THE AGING OF THE POPULATION AND GENERATIONAL SHIFTS: CANADA 2067

MONICA BOYD

Dr. Monica Boyd is the Canada Research Chair in Immigration, Inequality and Public Policy and Professor of Sociology at the University of Toronto (St. George). Trained as a demographer and sociologist, Dr. Boyd researches the changing family, gender inequality, international migration (focusing on policy, immigrant integration and immigrant women) and ethnic stratification.

If the Fathers of Confederation were to reappear in 2067, they would be dumbfounded by the demographic transformation of Canada. Many population features that existed in 1867 are gone. This article highlights two of these changes: the transition of Canada as a country of young people to a country of older persons in which approximately one-quarter of the population will be age 65 and older; and the existence of groups that are distinctive by virtue of when they were born, particularly the baby boom generation and the new millennials. This latter cohort, born between 1981 and 2001, will predominate in Canada's older population at the country's bicentennial.

A MUCH OLDER POPULATION IN 2067

The age composition of a country is important for economists, sociologists and demographers alike. Economists think of a nation's productivity and consumption as reflecting the labour market activities of a population, and they usually define the core ages as 15-64; their productivity underlies the services and benefits provided to those under age 15 and to those 65 and older. Sociologists also agree that labour market activities are important because certain positions, such as a Supreme Court judge, signify status, and shape social relationships. Labour market activities also generate income that in a monetarized society can be used to buy products and services (food, shelter, health and education) that improve well-being. For population experts, the age composition (or alternatively, the age distribution) is important because demographic behaviours such as having children or migrating (and dying) vary with age, and because groups of people who are born during specific years form birth cohorts who themselves age and cause later changes in the age profiles of a society.

Information on the ages of a population combine with the numbers of men and women to produce an age-sex pyramid that shows the dramatic alteration of Canada's age composition since Confederation times (Figure 1); the middle column gives the age of the population and the side bars indicate the year of birth, according to the 2016 census of population. The red line for 1871 shows the age-sex pyramid by ages of the 1871 population. The red line indicates that Confederation occurred at a time when most Canadians were young; according to Statistics Canada data for this figure, seven out of 10 in Canada were under the age of 30, with 42% under the age of 15. This triangle-shaped age-sex pyramid is found in societies with very high fertility rates; this was true for Canada at Confederation, with women on average having nearly seven children around 1871 (Henripin 1972). Fertility, not immigration was the main driver of Canada's population increase between 1861-1901; even though migrants were and remain important additions to Canada's population, social fabric and economic strengths, more people left Canada during that 40-year period than entered (Chagnon and Martel 2012, Figure 1).

In 2067 the Fathers of Confederation would encounter a different world in which mature adults, not children, predominate. The age-sex pyramid for 2016 resembles a beehive, or a traditional haystack. The shape reflects fertility declines during the 1900s — but especially from the 1970s on — along with lower levels of mortality. Today, because fertility is so low, having children does not add large numbers to the base of the population pyramid and thus the age distribution moves away from a large concentration of young people. In 2016, slightly more than one in three (35%) are under thirty years of age, or to state the reverse, close to two-thirds are aged 30 and older. Whereas young children dominated Canada at the time of Confederation, today it is mature adults or those who are older.

