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The Burgess Award Lecture*

Beyond the Nuclear Family: The Increasing Importance of Multigenerational Bonds

Family relationships across several generations are becoming increasingly important in American society. They are also increasingly diverse in structure and in functions. In reply to the widely debated ''family decline'' hypothesis, which assumes a nuclear family model of 2 biological parents and children, I suggest that family multigenerational relations will be more important in the 21st century for 3 reasons: (a) the demographic changes of population aging, resulting in ''longer years of shared lives'' between generations; (b) the increasing importance of grandparents and other kin in fulfilling family functions; (c) the strength and resilience of intergenerational solidarity over time. I also indicate that family multigenerational relations are increasingly diverse because of (a) changes in family structure, involving divorce and stepfamily relationships; (b) the increased longevity of kin; (c) the diversity of intergenerational relationship ''types.'' Drawing on the family research legacy of Ernest W. Burgess, I frame my arguments in terms of historical family transitions and hypotheses. Research from the Longitudinal Study of Generations is presented to demonstrate the strengths of multigenerational ties over time and why it is necessary to look beyond the nuclear family when asking whether families are still functional.

During the past decade, sociologists have been engaged in an often heated debate about family change and family influences in contemporary society. This debate in many ways reflects the legacy of Ernest W. Burgess (1886–1965), the pioneer of American family sociology. It can be framed in terms of four general hypotheses, each of which calls attention to significant transitions in the structure and functions of families over the 20th century.

The first and earliest hypothesis concerns the *emergence of the ''modern'' nuclear family form* following the Industrial Revolution. This transition (suggested by Burgess in 1916 and elaborated by Ogburn, 1932, and Parsons, 1944) proposed that the modal structure of families had changed from extended to nuclear, and its primary functions had changed from social-institutional to emotional-supportive. The second hypothesis concerns the *decline of the modern nuclear family* as a social institution, a decline said to be attributable to the fact that its structure has been truncated (because of high divorce rates) and its functions further reduced (Popenoe, 1993). A third hypothesis can be termed the *increasing heterogeneity of family forms,* relations that extend beyond biolog-

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ical or conjugal relationship boundaries. Growing from the work of feminist scholars (Coontz, 1991; Skolnick, 1991; Stacey, 1990), and research on racial and ethnic minority families (Burton, 1995; Collins, 1990; Stack, 1974), this perspective suggests that family structures and relationships should be redefined to include both ‘‘assigned’’ and ‘‘created’’ kinship systems (Cherlin, 1999). I suggest a fourth hypothesis for consideration: The *increasing importance of multigenerational bonds.* I propose that relations across more than two generations are becoming increasingly important to individuals and families in American society; that they are increasingly diverse in structure and functions; and that in the early 21st century, these multigenerational bonds will not only enhance but in some cases replace nuclear family functions, which have been so much the focus of sociologists during the 20th century.

In this article, I first summarize the ‘‘Burgess legacy’’ in American family sociology and relate it to the four hypotheses summarized above. Then I suggest some foundations for my hypotheses concerning the increasing importance and diversity of multigenerational relationships, starting from a discussion of macrosocial trends (population aging and intergenerational family demography) and moving to microsocial dimensions (solidarity and types of cross-generational relationships). I conclude with some suggestions about future research that will be needed to examine further the role of multigenerational bonds in 21st century society.

The Burgess Legacy: As Families Have Changed, Have They Declined in Importance?

Before beginning to trace this argument—which is a substantial departure from conventional wisdom about the ‘‘problems’’ of American families and their solutions today—I want first to acknowledge my personal and intellectual debt to Ernest W. Burgess, the namesake for this award from the National Council on Family Relations. He was truly a giant in the development of family sociology in America and one of the great lights of the ‘‘Chicago school’’ of sociology from 1915 into the 1960s (Bogue, 1974).

Burgess was briefly my teacher at the University of Chicago, several years after his formal retirement. I remember him as a diminutive and courtly gentleman peering over the lectern as he talked, apparently without notes, about the ‘‘roleless role’’ of the aged in modern societies. Shortly after I first met him, he became increasingly frail and unable to live on his own. This led to a situation of profound irony. This giant of American family studies, who had never married and had outlived his biological kin, had no family to take care of his needs in his declining years. He had lived with his sister, also unmarried, for almost 40 years until her death. In early 1965, he quietly checked himself into a neighborhood board-and-care home for the elderly, which turned out to be in deplorable condition. Discovering this, Bernice Neugarten, Robert Havighurst, and other University of Chicago faculty arranged for his transfer to the Drexel Home for the Aged. He died there in December 1966 at the age of 80, without family except for the ‘‘fictive kin’’ represented by the warm care of the Drexel Home staff and his University of Chicago colleagues. It was an ironic departure for one of the U.S. pioneers in family sociology, a man who had no access himself to the multigenerational family network that is my theme in this paper.

Burgess was truly an innovator in sociology. He inherited a tradition of 19th-century sociological analysis based on political and moral philosophy; he adapted this to focus on the social problems encountered by early-20th-century Americans—social disorganization, crime, delinquency, urbanization, poverty—and to insist on the importance of empirical data in analyzing these problems. Because so little systematic social research had preceded him, he became a pioneer in almost every field he entered, from the methodology of social surveys (Burgess, 1916) to the role of the aged in Western societies (Burgess, 1960). But his most enduring legacy is reflected in the sociology of the family.

Burgess insisted that we must consider both the macrosocial contexts of families over time and their microsocial dynamics if we are to understand the increasing complexity of family life. Starting from Burgess’ insight, I think we can identify four major shifts in American families over the 20th century that I will list as hypotheses, the source for future research concerning their utility.

