Intergenerational Solidarity and the Structure of Adult Child–Parent Relationships in American Families[1]

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The authors investigate the structure of intergenerational cohesion by examining social-psychological, structural, and transactional aspects of adult child–parent relations. The authors use latent class analysis to develop a typology based on three underlying dimensions of intergenerational solidarity: affinity, opportunity structure, and function. The same five types are found for relations with both mothers and fathers: *tight-knit, sociable, intimate but distant, obligatory,* and *detached.* Relationship types are also differentiated by sociodemographic characteristics; relations with fathers and divorced parents tended to have the weakest cohesion. The authors conclude that adult intergenerational relationships in American families are structurally diverse but generally possess the potential to serve their members' needs.

INTRODUCTION

Recently there has been much scholarly debate concerning the decline of the contemporary American family (Popenoe 1988; Stacey 1990; Skolnick 1991; Bengtson, Rosenthal, and Burton 1995). This debate centers on whether the family has become ill equipped to handle the problems and dependencies—and to ensure the well-being—of its members. Proponents of the "family decline" hypothesis primarily focus on the negative conse-

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quences of changing family structure—resulting from divorce and single parenting—for the psychological, social, and economic well-being of dependent children (see Popenoe 1993). Further, they maintain that social norms legitimating the pursuit of individual over collective goals and the availability of alternative social groups for the satisfaction of basic human needs have fatally weakened the institution of the family as an agent of socialization and a source of nurturance (Lasch 1977).

When the "family decline" hypothesis has been extended to adult intergenerational relations, it has typically focused on the residential independence of elderly parents from their adult children as a sign that the family has lost its earlier function of serving the needs of older dependent members. The trend over the last half century for older people to live independently of their children (Thornton and Freedman 1985) has fueled pronouncements that the family has been stripped to little more than its nuclear functions of procreation and child rearing. In this view, the isolation of the nuclear family from extended relatives has effectively "split up" the generations (Popenoe 1993).

The argument that the family has lost its principal functions represents the completion of a circle in sociological theorizing about kinship relations. Almost 60 years ago, Ogburn (1938) wrote that six of the seven basic functions of the family had been transferred to other social institutions. Among these transferred functions is the family's role in protecting the welfare of its older members, including the provision of housing to dependent parents. In Ogburn's view, the decline of intergenerational coresidence signaled the decline in the function of the family as a source of old age security.

The theme of family decline is echoed in the writings of a later generation of structural-functional theorists who considered nuclear family isolation to be an inevitable fixture of an economically developed society (Parsons 1944; Goode 1970). From this perspective, adult children, if they are to maximize their occupational mobility, must distance themselves—both geographically and socially—from their parents or else face socioeconomic stagnation. Thus, to better meet the needs of a modern economy for a mobile and educated labor force, nuclear families *should* be isolated from their older relatives. Isolation from the extended family was considered a functional adaptation for the old as well as the young. For instance, the disengagement of the elderly from intergenerational family roles was thought to minimize the social disruption caused by their eventual physical decline and mortality (Cumming and Henry 1961).

However, by the 1960s empirical evidence suggested that reports of the demise of the extended family were premature. Studies of intergenerational family relations revealed that adult children were not isolated from their parents but frequently interacted and exchanged assistance

with them—even when separated by large geographic distances (Shanas 1979; Adams 1968; Sussman 1959; Rosenmayer and Kockeis 1963). Further, the strength of obligation and positive regard across generations was little diminished by geographic separation. In light of such evidence, family sociologists suggested that the extended family maintains cross-generational cohesion through modern communication and transportation technologies that allow contact in spite of centrifugal social forces that distance family members (Litwak 1960; Sussman and Burchinal 1962; Troll 1971; Bengtson and Black 1973). A distinctive feature of this type of extended family—labeled "modified extended"—is its capacity to respond to the needs of its members. For instance, even adult children who live far from their parents provide assistance to them when they become impaired (Dono et al. 1979; Sussman 1965).

A broader conceptualization of the contingencies inherent in family relations (as exemplified by the modified-extended family) has been termed the *latent kin matrix*—"a web of continually shifting linkages that provide the potential for activating and intensifying close kin relationships" (Riley 1983, p. 441). Increasing heterogeneity in intergenerational family structures—due to divorce/remarriage, the prolongation of intergenerational ties, and geographic dispersion—and the more voluntaristic, less contractual basis for maintaining intergenerational relations are taken as evidence for growing uncertainty in the function of kinship ties. An important feature of the latent matrix is that family members may remain dormant for long periods of time and only emerge as a resource when the need arises (Riley and Riley 1993). If family relationships alternately shift between latency and activity, then it is important to consider the latent *potential* of kinship relations—insofar as it triggers or enables manifest functions—before making pronouncements about the utility of the contemporary family. Indeed, research demonstrates that the strength of earlier emotional attachment to parents motivates adult children to enact supportive intergenerational roles later in the life course (Silverstein, Parrott, and Bengtson 1995; Whitbeck, Hoyt, and Huck 1994).

Thus, in this research, we stress the importance of considering latent forms of cohesion in assessing the strength and structure of intergenerational family ties. We define latent forms of cohesion as those factors that enable functional roles to emerge—broadly categorized as affinity and opportunity. Taken together with functional aspects of intergenerational relations (exchanges of assistance), we consider three dimensions of attachment that underlie intergenerational family relationships. Using data from a nationally representative sample, we examine diversity in the principal types of relationships between adult children and their parents based on their position on these dimensions. In the first stage of our analysis, we develop a typology of intergenerational relationships and examine the dis-

tribution of types in the population (with particular reference to differences between child-mother and child-father relations). In the second stage we test whether sociodemographic characteristics of parents and children differentiate the derived intergenerational types.

Intergenerational Solidarity

Building on theoretical and empirical advances in the social psychology of small group and family cohesion (Hechter 1987; Homans 1950; Heider 1958; Jansen 1952; Rogers and Sebald 1962; Hill and Hansen 1960; Nye and Rushing 1969), our previous research has codified six principal dimensions of solidarity between generations (Bengtson and Schrader 1982; Roberts, Richards, and Bengtson 1991). These dimensions comprise (1) structure (factors such as geographic distance that constrain or enhance interaction between family members), (2) association (frequency of social contact and shared activities between family members), (3) affect (feelings of emotional closeness, affirmation, and intimacy between family members), (4) consensus (actual or perceived agreement in opinions, values, and lifestyles between family members), (5) function (exchanges of instrumental and financial assistance and support between family members), and (6) norms (strength of obligation felt toward other family members).