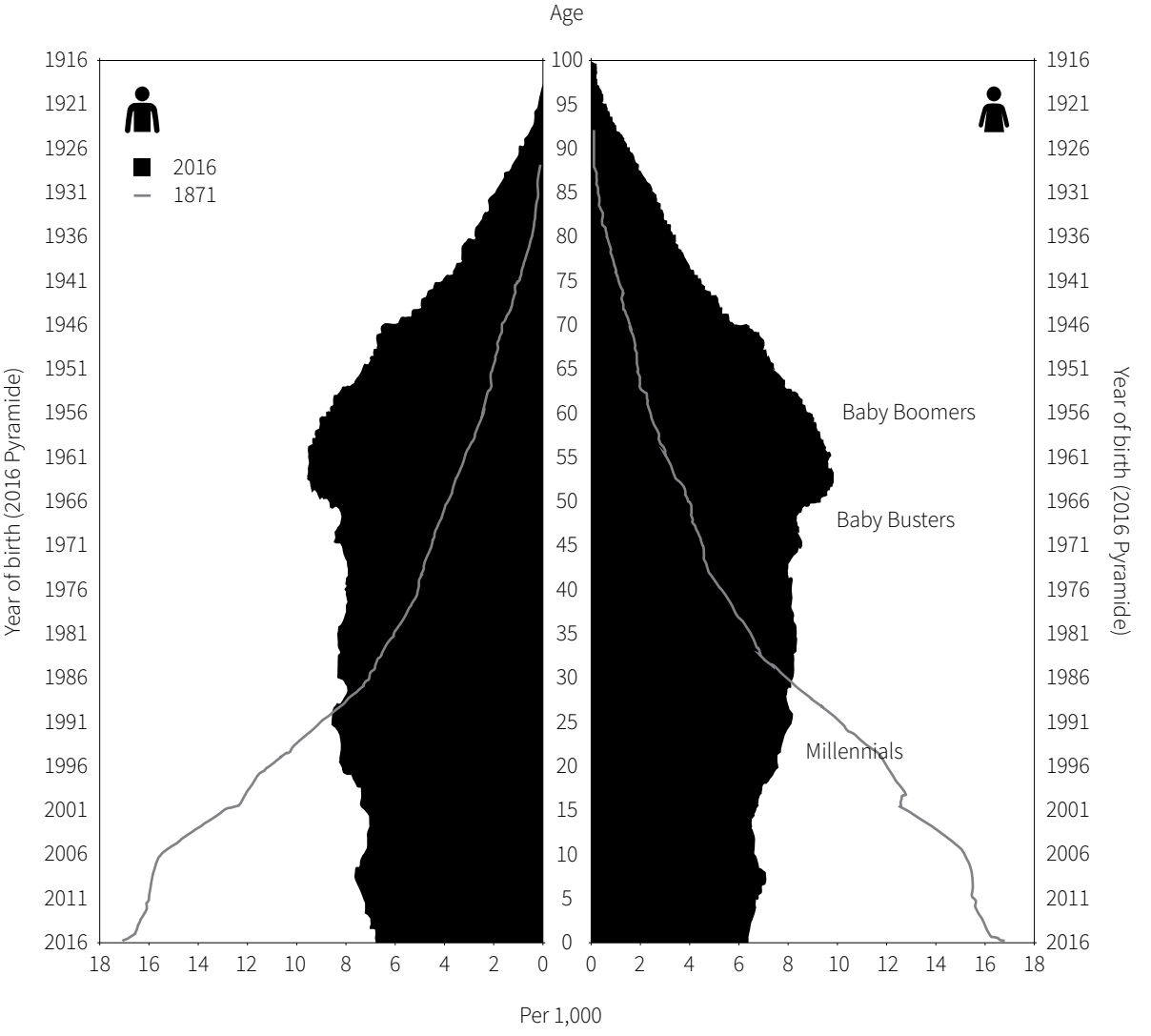
This "aging" of Canada's population can be seen by comparing the two age-sex pyramids in Figure 1, but it also is evident from percentages aged 65 and older (Figure 2). In the 1871 census, less than 5% were age 65 or older; in 2016 the percentage was 16.9 percent. Significantly, those aged 85 and older were among the fastest growing segments, reflecting increasing life expectancy as a result of better sanitation, public health services, medical advancements and diet throughout the 20th century (Statistics Canada 2017a).

