The Adult Child-Parent Relationship and Parent Psychological Distress: How Do Relationship Quality, Dissatisfaction, and Equity Matter?

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Abstract

Relationships with children are important for parents' psychological well-being. However, the vast majority of research in this area focuses on the consequences of having young children on parents' psychological outcomes. Research on adult child-parent relationships and parents' psychological distress tend to be cross-sectional and only examine one dimension of the parent-child tie. Drawing on a merged life course and stress perspective, we use four waves of national longitudinal data (Americans' Changing Lives, N = 1,656) to test how multiple dimensions of the intergenerational relationship between adult children and parents—relationship quality, relationship equity, and relationship dissatisfaction—shape baseline levels of, and trajectories of change over time in, parents' psychological distress. We find that relationship quality is associated with parents' distress at baseline but not over time, while relationship equity and dissatisfaction shape trajectories of change in parents' psychological distress over time. We further show how these effects vary for mothers and fathers.

Keywords: psychological distress, intergenerational relationships, intergenerational equity, relationship dissatisfaction, gender

Psychological distress is not static but tends to decline with advancing age across the life course (Jorm et al., 2005; Yang, 2007; Umberson, Liu, & Reczek 2008). Research in social psychology has focused on the predictors of psychological distress and shows that relationships with children are important for parents' psychological well-being (Milkie, Bierman, & Schieman 2008; Umberson, Pudrovska, & Reczek 2010). Despite the fact that the parent-child tie extends as both generations age into mid- and later-life (Fingerman, Pitzer, Lefkowitz, Birditt, & Mroczek, 2008; Fingerman, Cheng, Birditt, & Zarit, 2012), the vast majority of research in this area focuses on the consequences of having young children on parents' psychological outcomes (e.g., Bures, Koropeckyj-Cox, Loree, 2009; Evenson & Simon, 2005; Milkie 2003; Nomaguchi, 2012; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003). Yet, a linked stress process and life course perspective emphasizes that the "linked lives" of parents and children move together across the life course with likely implications for both generations' well-being (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003; Knoester, 2003); these linked relationships have effects on the psychological well-being of parents via the central pathway of stress, wherein relationships with children ameliorate, or contribute to, stress (Bierman & Milkie, 2008; Umberson et al., 2008). Yet, whether the consequences of the parent-child tie on parents' psychological well-being extend beyond the early years of parenthood has been relatively understudied.

The question of how the intergenerational tie shapes parents' well-being later in the life course is especially as parents age into mid- and later-life where parent-child interdependence reemerges. A growing number of studies that do examine the adult child-parent tie and parent well-being tend to be cross-sectional and non-representative, thus unable to speak to broader population trends (Allen, Blieszner, & Roberto, 2000; Milkie et al., 2008; Umberson 1992). Additionally, while research shows that there are multiple dimensions of the adult child-parent tie that are predictors of psychological well-being, previous studies tend to examine only one dimension of the adult child-parent tie (e.g., frequency or type of contact, care-provision, or strain) (Allen et al., 2000; Milkie et al., 2008) and thus do not provide a full picture of the effects of adult child-parent relationships

on parents' psychological well-being. Thus, a more holistic view of multiple parent-child relationship measures will facilitate a clearer understanding of which dimensions of the parent-child tie matter for parents' well-being.

In order to address these research gaps, the present study uses a merged stress and life course approach (Umberson et al., 2008) and national longitudinal panel data to test how multiple dimensions of parent-adult child relationship matter for baseline levels and trajectories of change in parents' psychological distress. First, we examine the relationship between adult children and parents with commonly used measures of relationship support and relational conflict (i.e., relationship quality) (Allen et al, 2000; Silverstein et al. 2013). Next, because previous research shows both relationship dissatisfaction and relationship equity matter to adults' psychological well-being (Fingerman, Chen, Birditt, & Zarit 2012; Thoits 2012), we test role of parental dissatisfaction (e.g., happy with how the child turned out, bothered by child, dissatisfaction with relationship quality) and relationship equity (i.e., how equal do parents' feel their intergenerational relationship is) as independent predictors of parental distress. Finally, because the parent-child tie (Lye 1996; Willson, Shuey, and Elder 2004; Cichy, Lefkowitz, Davis, and Fingerman 2013) and psychological distress (Mirowsky and Ross 2003) are stratified by gender, we test how these processes differ for fathers and mothers.