The Emergence of the ‘‘Modern’’ Nuclear Family Form

Burgess’ groundbreaking analyses of the American family started from a consideration of macrosocial trends brought about by the Industrial Rev-

olution and continued with his exploration of the microsocial dynamics within families. One of his earliest concerns was the family as an aspect of social organization in the context of social evolution. His first book (Burgess, 1916) would today be regarded as a polemic in support of the traditional extended family and its functions because he argued that this family form was necessary for the socialization of children if social evolution were to continue. Within the next decade, however, he shifted his perspective. From the structural ''functions'' of families applied to the modernizing societies of the early 20th century, he turned to an emphasis on family members' ''interactions.''

Burgess' hypothesis was that families had changed. He broke from late-19th-century views of the extended family structure as the bedrock of social organization and progress to say, ''The family in historical times has been, and at present is, in transition from an institution to a companionship'' (Burgess, 1926, p. 104). He focused on the nuclear family and its changing functions as the consequence of industrialization and modernization, arguments echoed later by Ogburn (1932), Davis (1941), and Parsons (1944). His thesis was that urbanization, increased individualism and secularism, and the emancipation of women had transformed the family from a social institution based on law and custom to one based on companionship and love.

Burgess advanced his position very quietly in a number of scholarly journal publications. These appeared to have escaped notice by the popular press at that time, quite unlike today's debates about the family. He argued that the family had become more specialized in its functions and that structural and objective aspects of family life had been supplanted by more emotional and subjective functions. This he termed the ''companionship'' basis of marriage, which he suggested had become the underlying basis of the ''modern'' family form.

But Burgess went further. He proposed that the most appropriate way to conceptualize and study the family was as ''a unity of interacting personalities'' (Burgess, 1926). By this he meant three things: First, ''the family'' is essentially a *process,* an interactional system influenced by each of its members; it not merely a *structure,* or a household. Second, the behaviors of one family member—a troubled child, a detached father—could not be understood except in *relationship* to other family members, their ongoing patterns of interactions, and personalities developing and changing through such interactions. This conceptualization provided the intellectual basis for the first marriage and family counseling programs in the United States. Third, the central *functions* of families had changed from being primarily structural units of social organization to being relationships supporting individuals' needs. Marriage was transformed from a primarily economic union to one based on sentiment and companionship.

Thus, Burgess represented a bridge between 19th-century conceptions of the family as a unit in social evolution to 20th-century ideas of families as supporting individuals' needs. His work also provided a bridge in sociological theory, from structural-functionalism to symbolic interactionism and phenomenology. But in all this, Burgess' focus was on the nuclear family, a White, middle-class, two-generation family; and the family forms emerging in the 21st century will, as I argue below, look much different than the family that Burgess observed.

The Decline of the Modern Nuclear Family Form

The ''decline of the family'' in American society is a theme that has become the focus of increasingly heated debates by politicians, pundits, and family sociologists during the last decade. David Popenoe (1993), the most articulate proponent of this position, has argued that there has been a striking decline in the family's structure and functions in American society, particularly since 1960. Moreover, his hypothesis is that recent family decline is ''more serious'' than any decline in the past, because ''what is breaking up is the nuclear family, the fundamental unit stripped of relations and left with two essential functions that cannot be performed better elsewhere: Childrearing and the provision to its members of affection and companionship'' (Popenoe, p. 527). Supporters of the family decline hypothesis have focused on the negative consequences of changing family structure, resulting from divorce and single parenting, on the psychological, social, and economic well-being of children. Furthermore, they suggest that social norms legitimating the pursuit of individual over collective goals and the availability of alternate social groups for the satisfaction of basic human needs have substantially weakened the social institution of the family as an agent of socializa-

tion and as a source of nurturance for family members (Popenoe).

There is much to support Popenoe's hypothesis. There has been a significant change in nuclear family structure over the past 50 years, starting with the growing divorce rate in the 1960s, which escalated to over half of first marriages in the 1980s (Amato & Booth, 1997; Bumpass, Sweet, & Martin, 1990). There also has been an increase in single-parent families, accompanied by an increase in poverty for the children living in mother-headed families (McLanahan, 1994). The absence of fathers in many families today has created problems for the economic and emotional well-being of children (Popenoe, 1996).

At the same time, the ''family decline'' hypothesis is limited, and to some critics flawed, by its preoccupation with the family as a coresident household and the nuclear family as its primary representation. Popenoe defined the family as ''a relatively small domestic group of kin (or people in a kinlike relationship) consisting of at least one adult and one dependent person'' (Popenoe, 1993, p. 529). Although this might be sufficient as a demographic definition of a ''family household,'' it does not include important aspects of family functions that extend beyond boundaries of coresidence. There is nothing in Popenoe's hypothesis to reflect the function of multigenerational influences on children—the role of grandparents in socializing or supporting grandchildren, particularly after the divorce of middle-generation parents (Johnson & Barer, 1987; Minkler & Rowe, 1993). Nor is there any mention of what Riley and Riley (1993) have called the ''latent matrix of kin connections,'' a web of ''continually shifting linkages that provide the potential for activating and intensifying close kin relationships'' in times of need by family members (Riley & Riley, p. 169). And there is no consideration of the longer years of shared lives between generations, now extending into many decades, and their consequences for the emotional and economic support for family members across several generations (Bengtson & Allen, 1993; Silverstein & Litwak, 1993).

