From the Desk of the Chancellor

Scholar Demystifies Aging

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by Charles R. Bantz

Dr. Pearl Dykstra, professor of sociology at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, challenges “traditional wisdom” when it comes to families, relationships between generations, gender differences, and what life is like for older adults in society. Her multidimensional research goes beyond demographics. Her translational scholarship yields a much clearer picture of gender and generational differences that have an impact on social dynamics and resulting implications for laws and public policy.

Her conclusions may not lead where you think they might. She has said, “There has been a tendency to view the childless through a lens of deficiency. My results show that it is more appropriate to view them as pioneering life course architects, who have led lives ‘off the beaten track.’”

By looking at such questions as what it means to be childless in old age, do men and women experience aging differently, the effect of first vs. second marriages on getting older, is there really a sandwich generation, what effects -- unintended or not -- that governmental policies have on relations between generations, Professor Dykstra examines issues that are of deep interest in society today -- compassionate care for the elderly, the intergenerational contract known as Social Security and the social and emotional prospects of single and childless people when they get older.

The 2nd annual Translating Research into Practice Keynote Address features Professor Pearl Dykstra’s presentation, “Alleviating Loneliness among Older Adults: What Works and What Does Not Work?” on Tuesday, March 26, at 5 p.m. in the IUPUI Campus Center 450A. The event is free and open to the public, but online registration is requested.

Pearl Dykstra was appointed chair of Empirical Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam in 2009. The internationally known scholar has been awarded such large-scale grants as the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study and the European Union 7th framework program MULTILINKS. She is an elected member of the Netherlands Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences and fellow of the Gerontological Society of America (2010). In 2012 she received the prestigious European Research Council Advanced Grant for her research project “Families in context.”

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