

## Chapter 5

# Relationships Between Young Adults and Their Parents

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**Abstract** Relationships between young adults and their parents have received considerable media attention in recent years. However, research on relationships between young adult children and their parents during the transition to adulthood are scant. Using data from the Family Exchanges Study and national data sets, we document parental involvement in the lives of young adult children (aged 18–24). Parents and offspring are highly involved in one another’s lives as evident by their phone conversations (more than once a week) and frequent parental financial, practical, and emotional support. This involvement represents an increase from parental involvement 30 years ago. Students are more likely to talk with parents by phone, and nonstudents are more likely to see parents in person. Students received more support from their parents than nonstudents, and that support contributed to their life satisfaction. Parents also use student status as an indicator of the offspring’s potential future success and experience more positive relationships with grown children they view as on target for achieving adult milestones.

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The transition to adulthood is rarely a solo journey. The majority of young adults traverse this period accompanied by their parents. Imagine the following scenarios: Michael, age 23, comes from an affluent background. He just graduated from college and landed a starting job in accounting, making him much luckier than most of his friends graduating college in a recession. Michael's parents helped him move out of the college dormitory, find an apartment, pay the deposit, move in using some of their old furniture, prolong his health insurance until benefits from the new job kick in, and offer him advice about the myriad issues involved in starting a new job in a new location. Eleesha, age 20, moves in with a former stepfather and his new partner. She never knew her biological father, and her biological mother is addicted to drugs and has insufficient funds to support herself, let alone Eleesha. Eleesha got along well with her stepfather, and he let her move 2 years ago. Eleesha started working at Burger King when she was 16. She is proud that she graduated from high school and has not gotten pregnant yet. Finally, Katlyn, age 19, calls her mother on her cell phone between classes at a local community college where she is studying to get a degree in early childhood education. She lives at home with her mother and sister, and she touches base throughout the day whenever something upsetting happens, with questions about children for her classes, and with her latest boyfriend issues.

In recent years, such relationships between young adults and their parents have received considerable media attention. Newspapers, magazines, and movies portray an overly-dependent young generation, with adults who turn to their parents for a variety of needs. These media imply two scenarios for parental overinvolvement: (1) offspring lack the resources, maturity, or motivation to leave the parental nest (either literally or figuratively) and/or (2) parents are overly invested in offspring due to their own difficulties or narcissism. Notably, few social scientific studies have examined why parents might be so involved with grown children.

Moreover, the effects of parent involvement with grown children are murky. Cultural conceptions in the USA suggest heavy parental involvement with grown children arises from weaknesses (the child's, the parent's, or both) and gives rise to further negative consequences (overdependency). This argument implies that close and supportive ties with parents would be deleterious for grown children if they fail to develop independence and their own identity. Yet, a vast literature has established that close, supportive personal relationships enhance well-being (Berkman & Glass, 2000; Cohen, 2004; Cohen & Janicki-Deveris, 2009). Of course, under some circumstances, heavy parental support may undermine offspring's adjustment. But under other circumstances, parental involvement may function like other close relationships, and warm interchanges between the parties may yield beneficial outcomes.

Finally, a monolithic view of young adults' ties to parents overlooks variability in these relationships. Parents' relationships with grown children may vary as a function of factors such as social class or the child's pursuit of education or work in young adulthood. The nature of these ties may differ in current cohorts from patterns in the recent past. Similarly, parenting young children has changed dramatically during the past century, from an emphasis on the economic value of children to an investment of parental emotion and time in raising each individual child (Alwin, 2010; Hulbert, 2003). With fewer children per family than in past generations,

middle- and upper-class parents have greater resources to invest in developmental play, lessons, play dates, tutoring, and sitters or nannies to enhance a child's future success. Indeed, these trends are also evident among less-well-off mothers. Time use data from the 1980s to 1990s suggest that daily time devoted to playing with children and teaching them increased for single mothers as well as for married mothers (Sayer, Bianchi, & Robinson, 2004). Among low-income single mothers, limited resources may preclude the ability to invest in a child's future, but these mothers exert considerable efforts to secure outside resources for their child's success (Uehara, 1994). Nonetheless, well-off parents typically have more time and money to invest in their children. Parallel variability with regard to economic and family conditions appears in young adulthood.

Other papers in this volume and in the literature describe vast differences in young people's experiences during the transition to adulthood. Well-off young adults experience an extended transition marked by prolonged education, a series of romantic partners, and other explorations before settling down. By contrast, disadvantaged youth may curtail their education and be unemployed or employed in jobs without benefits, irregular hours, and few opportunities for advancement (Furstenberg, 2010). Likewise, these distinct pathways may be associated with distinct relationship patterns with parents.

Here, we give particular attention to student status as a key factor that may determine qualities of ties with parents. Young adults who are students may traverse a distinct route from those who enter the work world or lack employment or education throughout the transition to adulthood. Over the past decades, the proportion of high school graduates continuing their education has increased steadily, from 49.3% in 1980 to 68.6% in 2008 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). If parents are more involved with students than nonstudents, the apparent increase in parental involvement with offspring may partially reflect the increase in the proportion of young adults who are students. Of course, student status is correlated with parents' socioeconomic background as well as parental marital status. Young adults who are students are likely to have parents who are better off financially and who are married than young adults who are not students. Thus, we consider parents' background as well.

In describing young adults' relationships with their parents, we address the following questions:

1. How involved are parents in the lives of young adult offspring in the early twenty-first century? We consider associational and emotional aspects of involvement: coresidence and contact between the parties, positive and negative emotional qualities of their ties, and parental evaluations of their grown children's successes and problems. We then consider different types of support that parents provide children during the transition to adulthood.
2. Do parent-child relationships vary by personal and situational factors? The literature clearly documents variability in family relationships as a function of gender, race or ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (McHale, Whiteman, Kim, & Crouter, 2007; Swartz, 2009). In addition, we consider the status of the offspring.

As mentioned, we focus primarily on student status, and secondarily on whether the offspring have partners.

3. What are the implications of parental involvement for young adult offspring? If parents are heavily involved in offspring's lives, does such parental involvement help or hinder these offspring? At the end of the chapter, we consider this issue for offspring and also ask whether parents find it rewarding or stressful to assist grown children.