These hallmarks of an aging population will continue up to, and well beyond, 2067. This legacy of today's age profile exists because those who will age and become older are already born. Experts suggest that by 2063 (a scant five years before the 2067 bicentennial) around one–quarter (between 24 to 28%) of Canadians will be age 65 or older and approximately one in 10 Canadians will be aged 80 or older (Bohnert, Chagnon and Dion 2015, Table 2.4)

GENERATING GENERATIONS AND THE MILLENNIALS IN 2067

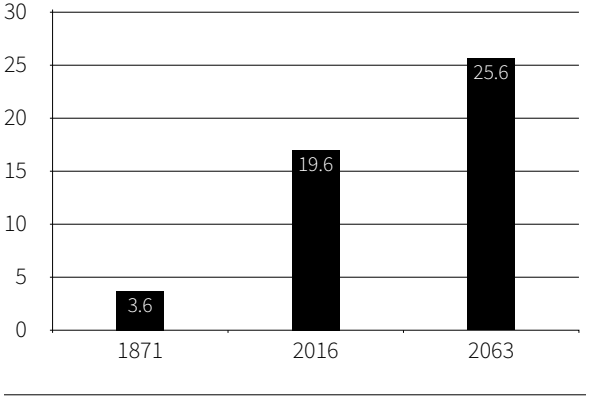
Births, deaths and migration are considered to be the determinants of population growth and the age-sex composition, but these factors are not constant. Levels can steadily or erratically change; a downward drift can be countered by an upward trend at a different time. These "bumpy" paths, in fact, are what happened in Canada, particularly with respect to fertility. As a result, Figure 1 highlights several

FIGURE 1
AGE-SEX POPULATION PYRAMID, CANADA 1871 AND 2016



SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA 2017B.

FIGURE 2
PERCENTAGE OF THE CANADIAN POPULATION AGED 65 AND OLDER, 1871, 2016 AND 2063



SOURCE: BOHNERT, CHAGNON AND DION 2015, MEDIUM PROJECTION SCENARIO FOR 2063 AND DATA FOR 1871 AND 2016 IN FIGURE 1 SUPPLIED TO THE AUTHOR BY THE STATISTICS CANADA DEMOGRAPHY DIVISION.

distinctive cohorts, or groups of people that were born around the same time or during a specific period. Earlier in the 20th century, fertility levels were declining. But, the "baby boom generation" was born between 1946 and 1964 as a result of higher levels of fertility, as families had three, four and more children. This increased fertility partly reflected postponed births earlier in the Great Depression, and also Canada's rising post-war economic prosperity at a time when most parents wanted more children and when women still were expected to work solely in their homes for the benefit of their children and their partners. The oldest of the baby boomers, born in 1946, turned 65 in 2011, and the last will do so in 2029. Because of their relatively large size and increased life expectancy, this cohort will dominate Canada's 65 and older population for some time. However, only centenarian Baby Boomers will be alive at Canada's bicentennial.

The cohort that will be dominating the population 65 years and older in 2067 will be the Millennials. This term refers to those who were born in the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s. Dates for this group vary by study, but the intent is to define a group that experiences adulthood in the early millennium. If we define this cohort as born between 1981 and 2001, they are age 15-35 in 2016 (Figure 1) and they will be age 66 to 86 by the bicentennial. It is this group that will shape what it means to be older at Canada's 200 birthday.

Why the interest in the Millennials? Unlike the Baby Boomers, the answer lies not so much in the period in which they were born but instead in the trajectory of their young adult transition experiences, the implication of these for later in life and the fact that the beginning of the 21st century represents both a new starting point but also the continued and acceleration of the digital age, changes in the structure of work and related challenges to making a living. Canadian research suggests that, as a group, today's Millennials have the following characteristics: a) they are better educated than cohorts that preceded them; b) the sequencing of markers in pathways to young adulthood is no longer linear.

In a somewhat over-generalized script, for much of the 19th century, including the Baby Boomers, adulthood began somewhere along a series of sequential steps: completion of schooling; obtaining a "secure" job (ideally with a career trajectory); moving out of the parental home; getting married and having children, and eventually retiring, usually around age 65. Today, such timing is hardly sequential.