The Increasing Heterogeneity of Family Forms

A third hypothesis has been generated by feminist scholars (Coontz, 1991; Osmond & Thorne, 1993; Skolnick, 1991; Stacey, 1993, 1996; Thorne & Yalom, 1992) and researchers studying minority families (Burton, 1995; Collins, 1990; Stack, 1974). This hypothesis can be summarized as follows: Families are changing in both forms and meanings, expanding beyond the nuclear family structure to involve a variety of kin and nonkin relationships. Diverse family forms are emerging, or at least being recognized for the first time, including the matriarchal structure of many African American families. Stacey (1996) argued that the traditional nuclear family is increasingly ill-suited for a postindustrial, postmodern society. Women's economic and social emancipation over the past century has become incongruent with the nuclear ''male breadwinner'' family form and its traditional allocation of power, resources, and labor. We have also seen a normalization of divorce and of stepparenting in recent years. Many American families today are what Ahrons (1994) has described as ''binuclear.'' Following divorce and remarriage of the original marital partners and parents, a stable, child-supportive family context may emerge. Finally, because some four million children in the United States are being raised by lesbian or gay parents (Stacey & Biblarz, in press), these and other alternative family forms ''are here . . . and let's get used to it!'' (Stacey, 1996, p. 105).

In responding to Popenoe, Stacey (1996) argued that the family is indeed in decline—if what we mean by ''family'' is the nuclear form of dad, mom, and their biological or adopted kids. This form of the family rose and fell with modern industrial society. In the last few decades, with the shift to a postindustrial domestic economy within a globalized capitalist system and with the advent of new reproductive technologies, the modern family system has been replaced by what Stacey has called ''the postmodern family condition,'' a pluralistic, fluid, and contested domain in which diverse family patterns, values, and practices contend for legitimacy and resources. Stacey suggested that family diversity and fluidity are now ''normal,'' and the postmodern family condition opens the possibility of egalitarian, democratic forms of intimacy, as well as potentially threatening levels of insecurity.

The Increasing Importance of Multigenerational Bonds

I want to suggest a fourth hypothesis about family transitions during the 20th century that builds on those of Burgess, Popenoe, Stack, and Stacey but reflects the recent demographic development of

much greater longevity. It is this: *Relations across more than two generations are becoming increasingly important to individuals and families in American society.* Considering the dramatic increase in life expectancy over the past half century, this is not a particularly radical departure from conventional wisdom. But I suggest a corollary to this hypothesis, which I hope will lead to spirited debate: *For many Americans, multigenerational bonds are becoming more important than nuclear family ties for well-being and support over the course of their lives.*

I will attempt to provide a foundation for this hypothesis in the remainder of this article. First, I argue that changes in intergenerational demography (changing societal and family age structures, creating longer years of ''shared lives'') have resulted in increased opportunities—and needs—for interaction, support, and mutual influence across more than just two generations. Second, I will note the strength of intergenerational solidarity over time and the diversity of cross-generational types. Third, because the increase in marital instability and divorce over the last several decades has weakened the ability of nuclear families to provide the socialization, nurturance, and support needed by family members, I argue that kin across several generations will increasingly be called upon to provide these essential family functions in 21st-century society.

The Macrosociology of Intergenerational Relationships

The demographic structure of American families has changed significantly in recent years. We hear most about two trends: The increase in divorce rates since the 1960s, with one out of two first marriages ending in divorce (Cherlin, 1992); and the increasing number of children living in single-parent households, often accompanied by poverty (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Walker & McGraw, 2000). But there is a third trend that has received much less attention: The increased longevity of family members and the potential resource this represents for the well-being of younger generations in the family.

Multigenerational Family Demography: From Pyramids to Beanpoles

First consider how much the age structure of the U.S. population has changed over the past 100 years. Treas (1995b) provided a valuable overview of these changes and their consequences for families. In 1900, the shape of the American population structure by age was that of a pyramid, with a large base (represented by children under age 5) progressively tapering into a narrow group of those aged 65 and older. This pyramid characterized the shape of the population structure by age in most human societies on record, from the dawn of civilization through the early Industrial Revolution and into the early 20th century (Laslett, 1976; Myers, 1990). But by 1990, the age pyramid for American society had come to look more like an irregular triangle. By 2030, it will look more like a rectangle, with strikingly similar numbers in each age category starting from children and adolescents through those above the age of 60. The story here is that because of increases in longevity and decreases in fertility, the population age structure of the United States, like most industrialized societies, has changed from a pyramid to a rectangle in just over a century of human historical experience.

Second, consider the implications of these macrosocietal changes in age distribution for the generational structure of families in American society. At the same time, there have been increases in life expectancy over the 20th century, decreases in fertility have occurred, and the population birthrate has decreased from 4.1 in 1900 to 1.9 in 1990 (Cherlin, 1999). This means that the age structure of most American families has changed from a pyramid to what might be described as a ''beanpole'' (Bengtson, Rosenthal, & Burton, 1990), a family structure in which the shape is long and thin, with more family generations alive but with fewer members in each generation. Whether the ''beanpole'' structure adequately describes a majority of families today has been debated (Farkas & Hogan, 1995; Treas, 1995a). Nevertheless, the changes in demographic distribution by age since 1900 are remarkable, and the progression ''from pyramids to beanpoles'' has important implications for family functions and relationships into the 21st century.

The changing ''kin supply'' structure across generations. What might be lost in a review of macrosocial demographic trends are the consequences for individual family members and their chances of receiving family support. For example, the ''family decline'' hypothesis of Popenoe (1993) suggests that U.S. children are at greater risk today because of the breakdown of the nu-

clear family structure and the too-frequent disappearance of fathers. The decrease in mortality rates over the last century suggests a more optimistic story, however: The increasing availability of extended intergenerational kin (grandparents, great-grandparents, uncles, and aunts) has become a resource for children as they grow up and move into young adulthood.

Peter Uhlenberg (1996) examined the profound effects that mortality changes over the 20th century have had on the "supply" of kin available for support of family members in American society. He noted that for children born in 1900, the chances of being an orphan (both parents dying before the child reached age 18) were 18%. But for children born in 2000, 68% will have four *grand*parents still living by the time they reach 18. Further along the life course, by the time these children are themselves facing the responsibilities of rearing children, the effects of mortality declines on the availability of older kin for support are even more substantial. For those born in 1900, by age 30 only 21% had *any* grandparent still living. For those born in 2000, by age 30, 76% will still have at least one grandparent alive. Today it is more likely that 20-year-olds will have a grandmother still living (91%) than 20-year-olds alive in 1900 had a mother still living (83%; Uhlenberg).

