A Decade of Research on Intergenerational Ties:

Technological, Economic, Political, and Demographic Changes

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Abstract

Due to extended transitions to adulthood and declining marital rates, bonds between adults and parents have grown increasingly salient in individuals' lives. This review organizes research around these topics to address ties between parents and grown children in the context of broader societal changes over the past decade. Literature searches included tables of contents of premier journals (e.g., Journal of Marriage and Family), Psychological Info, and Google Scholar. The literature review revealed patterns of social and intergenerational changes. Technological advances (e.g., introduction of the smart phone) co-occurred with more frequent contact and interdependence between generations. The Great Recession and financial strains altered the nature of many parent/child ties, including increased rates of intergenerational coresidence. Individual life problems such as divorce, addiction, and physical health problems were reflected in complex changes in positive and negative relationship qualities, ambivalence, and intergenerational support. Government policies reflect societal values and in turn, affected the distribution of parents' and grown children's resources. Political disruptions instigated migration, separating generations across large geographic regions. Political disruptions instigated migration, separating generations across large geographic regions. Demographic changes (e.g., constellation of family members, delayed marriage, same sex marriage) were also manifest in ties between adults and parents.Findings were consistent with the Intergenerational Systems in Context Model, which posits that societal transformations co-occur with changes in intergenerational relationships via reciprocal influences.

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Social science is intended to be prescient and predict the course of societal change. Vern Bengtson did just that in his 2001 *Journal of Marriage and Family* paper foreseeing the rise in salience of intergenerational ties in the 21st century (Bengtson, 2001). Bengtson argued that demographic changes in longevity and in family structures would result in a primacy of intergenerational ties over other relationships. Due to a variety of societal changes, Bengtson's predictions have borne true: ties between adults and parents are now more common than any other relationship in adulthood. While data are not available regarding the prevalence of parent/adult child ties throughout the population, 98% of US adults aged 25-32 report that they have regular contact with at least one parent (Hartnett, Fingerman, & Birditt, 2018). Furthermore, consistent with Bengtson's predictions, over the past 15 years, individuals are at greater risk of lacking a romantic partner due to diminished rates of marriage, stable (relatively high) rates of divorce, and delayed first marriages; these changes have generated greater involvement between adult offspring and parents. Indeed, a tie to a parent or grown child may be the most important relationship in many adults' lives. Consequently, this relationship deserves the research attention that marriage has received in the past.

As defined in the family literature, intergenerational ties involve bonds between adults of different generations and their progeny: midlife parents and young adult offspring, aging parents and midlife adult offspring, grandparents and grandchildren, and even great grandparents and great grandchildren. This decade review covers publications from 2008 to 2019 addressing ties between adults and their parents. We focus on the parent/child bonds because it serves as the key link in intergenerational families; that is, grandparent/grandchild ties are built on parent/child ties (Monserud, 2008, 2010).

In this review, we differentiate between young adults and parents, and midlife adults and parents. The past 30 years have seen shifts in the nature of early adulthood with 18- to 34-year-olds increasingly dependent and interconnected with their parents throughout much of the developed world (Arnett, 2009; Furstenberg, 2010). These changing patterns have rendered ties between young adults and their parents distinct from relationship dynamics observed later in adulthood and old age (Fingerman, 2017; Furstenberg, Hartnett, Kohli, & Zissimopoulos, 2015). Furthermore, midlife adults often support both young adults and aging parents, and aging parents are often involved in supporting their midlife offspring and grandchildren (Fingerman et al., 2011; Huo, Graham, Kim, Birditt, & Fingerman, 2019). We consider parent/offspring ties prior to the onset of intensive caregiving, noting that caregiving is addressed in a distinct literature (for reviews of the caregiving literature see: MS #6776; Zarit & Zarit, 2015).

We draw on the Intergenerational Systems in Context Model (ISC Model; see Figure 1) to consider how macrolevel factors may be associated with microlevel processes in parent/child ties. In examining adult intergenerational ties, the model draws on ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), life course theory (Elder, 1998; Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003), solidarity theory, intergenerational ambivalence theory (Bengtson & Oyama, 2010; Fingerman, Sechrist, & Birditt, 2013), and the family stress model (Conger et al., 2010). These theories propose interrelated processes between macrolevel societal factors and familial processes. Indeed, scholars have referred to "linked lives" to describe the reciprocal influences between adults and parents (e.g., Greenfield & Marks, 2006). This paper attempts to flesh out these models with a specific focus on intergenerational ties. We highlight the ways in which research over the past decade illuminates associations between macrolevel societal changes and intergenerational processes. We also point out significant gaps in the literature regarding

associations between macrolevel phenomena and family processes that should be addressed in future research.

Macrolevel factors specified in the Intergenerational Systems Context Model (ISC Model) include large societal disruptions over the past decade that are associated with patterns in parent/adult child ties. Technological, economic, political and demographic changes permeate family life. For example, the past decade has witnessed: widespread use of smartphones (introduced by Apple in 2007) and social media, the onset and recovery from the Great Recession (with many families left behind), persistent elevated rates of immigration worldwide (United Nations, 2017), and changing societal recognition of diverse families (e.g., legalization of same sex marriage in many countries). Relationships between adults and parents are embedded with and show bidirectional associations with these transformations,.

The model addresses implications of these societal trends on outcomes outlined in the intergenerational solidarity model and the intergenerational ambivalence model (Bengtson & Oyama, 2010; Fingerman, Sechrist, & Birditt, 2013; Silverstein & Giarrusso, 2010). The solidarity model takes a mechanistic view of intergenerational relationships that reflects interconnections between: contact, emotions (e.g., affection/conflict/ambivalence), norms or values, and behaviors (e.g., support exchanges; Silverstein, Conroy, & Gans, 2012). Ambivalence theory suggests that, due to competing needs for independence and connection, intergenerational relationships can be simultaneously close as well as irritating. Integrating life course theory, solidarity theory, and ambivalence, we consider these dimensions of intergenerational ties in association with societal shifts.

