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Extending the Intergenerational Stake Hypothesis: Evidence of an Intraindividual Stake and Implications for Well-Being

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Abstract

The intergenerational stake hypothesis suggests that parents are more invested in their children and experience better quality parent–child ties than do their children. In this study the authors examined variation in reports of relationship quality regarding parents and children intraindividually (do people report better quality ties with their children than with their parents?) and whether within-person variations have implications for well-being. Participants age 40–60 (N = 633) reported on their relationship quality (importance, positive and negative quality) with their parents and adult children. Individuals reported their relationships with children were more important and more negative than relationships with parents. Individuals with feelings that were in the opposite direction of the intergenerational stake hypothesis (i.e., greater investment in parents than children) reported poorer well-being. The findings provide support for the intergenerational stake hypothesis with regard to within-person variations in investment and show that negative relationship quality may coincide with greater feelings of investment.

Keywords

intergenerational relationships; parent–child relationships; well-being

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A burgeoning literature has linked qualities of the parent–child tie in adulthood to each party's well-being (for reviews, see Birditt & Fingerman, 2013; Umberson, Pudrovska, & Reczek, 2010). Strong parent–child bonds may provide support or buffer against life's vicissitudes throughout adulthood (Fingerman et al., 2010; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1991). However, the strength of ties may vary by generation. The *intergenerational stake*

hypothesis suggests that parents are more invested in their children than the reverse (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971). Studies including two generations have often shown that parents report feeling more positive and less negative about their children than their children report feeling about them (Aquilino, 1999; Shapiro, 2004). In the previous literature the term *intergenerational stake* has primarily referred to variations in how parents and children feel about one another (i.e., interindividual stake).

This study expands on the intergenerational stake hypothesis to suggest that there may be within-person variations in how people feel about their parents and their children that are consistent with the intergenerational stake hypothesis. In particular, individuals may report better quality relationships with their children than with their parents. For the purpose of this study and for brevity, we use the term *intraindividual stake* to refer to within-person differences in relationships with parents and with children. In addition, within-person variations in feelings about parents and children may have differential consequences for well-being in two ways. First, relationships with children may have a stronger association with well-being than relationships with parents; second, individuals who experience better quality ties with parents than children (opposite of the stake) may report lower well-being. Feelings that are inconsistent with the intergenerational stake hypothesis (greater investment in parents than children) may cause distress due to violations of norms of intergenerational independence, feelings of disappointment due to a lack of closeness with children, and increased strain on resources due to demands received from both parents and children.

Research that has examined links between intergenerational relationship quality and well-being, however, often has focused on the respondent's feelings about either parents or children, but not both (e.g., Kiecolt, Blieszner, & Savla, 2011; Lowenstein, 2007), and studies that have considered the quality of both ties have not examined within-person differences in how individuals view these relationships or whether the intraindividual stake has implications for well-being (Umberson, 1992). In contrast to prior work, in the present study we considered within-person differences in perceptions of relationship quality with parents versus children as well as variability within individuals regarding multiple children. We also considered whether perceptions of relationship quality with parents and children have differential implications for well-being. The examination of within-person differences in how people feel about their intergenerational relationships advances the field conceptually in that it considers how a process that is typically considered dyadically across generations may also exist within individuals. These within-person differences may have even greater links with individual well-being because they refer to internal processes that may create distress. These internal processes may also be a reflection of dyadic interactions.

Qualities of the Parent–Child Tie in Adulthood

According to *solidarity theory*, there is a range in positive feelings between parents and children, including the extent to which they experience feelings of closeness, love, caring, and understanding in the relationship (Bengtson, Giarrusso, Mabry, & Silverstein, 2002). The concept of the intergenerational stake hypothesis emerged from solidarity theory and suggests that parents are more emotionally invested in the parent–child relationship than are their children (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971). Parents view their children as continuations of

themselves and thus perceive more positive feelings in this tie, whereas children desire greater independence from parents and are more invested in enhancing differences. Older and middle-aged parents typically report greater investment in the tie, greater closeness, and greater positive relationship quality regarding their children than their children do with them (Aquilino, 1999; Shapiro, 2004). Also consistent with the intergenerational stake hypothesis, children tend to report greater conflict and negative relationship quality than do their parents (Aquilino 1999; Fingerman, 2001). Negative relationship qualities include the extent to which parents and children get on one another's nerves, criticize the other, or make too many demands on one another.