Another perspective on this issue is provided by Wachter (1997) in computer simulations about availability of kin for 21st century family members. He examined implications of longevity, fertility, and divorce for the future. He noted that although low fertility rates in the late 20th century will lead to a shortage of kin for those reaching retirement around 2030, the effects of divorce, remarriage, and family blending are expanding the numbers and types of stepkin, "endowing the elderly of the future with kin networks that are at once problematic, rich, and varied" (Wachter, p. 1181). The implication is that stepkin are increasing the kin supply across generations, becoming potential sources of nurture and support for family members in need, and that this may compensate, in part, for lower fertility rates (Amato & Booth, 1997).

Longer years of "shared lives" across generations. Other implications of these demographic changes over the 20th century should be noted. First, we now have more years of "cosurvivorship between generations" than ever before in human history (Bengtson, 1996; Goldscheider, 1990). This means that more and more aging parents and grandparents are available to provide for family continuity and stability across time (Silverstein, Giarrusso, & Bengtson, 1998). This also means a remarkable increase in multigenerational kin representing a "latent network" (Riley & Riley, 1993) who can be activated to provide support and well-being for younger family members. The increased longevity of parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and other older family members in recent decades represents a resource of kin available for help and support that can be, and frequently is, activated in times of need (King, 1994; Silverstein, Parrott & Bengtson, 1995). These older kin will also be in better health (Hayward & Heron, 1999).

At the same time, there are potentially negative consequences of the "longer years of shared lives" across generations. One involves protracted years of caregiving for dependent elders (Bengtson, Rosenthal, & Burton, 1995). A second involves protracted conflict—what a 84-year-old mother in the Longitudinal Study of Generations termed a "life-long lousy parent-child relationship." Family researchers have not adequately addressed intergenerational conflicts throughout the adult years (Clarke, Preston, Raskin, & Bengtson, 1999). Because of longer years of shared lives, intergenerational relationships—in terms of help given or received, solidarity or conflict or both—will be of increasing importance for family life in the future.

Finally, to the story of multigenerational family demography and its changes over the 21st century must be added a recognition of "alternative family forms," reflected in gay and lesbian couples raising children (Kurdek & Schmidt, 1987), never-married singles and couples raising children (Smock & Manning, 1997), and other nonbiological but socially significant family forms. We know little about the intergenerational relationships of these variations beyond the White, middle-class, two-generation household in America today. What they represent in "latent kin support networks" or "cosurvivorship across generations" must be a focus of future research.

When Parenting Goes Across Several Generations

A function not addressed by Burgess was the importance of grandparents to family members' well-being, an understandable oversight given the historical period when he was writing, when the expected life span of individuals was almost 3 decades shorter than today. Popenoe (1993) also did not discuss the importance of grandparents in the

potential support they represent for younger generation members.

Grandparents provide many unacknowledged functions in contemporary families (Szinovacz, 1998). They are important role models in the socialization of grandchildren (Elder, Rudkin, & Conger, 1994; King & Elder 1997). They provide economic resources to younger generation family members (Bengtson & Harootyan, 1994). They contribute to cross-generational solidarity and family continuity over time (King, 1994; Silverstein et al., 1998). They also represent a bedrock of stability for teenage moms raising infants (Burton & Bengtson, 1985).

Perhaps most dramatic is the case in which grandparents (or great-grandparents) are raising grandchildren (or great-grandchildren). Over four million children under age 18 are living in a grandparent's household. Frequently this is because these childrens' parents are incapacitated (by imprisonment, drug addiction, violence, or psychiatric disorders) or unable to care for their offspring without assistance (Minkler & Rowe, 1993). Research by Harris (2000) indicates that about 20,000 children in Los Angeles County alone are now the responsibility of grandparents or great-grandparents because of recent court decisions concerning the parents' lack of competence. In Harris' study, one grandmother had been assigned by the court as guardian to 13 of her grandchildren, born to two of her daughters, each of whom had been repeatedly imprisoned on crack cocaine charges (Harris & Pedersen, 1997). Similar instances are related by Minkler and Rowe in their study of crack-addicted parents in the San Francisco area.

When Parents Divorce and Remarry, Divorce and Remarry

The rising divorce rate over the last half of the 20th century has generated much concern about the fate of children (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). The probability that a marriage would end in divorce doubled between the 1960s and the 1970s, and half of all marriages since the late 1970s ended in divorce (Cherlin, 1992). About 40% of American children growing up in the 1980s and 1990s experienced the breakup of their parents' marriages (Bengtson, Rosenthal, & Burton, 1995; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991), and a majority of these also experienced their parents' remarriage and the challenges of a "blended family."

In the context of marital instability, the breakup of nuclear families, and the remarriage of parents, it is clear that grandparents and step-grandparents are becoming increasingly important family connections (Johnson & Barer, 1987). Two fifths of divorced mothers move during the first year of the divorce (McLanahan, 1983), and most of these move in with their parents while they make the transition to single parenting (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1993).

When Help Flows Across Generations, It Flows Mostly Downward

An unfortunate stereotype of the older generation today is of "greedy geezers" who are spending their children's inheritance on their own retirement pleasures (Bengtson, 1993). This myth is not in accord with the facts. Intergenerational patterns of help and assistance flow mostly from the older generations to younger generations in the family. For example, McGarry and Schoeni (1995) have shown that almost one third of U.S. parents gave a gift of $500 or more to at least one of their adult children during the past year; however, only 9% of adult children report providing $500 to their aging parents. Similar results are reported by Bengtson and Harootyan (1994) and Soldo and Hill (1993).