The ISC Model does not make causal arguments. Rather, associations between family life and societal changes are interrelated. For example, we do not propose that iPhones caused

increased contact between generations, but rather co-occurred with changes in family life. A

device like the iPhone could have been applied to many purposes; but apps have been designed

to respond to needs and desires for family contact. Indeed, in several instances, evolving norms

appear to have contributed as much to shifts in intergenerational ties as technologies or economic

events. Here, we synthesize extant literature on intergenerational ties within a framework of

events in the past decade.

### Technologies and Contact between Adults and their Parents

When the last decade review on parents and children went to press (e.g., Umberson et al.,

2010), people were still using cell phones to *talk* to people rather than smartphones to take

selfies. Thus, there was very little texting and no Facetime or other video chatting capabilities.

Social media were scant (e.g., Facebook had recently replaced MySpace and Snapchat and

Instagram were still being perfected by computer programmers).

Across this decade, cell phone use reached near saturation among U.S. adults, with 100%

of adults aged 18 to 29 reporting that they use a cellphone (Pew Research Center, 2018). Indeed,

as of 2018, 95% of Americans overall reported owning a cell phone and 77% had smart phones;

those rates were much lower for adults over age 65 where only 80% owned a cell phone and 46%

owned a smart phone (Anderson & Perrin, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2018) We saw a surge in

text messaging (Stern, 2012) followed by a decline in texting with the advent of messaging

services (e.g., imessage, WhatsApp) and technology-facilitated face-to-face communication

(e.g., Facetime, Skype) among younger adults (Statista, 2018).

The use of text and other digital forms of communication may serve to enhance what

Peng and colleagues (2018) refer to as "digital solidarity." Digital solidarity builds on the

premise of associational solidarity by fostering relationship strength through contact (Bengtson

& Oyama, 2010; Fingerman, et. al, 2013; Silverstein & Giarrusso, 2010). Indeed, new

technologies have facilitated contact between social partners in general (Cotton, McCullough, &

Adams, 2012) and the same may be true of adults and parents. One large study focused on

adults' (aged 18 to 83) contact with living mothers. The researchers used country level data from

24 nations collected in 2001, during a period with variability in cell phone adoption (from

Russia, where 5 out of 100 persons used mobile phones, to Italy, where 90 out of 100 did). In

countries with greater mobile phone use, adult offspring (particularly daughters) reported more

frequent contact with mothers (Gubernskaya & Treas, 2016). As the data were country level and

correlational in nature (i.e., more cell phone users in the country, more people reporting frequent

contact with parent or child), it is not clear whether the communication occurred via the cell

phone technology.

The use of technology also fits into a broader historical trend in contact between adults

and parents. Contact has certainly become more frequent over the past 2 decades in the United

States, but the shifts predate the widespread use of cellphones. Prior work documented a steady

uptick in contact between young adults and parents dating back to the 1990s (Fingerman, Cheng,

Tighe, Birditt, & Zarit, 2012). That prior uptick may have reflected declining prices for long-

distance phone calls and airline deregulation. The persistent trajectory also reflects the prolonged

transition to adulthood over the past 20 years (e.g., higher education, delay partnering) that

fosters interdependency among adults and parents (Fingerman, 2017; Furstenberg, Hartnett,

Kohli, & Zissimopoulos, 2015). As such, younger generations today report contact at least once a

week, or even daily. In a diary of intergenerational ties, nearly all (96%) midlife parents (aged 45

to 65) had contact with a grown child that week either in person, by phone or text; on average,

they had contact on three quarters of study days (Fingerman, Kim, Birditt, & Zarit, 2016).

Although the advent of increased contact *predates* mobile technologies, these technologies are associated with increasing frequency of contact. A study conducted prior to 2010 revealed that adult children never or rarely communicated with parents via electronic technologies (Antonucci, Ajrouch, & Manalel, 2017). Likewise, from 2008 to 2011, just under one third (31%) of older mothers had either texted or emailed a grown child in the past year. Newer data, obtained from better educated mothers in 2016 found that 95% of mothers reported instant messaging or emailing a grown child. (Peng, et al., 2018).

Thus, research over the past decade suggests technological advances are associated with altered forms and frequency of contact between generations. The Intergenerational Systems in Context Model proposes that these associations are likely bidirectional. New technologies could have been adapted to many purposes (and indeed, were), but development of communication capacities partially reflects ongoing trends and values for being in touch with friends and family, including parents and grown children.  Further, changes in forms of communication may be associated with changes in affective qualities of the relationship (affection, ambivalence, conflict), as well as shifts in the nature of support exchanges. In the 1980s, a young adult might call parents on Sunday evenings and talk for an hour, discussing the week's events. But in the 2010s, parents and young adults texted or talked in small moments throughout the day. This frequent contact introduces opportunities for parents and children to influence one another's mood and stress reactions in the moment (Birditt, Kim, Zarit, Fingerman, & Loving, 2016; Birditt, Manalel, Kim, Zarit, & Fingerman, 2017) and warrants research attention.