BACKGROUND

Theorizing Adult Child-Parent Relationship Quality on Parent Psychological Distress

Following a merged stress process and life course approach, the majority of research on the parent-child tie and parents' health focuses on the effects of adult child-parent relationship quality, often conceptualized as relationship support and relationship strain (Bengtson, Giarrusso, Mabry, & Silverstein 2002; Pudrovska, 2008; Umberson, 1992). For example, support from adult children serves as a stress-buffering resource for parents across the life course, which is in turn strongly linked to psychological well-being (Thoits 1995). Parents who receive emotional support from adult children experience increased life satisfaction (Lang & Schutze, 2002) and decreased loneliness (Long & Martin, 2000), while parents that receive instrumental support, financial support,

and generalized caregiving from their adult children experience a boost in psychological well-being (Merz, Consedine, Schulze & Schuengel, 2009). Poorer quality parent-child ties are associated with worse psychological well-being among parents, again in relation to stress processes (Koropeckyk-Cox, 2002; Milkie et al., 2008; Ward & Spitze, 2004). For example, cross-sectional studies show that parents with poorer adult child-parent relationship quality have higher rates of depression and loneliness, while parents who report being distant from an adult child have lower levels of happiness (Connidis & McMullin, 1993; Koropeckyj-Cox, 2002; Umberson 1992). Negative treatment from adult children is associated with more depression over time (Milkie et al., 2008).

Taken together, previous research shows linkages between the adult child-parent tie and psychological distress, we predict the following hypotheses for our longitudinal analyses:

H1: Higher relationship quality (i.e., high levels of support and lower levels of strain) from adult children at baseline will be associated with lower levels of psychological distress at baseline and a faster rate of normative decline in psychological distress over time.

Theorizing Parental Dissatisfaction on Parent Psychological Distress

Parental dissatisfaction may also be important to parents' psychological distress across the life course and again linked with stress processes. In line with previous research, we conceptualize parental satisfaction with an adult child as encompassing three primary domains: (dis)satisfaction with being a parent, feeling bothered as a parent, and (dis)satisfaction with how a child turned out (Greenberger & O'Neil 1993; Umberson & Williams 2003). A significant body of research suggests that dissatisfaction or upset with the parental role are important when examining the effects of parenting minor children on parents' psychological well-being (Umberson & Williams 1993; Vitanza & Guarnaccia 1999), although few studies examine whether dissatisfaction or upset with the parental role of an adult child matters for parents' distress. Measurement of dissatisfaction regarding how an adult child has "turned out" has been the site of a much larger research area. Several cross-sectional studies

demonstrate that parents whose child has more perceived problems have worse psychological distress and well-being (Greenfield, & Marks, 2006; Pillemer & Suitor, 1991), including life satisfaction and depression (Fingerman et al. 2012; Ha, 2008). Dissatisfaction specifically around adult children's failure to achieve normative adult statuses (e.g., marriage, divorce, unemployment) is linked to parental distress (Cichy et al. 2013; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998; Kalmijn & Graaf, 2012; Milkie et al., 2008). These processes likely take a toll on parents' psychological distress via stress proliferation processes (Pearlin, 1999; Wethington 2000) wherein one generations stressors act as a contagion onto the other; however, how these processes operate overtime with longitudinal data has yet to be fully uncovered. Taken together, previous research shows linkages between relationship (dis)satisfaction and parents' psychological distress, we predict:

H2: Higher dissatisfaction from adult children will be associated with lower levels of psychological distress at baseline and a faster rate of normative decline in psychological distress over time.

Theorizing Adult Child-Parent Equity on Parent Psychological Distress

Undergirded by life course and stress processes research, a body of work on social ties more broadly shows that unbalanced social exchanges, wherein one social partner provides more support than another, increases depressive symptoms and psychological distress (Li, Fok, & Fung, 2011; Liang, Krause, Bennett, 2001; Ramos & Wilmonth, 2003; Vaananen, Buunk, Kivimaki et al., 2005). This is likely because any inequality in support-giving dictates need of support, and thus hardship; unequal exchanges also rebuke norms around the importance of reciprocity in social exchanges (Emerson, 1981) and thus inequality may mark underlying stress that is not shown via direct measures of intergenerational strain. Several studies look at the nature of equity or reciprocity assessments between adult children and parents, highlighting reciprocity as a central dimension of the adult child-parent tie (Antonucci, 1990; Morgan, Schuster, & Butler, 1991; Henretta et al., 1997; Silverstein, Conroy, et al., 2002). While most research focuses on the dimensions of equity between parents and children without looking at mental health outcomes, a growing number of studies show that unequal exchanges with adult

children in either direction is associated with decreased life satisfaction, loneliness, and increased depression (Gierveld & Dykstra 2008; Lowenstein, Katz, & Gur-Yaish, 2007; Lee, Netzer, & Coward, 1995; Liang et al. 2001). Other studies using with data on general networks that include (but do not specifically identify children) show it is better to give than to receive support; perhaps because receiving support entails need for support while giving support provides a sense of purpose and service to others (Dunbar, Ford, & Hunt, 1998; Thomas, 2009). Thus, parents who are receiving high levels of support but do not give support to adult children in an equitable exchange may experience increase psychological distress on account of such inequality (Brown, Consedine, & Magai, 2005; Gierveld & Dykstra, 2008). Notably, however, studies addressing this question are not population-based, tend to be based on convenience samples, and do not specifically test the adult child-parent tie, therefore they are unable to address causal processes through which equity may directly affect parents' psychological distress. Given this body of work, we predict the following hypothesis:

> H3: Equality in the adult-child parent relationship will be associated with lower levels of psychological distress at baseline and a faster rate of normative decline in psychological distress over time; inequality (i.e., parents providing more or less support) will be associated with a more baseline psychological distress and a more rapid increase in psychological distress over time.