## Sources of Data

To address these questions, the principal source of data is the *Family Exchanges Study (FES)*, with supplementary analyses of national data sets including the American's Changing Lives study and the US Census. The FES study included multiple generations, but this chapter focuses on middle-aged participants' descriptions of their grown children and a subset of their young adult offspring who participated. This study involved high minority participation (36% identified as racial minority) and a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. We used data from the Family Exchanges Study to evaluate parental contact with children aged 18–24 in the twenty-first century. The Family Exchanges Study included reports from middle-aged adults (age 40–60,  $n=633$ ) regarding each of their children aged 18–40 ( $n=1,374$ ), but here we focus only on those offspring aged 18–24, experiencing the transition to adulthood.

The middle-aged adults were recruited using listed samples and random digit dialing within regional area codes in the greater Philadelphia Primary Statistical Area encompassing urban, suburban, and rural areas (Pennsylvania State Data Center, 2001). Oversampling in high-density minority neighborhoods obtained a highly diverse sample (see Table 5.1 for sample description). The response rate for eligible middle-aged adults was 74%.

Data for the Family Exchanges Study were collected from January–August 2008, when some economists say the USA was in the early stages of a recession (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2010). Other economists argue that the recession took hold during the third quarter of 2008 (Chauvet & Piger, 2008; Thoma, 2008). It is clear, however, that FES data were collected immediately prior to the economic crisis of September 2008 (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2010). Thus, parental involvement trends in this study may be exacerbated by economic needs that have arisen for the younger generation since 2008.

Participants completed a computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) regarding each of their grown children and living parents. At the end of the interview, participants who were willing provided contact information for each grown child. Parents provided information for 63% of offspring, and 75% of those offspring participated ( $n=592$  total), comparable to participation of offspring reported in other studies (Suitor, Sechrist, & Pillemer, 2007).

Here, we report on the parents who had grown children aged 18–24 ( $n=296$  parents, reporting on 741 children) and their grown children aged 18–24 who

**Table 5.1** Description of family exchanges study parents and offspring aged 18–24

Variables	Parents ( <i>n</i> = 597)		Offspring ( <i>n</i> = 381)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Age	49.26	4.98	20.65	1.94
Years of education	14.30	2.16	13.39	2.09
Household income <sup>a</sup>	4.65	1.34	3.63	1.71
Self reported health <sup>b</sup>	3.07	1.12	3.69	.98
<i>Proportions</i>				
Women	0.51		0.51	
<i>Ethnicity</i>				
African American	0.24		0.22	
European American	0.74		0.73	
Hispanic	0.00		0.01	
Multiracial	0.01		0.05	
<i>Marital status</i>				
Married	0.71		0.04	
Remarried	0.07		0.00	
Divorced	0.11		0.00	
Separated	0.02		0.00	
Cohabiting	0.03		0.10	
Single/never married	0.05		0.87	
<i>Work status</i>				
Employed full time	0.75		0.20	
Employed part time	0.08		0.09	
Student	–		0.65	
Unemployed	0.04		0.04	
Homemaker	0.05		0.02	
Retired	0.02		0.00	
Disabled/Other	0.07		0.01	

<sup>a</sup>Household income in 2007: 1 = less than \$10,000, 2 = \$10,001–\$25,000, 3 = \$25,001–\$40,000, 4 = \$40,001–75,000, 5 = \$75,001–\$100,000, 6 = more than \$100,000

<sup>b</sup>Self-reported health rated from 1 (*poor*) to 5 (*excellent*)

participated in the study (*n* = 381 reporting on 597 parents). Young adults reported on each parent, but in some cases we have siblings from the same family (thus, the number of parents' offspring reported on is not double the number of offspring). We first examined similarities and differences in parents' and offspring's reports of their relationships. Consistent with prior studies (e.g., Aquilino, 1999; Mandemakers & Dykstra, 2008), their reports were correlated and patterns of findings were similar when conducted for parents or for offspring. For parsimony, we present findings from offspring's data in the first section and from parental data later in this chapter.

Table 5.1 provides descriptive information regarding the offspring and their reports of their parents. The sample includes a large minority population and a wide range of income levels, but parents and offspring were better educated than the general

population (Pennsylvania State Data Center, 2001). The offspring sample included a large proportion of students (65%), comparable to the proportion of students in this age group in the general population. In 2008, 68.6% of high school graduates pursued additional education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

The analytic strategy for the Family Exchanges Study data reflects the nested structure of the data; the sample included some siblings in the same family ( $n=165$  had at least one sibling), and offspring's reports on two parents. Thus, we used the Mixed Model function in SPSS to estimate multilevel models with unstructured covariance matrices. We present descriptive information and findings from such models throughout this chapter.

The American Changing Lives Survey (ACL), a longitudinal study of 3,617 adults in the 48 contiguous states, included one question regarding contact with grown children, in person, by phone, or by mail in 1986, 1989, and 1994 (House, 2010). The study was longitudinal and thus is not a true cohort study. Moreover, the study did not differentiate biological children from stepchildren. Nonetheless, these data may provide insights into changes in contact with regard to 18- to 24-year-old offspring; different respondents may have had children that age range in different waves of data, and, at the very least, different offspring were in that age range at those times. Societal mores may shape different experiences for younger children in the same family than for older children.

In sum, although general interest in the tie between adults and their parents has surged in the past decade, social scientists have been reticent to jump into a debate about the nature of this relationship and variability in its patterns. We refer to published research with available data, but where data were not already published, we analyzed data from the US Census, ACL, or FES to understand ties between adults and their parents as well as changes in these ties over time. This chapter and the data available provide fodder for discussion.

## **Parental Involvement with Young Adult Offspring**

Parental involvement with grown children takes many forms, including face-to-face visits and telephone conversations, emotional feelings of affection and irritation, and tangible and nontangible assistance. We begin with a consideration of contact and coresidence and then turn to emotional qualities of the tie, including parental appraisals of how their grown children have turned out.

### ***Coresidence, Proximity, and Contact***

In early life, children in the USA typically reside in the household of at least one of their parents. Most young adults still undergo a transition from residing with at least

one parent to the adult pattern of residing independently of parents. Indeed, during the twentieth century, the start of “adulthood” in the USA was marked by young adults’ moving out of the parental home (Goldscheider, 1997). Affluent young adults left the parental home to establish their independence via advanced education or the start of a career. Less affluent young adults also moved out of the parental home to establish independence, but this transition often involved marriage (Avery, Goldscheider, & Speare, 1992).