We adopt the paradigm of intergenerational solidarity to guide our analysis for three reasons. First, the solidarity paradigm represents one of the few long-term efforts in family sociology to develop and test a theory of family integration (Mancini and Blieszner 1989). Indeed, the solidarity model has guided much of the research studying adult intergenerational relationships over the past quarter century (e.g., Atkinson, Kivett, and Campbell 1986; Lee, Netzer, and Coward 1994; Markides and Krause 1985; Rossi and Rossi 1990; Starrels et al. 1995; Rosenthal 1987). Second, measures based on the dimensions of solidarity comprise a valid and reliable tool for assessing the strength of intergenerational family bonds (Mangen, Bengtson, and Landry 1988; Bengtson and Roberts 1991). Third, and key to the present analysis, the construct of solidarity is sufficiently broad to include *latent* forms of solidarity—affectual, consensual, associational, and structural dimensions—in its conceptual range.

Despite desirable measurement properties, the dimensions of intergenerational solidarity are not simply additive and thus do not form a unitary construct (Atkinson et al. 1986; Roberts and Bengtson 1990). Consequently, we maintain that classification analysis (resulting in typologies) is better at depicting the complexity and contradictions of family life than are additive models (Marshall, Matthews, and Rosenthal 1993; Mangen 1995). Becker (1992, p. 210) has discussed this enterprise as requiring a reconceptualization of the dependent variable from one that can be ex-

pressed as "one number on a ruler" to one that is represented "as a complex of activities, itself seen as multidimensional." Classification schemes for describing diversity in the structures and functions of family relationships have been developed with respect to nuclear families (McCubbin and McCubbin 1988), sibling relations in later life (Gold, Woodbury, and George 1990), and transfers of support between parents and adult children (Eggebeen and Hogan 1990; Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg 1993; Silverstein and Litwak 1993; Marshall, Rosenthal, and Daciuk 1987) and grandparent-grandchild relations (Cherlin and Furstenberg 1986).

Especially relevant to the present research is work by Hogan et al. (1993), which used nationally representative data to develop an innovative typology based on exchanges of support between generations in American families. Their research found that more than half the U.S. adult population can be characterized as "low exchangers." However, without examining latent dimensions of intergenerational relationships (i.e., the potential for support) the degree of intergenerational cohesion may be underestimated. We expand on their effort by examining a wider range of dimensions that includes social, emotional, structural, as well as transactional aspects of adult parent–child relations.

Hypotheses

We propose that social forces have sufficiently diversified families such that affinity, opportunity, and function are no longer coincident in adult intergenerational relationships. Therefore, latent forms of solidarity may or may not accompany overt supportive behaviors across generations. Our theorizing maintains that three metadimensions characterize intergenerational family relations and, further, that they are more often discrepant than they are concordant. Thus, we propose our first two hypotheses.

HYPOTHESIS 1.—*The dimensions of intergenerational solidarity will cluster such that (*a*) emotional closeness and perceived agreement between generations characterize* affinity *in intergenerational relationships, (*b*) frequency of contact and residential propinquity between generations characterize* opportunity structure *in intergenerational relationships, and (*c*) flows of instrumental assistance between generations characterize* functional exchange *in intergenerational relationships.*

HYPOTHESIS 2.—*Adult intergenerational relations will be characterized by types that are congruent on affinity, opportunity, and function and by types that are incongruent on those factors, and the majority of relationships will be incongruent.*

Further, we expect that there are important sources of diversity in the structure of adult child–parent relations. We focus on gender, divorce, and age as key factors in this regard because research suggests that these

factors structure family life in important ways. Given the matrilineal tilt often found in family relations (Hagestad 1986; Rossi 1984; Rossi 1993; Spitze and Logan 1989), we expect that relations of adult children with mothers will reflect different profiles based on the three metadimensions of solidarity than will their relations with fathers. Further, given the unique strengths of the mother-daughter bond in terms of greater lifelong contact and exchanges of functional assistance, we also expect that daughters and sons will have qualitatively different types of relations with mothers. We predict that daughters and mothers have more cohesive intergenerational relations than do sons and fathers. Thus, we derive our third set of hypotheses.

HYPOTHESIS 3.—*Adult children will be more integrated (based on congruent and incongruent combinations of affinity, opportunity structure, and functional exchange) with mothers than with fathers. Daughters will be more likely than sons to be integrated with parents, and particularly with mothers.*

Of particular concern in the "decline of family" debate is the role that divorce plays in fracturing intergenerational ties. Clearly, divorce and remarriage have created complex family structures, often with ambiguous and sometimes tenuous lines of responsibility across generations. Further, research documents that divorced fathers have weaker emotional attachment with their adult children and greater parental role strain compared to married fathers (Bumpass 1990). A persuasive explanation of this phenomenon is that custody decisions serve to distance children physically from their divorced fathers during early developmental stages of the family (Amato, Rezac, and Booth 1995; Umberson 1992; Umberson and Williams 1993; White 1994).

Therefore, we propose our fourth hypothesis with respect to parental divorce.

HYPOTHESIS 4.—*Adult children will be less integrated (based on congruent and incongruent combinations of affinity, opportunity structure, and functional exchange) with divorced parents than with married parents. Further, this difference will be more pronounced in relations with fathers than in relations with mothers.*

Finally, we turn our attention to the influence of age. The longevity revolution of the 20th century has enhanced the probability that parents and children cosurvive each other into old and middle age, respectively (Uhlenberg 1980). The increase in the duration of shared lives between adult generations has raised the intriguing possibility that later-life intergenerational relationships will be characterized by greater solidarity as the needs of older parents become more acute. In such a pattern, solidarity *declines* from young adulthood to early middle age as adult children adopt family and work roles that cause them to be more autonomous from their

parents but *increases* after middle age as the frailty and dependency of very old parents place children in supportive intergenerational roles. Therefore, we propose that there are life-cycle variations in intergenerational solidarity such that in early adulthood children will distance themselves from parents as their concerns shift toward family formation and career and later establish more integrated relationships with their parents (see Rosow 1985). Therefore we make our fifth hypothesis with respect to age of child.

