


# **Alice in Wonderland: Searching for Generational Intelligence**

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# **Generational Intelligence**

**"Through the Looking Glass and  
what Alice found there" by Lewis  
Carroll**


# Making Connections

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- ✓ First meeting, Helsinki, EBSSRS conference 1998
  - ✓ Mutual professional interests: life course, intergenerational relationships, elder abuse, migration
  - ✓ Ability to Collaborate
  - ✓ Developing Friendship

# Professional Background

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- ✓ Simon is a psychologist and Ariela is a sociologist
  - ✓ We both are Social Workers and Gerontologists
  - ✓ We both headed Research Institutes and Gerontology Departments
  - ✓ Understanding the need for Theory Development
  - ✓ Ariela's Appointment at King's College London
  - ✓ Revisiting Gerontological Paradigms

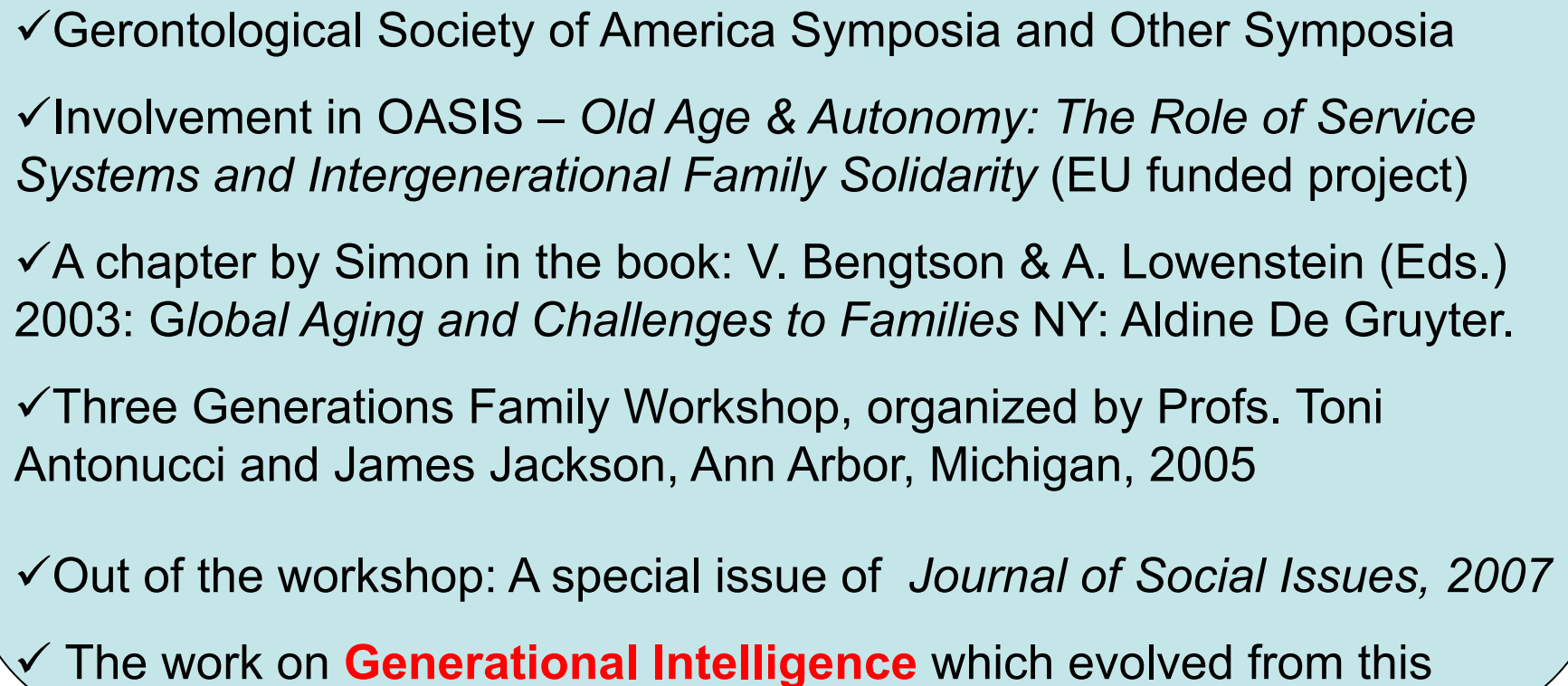
# Developing Conceptual Paradigms



**World Congress of the International Association of Gerontology & Geriatrics Symposium on Theory Development, Vancouver, Canada 2001**