### *Coresidence of Adults with Their Parents*

This is not to say that all young adults left their parental home in the twentieth century. Even in the 1990s, many ethnic groups endorsed positive views of inter-generational coresidence (Becker, Beyene, Newsom, & Mayen, 2003). Moreover, in the 1980s, over half of adult offspring of all age lived within 50 miles of their parents, and presumably rates were even higher for younger adults (Lawton, Silverstein, & Bengtson, 1994; Lin & Rogerson, 1995). And in times of economic (e.g., loss of a job) or marital (e.g., divorce) crisis, young adults often returned to their family of origin.

The literature suggests proximity between generations is largely determined by social structural variables both in the late twentieth century and the early twenty-first century. Coresidence and geographic distance between adults and their parents appears to stem from opportunities and familial decisions regarding education, jobs, or romantic partners (particularly for women), more so than from relationship qualities (Longino, 2001).

In the USA, data regarding the proportion of adult offspring who coreside with parents are available from the census. The US Census considers college students as coresident with parents even if the student resides in a college dormitory far from home 9 or 10 months a year. Official rates of coresidence with parents for 18- to 24-year olds from 1985 to 2009 suggest a fair degree of stability. Over this 25-year period, the census classified 55–60% of young men and 47–49% of young women as coresiding with parents (US Census Bureau, 2009). The rates wax and wane from year to year (rather than systematically), with a slight increase in rates of coresidence occurring since the recent economic downturn of 2007. In other words, national data regarding coresidence with parents do not support a view of dramatic increases in the past two decades during the transition to adulthood, but rather suggest that structural factors such as economic opportunity and housing have played a role in observed vicissitudes.

Similar to national data, in the Family Exchanges Study, 63.8% of offspring reported residing with a parent during the past 12 months and 37.6% reported currently residing with a parent. These patterns differed by student status (see 5.2), due to the fact that many students reside at the university during the academic year, but with their parents during school breaks. Indeed, when we looked at average geographic

distance from parents, students reported greater geographic distance from parents than nonstudents ( $M=164.0$  miles for students and  $M=111.7$  for nonstudents) when offering information on distance from parents while away at college.

### ***Contact Frequency Between Parents and Adult Children***

By contrast, contact between generations may reflect discretionary factors such as feelings of affection and interdependence. In the early and middle twentieth century, in-person and telephone contact between generations was largely a function of geographic proximity. But as air travel became increasingly affordable and relatively easy (delays on the tarmac notwithstanding), a greater proportion of grown children residing at a distance from parents traveled to visit more frequently. Although geographic distance remains a constraint on the ability to share activities, throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, technological advances such as cell phones, e-mail, text messages, or Skype and related technologies have permitted long-distance communication between adults and their parents with increasing efficiency at negligible costs (Cotten, McCullough & Adams, 2010; Fingerman, 2009).

There is relatively little information regarding the effects of technological changes on relationships between adults and their parents, however. Owing to electronic technologies, communication between today's young adults and their parents may occur on a more frequent basis than in prior cohorts. Anecdotal observations from walking across a campus suggest students "thumb" their parents or talk by cell phone several times a week. But actual data regarding such patterns of communication are difficult to come by. Below, we present available data regarding this issue.

Few studies have systematically asked about contact between adults aged 18–24 and their parents over different cohorts. Using findings from the ACL, there appears to be a consistent trend of increasingly frequent contact with offspring from the 1980s to the 1990s. The proportion of parents reporting contact more than once a week with at least one grown child showed a modest linear increase over time from 51.9% in 1986 to 54.3% in 1989, and 56.7% in 1994. Thus, overall, the trend toward contact more than once a week increased linearly.

In the Family Exchanges Study, we examined frequency of contact with a scale of 1 = *less than once a year or not at all*, 2 = *once a year*, 3 = *a few times a year*, 4 = *monthly*, 5 = *a few times a month*, 6 = *weekly*, 7 = *a few times a week*, and 8 = *daily*. Table 5.2 contains means and standard deviations for contact. On average, offspring reported frequent contact with parents. Indeed, 51.2% reported in-person contact with their parents at least a few times a week, and 62.1% talked with parents on the phone at least that often. E-mail or text message contact was not pervasive. Only 33.6% of offspring reported e-mailing on a weekly basis. Given the low frequency of e-mail contact, we did not consider it further.

Findings from the FES are not directly comparable to data from the 1980s and 1990s obtained in the ACL. There were differences in the nature of the questions

**Table 5.2** Offspring's reports of frequency of contact and coresidence

Type of contact	Students ( <i>n</i> =247)		Nonstudents ( <i>n</i> =134)	
	M	SD	M	SD
In person <sup>a</sup>	5.99	1.93	6.25	2.03
Telephone <sup>a</sup>	6.66	1.39	6.34	1.72
E-mail <sup>a</sup>	4.30	2.52	3.52	2.50
	<i>Proportions</i>			
Coresident at present	0.33		0.46	
Coresident in past year	0.72		0.58	

<sup>a</sup>1 = less than once a year or not at all, 2 = once a year, 3 = a few times a year, 4 = monthly, 5 = a few times a month, 6 = weekly, 7 = a few times a week, 8 = daily

and the sample. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that technological advances have resulted in increased contact between young adults and their parents. If the data were comparable, the linear increase in proportion of parents and offspring having contact more than once a week appears to continue from the 1980s to the present.

Frequency of contact also varied in different relationships. As expected, offspring reported more frequent contact with mothers than with fathers. In fact, 72.8% of grown children reported talking with their mothers on the phone several times a week or more often and 89.0% spoke to mothers at least once a week. By comparison, 51% talked with their fathers several times a week and 72% talked at least weekly. Nonetheless, the global pattern involves frequent contact with each parent for most offspring.

Of equal interest is how SES and student status may shape these ties. We estimated multilevel models for frequency of contact in person and by phone, with student status and parental socioeconomic background (i.e., income and education) as independent variables, controlling for parent's and offspring's gender.

For in-person contact, we obtained significant findings for student status and for parental education. In this case, students reported less frequent in-person contact ( $B=-0.65$ ,  $t=-3.58$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), as did offspring whose parents reported higher education ( $B=-0.19$ ,  $t=-5.24$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Of course, better-educated parents tended to have children who sought higher educational attainment. Thus, in better-off families, young adults had less frequent in-person contact with parents. Lower in-person contact likely stems from students residing at universities away from the parents' home during the school year. As such, students had limited in-person contact with parents.

By contrast, telephone contact with parents was more frequent among students ( $B=0.36$ ,  $t=2.44$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), as well as with mothers ( $B=0.71$ ,  $t=5.16$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and for daughters ( $B=0.25$ ,  $t=1.90$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Thus, the stereotype of a college co-ed on a cell phone talking to mom may be a truism. But young adults who are not students have more frequent face-to-face contact with parents, suggesting that the cell phone contact may in some way compensate for a lack of face-to-face contact at this stage of life.