HYPOTHESIS 5.—*Adult children will be less integrated with their parents following young adulthood (based on congruent and incongruent combinations of affinity, opportunity structure, and functional exchange), but this decline will moderate as children pass beyond middle age.*

In testing our hypotheses, we are guided by the following research questions: How many types are needed to represent adequately the diverse forms of adult intergenerational relationships in American society? How can these types best be characterized, and what is their representation in the population? Considering gender differences, do the same types emerge for relations of adult children with mothers as for relations with fathers? If so, are there differences in the distribution of types between the two kinds of relationships? Are demographic characteristics of adult children and parents associated with the type of relationship they are likely to have with each other?

METHOD

Sample

We address the research questions raised above using data from a nationally representative survey undertaken by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) in collaboration with a research team from Harvard University and the University of Southern California. The survey involved a sample of 1,500 adults ages 18–90 years old from randomly selected households in the 48 contiguous states, who were interviewed by telephone in July and August of 1990. One resident from each contacted household was randomly selected for interview; residents of institutions and group quarters were not part of the sampling frame. The average interview lasted 35 minutes. The main purpose of the survey was to address issues of cross-generational relationships in American society. Sample weights are used in subsequent analyses to adjust for differences in the probability of selection within contacted households (for details, see Bengtson and Harootyan [1994]).

Since our analysis focuses solely on the relations of adult children who live apart from their parents, we exclude the 3.8% of adult children in the sample who live with their mothers and 1.5% who live with their

TABLE 1

Analytic Variables for Adult Children

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
Gender:			
Female	.60	.49	0–1
(Male)	(.40)		
Race/ethnicity:			
Black	.07	.26	0–1
Hispanic	.05	.23	0–1
(White)	(.88)		
Marital status:			
Divorced or separated	.15	.36	0–1
Never married	.22	.41	0–1
(Married)	(.43)		
Missing income:			
Missing	.06	.24	0–1
(Valid)	(.94)		
Home ownership:			
Owns home	.58	.49	0–1
(Does not own home)	(.42)		
Parent's marital status:			
Divorced or separated	.19	.39	0–1
Widowed	.33	.47	0–1
(Married)	(.48)		
Age in years	35.32	10.50	21–72.5
Household income in thousands of dollars	39.06	28.56	5–150
Log of household income in thousands of dollars	3.40	.78	1.61–5.01

Note.—All variables refer to characteristics of the adult child, unless otherwise indicated. Reference category for dichotomous variables is noted in parentheses. $N = 971$.

fathers. Thus, the operational sample consists of 971 adult children who have at least one surviving noncoresident parent. Of these, 61% have two living parents, 28% have only a living mother, and 11% have only a living father. Adult children in the sample evaluated a total of 1,564 parental relations, 864 (55%) with mothers and 700 (45%) with fathers. Characteristics of the operational sample are described in table 1.

Measures of Intergenerational Solidarity

Adult children in the sample were asked a series of questions about the nature of their relationship with each surviving biological parent. These questions, reflecting five of the six dimensions of intergenerational solidarity, form the building blocks of our typology. We note that normative solidarity is not considered in the typology because it is measured in the

AARP survey as a *generalized* sense of responsibility for older parents and not as the responsibility felt by each respondent for his or her own parents.

Six dichotomous indicators are used to represent the dimensions of intergenerational solidarity considered in the analysis: frequency of contact, emotional closeness, similarity of opinions, geographic proximity, receiving instrumental assistance, and providing instrumental assistance. It is important to note that functional solidarity is measured as a bidirectional flow of assistance since adult children tend to rely on parents for help as much (if not more) than they provide help *to* them (Mutran and Reitzes 1984; Morgan, Schuster, and Butler 1991). In order to capture more widely the presence of functional assistance between generations, our measures of functional solidarity are inclusive with respect to the types of instrumental activities considered and the time frame in which they were exchanged. The survey questions and original response categories for the indicators can be found in the appendix.

In order to reduce sparseness in the cross-classification table, we collapse three indicators (contact, closeness, and opinions) from polytomous scales into dichotomous scores. The thresholds used for collapsing were chosen on the basis of findings from previous research using this data set (see Lawton, Silverstein, and Bengtson 1994). The remaining three indicators (proximity, receiving assistance, and providing assistance) are measured in the survey with dichotomous response categories. The six manifest indicators of the dimensions of intergenerational solidarity and their distributions are described in table 2. It should be noted that we treat relationships with mothers and relationships with fathers as independent analytic units. Dependence of measures across parental relationships (among children with married parents) is of minor concern since our purpose is to describe the gross attributes of each relationship. Comparing child-mother and child-father relationships reveals that, on each of the six measures of solidarity, relationships with mothers are more cohesive than those with fathers. The most striking gender difference is with respect to affectual solidarity, with 73% feeling "very close" to their mothers compared to 57% feeling similarly close to their fathers.

Latent Class Analysis

Since we are proposing that intergenerational family relations can be characterized as a circumscribed set of "ideal" types that are empirically manifested by combinations of observed variables, we use latent class analysis (LCA) to examine the typological structure underlying intergenerational solidarity. LCA is a statistical method that allows researchers to test whether a set of unobserved, or latent, classes accounts for the association

TABLE 2

Distribution of Items Measuring Dimensions of Intergenerational Solidarity

Indicator of Solidarity	Relations with Mothers		Relations with Fathers	
	N	%	*N*	%
Emotional closeness:				
Very close	655	72.9	405	57.0
Somewhat close or not close	243	27.1	306	43.0
Similarity of opinions:				
Very or somewhat similar	622	69.3	428	60.2
Very or somewhat different	276	30.7	283	39.8
Geographic distance:				
Lives within one hour	509	58.9	384	54.9
Lives more than one hour away	355	41.1	316	45.1
Contact:				
At least once a week	623	69.4	417	58.6
Less than once a week	275	30.6	294	41.4
Provides instrumental assistance:				
Yes	318	35.4	205	28.8
No	580	64.6	506	71.2
Receives instrumental assistance:				
Yes	292	32.5	195	27.4
No	606	67.5	516	72.6

among cross-classified categorical variables (Clogg and Goodman 1984; Lazarsfeld and Henry 1968; McCutcheon 1987). A key assumption of LCA is that membership in a latent class is the true source of covariation among measured variables. Thus, a given set of latent classes is acceptable to the extent that it minimizes the *within-class* association among observed indicators—the assumption of local or conditional independence. This property underlies a statistical test of whether a theoretical model adequately describes the observed data and provides a basis for comparing alternative theoretical specifications.