Because of generational differences in the stake, it would logically follow that individuals would report better quality ties with their children than their parents. Research indicates that individuals tend to provide more support, on average, to their children than to their parents (Fingerman et al., 2010). In the present study we examined first whether there is within-person variation in how people view their children versus their parents. We then examined whether individuals perceive their ties with children to be of higher quality than their ties with parents. Furthermore, unlike previous research we also examined whether the intraindividual stake is consistent across children. For example, individuals may report better quality ties with one child compared to another.

Relationship Quality and Well-Being

Studies that have examined parent–child relationship quality in adulthood and well-being have often focused on parents' feelings about their adult children and have found that both positive and negative aspects of the tie are associated with well-being. Satisfying and positive relationships with adult children (averaged across children) are associated with better psychological well-being among older adults (Ryan & Willits, 2007). Likewise, poor quality ties with children are associated with poorer well-being. Koropeckyj-Cox (2002) found that individuals with poor-quality child relationships reported greater depressive symptoms than individuals with at least one high-quality child relationship, and Milkie, Bierman, and Schieman (2008) found that negative treatment from at least one child was associated with reduced well-being among adults over age 65 (Milkie et al., 2008). Lowenstein (2007) examined mothers and fathers age 75 and older in England, Norway, Germany, Spain, and Israel and found that solidarity (positive relationship quality) with children predicted greater quality of life. In a related topic area—children's problems and successes—Fingerman and colleagues (Fingerman, Cheng, Birditt, & Zarit, 2012) assessed parents' feelings about multiple children and parental well-being. They found that having one problematic child was associated with poor well-being, whereas the total amount of success (and not simply one successful child) was associated with better well-being. Thus, we know that relationships with adult children are associated with well-being, but what is missing from these studies is a comparative evaluation of how individuals feel about their own parents. This is likely to matter, given that prior studies of support have shown that individuals are influenced by multiple generations of the family (Fingerman et al., 2010). For example, providing support to older generations may strain relations with younger generations.

Only a few studies have examined whether relationship quality with parents or adult children is more highly associated with well-being. Umberson (1992) assessed associations between positive and negative relationship quality with mothers, fathers, and children over age 16 and depressive symptoms. When parent and child relationships were examined in the same model, greater negative relations with mothers and adult children predicted greater depressive symptoms. Positive relationship quality was not associated with depressive symptoms. What is not clear from this study, however, is whether individuals feel differently about their parents than their children and what implications these within-person variations have for well-being. Because of greater feelings of investment in children than parents, relationships with children may have a greater impact on well-being compared to relationships with parents. Furthermore, having feelings that are outside the norm—specifically, having better quality ties with parents than children (i.e., the opposite of the intergenerational stake hypothesis)—may have detrimental implications for well-being. Previous research has shown that viewing parent–child ties or interactions as nonnormative or inconsistent with expectations is associated with distress (Fingerman, Cheng, Wesselmann, et al., 2012). Individuals who feel more invested in their parents than their children may experience disappointment due to a lack of closeness with children, or experience distress due to competing demands for their time and resources. Finally, the present study contributes to the literature because we examined whether individuals report greater investment in all of their children compared to their parents or only some children.

Other Factors Associated With Parent Child Relationship Qualities and Well-Being

In the current study we controlled for several factors associated with parent–child relationship quality and well-being, including age, gender, education, race, family size, and neuroticism. A great deal of research suggests that parent–child relationship quality and depressive symptoms vary by age (Aquilino, 1997; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010). Women report more emotionally intense intergenerational relationships with both more positive and more negative relationship qualities than do men. Women also tend to report poorer psychological well-being than do men (Nolen-Hoeksema, Larson, & Grayson, 1999; Smetana, Daddis, & Chuang, 2003; Willson, Shuey, & Elder, 2003). Furthermore, individuals who are better educated and/or have higher socioeconomic status report better quality parent–child relationships and better well-being (Pillemer & Suitor, 2002; Pinquart & Sörenson, 2000; Willson, Shuey, Elder, & Wickrama, 2006). Research and theory suggest that African Americans report more ambivalent intergenerational relationships (more positive and more negative) and worse psychological well-being than European Americans (Birditt, Rott, & Fingerman, 2009; Connidis & McMullin, 2002; Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson, 1997). In addition, individuals who have more neurotic personality characteristics tend to report more negative ties and greater depressive symptoms (Bolger & Schilling, 1991; Fingerman, Pitzer, Lefkowitz, Birditt, & Mroczek, 2008). Family size is also important to consider because it has implications for parent–child quality and may have implications for well-being (Uhlenberg & Cooney, 1990).