In sum, based on data from the Family Exchange Study, adults and their parents appear to have frequent contact, but the nature of that contact differs by

socioeconomic background. Among lower-educated parents and their offspring who are not students, face-to-face contact is more common. Among better-educated parents, offspring are more likely to pursue education when they are 18- to 24-years old, and educational opportunities may take them away from home at least part of the year. Therefore, they rely more on telephone contact.

### ***Positive, Negative and Ambivalent Relationship Qualities***

Interest in propinquity reflects other basic questions about qualities of relationships between young adults and their parents. The early relationship between a given child and parent may warrant consideration. A distinct feature of this tie is its longevity; parents and children experience the transition to adulthood after nearly two decades of prior interactions. Qualities of relationships in young adulthood stem from earlier histories and prior relationship qualities from childhood or adolescence.

In this section, we describe what is known about trajectories of relationship quality in the parent–child tie from childhood into young adulthood. We review the scant longitudinal literature addressing such changes over time. We also consider the potential of these relationships as offspring complete the transition into adulthood and approach middle age. In doing so, we consider positive and negative qualities of the relationship. The adolescent literature frames relationship qualities in terms of behaviors such as warmth and conflict (Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998; Shanahan, McHale, Crouter & Osgood, 2007). But research has shown that parents and adult children experience frustration, disappointment, or worry without explicit behaviors and in the absence of communicating those feelings to the other party (Birditt, Rott, & Fingerman, 2009; Fingerman, 2003; Lefkowitz & Fingerman, 2003). As such, we focus on subjective feelings rather than behaviors. Moreover, the literature on inter-generational relationships has focused on ambivalence (or combined positive and negative feelings; Birditt, Miller, Fingerman, & Lefkowitz, 2009; Fingerman, Chen, Hay, Cichy, & Lefkowitz, 2006; Fingerman, Pitzer, Lefkowitz, Birditt, & Mroczek, 2008; Pillemer et al., 2007) and we draw on this concept here. Finally, we address parental appraisals of their young adult offspring’s adjustment. In that regard, we examine subjective views of offspring’s successes and problems.

### ***Continuity and Discontinuity in Relationship Qualities***

The most distinct feature of relationships between adults and their parents involves the longevity of the tie. At the transition to adulthood, offspring and parents have 18 years of shared history to shape their relationships. Early psychodynamic perspectives on this tie purport a view of continuity, suggesting that qualities of the relationship in infancy and parental sensitivity determine much of the child’s subsequent personality development, as well as inherent tensions in relationships between

parents and their grown children (Erikson, 1950). Studies suggest considerably more malleability and plasticity in relationship qualities, however.

From the perspective of general age trends and cross-sectional data, research finds that most adults and parents report their relationships are predominantly positive (Fingerman et al., 2006; Umberson, 1992). In terms of longitudinal changes, parents and children typically experience a decline in feelings of warmth from middle childhood through mid-adolescence (approximately age 9–15) and then increasing warmth again as offspring approach the transition to adulthood (age 19; Shanahan et al., 2007). Researchers using data from the 1980s also documented increased warmth throughout the transition to adulthood, from age 18–23 (Thornton, Orbach, & Axinn, 1995). Similarly, more recent longitudinal research indicates that parents' feelings of negativity regarding their offspring decrease over time; especially among young adult and middle-aged parents (Birditt, Jackey, & Antonucci, 2009).

Nonetheless, individual differences in relationship patterns are not straightforward. Studies find only modest effects for relationship continuity from adolescence into young adulthood (Aquilino, 2006; Thornton et al., 1995), and early patterns appear to weaken over longer periods of time (Fingerman, Whiteman, & Dotterer, 2009). For example, Belsky, Jaffee, Hsieh and Silva (2001) used data from the Dunedin Study in New Zealand to examine continuity in early relationship patterns into young adulthood. The study assessed relationship qualities with parents every other year from the time the children were aged 3–15, and then again when these children were aged 26. Findings suggest that discontinuity in relationship qualities from childhood to young adulthood may be the rule rather than the exception. That is, relationship qualities at age 15 were modestly associated with relationship quality at age 26, but there were few associations from early or middle childhood into young adulthood. Of course, most children had positive relationships with parents by age 26. Thus, lack of variability in adulthood may help explain difficulties in detecting individual continuity. Moreover, apparent discontinuity may stem from the lessened ability of measures to distinguish subjective qualities of relationships in young adulthood in comparison to the behavioral measures used in early childhood. Nonetheless, data do not support the premise that adult relationships with parents are established early in life.

Studies also reveal within-family differences in relationship patterns. These patterns vary by parental gender and offspring's birth order. Parents respond to latter-born children differently than to their first child's adolescence, and mothers and fathers differ in their reactions to children over time, depending on the gender of the child (Shanahan et al., 2007; Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2003). We consider these issues in young adulthood as well.

### ***Ambivalent Relationships with Parents in Young Adulthood***

Although young adults and their parents generally report that their relationships are strong in young adulthood, conflicts and negative feelings do not dissipate altogether.

Rather, relationships in early adulthood may be characterized by ambivalence or a mixture of positive and negative sentiments. Scholars use different approaches to assess ambivalence, including separate assessments of positive and negative ratings of feelings that are then combined into a single index of ambivalence (e.g., Fingerman et al., 2006, 2008; Willson, Shuey, Elder, & Wickrama, 2006), subjective reports of feelings torn or conflicted (Lowenstein, 2007; Pillemer et al., 2007), and having participants classify their close relationships and their problematic relationships and looking for overlap in these classifications (Fingerman & Hay, 2004; Fingerman, Hay, & Birditt, 2004).

In a study of individuals aged 13–99, we found that parental ambivalence toward grown children peaked when children were adolescents, but nearly half of parents still classified offspring in their 20s as both close and distressful (Fingerman & Hay, 2004). By contrast, the majority of offspring aged 40 and over were classified as close (with few classified as ambivalent). Among offspring, ratings of ambivalence toward parents peaked when they were in their 20s (and were even higher than among adolescents), with over half of offspring classifying their relationships with parents as both close and problematic, particularly for mothers (Fingerman & Hay, 2004).

