



Book review: Interdisciplinary view on intergenerational family relations

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Tanskanen Antti & Danielsbacka Mirikka:

Intergenerational family relations – an evolutionary social science approach

In their new book *Intergenerational family relations – an evolutionary social science approach* Antti Tanskanen and Mirikka Danielsbacka have taken an ambitious task. They try to connect evolutionary and social scientific theories in order to explain how intergenerational family relations operate. Danielsbacka and Tanskanen emphasize that there has not been a dialogue between evolutionary and social scientific fields, although the research subject (i.e. family relations) has been the same.

The book concentrates mostly to analyze contacts between three generations (grandparents, parents, and grandchildren), although influences of uncles and aunts on nephews and nieces are explained as well. The objective of the book is to answer the following questions: Why does caring grandparenthood exist among humans? Why do the four categories of grandparents differ in their investment in their grandchildren? Why and how does genetic relatedness tend to shape intergenerational relations? How do socioeconomic factors influence on kin support? How the welfare state modifies grandparental investments in grandchildren? Does active grandparenting improve grandchildren's development, parental fertility, and wellbeing of the grandparents? Furthermore, the book offers a synthesis of the theories and results of intergenerational relations by connecting evolutionary and social scientific research.

Tanskanen and Danielsbacka succeed to answer the objectives they set forth at the beginning of the book. Different theories from the fields of social and evolutionary sciences are explained thoroughly. Further, theories from both levels are integrated with each other in a clear manner. Although the book is theoretical by nature, the authors also present a huge amount of empirical results in the book.

The book consists of nine chapters. The first four chapters are theoretically driven whereas the last five chapters present more empirical results. As a starting point, authors take the fact that the people are cooperative breeders and in addition to the parents, many relatives such as grandparents participate to raise children. This is justified by the fact that children's brain requires a considerable amount of calories for growth that cooperative breeding has been necessary for human evolution. The human child is born "unfinished" and needs a great amount of care during the first years. Thus, it is likely

that cooperative breeding and the growth of the brain have been developed simultaneously during human evolution. The authors highlight that humans are a unique species because it is highly unlikely that the extended kin or even father would participate in childrearing among other species than in humans.

I enjoyed reading about evolutionary mechanisms because these mechanisms are rarely introduced in the (family) sociology literature. The key factors that influence parental, as well as grandparental investments, are sex, genetic degree and lineage of the relationship (is child-related to extended kin by mother or father's side). For example, according to parental investment theory and kin selection women invest more (time, care and energy) in children than men. Natural selection has favored parental behavior that makes parents invest a great number of resources and energy in their descendants. The reason for this is that descendant's survival and some extent reproduction is dependent on parental and extended kin investments. On the other hand, when parents and extended kin invest time and care in children, they increase likelihood that their genes spread within population and thus increase inclusive fitness. Because mothers have more cost in descendants due to pregnancy and lactation, they invest more than men do. The same applies to maternal side grandparents and particularly mother's mothers. Authors also point out that degree of genetic relatedness between kin is associated with the investments they are willing to make (biological parent and child share on average 50 % of the genes whereas grandparents and grandchild 25 %). Individuals are likely to invest more in their close relatives than in more distant ones or non-relatives.

At the end of the book authors point out interesting and important thing about evolutionary social science approach. Genetic dispositions that guide human behavior, are dependent on social and economic circumstances. For example in the environments, where individuals have more options to make their own choices, the effects of genetic dispositions are amplified not reduced as some sociologists have been previously argued. This shows that authors understand that genetic endowments interact with (social) environment and thus the book does not lapse either to genetic or cultural determinism. In the last chapter, the authors also state their criticism of the studies on intergenerational family relations. They argue that a large part of the studies has been based on the correlations, not the causal identifications. They call for better designs to study the causal relationship between grandparental investments and grandchildren's wellbeing and other grandchildren's outcomes. This proposition is most welcome and should be taken seriously among family researchers.

In their book Tanskanen and Danielsbacka, present an evolutionary social science research program. The advantage of this research program is that evolutionary theory formulates a clear macro-level theory that can be logically combined with the hypotheses and theories from the different research fields. The authors highlight that by adopting evolutionary mechanisms as macro-level theory also in social sciences intergenerational family relations can be explained more effortlessly. Furthermore, they claim that evolutionary explanations would strengthen the credibility of the social sciences in the field of sciences. Under multidisciplinary paradigm, knowledge on family

relations would accumulate that hardly has happened in the field of social sciences this far. The approach that considers both human evolutionary adaptations and social structures has been in a marginal position for a long time in the field of social sciences, although evolutionary reasoning is not completely obnoxious among social scientists nowadays anymore. The book is extremely welcome and a breath of fresh air sometimes so fusty discussions about the mechanisms of a family environment. I recommend this book particularly for social science researchers as well as students to widen their scientific worldview.