The Present Study

In this study we examined whether there is support for the intergenerational stake hypothesis by looking at variation in reports of relationship quality regarding parents and children intraindividually (i.e., do people report better quality ties with their children than their parents?) and whether within-person variations in how people feel about their parents and children have implications for their well-being. We benefited from having data from middle-aged individuals who reported on both parents and up to three adult children. We examined the following three questions:

1. Do individuals report better relationship quality with their adult children than their parents? Consistent with the intergenerational stake hypothesis, we predicted that people would report better quality relationships (greater importance, greater positive relationship quality, lower negative relationship quality) with their children than their parents. We also predicted that this within-person difference (i.e., intraindividual stake) in reports of relationship quality regarding parents and children would be consistent across multiple children.
2. Do relationships with children have a stronger association with depressive symptoms than relationships with parents? On the basis of the intergenerational stake hypothesis, we predicted that relationship quality with children would be more highly associated with well-being than relationship quality with parents.
3. Do individuals who report feelings that are inconsistent with the intergenerational stake hypothesis (i.e., better quality ties with parents than children) report greater depressive symptoms? We predicted that individuals who report greater investment and better relationship quality with their parents than their children will report greater depressive symptoms.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were from the Family Exchanges Study I,, which included 633 middle-aged individuals age 40–60 who had at least one child age 18 or over and at least one living parent. Individuals were randomly selected from phone lists obtained through Genesys Corporation as well as random-digit dialing in the Philadelphia Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area (five counties in southeastern Pennsylvania and four counties in New Jersey) and stratified by gender and age (40–50, 51–60). Participants living in Philadelphia County, high-density racial/ethnic minority neighborhoods, and lower-socioeconomic status households were oversampled, resulting in a total of 37% middle-aged racial/ethnic minority participants. Data were collected from January through August 2008. Of the potential middle-aged participants contacted, 75% took part and all completed the interviews. See Table 1 for a sample description.

Participants completed hour-long computer-assisted telephone interviews and received $30 for their time. Midlife participants reported their relationship quality with up to three children over age 18 and each of their living parents. Participants with more than three

children (12%) reported on the child to whom they provided the most support, the child to whom they provided the least support, and a randomly selected child.

Respondents included 543 who reported on mothers and 325 who reported on fathers (a total of 868 parents). A total of 202 respondents reported on one child, 245 reported on two, and 186 reported on three (a total of 1,250 children).

Measures

Relationship quality

Participants rated the importance, positive quality, and negative quality of their relationships with their mother, father, and up to three adult children.

Participants rated the importance of each parent and adult child compared with their other social relationships: 1 (“most important person in your life”), 2 (“among the 3 most important”), 3 (“among the 6 most important”), 4 (“among the 10 most important”), 5 (“among the 20 most important”), and 6 (“less important than that”). The item was reverse coded so that higher numbers reflected greater importance (Fingerman et al., 2008).

Positive and negative quality was assessed using four widely used items from the intergenerational relationships literature (Birditt, Tighe, Fingerman, & Zarit, 2012; Umberson, 1992). Positive qualities of the relationship included two items: (a) “Overall, how much does your (father/mother/child) love and care for you?” and (b) “How much does your (father/mother/child) understand you?” Negative qualities included two items: (a) “How much does your (father/mother/child) criticize you?” and (b) “How much does your (father/mother/child) make demands on you?” Participants rated the items on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *a great deal*). The items were averaged to create positive and negative quality scores that had moderate to moderate–high internal consistency (Spearman–Brown coefficient range: .59–.80). Reliability for scales was calculated with the Spearman–Brown statistic due to limitations of two-item scales (Eisinga, Grotenhuis, & Pelzer, 2013). Previous research using similar scales has found similar coefficients (Birditt et al., 2012; Umberson, 1992).

Well-being

Participants completed the five-item Depression scale from the Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis & Melisarator, 1983). Respondents were asked to “Please report how much the following problems distressed or bothered you during the past seven days, including today: (1) Feeling lonely, (2) Feeling blue, (3) Feeling no interest in things, (4) Feeling hopeless about the future, and (5) Feelings of worthlessness.” Response options included: 1 (“not at all”), 2 (“a little”), 3 (“moderately”), 4 (“quite a bit”) and 5 (“extremely”). We calculated the mean of the items to create a depressive symptoms score (α = .82).