Formally, the latent class model is defined by latent variable X with T categories (corresponding to latent types of intergenerational relations) that are described by variables A, B, and C, whose levels are indexed by i, j, and k respectively. The probability of membership in an observed cell (ijk) is defined as follows:

$$\Pi_{ijk} = \sum_{T=1}^{T} \Pi_X(t) \prod_{A|X=t}(i) \Pi_{B|X=t}(j) \Pi_{C|X=t}(k),$$

where $\pi_X(t)$ is the probability that $X = t$, $\pi_{A|X=t}(i)$ is the conditional probability that item A takes on level i, given that latent variable X is at level t; the other conditional probabilities are defined similarly.

The cross-classification table of the six dichotomous indicators of solidarity results in 64 response patterns, which are analyzed for latent class structure using the MLLSA program as adapted by Eliason (1990). Two kinds of parameters are estimated for each model tested: conditional probabilities and latent class probabilities. Conditional probabilities reflect the distribution of observed indicators for members of each latent class. These estimates are analogous to factor loadings in that they represent the association between observed and latent variables and are useful for characterizing the nature of the latent classes. Latent class probabilities signify the distribution of members *across* types, making it useful for describing the prevalence of types within a population and for comparing prevalence between subpopulations.

The adequacy of each model tested is assessed using several goodness-of-fit measures: the likelihood ratio chi-square test statistic (L^2), the Baysian informal criterion (BIC) statistic, and the index of dissimilarity (ID). The L^2 tests for statistically significant discrepancies between a theoretical model and the observed data, providing a basis for judging the adequacy of a given specification through statistical inference. The BIC statistic (Raftery 1986) is useful when selecting the best fitting model *among* reasonable but competing models, especially when choosing among nonnested models and where large sample size causes otherwise acceptable models to be rejected based on the L^2. The most desirable property of the BIC is that, compared to the L^2, it is less likely to disadvantage more parsimonious models—those that have fewer latent classes and estimate fewer parameters—in the selection process. The ID is a goodness-of-fit indicator not directly tied to the chi-squared distribution and signifies the percentage of cases misallocated by the theoretical model (Clogg 1995).

Measurement Model of Intergenerational Types

In identifying types of intergenerational relationships, we use LCA in an exploratory fashion with no a priori assumptions about the number or nature of the classes (Goodman 1974). We test, separately for child-mother and child-father relations, a series of models that successively add a latent class until an acceptable fit to the data is reached. We base our selection of the "best" model on the goodness-of-fit indicators discussed earlier. Minimally, this model fits the observed data based on the L^2; competition among models that meet this first criterion is resolved by searching first for the lowest BIC and then the lowest ID.

A summary of the goodness-of-fit statistics for six models is shown in

table 3 for relations with mothers and with fathers. The first model is the one-class or independence model, which assumes that there are no associations among the six manifest indicators. Not surprisingly, this model fits the data poorly, based on the L^2, for both kinds of relations. The two-, three-, and four-class models also do not fit the data well. The five-class model exhibits a marginally good fit to the observed data for both relations with mothers and relations with fathers. While the six-class model appears to be superior to the five-class model based solely on the L^2 statistics, the much lower BIC statistics of the latter suggest that the five-class model is preferable. The ID for the five-class models demonstrates reasonable misclassification rates of 7% and 8% for relations with mothers and fathers, respectively. Therefore, we accept the five-class model as that which best fits the data, with confidence in our selection further strengthened by the concordance of evidence across the two types of parental relationships.

Before interpreting the five latent classes, we examined whether the five-class model similarly characterizes relations with mothers and relations with fathers. To do this we compared the L^2 fit of a model where equality restrictions are imposed on conditional probabilities across parent-groups to the L^2 fit of a model where the conditional probabilities are free to vary across parent-groups. Table 4 shows that the decrement in fit due to adding equality constraints is not statistically significant ($P = .977$), indicating that little fit to the data is lost by accepting the equivalence model. The finding that child-mother and child-father relationships have both the same number of latent classes *and* a common underlying measurement structure suggests that the five classes can be similarly labeled and meaningfully contrasted between the two sets of parental relationships.

The task of labeling the latent classes requires inspection of the conditional probabilities associated with the manifest indicators within each class, as shown in table 5 (probabilities greater than .6 are shown indicated with an asterisk). Using the pattern of these probabilities, we have assigned the labels defined in table 6 to describe the latent classes.

It is important to note that, consistent with our expectations, the conditional probabilities associated with the six manifest indicators cluster into three groups of two dimensions each. One pair, comprising emotional closeness and consensus of opinions, reflects *affinity* between the generations. A second pair is comprised of geographic proximity and frequency of contact, reflecting the *opportunity structure* of the relationship—the necessary condition for exchange behavior. A third pair, comprised of providing and receiving assistance, reflects *functional exchange* between the generations. These pairings suggest that greater parsimony is achieved by modeling the structure of intergenerational solidarity with three, rather than six, underlying dimensions.

TABLE 3

LATENT CLASS MODELS OF INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS USING SIX DICHOTOMOUS INDICATORS OF SOLIDARITY

Unrestricted Heterogeneous Models	Relations with Mothers					Relations with Fathers				
	L^2	*df*	*P*	BIC	ID	L^2	*df*	*P*	BIC	ID
One-class model (complete independence)	631.65	57	.000	246.33	.304	647.93	57	.000	274.58	.364
Two-class model	219.22	50	.000	−118.78	.194	248.80	50	.000	−78.70	.239
Three-class model	171.52	43	.000	−119.16	.155	133.14	43	.000	−148.51	.156
Four-class model	89.52	36	.000	−153.84	.090	79.61	36	.000	−156.19	.106
Five-class model	45.76	29	.025	−150.28	.068	43.75	29	.039	−146.20	.080
Six-class model	32.96	22	.062	−115.76	.046	27.94	22	.178	−116.16	.049

NOTE.—N = 864 for relations with mothers; N = 700 for relations with fathers.