From this Symposium emerged the book:  
Biggs, S., Lowenstein, A., & Hendricks, J. (Eds.). (2003).  
***The need for theory: Critical approaches to social gerontology***. Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing

# Intergenerational Relationships

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- ✓ Gerontological Society of America Symposia and Other Symposia
  - ✓ Involvement in OASIS – *Old Age & Autonomy: The Role of Service Systems and Intergenerational Family Solidarity* (EU funded project)
  - ✓ A chapter by Simon in the book: V. Bengtson & A. Lowenstein (Eds.) 2003: *Global Aging and Challenges to Families* NY: Aldine De Gruyter.
  - ✓ Three Generations Family Workshop, organized by Profs. Toni Antonucci and James Jackson, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 2005
  - ✓ Out of the workshop: A special issue of *Journal of Social Issues*, 2007
  - ✓ The work on **Generational Intelligence** which evolved from this

# Generational Intelligence

- In post-modern societies there is blurring of boundaries between generations
- Questions then arise: what is the meaning of a generation; how can we understand it and act upon such understanding

# The goal

- (1) to discuss and analyze existing literature (psychodynamic, gerontological and sociological) that impacted theory development and the meaning of a generation
- (2) to examine the relationship between concepts of generation at individual, familial and cohort levels
- (3) to suggest a conceptual framework of **Generational Intelligence** that reflects the phenomenology of understanding generations in their various forms and contexts



# Discourses on Generation

Generation thought of in different ways or on three levels:

social cohorts

families

individual life-course

# Why is this important?

- (1) Generation is experienced in everyday life as a phenomenological whole. Beyond separate attitudes to life course, family or cohort.
- (2) Social problems such as: the care gap, pensions policy, age unfriendly environments, elder abuse are intergenerational in nature.
- (3) Sustainable intergenerational relationships will need to rely on increased levels of generational insight, empathy and 'intelligence'.