Participant characteristics

Participants reported their age, which we included as a continuous variable. Participants also reported the number of years of education they had completed. The participant’s gender was coded as 1 (male) or 0 (female), and race was coded as 1 (non-White) or 0 (White).

Neuroticism was assessed with a four-item neuroticism scale that asked individuals to report the extent to which the following characteristics described them: moody, worrying, nervous, and calm (reverse coded; Lachman & Weaver, 1997). Participants rated each item on a scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*). We created a mean of the items ($\alpha = .73$). Family size included the total number of children the respondent reported having.

Analysis Strategy

We first described the measures of relationship quality with descriptive statistics and paired-sample *t* tests. Next, to address the first research question, we estimated multilevel models to assess whether individuals rated relationships with their children as more positive, less negative, and more important than their relationships with their parents. The models included three levels in which the lowest level was the specific child or parent, the second level was generation (parent or child), and the upper level was the participant. We first estimated a model without predictors to examine whether there was significant variance within and between participants in how they rated their family members. Next, we included predictors and covariates. The primary predictor was generation, which was coded as 0 (parent) or 1 (child). We included several covariates, including age, gender, education, race, family size, and neuroticism. We estimated three models predicting importance, positive relationship quality, and negative relationship quality. Next, we assessed whether the intraindividual stake was consistent across multiple children. Because participants could report on up to three children we examined whether the stake was consistent across these three children, which were reported on from oldest to youngest. We did this by estimating the models again but with a four-category predictor for the parent–child tie (parent, Child 1, Child 2, Child 3) and the relationship quality scores as the outcomes (importance, positive quality, negative quality). We removed families with four or more children over age 18 because of the different selection process used to select the three focal children among those families.

Next, we assessed the second research question regarding whether relationship quality with children was more highly associated with depressive symptoms than relationship quality with parents. We did this by estimating an ordinary least squares regression model examining depressive symptoms as a function of relationship quality with parents and children. We estimated the model in two steps. In Step 1 we included the covariates, and in Step 2 we added the predictors. The covariates included age, gender, education, race, family size, and neuroticism. The predictors included importance of parents, importance of children, positive relationship quality with parents, positive relationship quality with children, negative relationship quality with parents, and negative relationship quality with children.

Finally, to assess whether individuals who had feelings inconsistent with the intergenerational stake hypothesis had greater depressive symptoms (Research Question 3), we created scores to represent whether individuals reported feelings regarding parents and children that were inconsistent with the stake. We did this by first creating difference scores between feelings about parents and children (parents minus children) and then categorizing respondents into three categories for each quality measure (children higher, parents higher,

or equal). We then estimated three analyses of covariance with the categories of quality as the predictor, depressive symptoms as the outcome, and the following covariates: participant age, sex, race, education, family size and neuroticism. Significant effects of relationship quality categories were examined with pairwise comparisons of means with Bonferonni adjustments for Type I error.

Overall, there were very little missing data. A total of two people were missing reports of parental importance, and four people were missing reports of child importance. One person was missing data on parent positive relationship quality. All participants provided negative relationship quality ratings of parents and children.

Results

Description of Intergenerational Relationship Quality

Overall, participants reported high levels of positive quality and low levels of negative quality with both parents and children (see Table 1). Relationships with children were rated as more important than relationships with parents ($t = -5.53$, $p < .01$). There was no significant generation difference in participant reports of positive and negative relationship quality (positive: $t = -1.37$, $p > .05$; negative: $t = -0.92$, $p > .05$).

Research Question 1: Is There Evidence of an Intraindividual Stake?

We first estimated whether there was significant variation in individuals' reports of relationship quality with parents and children by estimating models predicting positive, negative, and importance without predictors. There was significant between-person variance in how people felt about their relationships as well as within-person variation in how they felt about parents and children. A total of 16% of the variance in positive relationship quality and in ratings of importance was between person, and the remaining 84% of the variance was within person. A total of 18% of the variance in negative relationship quality was between person, and the remaining 82% of the variance was within person. Thus, reports of relationship quality do not appear to be due to individual differences (e.g., personality) but are dependent on the specific relationship.