TABLE 4

Tests of Equivalence of Latent Class Parameters for Five-Class Model between Child-Mother and Child-Father Relations

Across-Parent Equality Restrictions	ΔL^2	Δdf	P
Conditional probabilities	16.58	30	.977
Latent class probabilities	10.10	4	.039

Note.—The difference in the likelihood ratio between a five-class two-group model with no restrictions on parameter estimates and the same model with equality restrictions across parental groups is indicated by ΔL^2. The difference in the degrees of freedom between unrestricted and restricted models is indicated by Δdf.

The five derived classes typify various sociological models of contemporary families. The *tight-knit* class is most characteristic of the traditional (or corporate) extended family, while the *detached* class is most emblematic of the isolated extended family (Parsons 1944). Relationships in the other three classes are connected on some but not all the dimensions of solidarity, representing "variegated" forms of child-parent relations. The *sociable* and *intimate but distant* types are forms of the modified extended family in which functional exchange is absent, but where high levels of affinity may hold the potential for future exchange (Rosenmayer 1968; Litwak 1985). Yet, in intimate-but-distant relations, goodwill between the generations translates neither into action nor interaction. That these two types of relations are functionally independent, in spite of being otherwise integrated, may be related to the lack of *need,* or a preference for intergenerational autonomy. Interestingly, we also found evidence for an *obligatory* type of extended family that is structurally connected and has an average level of functional exchange but lacks strong positive sentiment. We attribute the structural and functional integration of generations in the absence of affinity to a sense of duty on the part of the adult child.

Distribution of Intergenerational Types and Gender of Parent

Next we examine whether the distribution of latent types in the population is the same for relations with mothers and relations with fathers. The distributions can be seen by examining latent class probabilities, which are shown separately for child-mother and child-father relationships in table 5. Latent class probabilities are reported in unweighted and weighted form; applying weights insures that the sample reflects a national profile on key demographic characteristics.

TABLE 5

LATENT CLASS COEFFICIENTS FOR FIVE-CLASS/TWO-GROUP MODEL OF ADULT CHILD–PARENT RELATIONS WITH ACROSS-PARENT EQUALITY RESTRICTIONS ON CONDITIONAL PROBABILITIES

Indicator of Solidarity	Tight-Knit	Sociable	Intimate but Distant	Obligatory	Detached
Emotional closeness:					
Very close	.974*	.982*	.790*	.059	.042
Somewhat or not close	.026	.018	.210	.941*	.958*
Similarity of opinions:					
Very or somewhat similar	.764*	.760*	.874*	.396	.245
Very or somewhat different	.236	.240	.126	.604*	.755*
Geographic distance:					
Lives within one hour	.893*	.656*	.058	.839*	.202
Lives more than one hour away	.107	.344	.942*	.161	.798*
Contact:					
At least once a week	.976*	.894*	.205	.723*	.077
Less than once a week	.024	.106	.795*	.277	.923*
Provides instrumental assistance:					
Yes	.685*	.132	.191	.373	.032
No	.315	.868*	.809*	.627*	.968*
Receives instrumental assistance:					
Yes	.675*	.019	.191	.375	.032
No	.325	.981*	.809*	.625*	.968*
Latent class probabilities:					
Relations with mothers:					
Unweighted	.319	.266	.198	.148	.068
Weighted	.311	.277	.187	.159	.065
Relations with fathers:					
Unweighted	.216	.237	.136	.164	.247
Weighted	.204	.230	.137	.161	.268

* Conditional probabilities > .6.

TABLE 6

Latent Classes of Intergenerational Relations

Class	Definition
Tight-knit	Adult children are engaged with their parents based on all six indicators of solidarity.
Sociable	Adult children are engaged with their parents based on geographic proximity, frequency of contact, emotional closeness, and similarity of opinions but *not* based on providing assistance and receiving assistance.
Obligatory	Adult children are engaged with their parents based on geographic proximity, and frequency of contact but *not* based on emotional closeness and similarity of opinions. While only about one-third of children in this class are engaged in providing and receiving assistance, this proportion is slightly higher than that for the sample as a whole.
Intimate but distant	Adult children are engaged with their parents on emotional closeness and similarity of opinions but *not* based on geographic proximity, frequency of contact, providing assistance, and receiving assistance.
Detached	Adult children are *not* engaged with their parents based on any of the six indicators of solidarity.

We formally test the hypothesis that the distributions between child-mother and child-father relationships are different by comparing the fit of a model where latent class probabilities (unweighted) are restricted to be equal between groups to a model where the probabilities are free to vary between groups. As seen in table 4, equality restrictions placed on latent class probabilities result in a statistically significant decline in model fit to the data ($P = .039$), suggesting that the distribution of latent classes are best estimated independently. Thus, we can conclude that intergenerational relationships of adult children are differently parsed among the five types depending on whether the parent is a mother or a father.

Since unweighted and weighted probabilities are not substantially different, we discuss only the weighted latent class probabilities when contrasting the prevalence of each type by gender of parent. For adult child–

mother relations, the most common type is the tight-knit, with nearly one in three (31%) of such relations falling into this, the most cohesive group. The next most common type, consisting of more than one-quarter (28%) of adult child–mother relations, is the sociable, followed by the intimate but distant (19%), the obligatory (16%), and last, the detached (7%).

Where detached relations are relatively rare among child-mother relations, they are the most prevalent among adult child–father relations, comprising more than one-quarter (27%) of all such relations. The sociable is the next most common child-father type (23%), followed by the tight-knit (20%), the obligatory (16%) and the intimate but distant (14%).

The most striking contrast between the two distributions is that the detached type is *least* common among child-mother relations and *most* common among child-father relations. Additionally, child-mother relations are more likely than child-father relations to be either tight-knit, sociable, and intimate but distant and less likely to be obligatory. Taken together, these gender-related patterns demonstrate that adult intergenerational solidarity is stronger with mothers than with fathers.

Differentiating among Types of Intergenerational Relations

Method.—In this section we examine whether characteristics of adult children and parents are associated with the five latent classes characterizing their relationships. The dependent variables are the set of probabilities that children with response pattern *ijklmn* (corresponding to the 64 patterns for each parental relation) derive from latent class *t,* where *t* refers to the range of five latent classes (Lazarsfeld and Henry 1968; Clogg 1995). We use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to examine—by gender of parent—how sociodemographic characteristics are associated with the probability of membership in each of the five latent classes.