(How) Are Mothers and Fathers Different?

A stress process and life course approach emphasizes that the relationship between the intergenerational tie and psychological distress likely varies by gender. Psychological distress varies at least in part by gender, wherein women are more likely to experience psychological distress over the life course than men (Mirowsky & Ross 2003). Moreover, relationship quality, parental dissatisfaction, and relationship equity all appear to differ, to at least some extent, by gender. Scholars show consistently that mothers report closer (Erdmans 2004; Chodorow 1978; Pillemer & Suitor, 1991), and more conflictual (Aldous & Klein, 1991) relationships with children than fathers, while also reporting lower levels of dissatisfaction with adult children and lower levels of

equity with adult children (Lye 1996; Rogers & White 1998; Amato, Rezac, & Booth 1995). Moreover, adult child-parent ties may be more salient to women across the life course, and thus relationships with children may have more direct effects on these parents' psychological well-being. One central study supports this view, finding that being treated negatively by an adult child is related to higher rates of anger only among women (not men) (Milkie et al., 2008). We build on this previous study to hypothesize that:

> H4: Compared with fathers, mothers with lower relationship quality, higher dissatisfaction with adult child, or less equity in the adult-child parent relationship will have higher levels of psychological distress at baseline and a slower rate of normative decline in psychological distress over time.

Methods

We analyze data from the first four waves of the Americans' Changing Lives (ACL) panel study (House 1986). Multistage stratified area probability sampling is used to obtain the original sample of individuals in the contiguous United States (aged 24 – 96). Face-to-face structured interviews lasting approximately 90 minutes each were conducted with individuals in 1986 (N = 3,617), 1989 (N = 2,867), 1994 (N = 2,562), and 2001 (N= 1,787). In the original sample (1986), 2,204 parents of adult children were interviewed. For the maximization of data usage, we keep those who have valid answers in one or more waves. Because one of the independent variables, parent-child relationship equity is only asked in Wave II, we drop those who only have one wave of valid answers (Wave I) and drop those who did not respond to Wave II, which leaves us 1757 individuals. Limiting our research to white and African Americans produces a sample of 1720 individuals (too few cases were available to examine other racial/ethnic groups). Further restricting the sample to those without missing dependent variables or independent variables (the missing is less than 5%) yields a sample of 1656 parents, among which 384 have two waves of answers, 501 have three waves, and 771 have four waves.

Measures

Psychological Distress. Our primary dependent variable is psychological distress from Wave 1 to Wave 4. Psychological distress is defined as "an unpleasant subjective state" that includes feelings of depression and anxiety (Mirowsky & Ross, 1989). Psychological distress was based on an 11-item version of the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression (CES-D) Scale. The CES-D scale was created from the following items for which respondents were asked, "how often you felt that way during the past week": I felt depressed; everything I did was an effort; my sleep was restless; I was happy; I felt lonely; people were un- friendly; I enjoyed life; I did not feel like eating, my appetite was poor; I felt sad; I felt that people disliked me; I could not get going. For each item, respondent could choose answers from: hardly ever, some of the time, and most of the time. All 11 items were standardized using Wave I weighted means and standard deviations before being combined. Responses were computed as the natural log of the mean score of CES-D scores plus 3 to avoid the log of zero, creating CES-D scores with higher values denoting higher levels of psychological distress. To better interpret the results, we multiply the mean scores by 100. Alpha reliabilities range from .82 to .83 across all four waves of the survey.

Child Support and Strain. Child support is a latent variable composed of two items based on two questions in Wave I: (a) "How much does your [child] make you feel loved and cared for?" (responses from 1 -5, *a great deal* to *not at all*); (b) "How much is [he/she] willing to listen to your worries or problems?" (responses from 1 – 5, *a great deal* to *not at all*). Child Strain is a latent variable constructed from two questions in Wave I: (a) "How much do you feel your child(ren) makes too many demands on you?" (responses from 1 -5, *a great deal* to *not at all*); (b) "How much is [he/she] critical of you or what you do?" (responses from 1 -5, *a great deal* to *not at all*). The answers are reverse-coded, combined, and imputed by the ACL researchers so that higher values in the scale indicate higher levels of the intended construct.

