
Anti-Aging Medicine, Professional Kinship Genealogies, and a New Methodological Approach (?)

Anthropology has a long tradition of scholarship based in kinship work. These community and family studies focused on uncovering and exposing links between people as agnates (blood relatives) or affines (marital relatives). This approach illuminated issues of community structure and function, networks of relations, gender roles, familial obligations, trade relationships, gift exchange, etc... But anthropology has matured greatly since this approach. We have moved beyond traditional community studies in which geographical boundaries are significant and we now consider our own cultures worthy and appropriate for investigation. Our “tribes” now include doctors, scientists, professionals, and even ideas.

I am attempting to blend the usefulness of some of anthropology’s more antiquated tools with contemporary issues. Working with the anti-aging medicine movement, I am interesting in excavating the trade-routes of ideas. In other words, I attempt to uncover the ways in which ideas move through communities by way of people, books, websites, conferences, e-list-serves, articles and other professional and informal relationships.

The anti-aging medicine movement seeks to redefine traditional notions of aging-as-natural. Anti-aging medicine interprets scientific discovery into a framework wherein aging becomes conquerable. Aging becomes a target for biomedical intervention. The inability of gerontology (a scientific, humanistic, and professional discipline devoted to the study of age/aging) to adequately define aging, while at the same time employing a rhetoric of decline, has fertilized the development of anti-aging medicine. Those involved directly with this movement include medical doctors, research scientists, chiropractors, nutritionists, therapists, and active laypersons.

As my research took me from practitioner offices to websites, from conferences to books, from radio shows to popular science journals, I began to recognize that this movement had roots in many places. And many of those gerontologists vocally opposed to anti-aging medicine could also be traced in other ways to the movement. How did the concept that aging could be treated as a disease develop? And how has it spread through scientific and biomedical channels while being either ignored or criticized by mainstream gerontology?

In an effort to examine this problem, I have devised a database that will track the relationships involved in this movement. This will, I expect, lead to a way to understand the messy trails of ideas at a point in time in which a revolution in science, medicine, and nature seethes below the surface. This is an attempt at a new methodology to expose a professional genealogy.