a person may not bring shame on himself/herself by not expecting old age support from children while shame could be brought to bear in failing to care for aged parents. [22] The third generation responded to the lower level (71.43%) and had the highest ambivalence (17.86 %) no doubt a reflection of their age and the remoteness of this issue.

There was a reversal in the response to the statement that "Parents are entitled to some return for all the sacrifices they have made for their children" with second generation responding on a lower level (75.00%) followed by the first generation (87.50%) and the third exceeding the two generations by an almost ninety per cent response with no ambivalence whatsoever The second generation reflects a split between ambivalence and disagreement, both on the twelve per cent level possibly a reflection of life circumstances where the issue of return is tested in real terms and with the accompanied conflict and guilt. The third generation comfortable in the untested reality of the issue and possibly in a position of being the recipient of parental sacrifices expresses reciprocity in ideal terms. Responses constitute another example of consistency of direction toward acknowledgment of obligation and responsibility toward parents, as well as strength in the parent-child bond. There are no very significant generational differences and the sense of obligation is reflected in generational continuity.

Assistance for aged parents to maintain their independence is reflected

[22] N. Ogawa & R.D. Retherford, "Care of Elderly in Japan: Changing Norms

in high intergenerational agreement (90.00% by the first generation, almost as high by the second, 89.37%, and a little lower by the third (85.71%) which also expressed the highest ambivalence (10.71%). There is no doubt about the desirability for independence of aged parents both by those who might be the recipients of assistance and those who might be the givers if the need presents itself.

Another item concerned with obligations of children towards their aged parents explores specifically the attitudes toward aged parents who are incapacitated. The responses to the statement "Aging parents who are incapacitated are best placed in a nursing home manifest an interesting break down with the least agreement from the first generation, only agreeing on a 15% level with high ambivalence at the 35% level. The highest degree of disagreement is projected by the second generation, the group that was also the most willing to sacrifice. The third generation agrees a little higher (24.14%) and shows the greatest ambivalence (41.34%). The overall response fluctuates between ambivalence, almost 30% and disagreement of 50%. The third generation disagrees the least and projects the highest ambivalence, possibly the consequence of age, the distance from such crisis, the acculturation influencss and shift to patterns more readily in congruence with those of the larger society, and greater acceptance of formal societal systems of assistance. In an overall way, however, it becomes apparent that the idea of placement of parents in a nursing home is not quite acceptable to Greek Americans of all three generations, not even in the case of incapacitation. The sentiment could probably be expressed as a reluctance to put parents in an old age home, barring serious illness or a situation that left no alternative.

The group *in toto* presented almost a split between those agreeing to the statement that "It is considered a stigma for American children of Greek descent to place their parents in a home for the aged. Parents belong with their children," and those disagreeing and projecting ambivalence. The second generation projects again the highest agreement, most likely representing to a considerable degree the children of recent migrants who hold traditional values more steadfastly. There is considerable ambivalence, highest by the first generation who probably finds the value conflict more difficult to bear. It is possible that the co-residence implication may cloud the picture in view of the overwhelming acceptance of independence maintenance for aged parents. It is likely that in this particular case we have in operation internal controls of a sense of guilt as well as the pressure of external community controls.

It is of interest to note that the overwhelming one directional responses of the first three attitudinal statements did not allow a test of significance using a MICRO CASE computer program. Checking the number of respondents, the expected frequencies were low and the level unacceptable for the program which gave Prob.= n/a response. This was the case testing for generational status against the five statements of the questionnaire. The last three statements though presenting a more interesting distribution for the computer to analyze, did not have enough of percentage distribution differences to prove statistically significant. Thus, some intervening variables such as place of birth, due to the fact that the majority of the respondents were born in the United States, educational background, because the majority were educated in the United States, and number of children, because the majority of the sample came or had nuclear families with mostly two or perhaps three children, did not prove to be statistically significant as it was the case in the previous study. The number of children in the family of orientation is of important consideration as it becomes a question of sharing responsibilities and allocation of sibling resources.