Parental Dissatisfaction is also a latent variable constructed by the ACL researchers. It is based on three questions in Wave I: (a) "At this point in your life, how satisfied are you with being a parent?" (responses from 1

– 5, *completely satisfied* to *not at all satisfied*); (b) "How often do you feel upset or bothered as a parent?" (responses from 1 – 5, *almost always* to *never*); (c) "How happy are you with the way your (son/daughter/children) (has/have) turned out to this point?" (responses from *very happy* to *not at all happy*). Answers in (b) are reverse-coded so that higher values in the scale indicate higher levels of parental dissatisfaction.

Relationship equity is based on question in Wave 1: "Right now, would you say you provide more support, advice, and help to your (son/daughter/children), is it about equal, or (does he/does she/do they) provide more to you?" (responses 1 = *respondent provides more*, 2 = *about* equal, 3 = *child provides more*)in W II. We use the category of "child provides more" as reference group and construct two dummy variables for the other two categories.

Interactions with Gender. We generate interaction terms of each independent variables (child support, child strain, parental dissatisfaction, and relationship equity) with gender (0 = mother; 1 = father).

Sociodemographic covariates. We control for age, gender, race, education, and income in all analysis. We incorporate measures for age (in years) of the respondent at Wave 1, and control for other sociodemographic covariates that are relevant to parent-child relationship. These covariates include gender (0 = mother; 1 = father), race (0 = White; 1 = African American), marital status (0 = married, 1 = not married at Wave 1), education (measured in number of years completed at Wave 1), total family income (in $1,000s at Wave 1), and number of children (at Wave 1). Table 1 presents weighted means and standard deviation for all variables in the analysis.

Analytical Approach

We use latent linear growth curve models to estimate the effects independent variables on parents' initial levels and change in psychological distress over time. Growth curve models help us recognize that parents have different levels of psychological distress at the baseline and these parents also experience different rates of change in psychological distress as a function of their relationships with their adult children (e.g., child support

and child strain). Growth curve models are appropriate for our analysis because of their ability to distinguish two levels (i.e., within-individual and between-individual) of heterogeneity in estimating changes of psychological distress influenced by other variables. The equations of the linear growth curve model are as follows:

$$y_{it} = \eta_{0i} + \eta_{1i}T_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

$$\eta_{0i} = \alpha_0 + X_0'B_0 + \zeta_{0i} \quad (2a)$$

$$\eta_{1i} = \alpha_1 + X_1'B_1 + \zeta_{1i} \quad (2b)$$

Equation 1 represents within-individual change over time. Equations 2a and 2b represent between-individual change over time. The outcome variable is y_{it} (i.e., psychological distress of individual i at wave t); η_{0i} is the latent intercept; η_{1i} is the latent slope; T_{it} is the time score (reflecting the number of years since Wave 1); X_0 and X_1 represent the vectors of other Wave 1 covariates to predict the latent intercept and slope respectively; and B_0 and B_1 are the corresponding vectors of coefficient. α_0 and α_1 are level 2 intercepts (i.e., fixed effects). Residuals are represented by ε_{it}, ζ_{0i}, and ζ_{1i}.

All models are estimated using STATA XTMIXED (StataCorp, 2007) with maximum likelihood estimation, which allows us to incorporate all respondents who have been observed at least twice, including those who died during the survey period in the sample (Brown, O'Rand, & Adkins, 2012). Following previous research (Warner & Brown, 2011), we also account for differential rates of dropout and death attrition by controlling for the number of participated waves and whether respondents died during the study period.

The focus of this study is on estimating the effects of parental dissatisfaction and parent-child relationship equity on the baseline level (i.e., latent intercept) and rate of change (i.e., latent slope) in psychological distress over time. In analysis not shown, we also explore whether parental dissatisfaction/parent-child relationship equity functions as moderators that alter the relationship between child support/strain and psychological distress, but we found few significant results and thus do not include them.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows means or percentages for all variables at baseline used in the analysis separately for Wave 1. Consistent with previous research (Jorm et al., 2005; Yang, 2007; Umberson et al. 2008), results from unconditional growth models with no covariates (not shown) indicate that psychological distress decreased (b = -0.257 p <0.001) over the study period.[1]

Growth Curve Results

Tables 2 shows results from the growth-curve analysis, demonstrating the estimated effects of the adult child support and strain, parental satisfaction, and reported equity measures and other covariates at the baseline level (latent intercept) in addition to the rate of change (latent slope) in psychological distress over time. Each model controls for all sociodemographic covariates.

Support and Strain from Children and Psychological Distress

We first examine results from growth-curve models that estimated the effects of adult child support and adult child strain on parents' trajectories of psychological distress, as shown in Table 2, controlling for all sociodemographic covariates. We include both support and strain in the same model because testing them independently yielded same results. In Model 1, the significant coefficient of -4.297 (p < .001) shows that baseline support from adult children was negatively associated with baseline psychological distress. Results in Model 1 show no significant effects of baseline support from adult children on the rate of change (the latent slope) of parents' psychological distress. Turning to child strain, Model 1 indicates that baseline strain from adult children was positively associated with baseline psychological distress. The significant negative coefficient of -0.143 (p < .05) shows that every one-unit increase in baseline strain increased the rate of decline in psychological distress by 0.143 units. In analysis not shown, we also examined how changes in child

[1] We also stratify the sample by respondent's gender, but the unconditional growth model does not report significant change in psychological distress over time in the sub-sample of men.

support/strain from Wave 1 to Wave 2 influence the baseline level (i.e., latent intercept) and rate of change (i.e., latent slope) in psychological distress over time, yet we found few significant results.