Independent variables.—While our analysis focuses on the effects of gender and age of child and marital status of parent on the structure of parent-child relations, other factors known to influence intergenerational family relations, such as socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, and having a dependent child, are also controlled in multivariate equations. Independent variables include the following sociodemographic variables corresponding to characteristics of adult children: age in years and the natural log of total household income in thousands of dollars (cases with missing values are assigned to the mean value of logged income). The following dummy variables describing adult children are also tested (reference group indicated in parentheses): female (male), African-American and Hispanic (non-Hispanic whites), divorced/separated and the never married (married), missing income (valid income), owns home (does not own home), and has a dependent child in the household (does not have

such a child). In addition, marital status of the parent is coded as two dummy variables indicating that the parent is divorced/separated from the biological parent of the child or widowed (married to biological parent). The distribution of the independent variables is found in table 1.

In addition to age of adult child, we include age squared to test for curvilinear effects of child's age on the probability of class membership (the mean is subtracted from age to reduce colinearity between those two variables). We base this test on our hypothesis that the probability of having a more cohesive type of intergenerational relationship follows a U-shaped pattern over the life course.

Relations with mothers.—Equations in table 7 show parameter estimates predicting the types of relationships that adult children have with their mothers. Turning first to the effects of child's gender, we note that, consistent with our expectations, daughters are more likely than sons to have a tight-knit relationship with their mothers and are less likely than sons to have an obligatory relationship.

Parental marital status is also related to the type of relationship adult children are likely to have with their mothers. Marital disruption in the parental generation appears to weaken the strength of the maternal bond. Adult children are more likely to have obligatory and detached relations with divorced/separated mothers than they are with married mothers. In addition children have a higher probability of having obligatory relationships with widowed than with married mothers.

Age has a linear effect on the three types of relationships with mothers. Older adult children are less likely than younger adult children to have tight-knit relations and more likely than younger children to have sociable and detached relationships with mothers. However, there are no significant quadratic effects of age in these equations, providing little evidence for a resurgence in relationship quality with the aging of the child.

Divorced children are less likely than married children to have intimate but distant relations. Otherwise, marital status of child exerts little influence on relationship qualities.

Race and ethnicity variables are associated with types of maternal relationships. Both blacks and Hispanics are less likely than non-Hispanic whites to have obligatory relationships with their mothers, and blacks are less likely than whites to have detached relationships. This suggests that intergenerational contact and exchange between generations in minority families may be based more on altruistic than on obligatory or utilitarian motivations—affirming the cohesive strength traditionally ascribed to black and Hispanic families (McAdoo 1981; Burton 1996) and the matrifocal tilt of intergenerational relations in such families (Taylor and Chatters 1991).

TABLE 7

Regression Equations Predicting Probability that Adult Child–Mother Relationships are Characterized by Each of Five Latent Classes

Independent Variable	Tight-Knit	Sociable	Intimate but Distant	Obligatory	Detached
Female[a]	.088***	−.027	.003	−.062**	−.004
Mother divorced/separated[b]	−.057	−.032	−.053	.077**	.063***
Mother widowed[b]	−.050	.015	−.009	.050*	−.004
Age-mean	−.006**	.003*	.002	−.001	.002*
$(\text{Age-mean})^2$	.00014	−.000004	.00011	.00009	−.00008
Divorced/separated[c]	−.021	.037	−.072*	.022	.031
Never married[c]	−.031	.001	.013	.002	.013
Black[d]	.081	.043	.066	−.132***	−.051*
Hispanic[d]	.089	.058	−.019	−.090*	−.035
Log of income	−.046*	.014	.021	.001	.008
Missing income[e]	−.019	.017	.001	−.008	.011
Owns home[f]	.063*	.061*	−.102***	.030	−.046**
Has child in household[g]	.046	−.035	−.048*	.023	.014
Intercept	.384***	.170**	.247***	.126*	.067
R^2	.058	.044	.035	.040	.038

[a] Reference group is male.
[b] Reference group is married.
[c] Reference group is mother married.
[d] Reference group is white non-Hispanic.
[e] Reference group is valid income.
[f] Reference group is does not own home.
[g] Reference group is no child in household.
* $P < .05$.
** $P < .01$.
*** $P < .001$.

Income is inversely associated with having tight-knit relationships with mothers. That adult children with lower income have a greater likelihood of having this, the most cohesive type of relationship, is consistent with research showing stronger family orientations among lower- and working-class individuals (Kulis 1991). Homeownership is associated with four out of the five types of maternal relationships. Homeowners are more likely than those who rent to have tight-knit and sociable types of relations and less likely to be intimate but distant or detached. Homeownership may reflect the preference of adult children to purchase a home based on its proximity to parents with whom they desire to have regular interaction and exchanges (O'Bryant 1983).

Respondents who have at least one dependent child in the household have a significantly lower probability of being intimate but distant with their mothers. Given inequality in child-rearing duties between men and women, we also tested for interactions between gender of adult child and having a dependent child in the household. Significant effects were found for predicting the probability of having tight-knit relations with mothers. Confirming our expectation, the interaction term (not shown) indicates that when a dependent child is in the household, daughters are more likely than sons to have tight-knit relationships with mothers. It is likely that mothers are providing services that help their daughters cope with the demands of raising children.

Relations with fathers.—The equations in table 8 show parameter estimates predicting the probability of having each of the five types of relationships with fathers. Gender of child does not significantly predict membership in any of the latent classes. However, father's marital status is an important predictor of relationship type. Adult children are less likely to have tight-knit, sociable, and intimate-but-distant relationships and are more likely to have detached relationships with divorced/separated fathers than with married fathers; indeed, relations with divorced fathers are 33% more likely to be detached. In addition, relations with widowed fathers tend less to be tight-knit and tend more to be detached compared to relations with married fathers.

Age is also a significant predictor of paternal relationship types. As with relations with mothers, older children are less likely than younger children to have tight-knit relations with fathers and more likely to have sociable and detached relations with them. The quadratic age-squared term is significant in predicting detached relationships, signifying a curvilinear pattern with age. Further analyses of adjusted predicted values reveal that the probability of being detached from fathers is low in young adulthood (.13 at 21 years old), increases with age, peaking in middle age (.27 at 43 years old), after which it begins to decline as the adult child reaches old age (.13 at 68 years old).