Silverstein et al. (1995) noted that intergenerational support patterns ebb and flow over time. Multigenerational families represent "latent kin networks" of support (Riley & Riley, 1993) that often are enacted only in times of crisis. This is similar to Hagestad's (1996) notion of elders as the "Family National Guard": Although remaining silent and unobserved for the most part, grandparents (and great-grandparents) muster up and march out when an emergency arises regarding younger generation members' well-being.

The Microsociology of Intergenerational Relationships

Although there have been important changes in the demography of intergenerational relationships since the 19th century, population statistics about family and household structure tell only one part of the story. At the behavioral level, these changes have more immediate consequences in the ways family members organize their lives and pursue their goals in the context of increasing years of intergenerational "shared lives." How to conceptualize and measure these intergenerational inter-

actions has become increasingly important since Burgess (1926) put forth his definition of the family as ''a unity of interacting personalities.''

The Solidarity Model: Dimensions of Intergenerational Relationships

In discussing these social-psychological approaches to intergenerational relations, I should first identify the study from which my colleagues and I have examined them, the Longitudinal Study of Generations (LSOG). This study began as a cross-sectional survey of more than 2,044 three-generational family members, sampled from more than 840,000 members of the primary HMO serving Southern California at that time (see Bengtson, 1975 and 1996, for details of the sampling procedures). It has continued as a longitudinal study with data collected at 3-year intervals, adding the great-grandchild generation in 1991.

A concern in the LSOG since it began 3 decades ago has been the conceptualization and measurement of intergenerational relationships. We use the theoretical construct of *intergenerational solidarity* as a means to characterize the behavioral and emotional dimensions of interaction, cohesion, sentiment, and support between parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, over the course of long-term relationships. We define six conceptual dimensions of intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson & Mangen, 1988; Bengtson & Schrader, 1982; Roberts, Richards, & Bengtson, 1991).

1. Affectual solidarity: the sentiments and evaluations family members express about their relationship with other members (How close do you feel to your father or mother? How well do you get along with your child or grandchild? How much affection do you feel from them?)
2. Associational solidarity: the type and frequency of contact between intergenerational family members
3. Consensual solidarity: agreement in opinions, values, and orientations between generations
4. Functional solidarity (assistance): the giving and receiving of support across generations, including exchange of both instrumental assets and services as well as emotional support
5. Normative solidarity: expectations regarding filial obligations and parental obligations, as well as norms about the importance of familistic values
6. Structural solidarity: the ''opportunity structure'' for cross-generational interaction reflecting geographic proximity between family members

The theoretical rationale for these six dimensions and the adequacy (or limitations) of their measurement in survey research have been described at length in a volume by Mangen, Bengtson, and Landry (1988) and in subsequent articles (Roberts & Bengtson, 1990; Roberts et al., 1991; Silverstein et al., 1995). The solidarity paradigm has proven useful in research by other investigators (Amato & Booth, 1997; Lee, Netzer, & Coward, 1994; Marshall, Matthews & Rosenthal, 1993; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). It can be seen as exemplifying an operational definition of the life course theoretical perspective (Bengtson & Allen, 1993; Elder, Rudkin, & Conger, 1994).

The Strength of Intergenerational Relationships Over Time

Using longitudinal data from the LSOG, we have been able to chart the course of intergenerational solidarity dimensions over time. Our design allows consideration of the development and aging of each of the three and now four generations in our sample, as well as the sociohistorical context of family life as it has changed over the years of the study (Bengtson et al., in press).

One consistent result concerns the high levels of affectual solidarity (reflecting the emotional bonds between generations) that have been found over six times of measurement, from 1971 to 1997 (Bengtson et al., 2000). Three things should be noted. We find that the average solidarity scores between grandparents and parents, parents and youth, grandparents and grandchildren are high, considerably above the expected midpoint of the scale. Second, these scores are remarkably stable over the 26 years of measurement; there are no statistically significant differences by time of measurement, and the scores are correlated over time between .5 and .8. Third, there is a ''generational bias'' in these reports: Parents consistently report higher affect than their children do over time, as do grandparents compared with grandchildren. This supports the ''intergenerational stake'' hypothesis first proposed 30 years ago (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971; Giarrusso, Stallings, & Bengtson, 1995). The older generation has a greater psychosocial investment, or ''stake,'' in their joint relationship than does their younger generation, and

TABLE 1. CONSTRUCTING A TYPOLOGY OF INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS USING FIVE SOLIDARITY VARIABLES

Types of Relationships	Affect (Close)	Consensus (Agree)	Structure (Proximity)	Association (Contact)	Gives Help	Receives Help
Tight-knit	+	+	+	+	+	+
Sociable	+	+	+	+	−	−
Intimate but distant	+	+	−	−	−	−
Obligatory	−	−	+	+	(+)	(+)
Detached	−	−	−	−	−	−

this influences their perceptions and evaluations of their common intergenerational relationships.

These results indicate the high level of emotional bonding across generations and the considerable stability of parent-child affectual relationships over long periods of time.

At the same time, it should be noted that not all intergenerational relationships display such high levels of emotional closeness. We find that about one in five relationships are characterized by either significant conflict (Clarke et al., 1999) or detachment (as discussed next).