Parental Dissatisfaction

Next, we introduced our parental dissatisfaction index (e.g., how satisfied are you with how your child turned out, how satisfied are you with being a parent, how often you feel upset or bothered as a parent) in order to test how of a direct assessment of satisfaction in one's adult child-parent relationship shape trajectories of change on psychological distress. In Model 2 of Table 2, controlling for all covariates, results show that that baseline parental dissatisfaction was positively associated with baseline psychological distress. Moreover, the significant negative coefficient for baseline parental dissatisfaction on the rate of change (the latent slope) of psychological distress (b = -0.183, p < .05) indicated that every one-unit increase in baseline dissatisfaction increased the rate of decline in psychological distress over time by 0.183 units.

Equity

Next, we report results from growth-curve models that estimated the effects of reported relationship equity between parents and adult children on parents' trajectories of psychological distress, controlling for all sociodemographic covariates. Results in Model 3 of Table 2 indicated that parents who offered more help than their child offered them, or who offered the same amount of help as their child offered, had lower baseline psychological distress in the baseline than those who received more help from adult children. The significant positive coefficients for baseline relationship equity (b = .561, p < .05; b = .594, p < .05) on the rate of change of psychological distress indicated that offering both more as well as equal help to adult children in the baseline slowed the rate of decline in psychological distress over time by about 0.6 units.

Gender Interactions[2]

[2] Race and age interactions with each of the independent variables were also included in the analysis, but did not show consistent significant result (available upon request).

We also report results from growth-curve models that examined whether parent gender moderates the relationships between child support, child strain, parental dissatisfaction, and relationship equity and psychological distress in Table 3. We add gender (dummy variable, 1 = father) interaction terms with each predictor, and found no significant gender interactions in the effect of child support, child strain, and relationship equity on parents' psychological distress both in the baseline and change over time (results are available upon request). Yet results displayed in Model 1 of Table 3 and Figure 1 indicate that among fathers (compared with mothers), those with higher baseline levels of dissatisfaction experienced a less rapid decline in psychological distress over time, controlling for other demographic covariates and predictors. Correspondingly, among mothers, those with higher baseline levels of dissatisfaction experienced a more rapid decline in psychological distress over time.

DISCUSSION

Relationships with children are central to parents' well-being across the life course (Milkie et al., 2008; Umberson et al., 2013); yet previous research has primarily focused on the consequences of having minor children on parents' psychological well-being. Following a merged stress and life course approach which suggests that the parent-child tie will remain important to parents' psychological well-being even as children age into adulthood due to the "linked" lives of both generations, this study takes a next step in this research area with a longitudinal population-based analysis that moves beyond the early years of parenthood. We test how multiple dimensions of parent-child relationship contribute to parents' psychological distress over time in order to provide insight into the causal pathways through which parents' and children's intermingling lives are protective, or detrimental, to parents' well-being as they age into mid- and later-life. We further test how these effects differ across the gender of the parent. Overall, we find that while relationship quality has limited effect on parental well-being beyond the baseline level, both dissatisfaction and equity play an important role in changes in parents' psychological distress over time. Moreover, the effects only of relationship dissatisfaction on parents'

psychological distress appear to differ for mothers and fathers. We outline our three main contributions to the literature, highlighting directions and implications for future research, below.

First, findings suggest that while relationship quality has clear effects on other aspects of parents' well-being (Long & Martin, 2000; Lang & Schutze 2002), this dimension of the parent-child tie is only significant with levels of psychological distress at the baseline level. Specifically, we found higher baseline support from adult children was negatively associated with baseline psychological distress while higher baseline strain was associated positively with baseline psychological distress (consistent with H1). However, there are no significant effects of baseline support or strain from adult children on the rate of change (the latent slope) of parents' psychological distress (inconsistent with H1). This suggests that the effects of relationship quality matter for parents' psychological distress in the immediate, but do not have long-lasting effects on parents' psychological distress. Drawing on a stress process framework, it may be because individuals learn to cope with strain over time in ways protective of psychological distress (Kenny & McGilloway, 2007; Koropeckyk-Cox, 2002; Ward & Spitze, 2004; Merz et al., 2009); thus that the strained effects of these dimensions of the parent-child tie dissipate over time. Similarly, parents keep receiving similar levels of support over time. While the initial effects of this support initially boost psychological distress, it may not have a sustained effect on parents' well-being over time. In this way, parents may become resilient to strain and support over time, so much so that support becomes less effective and strain becomes less harmful for parents' well-being. Support from children may also be a double edged sword, wherein support from children implies the need of support (Ikkink, Van Tilburg, & Knipscheer, 1999), and therefore the positive effects of support may merely cancel out the negative effects of needing support on psychological distress over time. This finding has potential implications for the way scholars view support and strain from adult children on aging adults' well-being, wherein these components of the parent-child tie may be less salient to psychological well-being than previously theorized. Additionally, it may be that parents'

psychological distress is driving adult-child parent relationship quality, a reverse causal effect we cannot tease out at the baseline.