We next estimated multilevel models with generation as the predictor (parent vs. child) and relationship quality (importance, positive relationship quality, negative relationship quality) as the outcomes to examine whether there is evidence of an intraindividual stake (see Table 2). Consistent with the intergenerational stake hypothesis, people rated their children as more important than their parents. However, inconsistent with the intergenerational stake hypothesis, relationships with children were rated as more negative than relationships with parents. There was no generation difference in positive relationship quality.

Finally, we estimated models to examine whether within-person generation differences in relationship quality were consistent across multiple children (results are not given in the tables because of space limitations). There was no variation in the within-person generation differences by child when looking at ratings of importance. Consistent with our hypothesis, parents were rated as less important ($M = 4.15$, $SE = 0.04$) than all three children (Child 1: $M = 4.53$, $SE = 0.04$; Child 2: $M = 4.51$, $SE = 0.05$; Child 3: $M = 4.49$, $SE = 0.08$). Similar to

the previous findings, there was no generation difference in positive quality. When we examined negative relationship quality we did observe variation by child: Parents (M = 1.96, SE = 0.03) were rated as less negative than the second-oldest child (M = 2.18, SE = 0.05), and the third-oldest child (M = 2.24, SE = 0.08), but not the oldest child (M = 2.00, SE = 0.04). Thus, it appears that the intergenerational stake hypothesis is supported across multiple children when ratings of the importance of the tie are considered. Parents were consistently rated as less important than each child. It is interesting that younger children, but not the oldest child, were viewed more negatively than parents.

Research Question 2: Do Ties With Parents or Children Have a Greater Association With Depressive Symptoms?

Table 3 includes results from linear regression models that examined depressive symptoms as a function of relationship quality with children and parents. Consistent with the intergenerational stake hypothesis, greater positive relationship quality with children predicted lower depressive symptoms, whereas positive quality ties with parents were not associated with well-being. In contrast, negative relationship quality and importance of the relationship with parents, but not with children, were significant predictors of well-being. Individuals who reported greater negative parental relationship quality and greater parental importance reported greater depressive symptoms. Overall, these findings are only partially consistent with our hypothesis that children would have a greater impact on well-being than parents.

Research Question 3: Do Individuals Who Report Feelings That Are Inconsistent With the Intergenerational Stake Hypothesis Report Greater Depressive Symptoms?

We examined whether depressive symptoms varied by three categories of respondent reports of relationship quality with parents and children (parents higher than children, parents and children equal, or children higher than parents). We assessed the three relationship quality measures separately (importance, positive, negative). Depressive symptoms varied by reports of importance (F = 3.70, $p < .05$). Post hoc comparisons of means with Bonferroni adjustments revealed that respondents who reported that their parents were more important than their children had higher depressive symptoms than respondents who reported that children were more important than parents (see Table 4).

Depressive symptoms also varied by reports of negative quality regarding parents and children (F = 3.86, $p < .05$). Post hoc comparisons of means with Bonferroni adjustments revealed that respondents who reported that their relationships with their parents were more negative than their relationships with their children had greater depressive symptoms than people who felt equally negative about parents and children. There was no significant difference in reports of depressive symptoms between those who reported that their ties with children were more negative than those with parents and the other groups. There was also no association between the three positive relationship quality groups and depressive symptoms.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether the intergenerational stake hypothesis is supported by looking at within-person differences in how individuals feel about their parents and children and whether these within-person differences have implications for well-being. We found support for the intergenerational stake hypothesis with regard to variations in reports importance: Individuals reported that their children were more important than their parents. Of interest, however, is that people also reported that their relationships with children were more negative than with their parents. These within-person differences in how people felt about their parents and children had important implications for well-being. Individuals who reported feelings in the direction opposite of the intergenerational stake (parents more important than children) reported poorer well-being.

Generation Differences in Relationship Quality

Consistent with the intergenerational stake hypothesis, individuals reported feeling that their children were more important to them than their parents. These reports were similar across all children on whom parents were asked to report (up to three). These findings indicate that individuals do appear to experience feelings that are consistent with the intergenerational stake hypothesis, which suggests that parents are more emotionally invested in the relationship than are their children (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971). It is likely that parents view their children as continuations of themselves and thus perceive their ties with children as more important than ties with parents (Giarrusso, Feng, & Bengtson, 2004). Similarly, previous research has shown that individuals provide more support to the younger than the older generation (Fingerman et al., 2010), and parents usually report greater investment and closeness in the tie than do their children (Aquilino, 1999; Shapiro, 2004). This study contributes to the literature by showing that people experience feelings consistent with the intergenerational stake within themselves regarding their parents and children.