The Diversity of Intergenerational Relationships

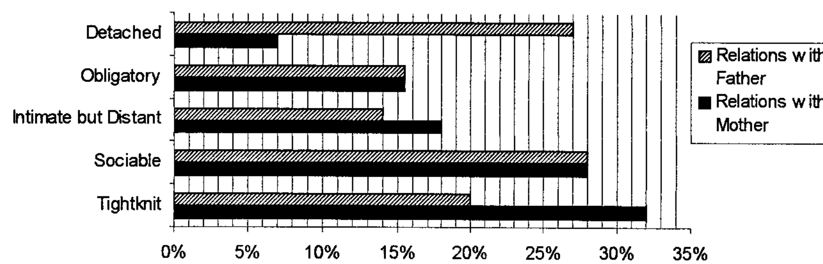
To gain a better understanding of the complexity and contradictions of cross-generational relationships, we employed latent class analysis (LCA) to examine the typological structure underlying measurements of intergenerational solidarity in a nationally representative sample (Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997). This methodology allowed us to simultaneously contrast five solidarity dimensions, some congruent, others incongruent, in a multidimensional framework. We found five types or classes of intergenerational family relationships (see Table 1). One type we labeled ‘‘Tight-Knit,’’ characterized by high emotional closeness, living fairly close to each other, interacting frequently, and having high levels of mutual help and support. This seems similar to what Parsons (1944) described as the ideal ‘‘modern family’’ type of relationship. At the other extreme is the ‘‘Detached’’ type, with low levels of connectedness in all of the observed measures of solidarity. This appears similar to what would be predicted by the ‘‘decline of the family’’ hypothesis. Between the Tight-Knit and the Detached are three classes which we called variegated types (Silverstein & Bengtson, p. 442). The ‘‘Sociable’’ and ‘‘Intimate-but-Distant’’ types seem similar to what Litwak (1960a) described as the ‘‘modified extended family’’ in which functional exchange is low or absent, but there are high levels of affinity that suggest the potential for future support and exchange. The ‘‘Obligatory’’ type suggests a high level of structural connectedness (proximity and interaction) with an average level of functional exchange, but a low level of emotional attachment.

We next assessed the distribution of the five types using a nationally representative sample from the American Association of Retired People Study of Intergenerational Linkages (see Bengtson & Harootyan, 1994, for details). The results suggest considerable diversity of intergenerational relationships in contemporary American society, particularly in terms of gender. When we examined responses from adult children concerning their interactions with parents (older fathers and mothers combined), we found surprisingly similar distributions across the five types of intergenerational relationships. The Tight-Knit and Sociable types each represented 25% of the sample; the Obligatory and Intimate-but-Distant types are each 16%; and the Detached type constitutes 17% (Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997). No one type is dominant, demonstrating the diversity of American family forms and styles.

We then looked at gender differences in these distributions—how relationships with older mothers compared with those with older fathers. Here we found significant contrasts, as indicated in Figure 1. At one extreme, relations with mothers were more likely to be Tight-Knit (31%) than were relations with fathers (20%). At the other, relations with fathers were 4 times as likely to be Detached (27%) that those with mothers (7%). In fact, the Detached represented the second most frequent type of relationship between older fathers and their adult children.

Next, we examined other predictors of differences in the distribution of intergenerational types: ethnicity and race, income (socioeconomic status), age, and gender of the child. There were no differences by income levels, nor were the results different in terms of the age or gender of the child. Nevertheless, we found important racial and ethnic variations. Blacks and Hispanics were less

FIGURE 1. TYPES OF INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS, BY GENDER OF PARENT



likely than non-Hispanic Whites to have obligatory relationships with mothers, and Blacks were less likely than Whites to have Detached relationships with mothers. This corresponds to other studies that have found stronger maternal attachments in Black and Hispanic families than within White families.

These results suggest the folly of using a ''one size fits all'' model of intergenerational relationships. There is considerable diversity among the types; there is no one modal type. Our findings reinforce the message of Burton (1995) in her enumeration of 16 structural types of relationships between teenage mothers and older generation family members: Diversity and complexity are inherent features of family networks across generations.

The Effects of Changing Family Forms on Intergenerational Influence

Situating multigenerational families in sociohistorical context allows us to broaden our inquiry about their importance and functionality. How have intergenerational influences changed over recent historical time? Are families still important in shaping the developmental outcomes of its youth? What have been the effects of changing family structures and roles, the consequences of divorce and maternal employment, on intergenerational influences? We used the 30-year LSOG to explore these issues.

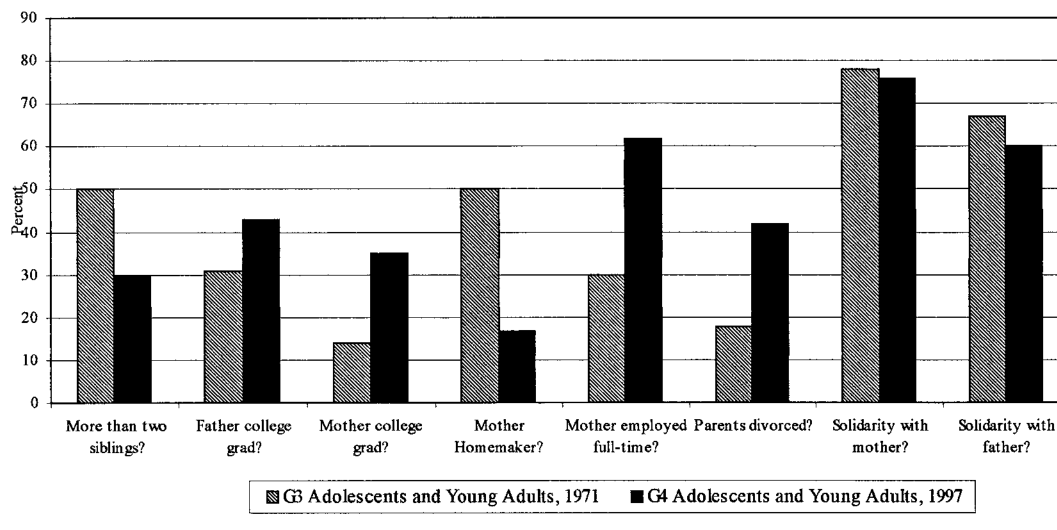
An important feature of the LSOG is that enough time has elapsed since its start in 1971 that the ages at which members of different generations were assessed have begun to overlap. This provides what we call a generation-sequential design. A limitation of existing data sets has been that researchers could not track changes across generations within specific families over decades of time, nor draw conclusions about the relationship between historical change in family structures and intergenerational influence and socialization outcomes. The LSOG is unique because of its accumulation of parallel longitudinal assessments for multiple generations within the same families in different historical periods.