Second, we find that unlike relationship quality measures, both parental dissatisfaction and equity of exchange appear to matter for both baseline and change in psychological distress. We find strong support for hypothesis 2—that baseline parental dissatisfaction is positively associated with both baseline psychological distress as well as the rate of change (the latent slope) of psychological distress over time. Following a life course and stress process model, it may be that dissatisfaction in particular—which includes being unhappy with the way a child turned out and unhappy with a parenthood role—more so than conflict with a child, has lasting effects on well-being. For example, being unhappy with your role as a parent may be a long-term, chronic dissatisfaction, which certainly has implications for well-being. Moreover, being dissatisfied with how a child turned out may have two complementary effects on parents' well-being (Greenfield & Marks, 2006; Ha, 2008; Figerman et al., 2012). First, dissatisfaction may be a function of a child's own stressful life events – such as a divorce or job loss. Following a life course perspective, the events in adult children's lives will affect the "linked" parent life (Elder et al., 2003), wherein trouble in adult children's lives has strong ramifications for parents' well-being via intergenerational stress proliferation (Bierman & Milkie, 2008). Second, a child's own stressful life events may contribute to parents feeling dissatisfied, in turn making a parent feel as if they are failed at parenthood – lowering levels of life satisfaction, mastery, and self-esteem which are in turn related to psychological distress (Figerman et al., 2012).

We also find support for hypothesis 3—that parents who offered the same amount of help as their child offered at baseline had lower baseline psychological distress than those who received more help from adult children at baseline; this effect also slowed the rate of decline in psychological distress over time. However, in contrast to hypothesis three, we also find that parents who offer more help to adult children than they received from children at the baseline experience a slower rate of decline in psychological distress. This finding supports

a growing body of work (Dunbar, Ford, & Hunt, 1998; Thomas, 2009) that suggests it is better to either give than receive, or at least it is better to give equally, in contrast to receiving more support than one gives. This may be especially true in mid to later life, when receiving support may be strongly linked to requiring more help than at previous life stages. Receiving more help may in fact reflect the fact that these parents do require more help, and are perhaps unable to care for themselves, which is in turn associated with an increase in psychological distress over time (Ikkink et al., 1999; Brown, Consedine, & Magai, 2005; Gierveld & Dykstra, 2008). Giving support and receiving equal levels of support may provide a sense of purpose to parents in line with their identity as caregivers (Thomas, 2009). Moreover, giving at least equal support my boost self-salience and lower stress levels, which in turn may lower psychological distress.

Third, we find that nearly all of these processes operate similarly for mothers and fathers with the exception of our measure of dissatisfaction. As shown in Figure 1, among those with higher levels of baseline dissatisfaction, mothers experience a more rapid decline in psychological distress over time than fathers. For those with lower levels of dissatisfaction, mothers and fathers experience a decline in psychological distress that is more similar. We suggest these effects reflect the fact that the nature of fathers' and mothers' dissatisfaction is uniquely related to psychological distress by gender. Our measure of dissatisfaction captures dissatisfaction with being a parent, being upset as a parent, and feeling dissatisfied with how your child turned out. Compared to fathers, mothers in our sample receive significantly more support from adult child, have lower overall levels of dissatisfaction with children, and have more contact with children than fathers. It may be that mothers invest deeply in their children, and that the parent role has more salience for mothers than fathers (Suitor, Sechrist, Gilligan, & Pillemer, 2011). Because it is less common for mothers to be dissatisfied with their children and their motherhood role, mothers who experience uncharacteristically high levels of dissatisfaction with the way their child turned out or their role as a mother may be associated with increased stress, hastening the decline in psychological distress. That is, it is more distressing to mothers to be dissatisfied with motherhood and their

child than fathers due to the gender imbalance in the meaning and degree of motherhood. Moreover, mothers who care about and invest deeply in their relationships with their children, children do not turn out to be what they are expecting, may create high levels of ambivalence (Pillemer & Suitor, 2002), wherein there is a high degree of love but therefore more room to be let down. It may be that fathers who have high dissatisfaction experience qualitatively different, perhaps less invested, relationships with their children and therefore are not affected by this high level of dissatisfaction. This may be a consequence of the structure of fatherhood and motherhood, wherein fathers, especially divorced fathers, are more estranged from children than divorced mothers later in life and thus their dissatisfaction has little role in their own well-being.