Millennial Joe/Jo may drop out of school, live with parents, get married around age 30, go back to school, move to his/her own apartment, have the first/only child at age 35, get divorced, lose a job, move back with parents, go back to school, and so forth. (S)he may retire at 55, re-enter the labour force at age 60, retire again, and each time change his/her full time/part time job status, type of work and earnings.

These multiple changes often are described as delays in the transition to adulthood, implying that important stages such as educational completion, marriage or partnering, having children, earning a living and owning a home are all delayed. Research, in fact, confirms increases in the percentages of young people living with parents, the postponement of marriage and birth of children, often when young adults are in their thirties, and difficulties in obtaining full-time jobs and earning money (Clark 2007; Galarneau, Morissette and Usalcas 2013). In 1976, for example, the maximum full-time employment was reached at age 25, whereas in 2012 the maximum age occurred at 31 and then again at age 42.

Wage increases in the 2000s also did not appear to compensate for lower wages found in previous decades (Galarneau, Morissette and Usalcas 2013 and background tables; also see Morissette 2016; Statistics Canada 2018). It thus is not accidental that groups born after the baby boom, particularly those in young adulthood, have the highest percentages of all "generational groups" worried about economic factors (see Jedwab this volume). Their delayed and varied pathways to adulthood may also mean lower pensions and savings as they age.

Currently, the experiences of the Millennial cohort raise the potential for three outcomes: 1) brain waste, which happens when Canada's highly educated young adults are not working in jobs that match their expertise; 2) lower economic status in terms of household earnings, home ownership and higher poverty rates in middle age; 3) followed by lower economic status in old age. By the bicentennial, researchers will have determined if the delayed transitions of Millennials indeed had lifetime negative consequences. For now, two characteristics of the 2067 bicentennial are assured: a much higher percentage of persons age 65 and older than ever before, and the maturation of a unique birth cohort, the Millennials.

REFERENCES

BOHNERT, N., J. CHAGNON and P. DION. 2015. *Population Projections for Canada* (2013 to 2063), *Provinces and Territories* (2013 to 2038). Catalogue No. 91-520-X. Ottawa: Statistics Canada. www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/91-520-x/91-520-x2014001-eng.htm (accessed 10 April 2018)

CHAGNON, J. and L. MARTEL. 2012. *Population growth in Canada: From 1851 to 2061.* Catalogue No. 98-310-X2011003. Ottawa:Statistics Canada www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-310-x/98-310-x2011003_1-eng.pdf (accessed 02 April 2018).

CLARK, W. 2007. "Delayed Transitions of Young Adults." *Canadian Social Trends*, Winter: 14–22 www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/2007004/pdf/10311-eng.pdf (accessed 10 April 2018).

GALARNEAU, D., R. MORISSETTE and J. USALCAS. 2013. What has changed for Young People in Canada? *Insights on Canadian Society*. July. www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-006-x/2013001/article/11847-eng.pdf (accessed 02 April 2018).

HENRIPIN, J. 1972. *Trends and Factors of Fertility in Canada.* 1961 Census Monograph. Ottawa: Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce.

MORISSETTE, R. 2016. Perspectives on the Youth Labour Market in Canada. Presentation at Statistics Canada, December 5. www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2016002-eng.htm (accessed 10 April 2018).

STATISTICS CANADA. 2017a. *A Portrait of the Population Age 85 and Older in 2016 in Canada*. May 3. www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016004/98-200-x2016004-eng.cfm (accessed 02 April 2018).

STATISTICS CANADA. 2017b. *Age and sex, and type of dwelling data: Key results from the 2016 Census*. https://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/170503/dq170503a-eng.pdf (Accessed 02 April 2018).

STATISTICS CANADA. 2018. *A Portrait of Canada's Youth*. February 7. www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2018001-eng.htm (accessed 10 April 2018).