Within a life course framework that focuses on the interplay of macroeconomic and microrelational processes, Bengtson, Biblag, and Roberts (in press) examined the development and cultivation of youth's achievement orientations: Their educational and occupation career aspirations, their values, and their self-esteem. Achievement orientations are viewed as personal attributes that may be passed down, or ''transmitted,'' from generation to generation in families, promoting continuity over multiple generational lines across many decades of history. We also know that parent-child affectual bonds can mediate this process. It is therefore useful to study these intergenerational transmission processes. In so doing, we can empirically examine the hypotheses concerning family decline or intergenerational family importance and diversity.

Our analysis (Bengtson et al., in press) contrasted the achievement orientations of Generation X youth (18- to 22-year-olds) today with their baby-boomer parents when they were about the same age in 1971. We know that Generation Xers have grown up in families that were quite different in structure than their parents' families were. How has this affected their achievement orientations: their aspirations, values, and self-esteem?

Figure 2 illustrates just how different the family context of these two successive generations has been. Generation Xers were much more likely than their baby-boomer parents to have grown up in a family with less than two siblings, with a father and mother who were college graduates, with a mother who was working full time, and, above all, in a divorced household (40% for Gen-

FIGURE 2. HISTORICAL CHANGES IN FAMILY STRUCTURE AND PARENTAL ATTRIBUTES: "GENERATION X" COMPARED WITH THEIR BABY-BOOMER PARENTS AT THE SAME AGE



eration Xers, 20% for their baby boomer parents). Given these differences, how do the two generations compare in terms of family solidarity and achievement orientations?

Our analysis suggests that today's Generation Xers are surprisingly similar to what their baby-boomer parents were on these measures at the same age, almost 30 years ago. This suggests that despite changes in family structure and socioeconomic context, intergenerational influences on youths' achievement orientations remain strong. Generation Xers whose parents divorced were slightly less advantaged in terms of achievement orientations than Generation Xers who came from nondivorced families but were nevertheless higher on these outcome measures than were their baby-boomer parents at the same age, regardless of family structure. We also found that maternal employment has not negatively affected the aspirations, values, and self-esteem of youth across these two generations, despite the dramatic increase in women's labor force participation over the past 3 decades. Finally, we found that Generation Xer women have considerably higher educational and occupational aspirations in 1997 than did their baby-boomer mothers almost 30 years before. In fact, Generation X young women's aspirations were higher than Generation X young men's.

These findings challenge the hypothesis that families are declining in function and influence and that "alternative" family structures spell the downfall of American youth. Multigenerational families continue to perform their functions in the face of recent social change and varied family forms.

Implications for Multigenerational Family Research

The intergenerational solidarity research model represents only a start at understanding the processes and dynamics of multigenerational relationships over time. Nevertheless, it is a start, and the research that my colleagues and I have been pursuing over the past 2 decades suggests several things about family relationships.

First, intergenerational relationships *are* complex (Amato & Booth 1997; Szinovacz, 1998). They involve not only demographic configurations (the number and availability of kin) but also opportunity structures for interaction (geographic proximity). They reflect not only behaviors (frequency of contact, help given and received) but also emotional-cognitive dimensions (feelings of closeness and bonding, similarity of values and opinions). They concern not only intergenerational exchanges that can be counted (the amount of financial support given to or received from other generation members) but also normative issues (filial obligations and values about the importance of family relationships) that may lead to help given or received in the future. In short, there are multiple dimensions of intergenerational relation-

ships. Most research to date has focused only on the demography of intergenerational relationships (family structures and the proximity of family members to each other) or on behaviors such as contacts and exchanges of tangible assets between generations. Emotional-cognitive and normative dimensions of intergenerational relations deserve equal attention in research, however (Rossi & Rossi, 1990).

Second, our studies suggest that the multifaceted nature of intergenerational relationships can be summarized with a relatively small number of concepts. For example, the five solidarity measures can be examined simultaneously; this results in five multidimensional types ranging from the Tight-Knit to the Detached. Interestingly, these types appear to be distributed fairly evenly across a sample of U.S. adults. No one type predominates: With one fourth of the intergenerational relationships categorized as Tight-Knit and another one sixth categorized as Detached, this suggests considerable diversity in family intergenerational relationships today.

Third, if these data were used to test Popenoe's ''family decline'' hypothesis, there is little to support it here. In contrast, there is support for the views advanced by feminist scholars concerning significant gender contrasts in family relationships: Relations of adult children with older fathers are much more likely to be Detached, whereas those with mothers are more likely to be Tight-Knit. Moreover, we found that U.S. families continue to perform their socialization function across successive generations, transmitting aspirations, values, and self-esteem, even when parents are divorced.

There are other issues that should be pursued. For example, we must recognize that conflict is another important dimension in intergenerational relationships (Clarke et al., 1999) and the ''paradox between conflict and solidarity'' (Bengtson et al., 1995, p. 351) is characteristic of most parent-child relations. Others have termed this ''intergenerational ambivalence'' (Luescher & Pillemer, 1998). Regardless of how we label it, we need more research on the nature and sources of intergenerational conflict, in the context of the extensive solidarity that many families seem to exhibit over time (Richlin-Klonsky & Bengtson, 1996).