Some intervening demographic variables were statistically significant and they all related to the last two statements, which dealt with parental incapacitation and the stigma attached to placing a parent in a home for the aged. Age was significant in the case of attitudes toward incapacitation $x^2 = 20.87$, D.F. 4, p<0.000) and in the consideration of stigma of American children of Greek descent to place parents in an old age home ($x^2 = 14.84$, D.F. 4, p= <0.005). Segmenting the sample in terms of Greek language fluency and non-fluency, a high degree of significance was revealed for this variable, a measure of ethnic identification by the group. Chi square was expressed as ($x^2 = 8.54$, D.F. 2, p< 0.014) for incapacitation and ($x^2 = 7.41$, D.F. 2, p <0.025) for stigma. Checking for marital status in a segmented sample of marrieds and non-marrieds, the variable was significant with respect to the stigma associated with consideration of placing parents in an old age home. Lastly, church membership was significant for the incapacitation position ($x^2 = 10.42$, D.F. 2, p<0005) such position drawing from both religious and cultural values.

It becomes apparent that any analysis of the data points to a strong sense of obligation toward aged parents, a sense which appears to be intensified by comparison to earlier findings, an obligation which is only beginning to erode among third generation respondents. The second generation upholds the value in considerable strength close if not surpassing the first generation thus indicating that such a value has been deeply internalized most

likely with the descendants of more recent migrants as the age distribution of the group indicates. The crucial test rests with issues of parental incapacitation, the stigma of entertaining alternatives to informal patterns of family assistance, and residential proximity concerns. Help for parental independence is expressed in overwhelming support with co-residence in great decline and limited to grandparents. In the small percentage of extended families reported, it was only grandparents included in the household and no other relations. Thus, assistance does not necessarily include co-residence.

The responses to the open ended statements "What in your opinion are the obligations of children toward aged parents" and "Are those obligations seen differently by Greek Americans vis a vis Americans" give meaning to the direction of the norm within the Greek American community of the three generations tested. They reinforce the sense of support for the value of filial responsibiliy and point to some emerging shifts and transformations regarding the maintenance of this norm.

Out of the total number of one hundred and nineteen respondents, fifty one representatives of the three generations expressed the strongest support that parents should be taken care of for most needs, physical, emotional, and financial. On the middle of the spectrum fell forty of the remaining respondents who felt that parents should be taken care of for some needs, but with some conditions placed on obligations, such as "if children can afford it," "to best of ability," "to a point, but not at expense of own spouse and children," it depends on relationship aging parents had with children," "if they give, they get," "until incapacitated." The needs mentioned predominantly included respect, companionship, love, and dignity. Two of the respondents felt no obligation and one felt that "it was too personal a question to answer." The remainder of respondents did not answer.

In terms of the difference between the Greek American position and that of the larger society, eight of the subjects felt obligations to be the same, ten respondents stated that there were some similarities, but that differences were situational, and that cultural values are merging. Sixty-nine from the total number of respondents expressed absolute difference between the cultures with the Greek American families feeling greater obligation than Americans. Two of the subjects did not know if there was a difference, they were not sure and the rest of the group did not respond. The words of respondents, generationally presented, eloquently speak to the attitudes and opinions they hold. First generation respondents had this to say:

Children should assist their parents. My opinion is the same with

the first statement, that is, a family should be willing to sacrifice some of the things they want for their children in order to help their parents.

It is the obligation of children to take care of their parents in their old age. Respect, love, consideration, any kind of help possible.

It is an honor and duty for children to take care of their parents who in turn had sacrificed to bring up their children, gave them support and education. Their twilight years should be lived with dignity and love.

I feel that aged parents should be made as comfortable as possible. Our parents did not have the opportunities that were available to their children. Many of them sacrificed to make better lives for our generation.