**A Recession, Financial Difficulties and Other Problems Adults and Parents Incur**

The Great Recession was one of the biggest events in the past century. The Recession started in 2007, but was only widely recognized by the general public in 2008. This global

financial downturn shaped intergenerational ties, fostering closeness and tensions in the tie. Moreover, less well-off families lagged in the recovery, exacerbating economic disparities for ethnic and racial minority families (Cynamon & Fazzari, 2016; Kochhar & Fry, 2014). These financial disparities generated risks for young adults and families regarding: access (or lack of access) to education (Albertini & Kohli, 2012; Henretta, Wolf, van Voorhis, & Soldo, 2012; Swartz, McLaughlin & Mortimer, 2017), rates of coresidence (Lei & South, 2016), patterns of support (Fingerman et al., 2015), and likelihood of, and timing of disability and dementia in late life necessitating caregiving (Chatterji, Byles, Cutler, Seeman, & Verdes, 2015). Adults and parents may be sensitive to these types of problems in one another's lives.

The Family Stress Model considers the distress generated within the family when parents of young children incur financial difficulties; the parental stress is transmitted to the children directly via parental behaviors towards the child, and directly via repercussions of spousal conflict (Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010). The ISC Model draws on this premise by proposing links between societal microlevel events and processes within family, yet the Family Stress Model has not been directly applied to adult generations.

Nevertheless, research regarding intergenerational ties suggests the influence of financial difficulties and other adverse life events (e.g., divorce, health problems, victim of a crime) on well-being. Adverse events in one generation are associated with stress outcomes across generations of families including young adult (Fingerman, Cheng, Birditt, & Zarit, 2012; Kalmijn & De Graaf, 2012) and midlife offspring (Bangerter, Zarit, & Fingerman, 2016; Gilligan, Suitor, & Pillemer, 2013; Pillemer, Suitor, Riffin & Gilligan, 2017; Suitor et al., 2016).

**Emotional Qualities of Relationships and Life Problems**

As suggested by the Family Stress Model, a variety of life problems (e.g., divorce, health problems, addiction, incarceration) affect qualities of the parent/child tie in adulthood. Research examining financial problems typically has focused on the grown child's financial distress (Gilligan, Suitor, & Pillemer, 2013). For example, Hammersmith (2018) used national data from the Health and Retirement Study to document tensions between grown children and older parents if the child lost a job or moved back home.

Other research portray relationships as more complicated (with a mixture of positive and negative sentiments) when grown children suffer life problems or fail to live up to expected norms. Dating back two decades, researchers introduced the concept *intergenerational ambivalence* to describe complex feelings that parents and grown children may experience in this tie (Luescher & Pillemer, 1998; Connidis, 2015; Giardin et al., 2018; Lendon, 2017). Researchers have measured intergenerational ambivalence in a variety of ways (MS # 6776), including: direct measures (i.e., feeling conflicted or torn in a relationship with a grown child or parent), qualitatively in open-ended questions  (Verma & Satayanarayana, 2013), and indirectly as a combination of ratings of positive and negative sentiments (Pillemer, Munsch, Fuller-Rowell, Riffin, & Suitor, 2012; Suitor, Gilligan, & Pillemer, 2011). The indirect approach is the most common; a plethora of studies in the past decade have examined a combination of sentiments to assess intergenerational ambivalence (Birditt, Fingerman, & Zarit, 2010; Kiecolt, Blieszner, & Savla, 2011). Yet, one comparison of the two methods suggested that the direct method is better for assessing ambivalence among sons (Suitor et al., 2011). One study examining the indirect approach of asking about both positive and negative sentiments suggests the negative component of ambivalence accounts for associations between ambivalence and

well-being (Gilligan, Suitor, Feld, & Pillemer, 2015). Thus, measurement of ambivalence warrants research attention in the next decade.

Many studies addressing intergenerational ambivalence in the past decade have focused on parental distress and love for their grown children who suffer different types of problems. For example, Ingersoll-Dayton and colleagues (2011) presented qualitative data from 22 older mothers who had seriously mentally ill daughters. Mothers described conflicted feelings of love and understanding about their daughters' troubles, with simultaneous frustration and a desire for daughter's greater independence. Kiecolt and colleagues (2011) tracked parental ambivalence towards children in a general sample as the children transitioned from adolescence through young adulthood over 14 years. Parental ambivalence remained elevated for grown children who had suffered life problems in adolescence (e.g., running away from home, troubles with the police, being expelled or other behavioral problems). Birditt and colleagues (2010) examined over 600 parents who reported on multiple children. Parents experienced increased tensions toward a young adult who incurred life problems, but reported comparable affection for children with problems as their more successful siblings. Using the same dataset, Fingerman and colleagues (2012) found midlife parents experienced poorer well-being when at least one adult child experienced a life problem, even if other grown children were faring well.

Researchers also have documented parents' greater ambivalence and poorer well-being when grown children have failed to achieve life markers of success such as completing education or securing a job (Kalmijn, & DeGraaf, 2012; Pillemer et al., 2012). These patterns are found in different cultural groups. For example, Pei and Cong (2016) reported that Mexican American parents experienced greater ambivalence when their children were not married or when sons had

less education. Nevertheless, adult markers are not deterministic. Kiecolt et al. (2011) found that ambivalence was only associated with nonmarital status, not other adult statuses.

Regarding offspring's ambivalence towards aging parents, most research has focused on the parent's late life physical declines and spousal loss, rather than broader social issues such as the Recession or other life crises (Igarashi, Hooker, Coehlo, & Manoogian, 2013). For example, Ha and Ingersoll (2008) found relationships between parents and adults became less ambivalent immediately after a parent was widowed. The effects of widowhood on relationship qualities diminished after 18 months. A few studies have shown midlife children experience distress over a wide array of parents' life problems (e.g., addiction, divorce; Bangerter, et al., 2016), and daughters in particular experience such distress when they give high levels of support (Bangerter et al., 2018). Cultural norms may contribute to how parental transitions affect relationship qualities. Chen (2017) examined decisions to place older adults in skilled nursing care facilities in Shanghai and found that discrepancies in beliefs about filial piety (the Asian ideal of caring for parents) affected parental relationship distress. Overall, problems experienced among both younger and older generations affect relationship quality and well-being in the broader social and cultural contexts in which those problems occur.