Throughout adulthood, however, the degree of ambivalence adults or parents report toward the other party varies across any given relationship. For parents, more ambivalent feelings are often associated with children who have not achieved success in normative roles of adulthood, such as marriage or employment (Birditt, Fingerman, & Zarit, 2011; Fingerman et al., 2006; Suito et al., 2007). Our prior research also found that parents reported greater ambivalence toward offspring who scored higher on personality measures of neuroticism (Fingerman et al., 2006). These findings held for older offspring who were in their 30s or 40s, as well as for offspring in their 20s. Collectively, these findings suggest that parental ambivalence is high when they must assist offspring to be independent. Indeed, offspring's autonomy from parents may allow a dissipation of parental negative feelings in part because parents feel less responsibility for them, or are pleased with their success in attaining normative milestones.

For offspring, concerns about parental health appear to generate ambivalent feelings (Fingerman et al., 2006; Willson, Shuey, & Elder, 2003). Young adults report worries about their parents' health, even when parents are middle-aged and still in relatively good health (Hay, Fingerman, & Lefkowitz, 2008). As parental health declines in late life, not surprisingly the parents' functional deficits generate increasing difficulties for children. Indeed, relationship qualities appear more conflicted and less positive as parents approach the end of life and require hands-on care from offspring (Fingerman, Hay, Kamp Dush, Cichy, & Hosterman, 2007; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Zarit & Eggebeen, 2002).

Despite ambivalence, the period when offspring are in their 20s may be something of a honeymoon period if offspring are on track and doing well. In one study, we compared young adult women aged 18–22 and their mothers to middle-aged women in their 40s and their mothers over the age of 70 (Fingerman, 2000). In response to questions about what they enjoyed in their relationships, the younger

mother–daughter pairs painted their relationships in rosy terms, providing a wholly positive view of their tie. The younger women described conversations and visits that focused on the daughter’s lives, school, relationships, or her own children. These mothers and daughters alike contrasted their current tie with the recent, more tumultuous period of adolescence. The daughters often characterized the intimacy of the tie by describing their mothers as their “best friends.” Descriptions of the relationship included mothers who cooked favorite meals, did laundry, listened to the daughter talk only about her problems, and arrived to help in any emergency. In brief, these portraits of the relationship were considerably more lopsided than most friendships. By contrast, the middle-aged women and their mothers were subdued and nuanced in their responses, often mentioning negative events or situations such as the mother’s widowhood or the daughter’s stressful job, which detracted from their ability to fully enjoy their tie. The middle-aged women and older mothers also were equally likely to mention helping one another and their shared investment in other family members.

These findings suggest that young adults and their parents are able to recognize negative as well as positive feelings in the tie, but may view these feelings as compartmentalized. That is, the negative issues are solely negative and the positive issues are solely positive. As offspring enter their 30s and 40s, however, parents and offspring alike may integrate their positive and negative feelings into a more unified view of the relationship, with an understanding of strengths and weaknesses. Thus, the period of young adulthood serves as a segue in the parent–child relationship as well, from a period of behavioral warmth, conflict, and parental involvement in adolescence, to the mature state at the end of life, when positive and negative feelings may coexist without being acted upon.

## Parental Evaluations of How Offspring Turned Out

Although relationships between young adults and their parents are typical of other close ties, these ties also are unique in several respects. As mentioned above, parents appear to be more ambivalent about young adult offspring who are not attaining normative milestones of adulthood (Fingerman et al., 2006; Sutor et al., 2007). Indeed, parents have invested a great deal by the time children enter adulthood, and parents may be particularly sensitive to how their adult offspring have turned out. That is, they may react to their grown children’s successes and problems (Birditt et al., 2010; Fingerman, Cheng, Birditt, & Zarit, 2010).

Several studies have shown that offspring’s problems are associated with parental distress when offspring are in their mid-20s, 30s, and 40s (e.g., Byers, Levy, Allore, Bruce, & Kasl, 2008; Milkie, Bierman & Schieman, 2008). These studies have primarily examined negative life events grown children have experienced, such as health problems or injury, financial difficulties, divorce or relationship problems (Birditt et al., 2010; Greenfield & Marks, 2006; Pillemer et al., 2007). Further, scholars have attempted to differentiate whether the problems can be attributed to

the offspring's own behaviors (e.g., drug addiction) or as random events (e.g., victim of a crime; Birditt et al., 2010; Pillemer & Suito, 1991). Interestingly, there has been little attention to these issues during the period of young adulthood specifically. When offspring are young adults, parents may be particularly involved in their young adults' lives and thus may be particularly aware of such problems.

Parents also may hold evaluations of how their grown children have turned out with regard to success and accomplishments. Only a few studies have addressed parental evaluations of children's successes (Carr, 2004). Ryff, Lee, Essex and Schmutte (1994) examined middle-aged parents' evaluations of how their grown children had turned out using open-ended questions. More recently, we addressed this issue in the Family Exchanges Study (Birditt et al., 2010; Fingerman, Miller, Birditt & Zarit, 2009). We found that parents differentiate among their children and consider some grown children more successful than other grown children (Birditt et al., 2010). Indeed, parents are cognizant of their children's failures as well as their successes; parents who have more than one grown child most often view some as problem-ridden and others as successful (Fingerman, Pitzer et al., 2010). Finally, parents typically report comparable affection for offspring whom they deem successful and whom they deem problem-ridden, but they experience greater relationship conflict and distress with children suffering problems (Birditt et al., 2010).

Parents' views of offspring's successes during the transition to adulthood may not correspond to objective indicators of adult roles, however. Our prior research found that parental ratings of offspring success were not associated with actual educational attainment or marital status among 18- to 24-year olds, but parents' subjective appraisals of offspring's achievements correlated highly with actual indicators of adult attainment (i.e., employment, education, marital status) for adults over age 24. Young people in the transition to adulthood prior to age 25 may be in the process of attaining an education or in a long-term relationship that has not yet solidified with formal commitment. Indeed, a 19-year old who is studying successfully at a competitive university aspiring for graduate school looks the same "on paper" as a 30-year-old high school graduate. As such, parental ratings of their achievement may not correspond to observable external indicators. Moreover, relative success in education or career varies by social class, and parents may adjust views of offspring accordingly. We present data regarding offspring's negative life events and success during the transition to adulthood next.

Previously in this chapter, we presented data obtained from the offspring in the Family Exchanges Study (FES). In this section, we also include reports from parents in the FES who had grown children aged 18–24 ( $n=296$  parents) and their reports on 741 children, regardless of whether the offspring participated in the study. Table 5.3 includes descriptive information regarding offspring's ratings of their own success and parental evaluations of their offspring's successes and failures.