To become "good citizens" and productive members of society. To become responsible with regard to aiding parents emotionally and financially if possible. To share what they have if the need arises. Children should take care of their parents. They have an obligation toward them. They must support them emotionally and economically. Parents sacrifice.

Children should assist their parents. However, Greek parents rely on their children to a larger degree than non-Greek parents. If the parents are physicany and financiany able to care for themselves, then, they should not rely on their children

I have been taught all my life by my parents through subtle gestures and even bold talk that we (their children) owe them for their sacrifices to have raised us well. And up until this year I have believed this which caused me to feel guilty at times. I am working on changing that belief because I do see very clearly now that all I really owe them is respect and consideration for being good people—who meant well and do not know otherwise because they were raised this way too.

The obligation arises usually from economical and social issues. Since only recently Greece adopted the retirment plan, it was an unwritten law to look after your parents because they had no other means. Probably this was the case for co-residence also. They could not afford to keep two households. Since the establishment of the retirement plan even today in Greece the parents live separately from their children and it is very common to put them in a home for the aged.

In their own words, the second generation group expressed obligfations as follows:

> To take care of them until they are totally incapacitated. Give them care and comfort.

> The children should respect the feelings and morals of their parents and do whatever is you can to keep them healthy and well cared for.

> To take care of them if they are not able to remain independent, or to help them stay independent as long as possible if they are healthy. Children should honor parents. Be there whenever they need you. Financial assistance and moral support.

> In general they have obligations. Financial and physical assistance, if needed. TLC every day or four to five times a week.

> Children should help support their aging parents. The parents have brought up their children and now that the aging parents are incapable, the children should help take care of them.

> If they can afford it they should give as much to their parents' wishes, comforts, keeping them independent. It is traumatic to take one out of his/her nest.

> To care for them to the bitter end regardless of the cost. If nursing home becomes necessary, a good nursing home.

> Greek parents take excellent care of their young children. Later the children must take equally good care of parents. Give back to the parents and support them. Give back love and support them if possible.

To help parents when necessary. Involve them in their own family or activities. Show respect for the aged.

Major obligation because parents play a very significant role in the child's life. They show and pave the way for their children. Their love, sacrifices, and warmth is and should be greatly appreciated.

The children must respect their parents for their entire lives. Protect them till they die, and have the responsibility to carry their memory on, by informing the grandchildren about their family history. The aging parents must be cared for by all means possible, even if it means to sacrifice something from the children.

To treat them with due respect with dignity and compassion. Children should support their parents as best they can. There is no reason to place them in an aging home.

They should help their parents to the best of their ability. To ensure their continued independence, and care for them when they are no longer independent.

Highlights of the third generation responses include the following expressions of obligation:

To respect and help them the way they invested in us. Same applies for aging. Financial and physical support as well as moral support and love. We have an obligation to care for our parents.

Children should respect the needs of their parents who have attended their needs growing up. As parents age, they should be supported emotionally and financially whenever possible. Aging parents are actually a vital aspect reinforcing the integrity of the Greek family and culture .

Parents should be taken care of by the children as much as possible. Daily contact and emotional support at any age. For aging parents physical assistance and financial support needed. They should be there for their parents. Be supportive and helpful. How-

ever, children should not sacrifice their entire lives, especially when a reasonable solution is feasible.

Meet their needs physically or financially as best they can. To respect their requests or concerns as to their quality of life. I would let them live in my house.

Children should love and respect parents. As parents age, we often see role reversal between them and their offspring. We should try to make their remaining years pleasant. I feel old people should not be alone.

Respect, affection, if deserved.

Take care of them, but if this creates strain, the choice is in favor of alternative solutions.

Love, respect honor. Be as helpful as possible depending on finances, their state of health, etc.

There should be some obligations of children toward their parents. Aging parents? Nursing home.

To love them and be there when needed to a point—some help but not at the expense of my husband and children.

This is extremely personal and in each case different. I can certainly not render a general statement on the issue.

You take care of them, as they took care of you, as long as you can afford to do so. When the son/daughter can no longer provide a healthy environment, responsibility for parent can no longer be taken.