Limitations and Conclusion

The present study provides new insight into the relationship between various components of the intergenerational tie and parents' psychological distress, however, limitations should be considered. First, we do not have a measure of instrumental support or financial support; our measure of intergenerational support is primarily focused on emotional support processes. Therefore, our study cannot attest as to whether instrumental or financial support may have significance for parents' well-being. Second, ambivalence is a major construct in the field of intergenerational relationships, shown to affect well-being. We examined the consequences of indirect ambivalence with a measure of individuals how experience high levels of support and high levels of strain with adult children (e.g., Lendon, Silverstein, & Giarrusso, 2014), however, ambivalence was not a significant predictor of well-being. We encourage future work to examine ambivalence as a potential influence on other aspects of parents' well-being, perhaps especially with the more direct measure of ambivalence (i.e., direct question that asks about the occurrence of ambivalence). Third, also examined whether these processes varied by age but did not find significant interaction results. Clearly, psychological distress and the parent-child tie varies significantly by age, and future research should examine this possibility with other data. Fourth, while our longitudinal data provides us the ability to look temporally at change in psychological distress over time, we

note that we cannot rule out reverse causality completely, nor other intervening variables that are not included in our data source but may underlie the relationship between intergenerational ties and parents' psychological distress. Fifth, while we are able to examine how the gender of a mother or father matters in these relationships, due to the construction of the survey we are unable to ascertain the gender of the child. Relatedly, our measures of the parent-child tie are global assessments of all children. Significant work suggests that parents experience each child in their family differently (Suitor, Sechrist, Pilkuhn, Pardo, & Pillemer, 2008); thus, future work should explore this possibility in future research. Finally, relationship quality, dissatisfaction, and exchange of equity are likely to change, to some degree, over time. In analyses not shown (but available upon request), we test change in relationship quality, dissatisfaction, and equity between waves 1 and 2 in our date to examine this possibility but do not find robust findings. However, we are only able to test change in a short period of time; future research should explore how change over time across a longer time frame matters for parents' psychological distress.

CONCLUSION

Our findings build on a growing body of literature on intergenerational relationships and health to detail which aspects of the parent-child tie appear to matter for parents' long-term psychological distress. We find that it is satisfaction and equity, not relationship quality, which has the strongest effects on parental distress over time. This study suggests that while a wealth of studies focus on intergenerational solidarity and conflict as the main sources of stress and strain among parents, these factors seem to matter less over time. Rather, what appears important for parents' psychological distress is the equity of exchange and dissatisfaction. Notably, receiving is not good for parents' psychological well-being, and being dissatisfied is also negative for psychological distress. Thus, while relationship quality is not a predictor of parents' psychological distress over time, measures of dissatisfaction and equity are independent predictors and should be the site of future research on the intergenerational tie and health. This study questions the attention on support and strain as predictors of

well-being, suggesting a more nuanced approach to the effects of parent-child relationships may lie not in dimensions of support and strain but rather more specific predictors of satisfaction across the life course.

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Table 1. Weighted Descriptive Statistics of Variables Analyzed (N = 1,656)

	Mean	SD	n
Psychological Distress T1	101.078	30.399	1,656
Psychological Distress T2	101.738	30.573	1,656
Psychological Distress T3	95.516	29.347	1,243
Psychological Distress T4	96.172	28.212	800
Child support T1	0.041	0.971	1,656
Child strain T1	-0.026	0.951	1,656
Parental Dissatisfaction T1	0.034	1.060	1,656
Relationship Equity (ref: child provides more)			1,656
parent provides more	0.430	0.495	1,656
equal relationship	0.503	0.500	1,656
Age (T1, in years)	57.261	12.156	1,656
Gender (1 = father)	0.399	0.490	1,656
Race (1 = African American)	0.113	0.317	1,656
Years of Education (T1)	11.846	3.054	1,656
Family income (T1, logged $1000)	3.070	0.936	1,656
Marital status (T1, 1 = not married)	0.261	0.440	1,656
Number of children T1	3.355	1.734	1,656

Table 2. Unstandardized Coefficients for Models Predicting the Intercepts (Int) and Slopes of Growth Curves for Parents' Psychological Distress (N=1,656)