TABLE 8

Regression Equations Predicting Probability that Adult Child–Father Relationships are Characterized by Each of Five Latent Classes

Independent Variable	Tight-Knit	Sociable	Intimate but Distant	Obligatory	Detached
Female[a]	−.024	.037	−.020	−.014	.020
Father divorced/separated[b]	−.186***	−.134***	−.053*	.038	.335***
Father widowed[b]	−.202***	−.053	−.002	.070	.187***
Age-mean	−.006**	.003*	.001	−.002	.006**
$(\text{Age-mean})^2$	.00022	.00004	.00001	.00001	−.00027*
Divorced/separated[c]	.011	.008	.030	−.031	−.017
Never married[c]	−.048	.033	−.039	.010	.044
Black[d]	−.018	.045	.033	−.055	−.005
Hispanic[d]	.008	−.066	−.018	.030	.046
Log of income	−.028	−.012	.031*	−.008	.017
Missing income[e]	−.015	.048	−.046	.012	.002
Owns home[f]	.112***	.087**	−.055*	−.022	−.122***
Has child in household[g]	.022	−.021	−.039	.014	.023
Intercept	.316***	.208**	.139*	.214**	.123
R^2	.112	.089	.026	.018	.207

[a] Reference group is male.
[b] Reference group is married.
[c] Reference group is father married.
[d] Reference group is white non-Hispanic.
[e] Reference group is valid income.
[f] Reference group is does not own home.
[g] Reference group is no child in household.
* $P < .05$.
** $P < .01$.
*** $P < .001$.

Neither race/ethnicity nor child's marital status predict child-father type. However, higher income is associated with a greater probability of being intimate but distant with fathers. This is consistent with the greater geographical dispersion and lower affiliation with extended family typically found among those with higher social class.

In addition, homeownership differentiates child-father relations. As in the analysis of child-mother relations, owning a home is associated with a higher probability of having tight-knit and sociable relations with fathers and a lower probability of having intimate-but-distant and detached relations with them. However, having a dependent child in the household does not predict type of relationship with fathers nor does this variable significantly interact with adult child's gender.

DISCUSSION

We began this article by suggesting that contemporary social commentaries that paint the family as an institution in decline have used too broad a brush to characterize intergenerational family relationships. Portrayals of the family solely in terms of lost functions fail to capture the diversity, as well as the latent potential, embedded in such relationships.Using the conceptual model of intergenerational solidarity as a theoretical guide, we have identified five underlying types of intergenerational family relationships. In doing so we have attempted to advance the development of measurement models in the study of family relations. In support of our first hypothesis, we have shown that three metadimensions—comprising affinity, structure, and function—more parsimoniously describe the ways that families are integrated across generations than the original six dimensions of solidarity (Bengtson and Roberts 1991).

Several aspects of the resulting typology are noteworthy in light of the current decline-of-family debate. First, none of the types constitute a majority of relationships or represent a "typical" relationship: for example, among child-mother relations, the most common type—the tight-knit—comprises less than one-third of total relations, while for child-father relations the most common type—the detached—comprises about one-quarter of total relations. Given the heterogeneity of types, we conclude that it is misleading to generalize about a "modal" type of intergenerational family, as is often done on both sides of the debate.

Second, the prevalence of "variegated" types (i.e., those other than tight-knit and detached) represent a majority of relations with mothers (62%) and with fathers (53%), supporting our second hypothesis. Several of the "variegated" types in particular—the sociable and the intimate but distant—evoke earlier sociological models of intergenerational kinship struc-

tures, collectively labeled "modified-extended," where family members are geographically dispersed but not necessarily emotionally or socially distanced. While functional exchanges are less prominent in these types of families, a reservoir of latent solidarity may motivate or enable the exchange of assistance should it be needed in the future.

There are also important sources of heterogeneity in the distribution of types with respect to gender, marital status, and age. Most notable is the importance of parents' gender in structuring intergenerational relationships. In support of our third set of hypotheses, we found a wide schism in the types of relations that adult children maintain with their mothers and with their fathers. Indeed, almost four times as many children are detached from their fathers as from their mothers, supporting claims that it is the "disappearance of fathers" that is responsible for family decline (Furstenberg and Nord 1985). It is likely that the weakness of child-father relations in adulthood has its antecedents in early family socialization, including gender-specific allocation of nurturing roles to women and in custody decisions that favor mothers over fathers (Hagestad 1986; Rossi 1984; Rossi 1993).

The gender of the adult child plays less a role than predicted by our third set of hypotheses. While daughters are more likely to be tight-knit and less likely to have obligatory relations with mothers, there are no differences between daughters and sons in relations with fathers. These results suggest that there is a unique salience to the mother-daughter bond and that paternal relations are relatively weak with both sons and daughters.

Our fourth hypothesis concerning the effects of marital disruption of parents on intergenerational relations is supported. The divorce or separation of parents weakens intergenerational relations with both mothers and fathers, as it is positively associated with each relationship being detached, and, for fathers, it is also inversely associated with having a relationship characterized by strong affinity. Thus, as predicted, the magnitude of the effects of marital disruption are more pronounced in relations with fathers than in relations with mothers; the effect of parental divorce/separation on the likelihood of having detached relations is about five times greater with fathers than it is with mothers. These results echo other findings documenting the deleterious effects of parental divorce on intergenerational relations with fathers (Umberson 1992; White 1992). Widowhood also erodes relationships of children more so with fathers than with mothers. The potential for the dependencies associated with widowhood to strain close family relationships (Ferraro and Barresi 1982; Morgan 1984) is heightened among widowed fathers who generally lack the skills necessary for household management (Umberson, Wortman, and Kessler 1992).

In addition, since widowed fathers have a greater chance of remarrying than widowed mothers (Goldscheider 1990), widowers may be more likely than widows to have dual family allegiances. Taken together, our results concerning the effect of marital disruption on intergenerational relations suggest the tenuous role played by divorced and widowed fathers in the lives of their biological children (Amato et al. 1995; Cooney and Uhlenberg 1990) and foreshadow possible deficits in their social support portfolio when they reach old age (Goldscheider 1990).