**Support Exchanges in Response to Parent or Offspring Problems**

Financial contingencies, life problems, and cultural norms also contribute to intergenerational support patterns. Midlife adults give more to their grown children than to their aging parents (unless the parents incur disability; Fingerman et al., 2011). Indeed, Kornich and Furstenberg (2013) found that on average, parents give 10% of their income to young adult children, regardless of their own socioeconomic position or disposable income. In late life, most parents with higher income intend to leave some sort of bequest to their grown children, but

many grown children were unaware of their parents' intentions and do not expect to receive such

an inheritance (Kim, Eggebeen, Zarit, Birditt, & Fingerman, 2013).

Furthermore, parents respond to other life problems that adult offspring incur

(Fingerman, Miller, Birditt, & Zarit, 2009; Kalmijn, 2013). Many studies have examined midlife

parents who are caregivers of adult children suffering mental health conditions, autism, or

developmental delays, though outcomes are often associated with well-being rather than support

exchanges (i.e., the support is presumed; Gilligan, Suitor, Rurka, & Pillemer, 2017; Smith,

Greenberg, & Seltzer, 2012; Song et al., 2014; Taylor, Burke, Smith, & Hartley, 2016). In these

situations, consistent with the literature on family caregiving in late life, in these situations,

social support for the parent and parental attitudes about the young adult matter more than

objective burden.

Researchers have considered overarching macrolevel societal changes with regard to

offspring life problems. For example, Siennick (2015) used national data to consider the effects

of mass incarceration on intergenerational support patterns and found that parents provide more

financial assistance to offending young adults than to nonoffending peers or siblings.

Interestingly, there has been little research examining parental support of young adults with

opioid addiction. Issues such as addiction warrant research attention in the family literature.

Parenting in childhood has intensified in many parts of the world over the past two

decades (MS #6759). Studies also find that parents persist in helping young adults to achieve

statuses of adulthood such as completion of education, settling with a partner, or raising young

children of their own (Bucx, van Wel, & Knijn, 2012; Fingerman, et al., 2009; Swartz, Kim,

Uno, Mortimer, & O'Brien, 2011). These findings are consistent with the perspective that

parental support during the transition to adulthood has become normative (Fingerman, 2017;

Furstenberg, et al., 2015).  Even when midlife adults are in the throes of caregiving or supporting

aging parents in decline, they continue to provide for young adult children simultaneously

(Friedman, Park, & Weimers, 2016). Nevertheless, as parents themselves incur disabilities, the

flow of support may shift towards parental receipt of support (Hogerbrugge & Silverstein, 2015;

Huo, Graham, Kim, Zarit, & Fingerman, 2018; Kim et al., 2016).

Giving and receiving support in response to problems may affect a parent's or grown

child's well-being. For example, research conducted in the Netherlands found that midlife

parents derive emotional benefits from serving in the grandparent role and providing childcare

for grandchildren  (Geurts, Poortman, & van Tilburg, 2012). Likewise, Huo reported that

providing daily support may mitigate distress for aging parents regarding a midlife child's

problems in the United States (Huo, Graham, Kim, Birditt, & Fingerman, 2019). These patterns

in the United States (and other countries) may be conditioned on racial and ethnic differences,

however. Cichy and colleagues (2014) found that providing daily support to family members

(including parents and grown children) was associated with poorer well-being for African

Americans on a daily basis, but not for non-Hispanic Whites. Thus, intergenerational support

needs to be considered in the context of race and ethnicity.

Popular media and researchers (to some extent) have framed young adults' dependency

on parents as deleterious. Articles about "helicopter parents" insinuate that parents bestow too

much attention on young adult children (Nelson, Padilla-Walker, & Nielson, 2015; Segrin,

Woszidlo, Givertz, Bauer, & Murphy, 2012 ). Some research suggests that receiving financial

help is associated with poorer well-being for offspring over time (Johnson, 2013). Yet evidence

also shows that young adults can thrive due to parental involvement, reporting better adjustment

and greater likelihood of attaining adult statuses such as completing education (Fingerman,

Cheng, Wesselmann, et al., 2012; Swartz, McLaughlin, & Mortimer, 2017). Indeed, parental

involvement throughout adulthood is considered normative in many places in the world

(Nesteruk & Marks, 2009; Newman, 2013). Western cultures may be suffering from a "cultural

lag" where beliefs about generational autonomy have not caught up with family dynamics.

**Coresidence between Adults and Parents**

As of 2015, for the first time in U.S. history, young adults were more likely to reside with

a parent than with a romantic partner (Fry, 2016; Vespa, 2017). Coresidence reflects macrolevel

changes in microlevel patterns within the family. Indeed, it would be oversimplifying to argue

that coresidence is simply a reflection of the economy - coresidence also occurs in the context of

changes in familial values, family structure (e.g., adults are less likely to be married or

partnered), and broader societal constraints.

Coresidence is not monolithic. Researchers differentiate young adults who have never left

home ("failure to launch") from those who have returned home ("boomerang children"; Mitchell,

2011; South & Lei, 2015). Further, coresidence varies across adulthood. The young adulthood

pattern typically involves young adults residing with parents: The late life pattern of coresidence

often stems from parental disability or cultural imperatives (Cohn, & Passel, 2018). Likewise,

10% of young adults who live with parents in the United States have some type of disability

(Barker et al., 2011; Vespa, 2017).

Increases in rates of coresidence co-occurred with the Great Recession. Indeed, cross-

national research shows that rates of coresidence correlate with financial constraints such as lack

of access to: high paying jobs, rental housing, mortgage, or steady employment (Newman, 2013).