To help them, if they are very elderly (75) and unable to help themselves (to the extent the child can). But, in no way should the child sacrifice his own well-being or put the parent's needs before his own or those of the child's family.

In summary, attitudes toward the aged have emerged as highly positive and the norm remains strong and in continuity in the three generations of Greek Americans of the study. Consideration should be given, however, to the portrait of the sample, well educated, of rather high occupational level, a predictable affluence, proficient in both the English and the Greek language, and concentrated in the younger and middle aged groupings. Such attributes may account for a degree of acculturation which allows fluidity in partaking in the two worlds, that of the ethnic subcommunity and the larger society. Economic affluence provides the freedom for independent living desirable by both the elderly and their younger families. The emerging intimacy at a distance" affords ease for filial obligation expression and mutuallity of services often flowing also from the older generation to the young, the latter progressively found in dual career households. The response regarding changes in the country of origin invites comment as it reflects what often happens with regard to social change often manifested in greater rapidity in the country of origin than in the ethnic communities of the diaspora.

Testing perception of differences and/of similarities between Greek Americans and the larger society with regard to filial responsibility, the responses of the three generations are as follows:

> Yes!! Differently...Definitely, yes..Greek American families mostly stick to Greek traditions and customs. Taking care of their parents is something that is expected of them. It is not even an issue except for instances where parents are severely ill and need medical assistance at all times.

> They see them differently...Yes, differently, in my opinion.

> Yes!! Greek Americans have different beliefs for the family. They are more connected.

> Differently. Greek Americans see things more like the regular Greeks do.

> Not sure!! I think a little differently, since we are still family oriented. There is no stigma-in fact there is honor-in staying in touch with your parents. Greek Americans see obligations differently. Nursing homes in severe incapacitation. It is still a

stigma to place parents in a home for the aged if incapacitation is not severe.

I think they are somewhere in-between. Americans have nothing to do with their parents where Greeks (90%) have them in their household until their death.

Yes! Differently!! Amongst Greek Americans, there is the belief that children are responsible for elderly and sick parents, regardless of the child's own personal obligations. Non-Greeks have a greater sense of independence from the family than Greek American families.

I think Greek Americans of first and possibly second generation see these obligations differently from the larger American culture. They believe they owe their parrents joy and a better financial situation (if they do not have that yet). Just do not be fooled that these children (including myself) do not use this 'obligation as a reason for justification for not growing up and taking responsibility for their own lives.

Differently! There is a lot of pressure for Greek Americans to have to take care of their parents. I do believe that Greek Americans are more concerned about the welfare of their parents.

Because the Greek American community prefers to keep their traditions, usually based in a culture of fifty or more years ago, they kept also the unwritten law that it is a disgrace to put your parents in a home. Also, since those parents came to America as immigrants they had to struggle to raise their children, so their children feel obligated to their parents for all the sacrifices they had made for them.

In my opinion, we view (in general) parental responsibility more obligatory than American born descendants. However, I also believe that we are slowly losing our cultural identify as our children and grandchildren become assimilated in the greater American culture.

Most of my acquaintances feel the same degree of obligation whether or not they are Greek.

The second generation addressed differences in statements, such as:

I think Greek Americans feel a little more strongly about respect for their elders. We are taught to look up to elders. They are wiser and deserve respect

In my opinion, Greek Americans firmly believe in assisting, loving, and helping their parents. It should not be an obligation, instead it is the child itself that should want to fulfill these actions.

I feel Greeks feel a stronger obligation. The Greeks see these obligations very differently from the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture. To agree with this dominant culture about the issue of aging parents would mean betrayal of the Greek family structure and a further betrayal of the Greek ideal because this most likely would cause a chain reaction to other traditions, and would slowly change them all. Probably seen differently in that the Greek Americans will support aged parents in terms of keeping them in a home environment unless certain debilitating diseases such as Alzheimer's disease forces the family to seek nursing home or hospice care.