	Moldel 1				Model 2				Model 3			
	Int		Slope		Int		Slope		Int		Slope	
Child Support T1	-4.297	***	0.036		-0.667		-0.053		-0.919		-0.046	
Child Strain T1	5.575	***	-0.143	*	3.371	**	-0.088		3.48	***	-0.09	
Parental Dissatisfaction T1					7.458	***	-0.183	*	7.686	***	-0.189	*
Parent provides more									-15.823	***	0.561	*
Equal relationship									-14.419	***	0.594	*
Gender (1 = father)	-9.153	***	0.296	*	-8.743	***	0.286	*	-7.999	***	0.273	
Age (T1, in years)	-0.313	***	0.013	*	-0.244	**	0.012		-0.305	***	0.013	
Race (1 = African American)	2.871		0.046		2.469		0.056		2.707		0.061	
Years of Education (T1)	-0.835	**	-0.027		-0.968	**	-0.024		-0.871	**	-0.027	*
Family income (logged $1000)	-3.751	**	-0.022		-3.603	**	-0.026		-3.355	**	-0.034	
Marital status (T1, 1 = not married)	6.419	**	-0.33	*	5.976	**	-0.317	*	5.739	**	-0.313	
Number of children (<18) at home	-0.152		0.031		-0.423		0.038		-0.555		0.043	
Number of Waves R participated	-2.152		0.014		-2.646		0.027		-2.409		0.015	
R died during the survey period (1=died)	2.545		0.871		2.297		0.195		1.571		0.227	
Mean	150.166	***			149.62	***			164.827	***		
Variance	0.04		389.9		0.139		18.827		0.000378		338.217	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 3. Unstandardized Coefficients for Models Predicting the Intercepts (Int) and Slopes of Growth Curves for Parents' Psychological Distress (N=1,656)

	Model 1			
	Int		Slope	
Child Support T1	-1.124		-0.025	
Child Strain T1	3.291	**	-0.072	
Parental Dissatisfaction T1	8.759	***	-0.296	***
Parent provides more	-16.208	***	0.604	*
Equal relationship	-14.662	***	0.621	*
Gender (1 = father)	-7.859	***	0.251	
Parental Dissatisfaction T1 * Gender	-2.979		0.299	*
Race (1 = African American)	2.597		0.071	
Parental Dissatisfaction T1 * Race				
Age (T1, in years)	-0.296	***	0.012	
Years of Education (T1)	-0.86	**	-0.028	
Family income (logged $1000)	-3.274	**	-0.042	
Marital status (T1, 1 = not married)	5.904	**	-0.329	*
Number of children (<18) at home	-0.558		0.043	
Number of Waves R participated	-2.356		0.011	
R died during the survey period (1=died)	1.374		0.248	
Mean	164.189	***		
Variance	0.000419		338.954	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

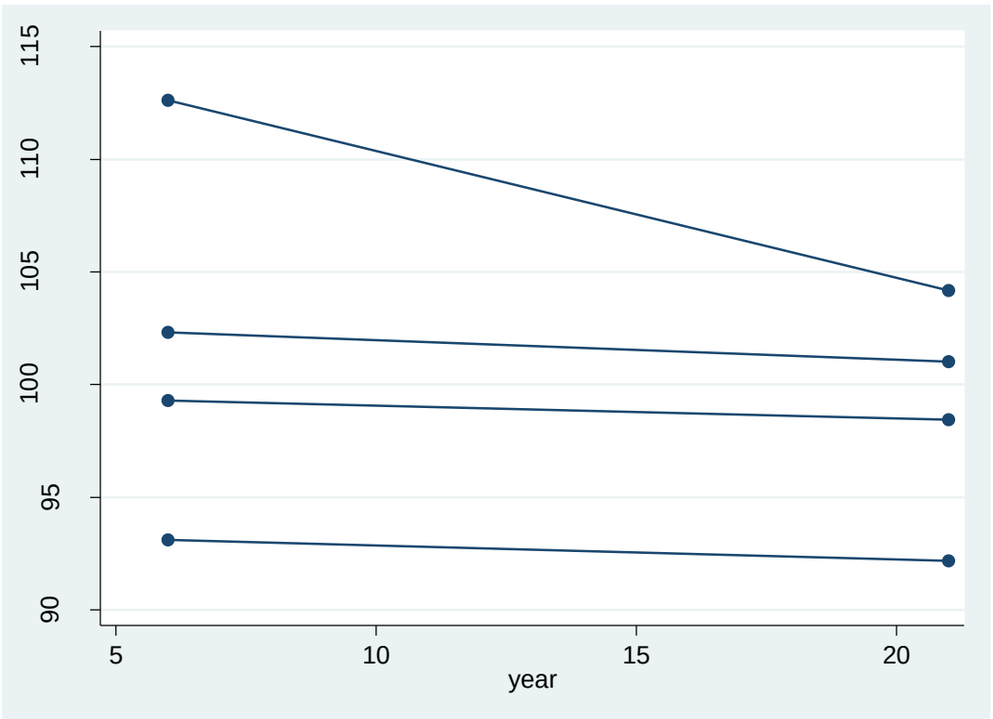

Figure 1. Predicted psychological distress by Respondents' gender and level of dissatisfaction with adult children.

Note: The order of the lines from top to bottom: 1. Mother with high dissatisfaction; 2. Father with high dissatisfaction; 3. Mother with low dissatisfaction; 4. Father with low dissatisfaction.
The value of high dissatisfaction is set at 0.55 (75% of the distribution), and the value of low dissatisfaction is set at -0.97 (25% of the distribution).