Notably, however, in the US, nearly half of coresident offspring pay rent and 90% contribute to

household expenses (Pew Research Center, 2012),

Values and norms also motivate coresidence. In the United States coresidence is more common and more accepted in early young adulthood; up to half of the coresident offspring in the United States are students enrolled in higher education (Fry, 2013). Likewise, cross-cultural comparisons find that values (as well as economic circumstances) shape population likelihood of coresidence. Rates of coresidence in Northern Europe are relatively low, whereas rates of coresidence in Southern Europe are high; researcher have noted the public policies that contribute to these patterns (Dystra, 2018; Newman, 2013). Families in Southern European countries value intergenerational coresidence more. For example, in Italy, parents who have *higher* income are more likely to reside with grown children because they make the living arrangements more comfortable (Manacorda & Moretti, 2006).

Within countries, young adults from different ethnic groups vary in their likelihood of residing with parents. A study of the Dutch population revealed that second generation young adults (i.e., children of Turkish, Moroccan, Surinam immigrations) were more likely to return home than young adults of parents born in the Netherlands (Gruiuters, 2017). Similarly, within the United States, young adults from ethnic or racial minority groups are more likely to reside with parents than are non-Hispanic white young adults, notwithstanding socioeconomic disparities (Lei & South, 2016). Granted, discrimination may contribute to different economic opportunities for different ethnic groups and as such, rates of coresidence among ethnic groups may reflect financial rather than cultural differences.

The implications of coresidence for adults' and parents' well-being are complex. A diary study compared coresident to non-coresident young adults with regard to their daily experiences with parents and mood; the study found few differences after controlling for in-person contact. The only exception was that coresident offspring were more likely to laugh and share humor

with their parents (perhaps coresidence gives opportunities for "inside jokes"; Fingerman, Huo, Kim, & Birditt, 2017).

Having a coresident grown child may generate financial and emotional strains for parents in the United States. Maroto (2017) examined longitudinal data (1994 to 2012) from over 4,000 midlife parents, and found that in years when they coresided with a young adult child, parents reported diminished financial assets and financial savings. Another study of parents aged 50 to 74 in New Jersey showed that parents reported reduced positive mood and increased negative mood when having an adult child in the home (Gerber, Heid, & Pruchno, 2018). But parents with higher income reported greater psychological distress than parents with lower income (Gerber, Heid, & Pruchno, 2018), suggesting that low income parents may view the coresidence as more normative and acceptable.

### Policies, Cultural Norms, and Intergenerational Exchanges

Over the past decade, scholars have been particularly interested in the macro/micro interface between public policies and intergenerational ties (Brandt & Deindl, 2013; Dykstra, 2018). Governments have passed laws in several countries specific to parents and grown children. Nevertheless, it is important to note that behaviors in intergenerational ties are not necessarily *caused* by public policies; rather in democracies, family values may *drive* those policies. For example, in the United States, where private health insurance is the norm (rather than publicly funded healthcare), a law in 2010, the Affordable Care Acti, required health insurance companies to allow parents to cover grown children up to age 26 under their own insurance policy (U.S. Department of Labor, 2018). This law recognized increased dependence of grown children on their parents that had occurred over the past 20 years (Arnett, 2009; Fingerman, 2017; Furstenberg, et al., 2010).

Dykstra (2018) provided an analysis of contact and support between adults and parents and government policies in European countries. For the past 20 years, scholars have conceptualized Northern Europe as a region of weak family ties and Southern Europe as a region of strong family ties (Albertini & Kohli, 2012). Related to these conceptions, Northern European government policies facilitate young adults' moving into their own abodes (Newman, 2013). Yet, the patterns are not straightforward with regard to government and family support: Northern European parents do support their grown children, sometimes more frequently that Southern European parents (albeit support is more intense and occurs in greater amounts in Southern European countries; Alberini & Kohli, 2012; Dykstra, 2018). Indeed, Brandt and Deindl (2013) examined the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement (SHARE) conducted in 13 European countries. They found that parents were more likely to support their grown children in countries that provided more public assistance to young adults, but the support was less intense (e.g., less money, less time).

Available social services also are associated with tasks that parents and grown children perform. For example, the U.S. government instigated TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) in the 1990s, requiring low income parents to engage in work-related activities at least 30 hours a week. Ho (2015) examined single low-income grandmothers from a large U.S. national study to understand the implications of this social welfare policy. With TANF, governmental supplements for childcare increased. As such, older mothers provided less childcare, but increased monetary support so the daughter could pay for childcare.

**Migration and support patterns**. As an offshoot of government policies, political disruptions, and civil unrest, rates of migration have increased steadily throughout the 21st century, with 258 million international migrants in 2017 (United Nations, 2018). Worldwide, the

age of international migrants has increased to a median age of 39.2 in 2017 (though age of

migrants has decreased in low income countries (United Nations, 2018). As such, many of these

migrants have intergenerational ties to living parents or even grown children who may or may

not accompany them (MS# 6725). Scholars have noted that in poorer countries, older generations

often are left behind while younger generations migrate to locales that are more prosperous.

      The implications of these migration trends are unclear. Countries such as Moldova

anticipate pension problems and difficulties providing social services, but it is not clear whether

older adults suffer due to absentee children (Cojocari & Cupcea, 2018). Research examining a

large national study of older adults in Mexico revealed that aging parents whose children had

migrated to the United States reported more loneliness, but their general well-being did not

suffer (Yahirun & Arenas, 2018), though a prior analysis with the same dataset had revealed that

women/mothers left behind did suffer poorer well-being (Silver, 2011).