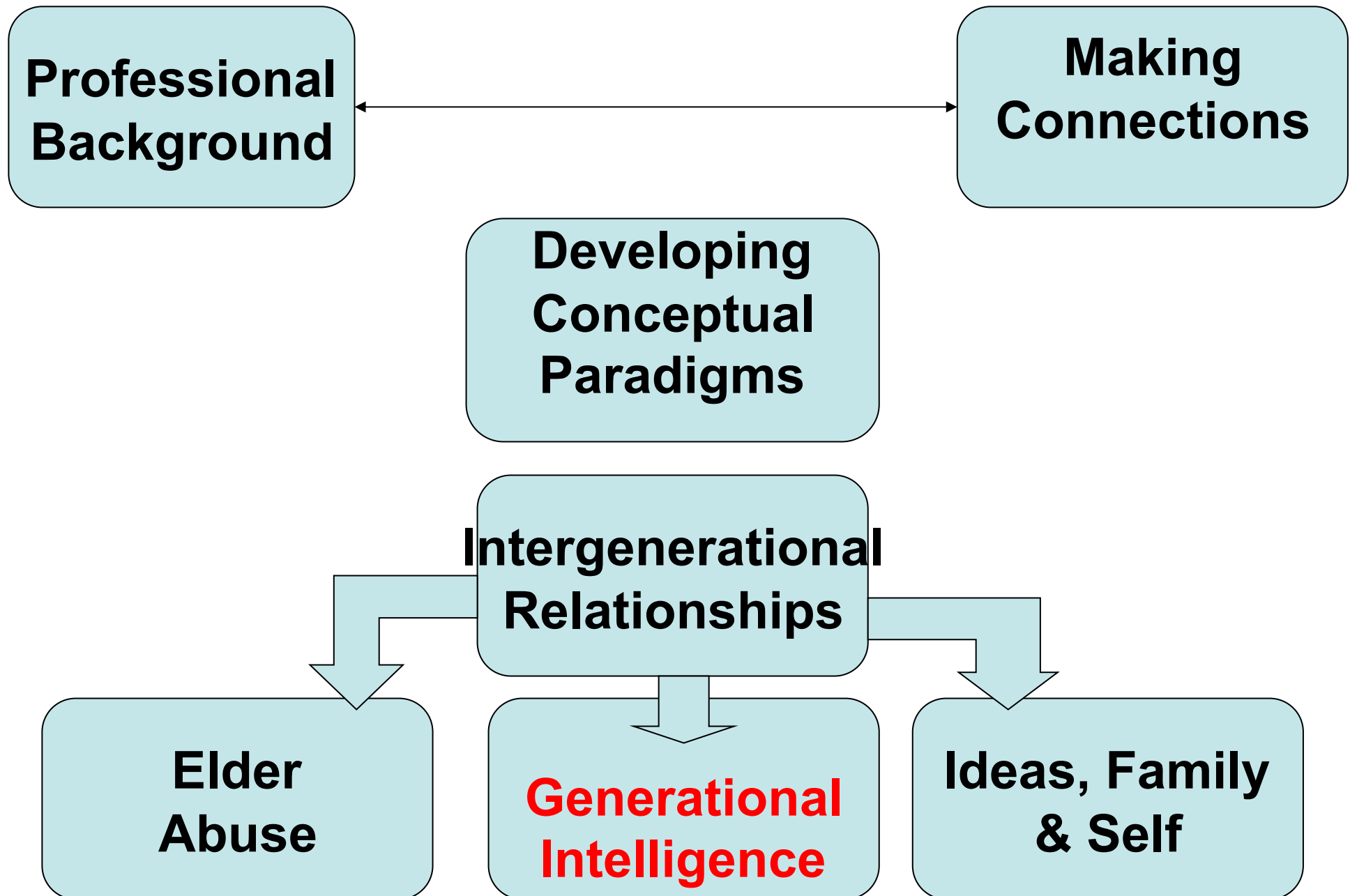
# Generation in Theory

- Sociological: Mannheim, Turner, Kohli
- Psychodynamic: Freud, Jung, Bollas
- Gerontological: Bengtson, Silverstein, Pillemer, Attias-Donfut
- Post-modern: Featherstone & Hepworth, Gilliard & Higgs

# Generational Consciousness

- Mannheim (Gilleard & Higgs)  
A self-conscious cohort
- Freudian (Bollas, Biggs)  
An awareness of ageing self  
The mature imagination
- Bengtson (Silverstein et al., Lowenstein, Pillemer)  
A relationship between  
Generations in the family

# Toward Generational Intelligence



# **Theoretical positions**

- **Social exchange theory**
  - Favours balance
- **Family solidarity paradigm**
  - Favours the older
- **Intergenerational stake hypothesis**
  - Favours the younger

# Social Exchange Theory

- **People are trying to maximize benefits and minimize costs**
- **Modal strategy – to repay benefits received and negotiate a balanced relationship**
- **Better to give than to receive?**
- **Immediate or delayed reciprocity (support bank)?**

# Intergenerational Family Solidarity Paradigm

- **Family obligations extend beyond the nuclear family (modified extended family)**
- **Filial norms oblige the younger generation vis-a-vis the older**
- **Reciprocity (support bank)**
- **Negotiated relative to other commitments**
- **Solidarity may be played out in different forms**
  - **several dimensions**
  - **directly or more indirectly**



# Intergenerational Stake Hypothesis

- **Parents have invested more than children**
- **Children have higher priority to parents than the other way around**
- **Parents are thus more strongly motivated to protect the relationship (and the younger generation).  
Parental norms of protection?**
- **De-obligating children?**
- **Filial independence?**
- **Generativity?**

# Why it is important?

- The importance of solidarity, conflict and ambivalence between generations is theoretically contested

# Intergenerational Themes

- Rivalry
- From top down
- From bottom up
- Solidarity
- Ambivalence
- Post-modern Life course (Blurring of boundaries between generations)

# What do the themes say?

- There is more conflict than harmony
- There is more harmony than conflict
- There is both harmony and conflict
- There is mostly ambivalence
- The whole problem is disappearing