We considered factors that might be associated with whether parents and offspring view the offspring as successful. We looked at indicators of potential future attainments, such as student status and serious relationship/cohabitation, in predicting subjective ratings. We estimated four multilevel models, including control variables, each predicting offspring's ratings of their own success in (a) relationships

**Table 5.3** Parents' and offspring's evaluations of how offspring turned out and appraisals of support

Variables	Parent report ( <i>n</i> =480 parents reporting on 741 offspring)		Offspring report ( <i>n</i> =381 reporting on self)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Offspring's success				
Education and career success <sup>a</sup>	3.52	1.16	3.57	0.94
Relationships success <sup>a</sup>	3.14	1.00	3.34	1.10
<i>Appraisals of helping</i>				
Offspring appraises support as appropriate <sup>b</sup>	–	–	3.04	0.79
Offspring's needs compared to others same age <sup>c</sup>	1.81	0.62	–	–
Rewarding to help <sup>d</sup>	4.20	0.90	–	–
Stressful to help <sup>d</sup>	2.20	1.20	–	–

<sup>a</sup>Appraisals of offspring's success compared to other people the same age: 1 = *less successful*, 2 = *somewhat less successful*, 3 = *about the same as other people the same age*, 4 = *somewhat more successful*, 5 = *more successful*

<sup>b</sup>Appraisals of the amount of help offspring received: 1 = *less than would like*, 2 = *a little less than would like*, 3 = *about right*, 4 = *a little more than would like*, 5 = *more than would like*

<sup>c</sup>Appraisals of the help offspring need compared to other people the same age: 1 = *less help*, 2 = *about the same*, 3 = *more help*

<sup>d</sup>Rewarding and stressful feelings parents find in helping offspring: 1 = *not at all*, 2 = *a little*, 3 = *somewhat*, 4 = *quite a bit*, 5 = *a great deal*

and family, and (b) education and career. We did the same for parents' ratings of success in the two domains. Findings are evident in Table 5.4. As can be seen, offspring's statuses projecting future accomplishments were associated with ratings of the offspring's success by both parents and offspring. That is, student status was associated with ratings that the offspring was more successful in education and career than others of comparable age, whereas partnered status (rather than marriage) was associated with higher ratings of success with regard to relationships. Thus, it appears that during the transition to adulthood, parents and offspring alike evaluate offspring with regard to activities that may foster future success, rather than solely based on current achievements. We consider this future potential in greater detail in the next section.

## Parental Support of Young Adults

In addition to love, affection, and contact, parents also often remain a source of tangible and nontangible support for young adults in the twenty-first century. Children were a source of labor and economic gain in agrarian societies but have become a target of parental investment of labor and material resources in the twenty-first

**Table 5.4** Student status and relationship partner associated with ratings of offspring's success<sup>a</sup>

Variables	Parental rating				Offspring rating			
	Education/career success		Relationships success		Education/career success		Relationships success	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE<sub>B</sub></i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE<sub>B</sub></i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE<sub>B</sub></i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE<sub>B</sub></i>
Intercept	2.64***	0.59	2.72***	0.52	2.92***	0.52	3.01***	0.63
Predictors								
Student status <sup>a</sup>	0.36**	0.10	0.12	0.09	0.22*	0.09	-0.06	0.11
Relationship partner <sup>b</sup>	-0.08	0.16	0.50***	0.14	0.26*	0.12	0.91***	0.14
Controls								
Parent income <sup>c</sup>	0.05	0.04	0.00	0.03	0.02	0.03	-0.04	0.04
Parent years of education	0.04	0.03	0.00	0.02	0.07***	0.02	0.03	0.02
Parent sex	-0.11	0.09	-0.11	0.08	0.03	0.07	0.01	0.09
Offspring sex	-0.22*	0.09	0.05	0.08	-0.04	0.07	0.09	0.09
Offspring age	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02	-0.03	0.02	-0.00	0.03

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

<sup>a</sup>1 = student; 0 = nonstudent

<sup>b</sup>1 = cohabit or married; 0 = other relationship status

<sup>c</sup>Parental household income: 1 = less than \$10,000, 2 = \$10,001–\$25,000, 3 = \$25,001–\$40,000, 4 = \$40,001–75,000, 5 = \$75,001–\$100,000, 6 = more than \$100,000

century. These patterns continue into adulthood. In Western nations, parents give more to their offspring than the reverse until the very end of life (Fingerman, Pitzer et al., 2010; Lowenstein & Daatland, 2006; Zarit & Eggebeen, 2002).

Theories of family support have typically focused on help provided to those in need. Contingency theory in sociology and altruism theory in economics have pursued the premise that family members provide help in response to another's problems (Eggebeen & Davey, 1998; Schoeni, 1997), as have theories of social support more broadly (Vaux, 1988). But relationships between parents and young adults are distinct from these other ties. According to the developmental stake hypothesis, parents have a unique investment in their children as their legacy (Giarrusso, Silterstein, Gans & Bengtson, 2005). By extension, we propose that parents may invest in their grown children during the transition to adulthood if they foresee support as instrumental to the child's future success, even in the absence of present crisis. Indeed, our prior research on adults aged 18–40 found that parents provided more support to offspring they deemed high-achieving as well as offspring in need (Fingerman, Miller et al., 2009).

A key question in the transition to adulthood is whether support is linked to roles associated with future attainments, particularly student status. Student status might be viewed as a proxy variable for offspring's potential future success. Several aspects of the student experience may affect relationships with parents: residing away from home, financial commitments to pay tuition, lack of adequate income, and an amorphous sense of exploration or being unsettled. Thus, we might expect support of young adult offspring to be greatest when they are students. Table 5.5 presents the distribution of six types of support to students and nonstudents aged

**Table 5.5** Frequency of support provided by parents to grown children

Type of support <sup>a</sup>	Student (n = 244)	Nonstudent (n = 131)
Listening to talk about daily events	6.41 (1.56)	6.13 (2.04)
Advice	5.83 (1.67)	5.74 (1.97)
Emotional support	5.77 (1.97)	5.57 (2.32)
Practical support	5.08 (2.05)	4.73 (2.36)
Financial support	5.02 (2.12)	3.98 (2.18)
Technical help	2.69 (2.10)	2.55 (2.15)
Average total support	5.62 (1.45)	5.24 (1.74)

<sup>a</sup>1 = less than once a year or not at all, 2 = once a year, 3 = a few times a year, 4 = monthly, 5 = a few times a month, 6 = weekly, 7 = a few times a week, 8 = daily

18–24 from the FES. Consistent with our prior research (e.g., Fingerman, Miller et al., 2009, 2010), students and nonstudents alike reported receiving nontangible support such as having their parents listen to them talk about their day, emotional support, and advice most often, and practical and financial support less often.