      Nesteruk and Marks (2009) proposed that technologies may facilitate older generations'

involvement with a younger generation who immigrates, if the families are well-off. They

conducted a qualitative study of married Eastern European immigrants (e.g., Romania, Belarus,

Bosnia) in the United States who had a professional career. Well-off immigrants were able to pay

to return to Eastern Europe or for grandparents to visit the United States and used technology-

facilitated communication in the interim (e.g., Skype, phone calls). Yet immigrants with few

financial resources incur separation from family members still residing in the country-of-origin.

      A vast literature has also documented value differences in family between first- and

second-generation immigrant families with adolescents (Fuligni, 2001; Juang & Cookston,

2009). Researchers documented such differences in a large sample of immigrant family members

(aged 15 to 83) from Turkey, Morocco, Suriname, the Dutch Antilles to the Netherlands.

Consistent with prior research, first generation individuals reported stronger feelings of family solidarity than did second generation family members. Yet findings were conditioned on other factors: these differences were particularly strong among older adults and adults who espoused a religious background (particularly Islam; Merz, Ozeke-Kocabas, Oort, & Schuengel, 2009).

Research on migrant families has focused on generational differences adjusting to a new majority culture (Hardie & Seltzer, 2016). Within this framework, first generation immigrants generate tensions by clinging to the old culture, but the goal is akin to Star Trek's Borg, everyone should be assimilated. It may also be the case, however, that immigrant families influence the majority culture. Since 1990, the vast majority of immigrants to the US came from Latin American and Asian countries (Migration Policy Institute, 2016), regions which espouse strong ties and interdependence among generations. These trends in migration coincide with increased contact and closeness between generations in the majority US culture (Bengtson, 2001; Fingerman, 2016). It is possible that adults who migrated to the US shaped the majority culture. For example, adults in the majority culture may have envied their coworkers' engagement with family and adopted the desirable behaviors (much like sushi and cilantro in cooking).  Future research should address the bidirectionality of influence between migrant and majority culture, with attention to intergenerational ties.

**Within country mobility**. In addition to cross-national migration, within-country migration from rural to urban areas in countries such as China, Thailand, and Mexico also affects parents and grown children (Antman, 2010; Knodel, Kespichayawattana, Saengtienchai, & Wiwatwanich, 2010; Liang, 2016). China has witnessed the largest within-country migration, involving over 221 million individuals in 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2012). Traditional Confucian ideals endorsing commitment and support to parents have been

superseded by rapid economic development. Grown children often migrate to urban areas for

better employment opportunities and greater economic resources, leaving their parents behind,

and providing scant support from afar. A longitudinal study tracked over 1,000 Chinese aging

parents and their adult sons in rural China, and found that parents received more financial

support from sons who had migrated to urban areas than from non-migrant sons (Cong &

Silverstein, 2011). Yet, these parents received less practical help probably due to distance.

Furthermore, aging parents with migrant adult children reported more depressive symptoms than

aging parents whose children resided nearby (Guo, Aranda, & Silverstein, 2009).

An attempt to address this issue began soon after 2000, with rural families entering

formal Family Support Agreements – a contract that encourages adult children to provide

support to parents (Chou, 2010). China passed an "Elderly Rights Law" in 2013, requiring grown

children to visit their parents once a year (Kim, Cheng, Zarit, & Fingerman, 2015). Yet, in order

to visit aging parents, migrant children must apply for unpaid leave and spend money on

train/bus tickets, which may exacerbate the economic hardships in these families. As such, the

law appears to be scarcely enforced.

**Culture and intergenerational support**. Governments and policies partially reflect

cultural sentiments in democracies. Further, in the absence of government programs, cultural

norms direct support, such as grandparents who provide childcare throughout China (Chen &

Liu, 2011; Chen, Liu, Mair, 2011) and parents who pay for higher education in countries where

governments do not fully support higher education (Henretta, Wolf, van Voorhis, & Soldo,

2012).

These patterns of support are also conditioned on gender. A vast literature has shown that

daughters play a central role in the matrilineal Western cultures (Fingerman, Huo, & Birditt,

2018; Suitor & Pillemer, 2006; Suitor, Pillemer, & Sechrist, 2006). In Asian countries (e.g., China, Korea, Japan), by contrast, the dominant patrilineal norm renders parents more willing to help their sons and expect sons to reciprocate (Hu, 2017; Kim, Zarit, Fingerman, & Han, 2015). Societal changes in the past few decades (e.g., increased education and income in women) have facilitated the rise of daughters and daughter-in-laws in helping parents (Xie & Zhu, 2009). Yet, such changes have had little impact on parental decisions about downstream support. Hu (2017) found that daughters now provide more care to aging parents in China than do sons, but parental norms favoring sons still hold sway and parents provide more support to sons.

## Family Forms and Demographic Trends

Family forms in the United States have changed dramatically over the past two or three decades, but research on intergenerational ties has not kept pace (Seltzer, 2015). We consider three issues regarding intergenerational ties: (a) marital histories, (b) LGBTQ parents and grown children, and (c) estrangement between adults and parents. Notably, research has examined these patterns under a framework of causality or embeddedness. That is, as though changes in family forms have altered the nature of intergenerational ties. In some cases, that is likely true; for example, early life parental divorce contributes to later life weakening of the father/midlife child bond. Other aspects of family demography may reflect alterations in intergenerational bonds as much as cause them. For example, the legalization of same-sex marriage in many countries has altered family forms over the past 10 years, but in much of the population, shifts in parental attitudes towards having a gay child predate those legal changes. As such, we present these intergenerational phenomena in the context of demographic changes, but recognize bidirectional influences.