With respect to age, our results suggest that there is a realignment of child-parent relations with the aging of the child, supporting our fifth hypothesis. Consistent with the life-course theoretical perspective (Bengtson and Allen 1993; Elder 1984; Elder and O'Rand 1995), younger adult children are more likely than older children to have integrated relations with their mothers and their fathers and less likely to have detached relations with them. Young adults who have just been launched from the parental household are in the most need of social and tangible resources from parents, while in middle age, children occupy career and parenting roles that may limit their ability to invest in parental relationships. Children in young adulthood are enmeshed with their parents to satisfy emotional and material needs resulting from their transition to independence, and middle-aged children disengage from their parents because alternative family and occupational demands may supersede functional integration with them.

Further, we found a curvilinear relationship between age of child and whether relations with fathers are detached. When the child passes beyond middle age (and when their fathers pass into advanced old age) the likelihood of being detached is as low as it was in young adulthood. This pattern suggests that adult children reconcile with their elderly fathers at a stage of the fathers' lives when support needs are at a maximum and when intimate family relationships become most salient—an interpretation consistent with socioemotional selectivity theory in developmental social psychology (Carstensen 1992). Nevertheless, it should be noted that while we use respondent's age as a proxy for life stage, the effects of age confound birth cohort with maturational differences. Thus, we advise caution when attributing age effects to developmental factors in these cross-sectional data.

We note that several factors deserve more detailed attention than we were able to pay in this analysis. For example, physical and mental disabilities of parents (measures of which were not included in this data set) may be important forces in structuring intergenerational relations—especially in the older family. In addition, differences in family relations across ethnic groups deserve further consideration. We suggest that the intergen-

erational types found in our study can serve as the basis for investigations of minority families in order to highlight their distinctive patterns. Our findings about the relative strength of intergenerational relations of African-American families differ from those of Hogan et al. (1993), suggesting that cross-ethnic comparisons may be sensitive to the multiple dimensions of solidarity considered in this analysis.

CONCLUSION

In this analysis we have capitalized on the conceptual model of intergenerational solidarity (1) to develop a multidimensional typology of adult intergenerational relations in American society, (2) to develop a nomenclature to describe five empirically generated types, and (3) to examine individual and social-structural characteristics that differentiate the types.

We have drawn on modified-extended models of the family to incorporate latent forms of intergenerational attachment in describing family relationships. While we propose that latent dimensions of solidarity will serve as a cognitive-emotional blueprint for future action (particularly as a response to emergent needs and crises experienced by family members) the transition between latent and active solidarity is clearly probablistic; not all families with great support potential will become great support providers. The longitudinal analysis of intergenerational types is necessary to discover the degree to which this transition is actually made (Collins and Wugalter 1992).

Other questions remain concerning the state of the contemporary multigenerational family. Our analysis examined the point of view of only one partner of the intergenerational dyad—the adult child. Would the same typology hold if the responses of parents were analyzed? Existing evidence reveals that the same factor structure of the dimensions of solidarity holds for both generational perspectives, suggesting that the family position of the informant may make little difference to the relational typology (Silverstein, Lawton, and Bengtson 1994). And how about adult intergenerational steprelations? Given the proliferation of complex family structures resulting from the rise in divorce and remarriage rates in American society, it would be instructive to examine relations of adult children with their stepparents as well. Are these relations weaker than relations with biological parents? Does the gender of the stepparent make a difference? We hope that future research will incorporate multiple family perspectives and include steprelations in considering the strength of intergenerational relationships.

We have used in this research a typological approach to the investigation of family relationships. How useful is this epistemological strategy in

studying intergenerational relationships compared to more conventional assessments of individual survey items? We feel there are three important benefits of such an approach: (1) it applies multiple indicators to complex and multifaceted family phenomena, (2) it derives from a grounded theoretical perspective concerning family interactions and sentiment, and (3) it reflects a more holistic empirical approach to the study of family relationships. We urge future researchers of family structure and process to take advantage of the opportunities and challenges of typological investigation.

In summary, our findings portray adult intergenerational relationships in American families as diverse but reflecting five principal types based on affinal, structural, and functional dimensions of solidarity. At the broadest level, heterogeneity in intergenerational relationships can be attributed to historical trends over the past century, such as geographic and economic mobility of generations, the surge in divorce rates, increasing numbers of later-life families, and a shift away from the family of orientation as the basis for everyday social life in adulthood. For intergenerational families, particularly in paternal relations, these trends may have increased the uncertainty associated with enactment of supportive roles. On the other hand, our research demonstrates that adult children, especially daughters, serve as significant elements in the kin matrix of mothers. This suggests that the primacy of the mother-daughter bond—rooted in biosocial mechanisms of early socialization—extends through much of the adult life course (Rossi 1984).

Finally, we conclude that latent kin attachment is an important aspect of intergenerational family life, as it represents an enduring form of solidarity and a possible prelude to action and support (Riley 1983). Research that focuses exclusively on (more episodic) functional exchange is likely to underestimate the strength of intergenerational bonds and exaggerate the extent to which the family is in decline. We strongly suggest that multiple dimensions of solidarity be considered when assessing intergenerational relations in the modern family.

APPENDIX

Survey Questions Measuring Intergenerational Solidarity

Structural solidarity

Does your (mother) (father) live within one hour driving time from you? (yes/no)

Associational solidarity

How often do you see or have contact with your (mother) (father)?

__daily

__two to six times a week

__once a week
__two to three times a month
__once a month
__five to 11 times per year
__three to four times per year
__two times per year
__once a year
__less than once a year
__never

Affectual solidarity

In general, how close do you feel to your (mother) (father)?

__very close
__somewhat close
__not at all close

Consensual solidarity

How similar are your opinions to those of your (mother) (father)?

__very similar
__somewhat similar
__somewhat different
__very different

Functional solidarity

1. Now, please think about help that *you provide* for free to neighbors, friends, and family members who don't live with you. This might include doing things like babysitting, running errands, or helping with repairs. Do you ever provide this type of help to neighbors, friends or family members? (yes/no)
   If yes, who do you help in this way?[2]
   __mother
   __father
2. Now, please think about help *you receive,* that you don't pay for, from neighbors, friends, and family members who don't live with you. This includes free help you receive for things like baby-sitting, household chores, home repairs, shopping and transportation. Do you ever receive this type of help from neighbors, friends or family members? (yes/no)
   If yes, who are the people who help you?[2]
   __mother
   __father

[2] Responses are open ended and coded into 19 possible categories, including mother and father.

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