Yes!! Greek Americans for the most part do see those obligations differently because of the Greek morals and value system. Absolutely, we see it differently... We have a higher regard for the dignity and respect of our parents.

I would say yes in my limited vew. I may be wrong...more appropriately, Greek Americans who have maintained their culture have a more abiding interest in their parents. Those who have gone along the American mainstream may either feel as strongly as before or less.

I think opinion is beginning to merge/blend because of life styles.

I think they see obligations the same, may be even a little more.

Probably quite the same as general American culture, though different from most liberal New Yorkers,

Depends on the situation... I do not know..Opinions vary in all cultures...

And the third generation voiced the following opinions:

Yes!! Differently!! They have stronger family ties and a sense of responsibility.

I do believe that Greek Americans view obligations differently from the larger American culture, by and large. Yes, it is considered a stigma, and no, parents do not belong with their children.

Greek Americans tend to feel a greater obligation to their parents, and especially aging parents, in terms of supporting them, both financialy and emotionally. Greek Americans stress the involvement of their parents with their own families once they have grown, as compared to Americans in general.

Differently! Greeks will sacrifice everything for their aging parents whereas Americans will consider themselves first.

Greek Americans feel more obligated toward their parents, therefore, much differently from the larger American culture. Greek Americans see the child as very obligated to support the aging parents (financially, but also to the extent of allowing the parents to lead and influence the child's life). Americans are different. They are more comfortable with the process of separation and individuation, which the Greek Americans usually view as evil or immoral.

Greek Americans have stronger feelings of obligations toward parents. However, as we are assimilating, I feel this is changing.

Greek Americans overall view obligations the same as the larger American culture. They have love, respect and responsibility towards and for their parents. Too often, Greek Americans become overly concerned with opinions of others, however, ulti-

mately they are comfortable with their decisions.

No difference.

Differently, on the whole. Greater distance between them and parents.

Differently I have been upset by the burden my parents have had taking care of my grandparents though financially independent, because of physical disabilities.

In general Greek Americans believe that the sense of obligation toward parents is stronger among Greek Americans, although it is seen at the same time as changing under the influence of acculturation forces, more readily acknowledged by the third generation group.

Concluding Remarks

The study revealed the predominance of the family as a source of support and a consistent theme of attitudes of filial obligation toward aged parents cutting across the three generations of Greek Americans. In general the three generations endorsed ths ideal of filial obligation, the norm emerging in continuity with only slight erosion despite the demographic and socioeconomic changes accompanied this group and society at large.

The hypothesis of the study stated as the belief that the norm of filial obligation, though it might be changing in the non-immigrant generations, it is expected to emerge in considerable strength on the attitudinal level was confirmed by both the quantitative analysis and the qualitative data. In comparison to the first study, conducted in the early seventies, the norm of filial obligation appeared to be intensified in all three generations of the study. The strength may very well be due to the impact of ethnicity renewal, the shift from a negative to a positive view of ethnicity "from curse to pride and from host group to ethnic identity."[23] It also seems that second and third generation members of ethnic groups even when removed from involvement in the ethnic community, they may carry on a tradition of respect and assistance for aged parents, a norm anchored in the cultural value system of the group. Such tradition may be strongly internalized and thus resisting change. It also may speak to the fact that the first and second

[23] S. Tabachnik, "Jewish Identity Development in Young Adulthood," *Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation*, The Write Institute (Berkeley, CA), p. 68.

generations who carried the struggle of preserving their identity in a hostile larger culture would like to see it continue as they now comprise the dominant segment of the ethnic aged population.

The norm of filial obligation seems to be tested not when sacrifice is the issue but incapacitation of the aged parents and assistance by formal social services. There was reluctance and unwillingness to shift position expressed in disagreement and ambivalence. But, even on this crucial issue, the group in toto surpassed that of the earlier study in their disagreement to place parents in a nursing home. The agreement of the three generations to the level that they agreed that it is a stigma for American children of Greek descent to place their parents in an old age home and that parents belong with their children was higher than the agreement projected in the earlier study and paralleled the sentiments of the statements addressing incapacitation and elderly care. This aspect of the norm is holding but most likely in the process of change.