### Marital History and Parent/Offspring Ties

The likelihood of having married parents in adulthood has decreased over the past few decades. Many of today's young and midlife adults experienced parental divorce as children (Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014). Since 1990, the divorce rate for individuals aged 55 to 64 has doubled (from 5 to 11 per 1,000) and among adults over age 65 it has tripled (from 2 to 6 per 1,000; Wu, 2017).  Interestingly, rates of remarriage have been dropping over the past decade, particularly among divorced individuals with some college education (Payne, 2017). As such, the likelihood that parents will be unpartnered has increased over the past decade.

A recent examination of national data from the Health and Retirement Study revealed that over 40% of midlife adults and older couples with children were in stepfamilies (Lin, Brown, & Cupka, 2018). The patterns were complex, with more disadvantaged couples likely to be cohabiting and to have children from their prior marriages, whereas advantaged couples were more likely to be married and have joint children as well as stepchildren.

These variations in family structure have implications for intergenerational ties. Step family members are less likely to live near one another and are less likely to coreside (Seltzer et al., 2013) and parents in step families have less contact with their biological children than parents in intact families (Van der Pas & Tilburg, 2010). Older parents receive less support from stepchildren (Pezzin et al., 2008) and have poorer relationships with stepchildren (Ward et al., 2009) than with biological children.  When divorced fathers repartner, contact and support exchanges with adult children decrease even further (Noel-Miller, 2013). Nevertheless, Arranz and colleagues (2013) found that older adults had closer ties with stepchildren in relationships of longer duration and when older parents endorsed greater familism (van der Pas et al., 2013).

In addition, adult children's marital status and history also influence the parent child relationship. Never-married children have the most frequent contact and exchanges with their

parents (Fingerman et al., 2009; Kalmijn, 2016). Furthermore, compared to married children, divorced children have more frequent contact (Sarkisian et al., 2008) and are more likely to coreside with parents (Kalmijn, 2016).

Overall, marital status of both parents and grown children shape their intergenerational ties. These patterns likely will become even more complex as new generations of families are introduced and have their own complex marital histories.

**LGBTQ Adults and Intergenerational Ties**

Approximately 4% of adults in the U.S. identify as lesbian gay or bisexual and 0.6% are transgender (Flores et al., 2016; Gates, 2014). The past decade saw numerous shifts in laws and norms that affect these populations. Same sex marriage became legal in the U.S. in 2015 and was also recently legalized in many other countries (e.g., Argentina 2010, Australia 2017, Denmark, 2012, Germany, 2017, England 2013, New Zealand, 2013, Taiwan, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2017). Research has documented a general positive   shift in attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities (Russell & Fish, 2019). At the same time, discrimination is persistent, and indeed, many legal protections for LGBTQ individuals have been removed (Veldhuis et al., 2018).

An adult child identifying as LGBTQ may shape the tie with the parent. Some scholarship suggests LGBTQ adult children's ties to their parents are emotionally fraught. Early work on this topic focused on whether grown children had disclosed that they were in a same sex relationship to the parent (LaSala, 1998). More recent work has focused on situations where both parties are aware of the LGBTQ adult's identity. Parents report greater feelings of ambivalence toward their children who are LGBTQ (Reczek, 2016a) and may simultaneously worry about and love their LGBTQ children (Connidis, 2012).  Parental rejection is often associated with

underlying beliefs and values (Jones, Cox et al., 2013) and disapproval of LGBTQ identity is associated with greater parent child relationship strain (Reczek, 2016b).

Yet, it is not necessarily the case that LGBTQ adults have tense relationships with their parents. A majority of parents in 2015 indicated they would not be at all upset if their child were gay, and Reczek (2014) found that the majority of LGBTQ individuals report a supportive tie with at least one parent or parent-in-law. Research using the German Family Panel shows that LGBTQ adults' relationships with parents are similar to those of straight adult children. Although gay and lesbian adult children reported less closeness to both parents and less contact with fathers than straight children, there were no variations in geographic proximity or tensions with either parent (Hank et al., 2015). There is likely a great deal of variation in these ties, depending on parental beliefs and values as well as the broader cultural context.

Surprisingly, there is almost no research examining LGBTQ parents' relationships with their grown children. If the parent was open throughout the child's life (e.g., two same sex parents) or acknowledged their own sexual identity later, we do not know how that affected the relationship with the child.

**Estrangement and Loss of Intergenerational Ties**

The topic of estrangement or lacking ties to a parent or grown child has received increased attention over the past decade. The pervasiveness of estrangement depends on the definition. One study found that 62% of older mothers reported contact less than once a month with at least once grown children. Disparities in values typically differentiated that child from siblings (Gilligan, Suitor, & Pillemer, 2015). Estrangement of this type also may reflect structural factors associated with these value differences. For example, in some cases, LGBTQ adults may distance themselves from parents to cope with that disapproval (Reczek, 2016b).

Estrangement between LGBTQ adult children and their parents is not well-documented, though popular media and news accounts suggest that some parents reject LGBTQ youth at the time they disclose their identity. Additional research is needed to understand these patterns.

Using a more stringent criterion of little or no contact at all, Hartnett et al. (2018) examined a national sample of adults aged 25 to 32 who lacked a mother figure or lacked a father figure all together. Nearly 20% of young adults lack a father figure in the United States-- typically because their father was deceased, they never had a father figure, or the father was incarcerated. A smaller proportion lacked a mother figure (6%) primarily due to maternal death.

Loss of ties to a living parent or grown child also is confounded with race. Goldman and Cornwall (2018) examined two waves of data (2005/2006 and 2010/2011) from a large national study of older adults aged 57 to 85. They tracked whether parents named each grown child as a confidant across the 5 years. Black older adults and disadvantaged older adults reported more frequent contact with child confidants at Wave 1, but also were almost twice as likely as White older adults to exclude a child confidant from Wave 2 named at Wave 1. This instability in child confidants seemed to reflect residential moves by one or both parties (which may reflect financial difficulties and job loss).