# Aspects of generational life that might generate ambivalence

- (1) Ambivalence between dependence and autonomy
- (2) Ambivalence resulting from conflicting family norms
  - like norms of reciprocity and solidarity in care, which become problematic when chronic stress is involved and, causing EA and neglect
- (3) Ambivalence resulting from solidarity – “web of mutual dependency”, revealed in EA case studies

# Introducing **G**enerational **I**ntelligence

- A Definition of **GI**

To be reflective and develop conscious awareness about one's position in the life course, awareness of other generations in the family, and awareness about cohorts and the social climate one is embedded in

# Dimensions of GI

- The degree to which one becomes conscious of self as part of a generation
- Relative ability to put yourself in the position of other generations
- Relative ability to act with awareness of one's generational circumstances

# A Phenomenology of GI

## **Awareness of position in the life course**

- Live with the mature imagination
- Accept the aging process
- Absorb differences – contain ambivalence

## **Awareness of other generations in the family**

- Negotiate flexible relationships with other generations
- Be sensitive to care relations

## **Awareness about cohorts and the social climate**

- Recognize differences between cohorts and the uniqueness of your specific cohort
  - Understand reasons for the differences
  - Accept or reject the status quo
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- Surrounding context determines the salience of the different forms of awareness in phenomenal experience.



# **Stages of Generational Intelligence**

- Step One: recognize generational distinctiveness
- Step Two: understand the relationship between generational positions
- Step Three: take a moral stance toward generational positions
- Step Four: act in a manner that is generationally aware

# High Generational Intelligence

- Life course GI: maturity- insight that people develop and change with particular priorities arising from the point they are at in a typical life course.
- Family GI: acknowledging that family roles differ according to age and position in the family, interdependence of generations, being able to communicate and problem-solve.

# High Generational Intelligence

- Cohort GI: being aware of one's own membership/ or the salience of cohort for your age-generation, balancing the demands of different cohort groups
- General GI: Insight into own position, understanding of relationship to others, understanding needs of own and other generations, solving tensions between generations, understanding the social context in which is taking place.

# **A High GI: Attitudes to Self**

- Sense of being comfortable with own age
- Not to think that one should always be young
- Looking back and forth – awareness of time left
- Situate and accept oneself in the part of the life course that one is in

# **A High GI: On the Familial level**

## **Attitudes to family life**

- Looking up and down (back and forth) the generational ladder
- Awareness of time left for elders in the family
- Recognizing or living with continuities and discontinuities in family life
- Ability to assess or maintain relations with other family members across the life course
- Comfortable with your position in the family

# **A High GI: Attitudes to others or other generational groups**

- Ability to relate to peers
- Put oneself in position of others, understanding of others
- Able to see the special and common aspects – continuity and discontinuity of other ages
- Negotiate flexible solutions
- Contain ambivalence
- Interact with different age positions
- See relationships between LC, F and C in a broader social context
- Openness to alternative generational perspectives

# Low Generational Intelligence

## *Individual Level*

- Immersed in their own position, acting within a role
- Assert the primacy of personal position without taking other ones into account
- Pursue own interest
- Split off and reject ambivalent feelings
- Assume your position is universal.

# Low Generational Intelligence

## *Familial Level*

- Unable to reflect or recognize other positions or not interested in recognizing them
- Unable to see complex relationships between social actors
- Low quality exchange relations, low intergenerational interactions
- Exchange relations could be unidirectional and non reciprocal.



# Low Generational Intelligence

## *Cohort Level*

- Assume own age group is dominant and therefore generations are the same
- Only see own cohort perspective, not interested in alternative perspectives

## *General Level*

- Unable to reflect on own position, and recognize may be different from other ones
- Failure to distinguish between life course, family and cohort influences

# Conceptual Issues

Working toward an **integrative model** that takes into account:

- The experience/phenomenology of generation
- Includes the interplay of Cohort, Family & Individual Life-course
- Takes social & historical salience into account



# Research Questions

- Multiple perspectives from different researcher ages?
- Multiple perspectives from different generational groups?
- Can GI be measured?
- Can it be observed?
- What factors contribute to different forms?
- What is the role of moral judgement?

# How to Test Empirically

- Develop GI tests
- Develop typologies
- Develop research tools to identify different levels
- Implications for training researchers

# Conclusions

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**Thank You**