Transformation was in evidence with regard to filial assistance for independence with an overwhelming support reflected in the responses of the three generations. A family at a distance" orientation is taking hold with desirability for proximity, contact and affectional intergenerational bonds. The emotional aspects of assistance were emphasized with stress on love, honor, respect and dignity. To the extent that the obligation is perceived as more voluntary than obligatory the effect on guilt and giving with resentment is minimized if and when such existed. With regard to the extremely positive response to assistance for parental independence, it is to be noted that the upward mobility and status achievement of the group, translated in the financial ability to provide help, can be seen as a factor underlying the redirection of financial support for independence favored strongly by all three generational subgroupings. The fact, that the immigrant group at times followed the native group in level of response can also be attributed to the fact that the increased economic independence, which also touched the first generation has made the system in which the family occupies a central role in providing the older person with help less relevant as many of the elderly have achieved financial security of their own.

It is probably noteworthy that gender differences were not revealed in significance possibly the result of acculturation forces and a shift to more egalitarian attitudes as well as a strengthening in cross-generational ties for both men and women when both generations are adults.[24]

Both the findings and the limitations of the study suggest fruitful av

enues for further study. The nature of the actual behavioral aspects of filial obligation could shed light into the practices of filial responsibility. The impact of increased longevity with its potential of chronic illnesses and the demands of the change and duration of assistance that would be needed is an area to be studied with regard to caregiving when prolongation of life brings about generational overlappings and a decrease in the pool of caregivers. How can the expressed climate of support of the groups of the study under consideration be negotiated for the benefit of a quality life for elderly Greek Americans and the satisfaction of their adult children who feel strongly about their filial responsibility, but they may not always be able to deliver the requisite assistance in view of the present and predicted socioeconomic changes. What kind of preparation could help to proactively interfere with ethnic aging long before having to face the ethnic aged!

It would seem that attention should be directed to the suburban aged, the aged in institutions, to the "how" they experience aging, to factors relating to ethnic aging such as intermarriage, acculturation issues, mobility and its related lack of structural opportunity for contact and close interaction, just to name a few areas of research concern and interest. Ethnicity is not about to disappear as an important element in the lives of ethnic families and the aged in particular . What may change is the manner in which the generations view ethnic heritage, the means by which they choose to express it, and the effect that it has in interrelationships and family solidarity over the life course. The more knowledge we have about aging in ethnic families the more successful the journey.

The State of Greek American Assimilation: Towards Symbolic Ethnicity

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Introduction

Ethnic diversity is an essential component of American culture, shaping the basic nature of American society. Recently a revived interest in ethnic group studies has brought into light a significant amount of information about their contribution to the social, economic, and political history of the country.

Within the American sociological tradition, much attention has concentrated on the process of ethnic group assimilation and the impact of immigration on the pluralist structure of American society. However, Americans of Greek descent have not been the subject of many systematic sociological studies,[1] and therefore little knowledge is available concerning processes of maintaining or weakening of Greek ethnic identity, within the United Stated.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the concept of ethnicity among the Greek-Americans of the New York metropolitan area, which has the largest numbers of Greek Americans in the United States. It explores two alternative hypotheses concerning the state of assimilation of Greek Americans.

The first hypothesis follows Gordon's theory of ethnic group assimilation, according to which, ethnic groups go through a series of successive stages of assimilation. He identifies the first stage to be cultural assimilation. While all ethnic groups eventually experience cultural assimilation,

[1] Evangelos Vlachos, *The Assimilation of Greeks in the United States* (Athens, 1968) p. 29; Charles C. Moskos, *Greek Americans, Struggle and Success* (2nd. ed. New Brunswick 1989) p. 188.