The early loss of child or parent to death further reflects racial discrimination in the United States.  The past decade saw the rise of the *Black Lives Matter* movement founded in 2013 in response to lethal police violence against innocent Black young men. Early deaths in the Black community are widespread and may have profound implications for family members. Umberson and colleagues (2017) analyzed racial differences in two national datasets, the National Longitudinal Study of Youth and the Health and Retirement Study. Compared to non-Hispanic White Americans, Black Americans were twice as likely to enter young adulthood

having lost a parent to death, and more than twice as likely to experience loss of a child during

adulthood. These disparities in death rates generate extreme stress and health disadvantages

(Umberson, 2016).

## Future Research on Intergenerational Ties for the 2020s: What We Know (and Don't Know) About Ties between Adults & Parents

Family science has advanced an understanding of intergenerational ties regarding contact,

support, and feelings, and this review suggests bidirectional associations between these aspects

of relationships and historical and societal changes. Despite decades of head nodding to life

course and ecological theories, many studies on intergenerational ties examine: (a) behaviors and

qualities of this tie devoid of larger context, or (b) historical period with regard to the economy

or policy, but primarily with regard to tangible support (e.g., finances, coresidence, child care)

and without consideration of family values and social norms. Future research should continue to

examine intergenerational ties in the context of societal transformations.

It is possible that some aspects of the microcosm of family life for adults and parents

transcend historical events and societal disruptions; families navigate divorce, health problems,

and other life crises regardless of the broader social context. Yet, theories in family science

suggest that we should pay greater attention to technical, economic, policy, and demographic

changes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Elder, et al., 2003) and this review supports such

theory.

### Future Research Methods and Approaches to Understand Intergenerational Ties

Future research might also advance an understanding of intergenerational ties by

applying approaches and designs that have gained traction in the past decade. For example,

several studies have generated typologies of intergenerational ties (e.g., Latent Class Analysis) in

different countries including European nations, Israel and Korea (e.g., Dykstra & Fokkema, 2011; Kim et al.., 2016; Kim, Fingerman, Birditt & Zarit, 2016; Kim, et al., 2015; Silverstein, Gans, Lowenstein, Giarrusso, & Bengtson, 2010). Typological analyses capture the nuances and complexities of intergenerational relationships, and present combinations of relationship qualities or support patterns that differentiate families. Several of these analyses also have considered political and economic forces that may explain variability in family types. Future studies might consider the ICS Model to link changes in family classifications over time to macrolevel factors (e.g., economic, political) and microlevel or family level factors (e.g., changes in family members due to death or relationship dissolution, health problems, or individual life crises) that drive these changes.

Limited sources of data also prevent challenges for understanding parent/adult child ties. Many important contributions in the past decade regarding intergenerational ties relied on large national studies such as The National Longitudinal Study of Youth and the Health and Retirement Study (Hammersmith et al., 2018; Ho, 2015; Umberson et al., 2017). These studies include an impressive array of topics, but measurement of intergenerational ties is scant. As such, secondary analyses provide only a cursory understanding of the lived experience of adults and parents. Three longitudinal studies in the late 20th and early 21st-century focused specifically on intergenerational ties: Longitudinal Studies of Generations; Family Exchanges Study, and Within-Family Differences Study (for a description of these studies see: Suitor et al., 2018) and provided insights into a greater variety of experiences in this tie such as within family differences among siblings and daily experiences. A deeper understanding of family life in the next decade will require additional studies that delve indepth into intergenerational relationships, beyond the large scale national studies that capture a wide array of topics.

Qualitative research also disentangles nuances of relationships between adults and parents. Indeed, Sechrist and colleagues (2011) demonstrated that combining quantitative methods with qualitative analyses provided inferences into null findings regarding racial differences in mothers' preferences for different children. The qualitative data revealed that despite apparent racial similarity, Black mothers were more likely to emphasize interpersonal dynamics when they described more favored children. Likewise, qualitative data may provide insights into a wide array of other topics such as assumptions about the meaning of trends in family structure and societal events with regard to intergenerational ties. For example, the US has had a relatively high divorce rate for several decades, but we do not know whether divorce means the same thing in the context of ties to parents today as it did three decades ago. Likewise, the US has a growing maternal mortality rate, and qualitative research might inform an understanding of how the surviving parent/grandparent copes with these losses.

Further, a variety of observational, diary, and ecologically valid methodologies could be applied to intergenerational ties. The marital literature is rife with studies examining conversations, tracking daily moods and exchanges, and observational assessment (Gleason, Iida, Shrout, & Bolger, 2008; Neff & Karney, 2009; Williamson, Karney, & Bradbury, 2013). Given the potential importance of ties to parents and grown children, similar methods are needed to understand the dynamics of these relationships. For example, including Ecological Momentary Assessments via smart phones may shed light on how daily interactions and stress among parents and children are associated with daily well-being. Further, studies could use physiological monitoring to examine links between daily experiences in intergenerational ties and health outcomes such as physical activity, blood pressure, and heart rate as indicators of physiological reactivity to emotional experiences in these ties.

In sum, the past decade has ushered in technical changes that co-occurred with increased contact and dependency between generations. An economic downturn fostered greater dependency among generations. An uptick in coresidence between young adults and parents reflects economic circumstances, and also values and norms for such coresidence. Moreover, adults and their parents react to and support government policies by altering the distribution of their own resources. Political disruptions have instigated migration that separates generations across large geographic areas. Demographic factors regarding the constellation of family members, delayed marriage, and same sex marriage are reflected in qualities of ties between adults and parents in changing family contexts. In the next decade, we will need increasing research attention to adults and their parents in the context of societal changes and the new challenges that arise.

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Figure 1