It is interesting that, in contrast to our hypothesis, respondents reported feeling greater negative relationship quality with their children than their parents. It is possible that feelings of irritation are a sign of greater investment in the relationship (Fingerman, 1996). Indeed, previous research has found generational differences in tensions, with parents reporting greater tensions in some areas than their adult offspring (e.g., finances, education, and health; Birditt, Miller, Fingerman, & Lefkowitz, 2009). Other work has found that parents are more upset by conflicts with adolescent children and that they tend to ruminate over these interactions more than their children do (Larson & Richards, 1994; Steinberg, 2001). Greater feelings of negative relationship quality regarding children may be a sign of parents' desires for their children to reach independent status. Indeed, the generation difference in negative relationship quality existed for younger (and likely less independent) children rather than older children, which supports this hypothesis. Of interest is that the combined feelings of greater investment and negative relationship quality may be an indication of intergenerational ambivalence or simultaneous feelings of both negative and positive emotions about the same tie (Fingerman, Hay, & Birditt, 2004; Pillemer & Suitor, 2002).

Relationship Quality and Well-Being

Consistent with our hypothesis, greater positive relationship quality with children was associated with lower depressive symptoms, but greater positive relationship quality with parents was not. This finding parallels other work indicating that greater positive ties with children are associated with better well-being and greater quality of life (Lowenstein, 2007; Ryan & Willits, 2007). However, the present study showed that relations with children were more highly associated with well-being than positive ties with parents. This is in line with our hypothesis that greater investment in children than in parents may have implications for well-being.

In contrast to what we had hypothesized, relationships with parents were associated with well-being via negative relationship quality and importance. Individuals who reported greater negative relationship quality with parents and greater parental importance reported greater depressive symptoms. This finding is consistent with Umberson's (1992) study, which showed that negative relationship quality with one's mother predicted greater distress. The present study moves beyond Umberson's by revealing that negativity and investment regarding parents, but not children, was associated with well-being. Negativity regarding children may be more expected than negativity regarding parents given that the parent–child relationship typically shows declines in negativity over the life span (Birditt, Jackey, et al., 2009). Thus, experiencing negativity with parents during middle age may be disconcerting. Similarly, parents and children are expected to experience increased independence from one another as they age, and so experiencing high levels of investment in parents during middle age is not normative and may create feelings of discomfort.

The Intraindividual Stake and Well-Being

We also assessed whether feelings that were in the direction opposite of the intergenerational stake hypothesis (i.e., greater investment in parents than children) had negative implications for well-being. In line with our hypothesis, individuals who reported feeling that parents were more important than their children had poorer well-being than individuals who reported feeling children were more important than parents. In addition, feeling more negative about parents than children also predicted greater depressive symptoms than having no generation difference in negative quality. Thus, it appears that showing a pattern that is inconsistent with the norm may be harmful to well-being. In addition, generation differences in negative relationship quality may reflect generation differences in investment; consequently, it appears that it may be harmful for individuals to feel more invested in their parents than their children. Feeling more invested in parents, or more intense negative feelings about parents, may cause feelings of distress or discomfort because it is inconsistent with societal norms to provide more support to children as well as to have independence from parents at older ages. Similarly, previous studies have shown that parents who perceive support exchanges with their children as nonnormative (i.e., giving more support than they should) tend to report greater distress (Fingerman, Cheng, Wesselmann, et al., 2012). Feeling more invested in parents than children may create additional strains on resources because young adult children often require support well into adulthood. Furthermore, these individuals may be tied too closely to their parents and remain enmeshed in long-standing conflicts with them. By placing too much importance on

relationships with parents, respondents may not gain as much satisfaction from relationships with their own children. Likewise, they may feel distressed by the relative lack of closeness with their children.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