We estimated six multilevel models with the offspring's reports of each type of support treated as the outcome. Student status was the predictor; the control variables included parental income and education, parents' and offspring's gender, and offspring's age. Each model revealed significant associations for age, with younger offspring receiving more support than older offspring, but student status was not significantly associated with any type of support when age and parental income were included in the models.

Not surprisingly, other variables were significantly associated with each type of help. For example, mothers gave more support to offspring and daughters received more help. These findings are consistent with studies of adolescence that show greater involvement of mothers with grown children (McHale, Crouter, & Whiteman, 2003). Likewise, parents with higher income provided more frequent practical and financial support. Given the association between parental income and offspring student status, in models excluding parental income, student status was associated with greater financial and practical support. The models for support are not shown here.

### *Cohort Differences in Parental Support*

Again, clear data regarding shifts in parental support are not readily available. Nonetheless, it appears that parental support of young adult offspring has increased over the past two decades. Eggebeen (1992) examined National Survey of Family and Households (NSFH) data collected in 1988. The study asked parents if they

had provided any child with different types of support (money, advice, childcare, practical help) in the past month. The most frequent form of support was advice, but fewer than half (46%) of parents reported providing advice to any child in the past month and only 31% had provided at least one child practical assistance (Eggebeen, 1992).

By comparison, we consider parental reports of support to grown children in 2008 in the Family Exchanges Study. Because we have within-family data and asked about each child (rather than asking one question regarding “any child”), we examined the child who received the most help. That is, the child whom the parent helps most serves as an indicator of providing “any child” with help in this case. We also did not ask about the past month but, rather more generally, the frequency with which parents provide each child with each type of support (e.g., daily, once a week, a few times a month, etc.). With regard to advice, 88.9% of parents reported giving at least one grown child advice on a monthly basis and 69.4% reported giving monthly practical support. We assessed other types of support not examined in the NSFH and found that 90.2% gave emotional support on a monthly basis and 89.9% lent an attentive ear when offspring wished to talk about their day. In other words, findings from two distinct studies suggest an increase in provision of support to grown children over the past two decades, even though the data sets are fraught with differences that make it difficult to assure the validity of these comparisons.

### *Evaluations and Implications of Parental Support*

A key question regarding parental involvement also pertains to benefits, costs, or harm to offspring and parents. Although classic family systems theories suggest that parents should not be overly involved or “enmeshed” in their children’s lives, parental involvement is not always indicative of family problems in adulthood (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000). Rather, under some circumstances, parental involvement may be beneficial, while in others it may be detrimental. Moreover, parents and offspring themselves may view the support as appropriate and valuable.

We considered two types of implications regarding parental support of young adult offspring (a) appraisals of the appropriateness of that support, and (b) associations between support and individual well-being. Subjective evaluations of support likely play a role in the way that individuals experience that support. That is, when parents and offspring feel that the support they receive is normative and appropriate, the support may be more beneficial than if they feel it is demanding or insufficient.

### *Appropriateness of Support*

The Family Exchanges Study included questions regarding both the parents’ and offspring’s perceptions of the appropriateness of support. Parents were asked whether they believed their grown children required comparable, more, or less sup-

port than others the same age. Offspring were asked whether the amount of support they received was about right, too little, or too much (for descriptive information, see Table 5.3). Findings revealed most parents and grown children evaluated the amount of support as about right or similar to what other grown children need. But a small proportion of offspring (13.9%) evaluated the support as too little, and likewise, a small proportion of offspring (17.2%) evaluated the support as too much. A proportion of parents felt the support was more than others of comparable age require (11.7%), whereas nearly one-third of parents felt their offspring required less support than others of comparable age (30.4%).

We estimated multilevel models looking at parents' and offspring's perceptions of the appropriateness of the support. That is, we asked whether parents' evaluations of the appropriateness of support were associated with the amount of support they reported giving.

We looked at parental evaluations of the appropriateness of support as the outcome and parental reports of the amount of support they provide as a predictor, including control variables (e.g., parent gender, age, income, education, whether offspring was a student or had a partner). The outcome variable was coded from 1 (less than others the same age) to 3 (more than others the same age). The model was not significant for overall support.

We then estimated six additional models for each type of support separately, to ascertain whether provision of certain types of support (i.e., practical support) was associated with parental evaluations of the appropriateness of support. We adjusted significance level to  $p < 0.01$  due to multiple analyses. The only significant finding related to the provision of monetary support,  $B = 0.54$ ,  $t = 4.11$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . That is, parents who provided more frequent financial support felt the support their offspring received was more overall than other young adults of comparable age.

Treating offspring's evaluations of support as the outcome variable, we looked at offspring's reports of the amount of support and control variables as the predictors. Findings revealed that a greater frequency of overall support was associated with offspring's appraisals that the support was too much (and vice versa for low support being appraised as too little),  $B = 0.14$ ,  $t = 6.42$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .

We then considered each type of support separately for offspring's appraisals, again adjusting the significance level to  $p < 0.01$ . We found that all six types of support showed significant associations with offspring's evaluations of the appropriateness of support at the  $p < 0.01$  level. That is, offspring who received more of each type of support evaluated overall support as too much. Of course, these findings also speak to high correlations between types of support. Offspring who received more of one type of support received more of other types of support.

### ***Implications of Support for Individual Well-Being***

Provision and receipt of support have also been linked to individual well-being in other studies (Brown, Nesse, Vinokur, & Smith, 2003; Maisel & Gable, 2009).

Here, we considered whether parents' provision of support to offspring has beneficial or harmful implications for the offspring.

Research on this topic is scant, but one recent study of college students and their parents indicates parental involvement may be beneficial, particularly for students. According to findings from that study, communication with parents helped deter college students from heavy alcohol use (Small, Morgan, Abar, & Maggs, 2011). College students completed a 14-day diary study; on days when the students spent more time communicating with their parents, the number of drinks consumed, heavy drinking, and estimated peak blood alcohol concentration were lower. Thus, even nontangible support in the form of communication with parents can serve to buffer against poor health behaviors like heavy drinking during the transition to adulthood.

We then examined models for individual well-being, using an assessment of life satisfaction as a variable representing a general sense of well-being as the outcome. We included the amount of support, frequency of contact, and control variables as predictors.