Finally, our research paradigm is primarily based on survey data and quantitative analyses. These are ideal for examining central tendencies and distributions over a large sample but mask nuances and individual variation in responses. In addition, survey results are limited to dyads (a parent and a child), making the analysis of ''whole'' multigenerational families problematic (Hagestad, 1996). We have conducted qualitative studies that parallel our development of the solidarity paradigm, and these have revealed important themes in multigenerational family progress over time. One is the ''drifting apart, coming together'' history of one multigenerational family over time (Richlin-Klonsky & Bengtson, 1996). A second story is the contrast between ''collectivistic and individualistic'' family caregiving strategies in 20 multigenerational families (Pyke & Bengtson, 1996). A third story is the contrasting ''family narratives'' in four-generational families examined over decades of time (Gardner, Preston, & Bengtson, 1998). The insights from these studies suggest to me that the further exploration of multigenerational family issues will be advanced best by a combination of methods: qualitative studies focusing on a few families leading the way in generating new hypotheses, which can then be tested using large-scale survey data.

Multigenerational Family Bonds: More Important Than Ever Before?

My hypothesis is that multigenerational family bonds are important, more so than family research has acknowledged to date. I have argued that demographic changes over the 20th century (''from pyramids to beanpoles'' and ''longer years of shared lives'') have important implications for families in the 21st century, particularly with regard to the ''latent network'' of family support across generations. I have suggested that multigenerational relationship are increasingly diverse in structure and functions within American society. I propose that because the increase in marital instability and divorce have weakened so many nuclear families, these multigenerational bonds will not only enhance but in some cases replace some of the nuclear family functions that have been the focus of so much recent debate.

To test this hypothesis concerning the increasing importance of multigenerational bonds will require research such as the following: First, we will need to examine longitudinal data to trace the salience over time of the multigenerational model. My argument (following Riley & Riley 1993) is that multigenerational relations represent a ''latent kin network'' that may be inactive and unacknowledged for long periods of time, until a family crisis occurs. Such is the case when grandpar-

ents are called to help in the raising of grandchildren; when family elders become incapacitated and adult children and other kin provide caregiving support. Fortunately, by now we have several large ongoing longitudinal studies (such as the National Survey of Families and Households, Health and Retirement Survey, Analysis of Household Economics and Demography, etc.) that can be used to examine the activation of latent kin networks over time.

We will need trend data so as to examine whether multigenerational families are indeed interacting more and fulfilling more functions for members in the 21st century than in the past. We need to explore how trends in longevity, elder health, the bean pole intergenerational structure, and the aging of baby boomers are affecting intergenerational solidarity and support.

Third, we need more data on the ethnic and racial diversity of American family forms. We need to examine multigenerational influences across and within special populations, such as minority families and first- and second-generation immigrants. For example, considerable evidence shows that for many African Americans, extended kin relationships are more salient than they are for White families (Burton, 1995). As has been observed so many times in our recent history, minority patterns can signal changes on the horizon for White majority families.

We also need data reflecting the increasing diversity of American family forms beyond biological and conjugal relationships. We need to examine the multigenerational relationships of gay and lesbian families and of never-married parents.

We need cross-national data to examine how multigenerational relations are changing and the implications of these changes. For example, in the face of rapid industrialization and population aging, we are seeing changes in the meaning and expression of ‘‘filial piety’’ in Asian societies. In Korea and Japan, for example, multigenerational household sharing is becoming less prevalent (Bengtson & Putney, 2000). What does this imply in terms of Confucian norms about caring for one’s parents? We need also to examine the changing mix between state and family provisions for the elderly. Paradoxically, it appears that Eastern societies are becoming more dependent on state provisions for the elderly, whereas Western societies are facing declining governmental resources and placing more responsibilities on families (Bengtson & Putney).

Finally, we need to focus on policy implications of the growing importance of multigenerational bonds. What can be done to strengthen multigenerational family supports? Grandparent visitation rights have been challenged recently in the U.S. Supreme Court; what does this mean in light of other court decisions to place more responsibility on grandparents as court-mandated guardians of grandchildren?

Conclusion: Beyond the Nuclear Family

Are families declining in importance within American society? Seven decades ago, Ernest W. Burgess addressed this question from the standpoint of family transformations across the 19th and 20th centuries. His hypothesis was that families and their functions had changed from a social institution based on law and custom to a set of relationships based on emotional affect and companionship (Burgess, 1926). But this did not mean a loss of social importance. He suggested that the modern family should be considered as ‘‘a unity of interacting personalities’’ (Burgess) and that future research should focus on the interactional dynamics within families. In all this, Burgess’ focus, and that of those who followed him (Ogburn, 1932; Parsons, 1944), was on the nuclear family form.

Seven decades later, this question—are families declining in importance?—has resurfaced. Some family experts have hypothesized that families have lost most of their social functions along with their diminished structures because of high divorce rates and the growing absence of fathers in the lives of many children (Popenoe, 1993). A contrasting hypothesis is that families are becoming more diverse in structure and forms (Skolnick, 1991; Stacey, 1996).

In this article, I have suggested another hypothesis, one that goes beyond our previous preoccupation with the nuclear or two-generation family structure. This concerns the increasing importance of multigenerational bonds and the multigenerational extension of family functions. I want to be clear about this hypothesis because it differs from contemporary wisdom about the most pressing problems of American families today and because I hope it will generate much debate. I have proposed that (a) multigenerational relationships (these involving three or more generations) are becoming increasingly important to individuals and families in American society; (b) these multigenerational relationships are increasingly diverse in structure and functions; and (c) for

many Americans, multigenerational bonds are becoming more important than nuclear family ties for well-being and support over the course of their lives.

Burgess was right, many decades ago: The American family is in transition. But it is not only in transition ''from institution to companionship,'' as he argued. Over the century, there have been significant changes in the family's structure and functions. Prominent among them has been the extension of family bonds, of affection and affirmation, of help and support, across several generations, whether these be biological ties or the creation of kinlike relationship. But as families have changed, they have not necessarily declined in importance. The increasing prevalence and importance of multigenerational bonds represents a valuable new resource for families in the 21st century.

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