As with all research, this study has limitations. First, because of the cross-sectional nature of the research design it is impossible to know whether relationship quality predicts changes in well-being. Most likely there is a bidirectional link between relationship quality and well-being, and individuals with poorer well-being elicit negativity in their relationships. For example, Branje and colleagues (Branje, Hale, Frijns, & Meeus, 2010) found that greater depressive symptoms among adolescents predicted decreased parent–child relationship quality. One next step would be to examine these links over time in order to understand these bidirectional effects. We would also like to understand the factors that predict within-person discrepancies in reports of relationship quality regarding parents and children. For example, do health problems among parents lead people to report greater investment in parents than children? Furthermore, the present study included only depressive symptoms as an outcome; future studies should examine the implications of negative and positive relations for physical health and positive aspects of well-being, such as life satisfaction. Future research should also assess daily processes that occur in negative versus positive ties to identify where there are variations in these ties that are not revealed by examining well-being. Finally, these associations could be examined from both the parent and the child's perspective to understand how relationship quality and well-being are linked dyadically.

Overall, these results show that individuals experience an intraindividual stake in which they report both greater importance and more negative feelings regarding children than they do about parents. Parents and children also appear to have distinct effects on well-being. Greater positive quality with children was associated with better well-being, whereas greater investment and negative quality with parents was associated with lower well-being. It appears that feelings that are not consistent with the intraindividual stake (i.e., feeling more invested in parents than children) are associated with poor well-being. This study emphasizes the importance of examining within-person variations in feelings regarding interpersonal ties with both older and younger generations and that these variations have important implications for well-being.

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Table 1

Descriptive Characteristics for the Study Sample (N = 633)

Variable	% or *M/SD*	Range
Participant characteristics		
Gender (ref.: female)	52	
Race (ref.: non-White)	37	
Age	50.60/4.99	40–60
Education (years)	14.18/2.02	9–17
Family size	2.82/1.46	1–11
Neuroticism	2.63/0.79	1–4.75
Relationship quality		
Average quality regarding children		
Importance	4.48/0.86	1–6
Positive	4.04/0.74	1–5
Negative	2.08/0.75	1–4.5
Average quality regarding parents		
Importance	4.22/0.98	1–6
Positive	3.99/0.82	1–5
Negative	2.04/0.90	1–5
Depressive symptoms	1.47/0.65	1–4.6

Note. ref. = reference category.

Table 2

Multilevel Models Predicting Relationship Quality as a Function of Generation

Predictor	Importance		Positive quality		Negative quality	
	b	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*
Intercept	4.55	0.35	4.24	0.32	1.33	0.32
Generation (parent = 0, child = 1)	0.25	0.05**	0.05	0.05	0.08	0.04*
Gender (ref.: male)	0.07	0.05	−0.07	0.05	0.03	0.05
Race (ref.: non-White)	0.38	0.06**	0.02	0.05	0.07	0.05
Age	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.01
Education	−0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01*	0.04	0.01**
Family size	−0.16	0.02**	−0.05	0.02**	−0.01	0.02
Neuroticism	0.01	0.03	−0.11	0.03**	0.19	0.03**

Note. ref. = reference category.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

Table 3

Linear Regressions Predicting Depressive Symptoms as a Function of Relationship Quality With Children and Parents (N = 1,250 Children and 868 Parents Associated With 628 Participants)

Predictor	***b***	***SE***	***b***	***SE***
Gender (ref.: male)	−0.02	0.05	−0.05	0.05
Race (ref.: non-White)	0.15	0.05**	0.10	0.05
Age	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Education	−0.03	0.01*	−0.03	0.01*
Family size	0.01	0.02	−0.01	0.02
Neuroticism	0.32	0.03**	0.29	0.03**
Parent positive			0.05	0.04
Child positive			−0.10	0.04**
Parent negative			0.09	0.03**
Child negative			0.05	0.03
Parent importance			0.08	0.03*
Child importance			0.01	0.03
Adjusted R^2	.16**		.21**	

Note. ref. = reference category.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

Table 4

Estimated Means of Depressive Symptoms as a Function of Variations in the Intraindividual Stake

Depressive symptoms	Importance	Positive quality	Negative quality
Child higher than parent			
M	1.41	1.47	1.45
SE	0.04_{a}	0.04_{a}	$0.04_{a,b}$
n	253	267	295
No difference between child and parent			
M	1.44	1.39	1.33
SE	$0.04_{a,b}$	0.06_{a}	0.07_{a}
n	233	93	82
Parent higher than child			
M	1.60	1.50	1.53
SE	0.06_{b}	0.04_{a}	0.04_{b}
n	136	265	249

Note. Means in the same column that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$ in the pairwise comparison with a Bonferonni adjustment for Type I error.