When we ran the model for the full sample of offspring, findings for life satisfaction were not significant for either the amount of help offspring received overall or for appraisals that the amount of support was appropriate. When we looked at students, separately, we found that amount of parental support was associated with evaluations of life satisfaction. That is, students who received more support from parents also reported greater life satisfaction after controlling for other background characteristics,  $B=0.12$ ,  $t=2.34$ ,  $p<0.01$ . The models for nonstudents did not show such associations.

Interestingly, when we estimated models separately for each of the six types of support for students, each type of support from parents was significantly associated with offspring's reports of life satisfaction, except for practical support. That is, receiving more frequent practical support from parents was not associated with offspring's reports of life satisfaction, whereas receiving more frequent advice, emotional support, an attentive ear, companionship, and money were all associated with reports of higher life satisfaction among students. These patterns were not evident for nonstudents in the sample. Parental support of any type was not associated with nonstudents' life satisfaction.

Finally, for parents we also examined life satisfaction as an outcome variable. In these analyses, however, the outcome variable was an upper-level variable occurring at the parental level rather than at the offspring level. Thus, we did not have a nested outcome. Instead, we used ordinary least squares regression and aggregated assessments of the grown children in each family. We used several metrics to aggregate the ratings of appropriateness of support and amount of support provided, including the following: the mean across all children aged 18–24, the mean across all grown children (at least one of whom was 18–24), the sums, and the maximum rating. The regressions with amount of support provided to offspring as a predictor was not significant. The regression with appraisals of support as a predictor was significant, however, regardless of the metric we used,  $F(5,442) = 9.07$ ,  $p < 0.001$  for the regression with mean appraisals across children,  $R^2 = 0.09$ ,  $B = -0.44$ ,  $t = -3.73$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Parents who viewed their offspring as needing more than other children of comparable age reported less life satisfaction.

## **Implications of Research on Young Adults and Their Parents**

The overall portrait of relationships between adults and their parents shows that an image of a helicopter parent hovering and diminishing their young adults' transition may be a gross oversimplification. Comparative data across cohorts suggest today's parents are more involved with young adult offspring than parents in the past, but they are involved in ways that may foster (rather than hinder) a successful transition into adulthood.

### ***Cohort Differences in Relationships with Parents***

Available data suggest there have been changes in parent–child ties over the past few decades. Contact between adults and parents appears to have intensified, with more young adults reporting contact with a parent several times a week than in the late twentieth century. Parents also appear to be offering more support of all types to grown children than they did in the last century. Although we attribute some of these changes to technological advances such as the widespread adoption of the cell phone, some of these differences also may stem from societal changes.

Data from international studies indicate that macro-level economic factors and social policies also shape ties between adults and their parents. For example, cross-national differences in coresidence suggest decisions to live with parents reflect factors such as availability and affordability of housing and ease of finding stable employment. Indeed, data from the European Quality of Life Survey in 2003 documented national variability in the rental housing market, mortgage availability, and access to long-term employment accounted for rates of coresidence. These factors, along with cultural acceptance of coresidence, help explain why 60% of adults aged 18–34 resided with parents in Southern European countries such as Italy and Spain, compared to only a 10% rate of coresidence in Scandinavian countries (Newman & Aptekar, 2006). Direct payment to university students and policies to facilitate the transition to employment in Scandinavian countries accentuate these differences.

For the sake of comparison to data from Europe, we note that among adults aged 18–34 the rate of coresidence was 28.1% in 1985 and 29.4% in 2009 (US Census Bureau, 2009), lying somewhere between the rates in Southern Europe and Scandinavia. Thus, social factors relating to job opportunity and affordable housing also may explain offspring's greater dependency on parents.

### ***Student Status in the Transition to Adulthood***

Likewise, an increase in the proportion of students in the USA may help explain increased dependency on parents on average. Of course, students also come from more distinct milieus than do nonstudents. Students typically have parents who are

more affluent and more likely to be married than young adults who do not pursue higher education. Lower-SES parents are less likely to be able to support their children through prolonged higher education. Thus, the portrait we present here is not simply one of being a student, but of how parents from different social backgrounds assist their progeny through young adulthood.

Distinctions between parent–child ties by SES should not be overblown, however, as there were also similarities. For example, parents of students and nonstudents alike experienced coresidence with offspring aged 18–24. Nonstudents were more likely to report that they currently lived with their parents, but students were more likely to have done so in the past year. Likewise with regard to contact, young adults in general were in touch with their parents often. But students and nonstudents used different modalities of contact. Nonstudents reported more frequent in-person visits, but students talked more often on the telephone. Likewise, our prior research from the 1990s found that mothers were equally invested in young adult daughters who were not pursuing education and had children of their own, as in daughters still in school (Fingerman, 2000). The transition to adulthood appears to evoke recognition of the two decades of childrearing that preceded it and heavy investment by parents from different backgrounds.

### *Consequences of Parental Involvement*

Involvement with parents does not appear to be detrimental for parents and children, however. Feelings of ambivalence were evident at the transition to adulthood, but the parent–child relationship involves a great deal of positivity that appears to increase as parents and children grow older.

In addition, the support parents provide is associated with greater life satisfaction among students. Given the importance of student status to how parents view their grown children and how parental support appears to affect these children, a key question is: what happens when these children complete their education? Future longitudinal research should address this issue.

It was notable that parents' sense of what is expected of offspring (i.e., parental evaluations of whether offspring required greater support than others of comparable age) was associated with their own well-being more than actual support provided. This finding is consistent with research on elder caregiving. The consequences of providing care to a frail older adult stem from perceptions of burden more than the objective burden of providing help (Son et al., 2007; Zarit, Reever, & Bach-Peterson, 1980).

In this case, helping grown children may yield future benefits for parents. Grown children who successfully enter jobs and find partners after completing their education reap the benefits of parental investment and fulfill the promise of success. It is less clear how relationships between adults and their parents will fare if current economic difficulties persist in the USA and these current students have trouble finding employment and stable family life after they complete their education. Parents may suffer if they view continued needs for support as nonnormative.

In sum, the parent–child tie is an important source of support and well-being for both parents and children across the lifespan. This chapter indicates that the parent–child tie is also dynamic and nuanced. More work is needed to understand how the parent–child tie changes over time and the characteristics that lead to its diversity. Understanding the parent–child tie at this stage of life will help us to make improvements in the lives of both parents and children as they experience the stresses of everyday life and more serious life events. Although recent economic upheavals and technological advances have led to important changes in the parent–child tie, this tie may also serve as a resource to cope with these changes.

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