

Did Mom Really Love You Best? Developmental Histories, Status Transitions, and Parental Favoritism in Later Life Families¹

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In this paper, we draw upon insights from the developmental psychological literature on younger families to investigate within-family differences in parent–adult child relations in later life families. Using data from 30 families, we examine whether mothers aged 65–75 report greater closeness to particular adult children, and the extent to which patterns of closeness can be explained by within-family differences in the children’s status transitions and developmental histories. Eighty percent of the mothers reported being closer to at least one of their adult children. Further, mothers were more likely to report that the children to whom they were closest had experienced nonnormative status transitions or other problematic events that had been involuntary and had made the children more dependent on their mothers. In contrast, mothers were least likely to name children who experienced voluntary problematic events. Comparison of the data from mothers with that from adult children revealed substantial discrepancies in reporting developmental histories, thus demonstrating the limitations imposed by collecting data from only one generation. Taken together, these findings suggest that examining within-family variations in social structural transitions and developmental histories, in combination with collecting data from multiple generations, may shed light on the quality of intergenerational relations.

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Over the past decade, family scholars have paid increasing attention to intergenerational relationships among adults (Aquilino, 1999; Bengtson & Harootyan, 1994; Blieszner & Bedford, 1995; Clarke, Preston, Raksin, & Bengtson, 1999; Hareven, 1996; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998; Logan & Spitze, 1996; Pillemer & Suitoer, 1998; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Suitoer, Pillemer, Keeton, & Robison, 1995). Although there are a number of notable exceptions, the study of parent-child relations has tended to have a relatively narrow focus (Luescher & Pillemer, 1998; Marshall et al., 1993; Sprey, 1991), primarily exploring problems of parental dependency and family caregiving, while paying only limited attention to the broader issues that have interested social scientists studying young families (Cohler & Altergott, 1995; Luescher & Pillemer, 1998; Pillemer & McCartney, 1991). In contrast, the present paper draws upon important insights from the developmental psychological literature on younger families to investigate within-family differences in parent-adult child relations in later life families.

Research in developmental psychology suggests that there are differences in parent-child relations within families that develop in the earlier years. For example, studies of younger families have shown that parents of young and adolescent children differentiate between their offspring in terms of both affection and disapproval (Brody, Stoneman, & McCoy, 1992; Brody & Stoneman, 1994; Daniels, Dunn, Furstenberg, & Plomin, 1985; Kowal & Kramer, 1997; McHale, Crouter, McGuire, & Updegraff, 1995). Further, there is evidence that these patterns continue into adulthood. Studies by Bedford (1992) and Baker and Daniels (1990) showed that a substantial proportion of adult children felt that their parents favored some children in the family over others, whereas both Aldous, Klaus, and Klein (1985) and Brackbill, Kitch, and Noffsinger (1988) found that most parents reported that they differentiated among their adult children in terms of affection, pride, and disappointment.

Despite the evidence that within-family differences, such as parental favoritism and differential treatment of siblings, exist across the life course, the designs of most studies of parent-adult child relations do not permit an examination of these issues. The majority of these studies have asked parents about their adult children in the aggregate, rather than about each child separately, or have focused on only one target child. Even the work on within-family differences in adulthood cited previously (Aldous et al., 1985; Baker & Daniels, 1990; Bedford, 1992; Brackbill et al., 1988) did not collect data from both generations within the same family; thus, it is necessary to extrapolate from one study to another to develop a picture of the extent of, explanations for, and consequences of within-family differences in parent-adult child relations.

In the present paper, we propose a reconceptualization of the study of parent-adult child relations within a sociological developmental approach that focuses on within-family differences in the factors that are traditionally used to explain the quality of parent-adult child relations. We then use data from an exploratory

study of 30 later life families to illustrate the usefulness of the theoretical and methodological approach that we are advocating.

WITHIN-FAMILY DIFFERENCES AND PARENT-ADULT CHILD RELATIONS

The basic approach we are advocating draws upon classic work on social interaction by both Simmel in sociology and Heider in psychology which posits that the relationship between any two individuals is affected by each person's relationships with other role partners. It is reasonable to expect that these models of social interaction could be fruitfully applied to the study of parent-child relations in adulthood. Although there are a large number of within-family factors that may affect parent-adult child relations, we believe that three issues within the developmental history and life course events perspectives may be particularly relevant in explaining relationship quality. These are as follows: (1) normative transitions in adult children's lives; (2) nonnormative transitions in adult children's lives; and (3) problems in childhood and adolescence. We will discuss each of these issues in turn.

Normative Transitions

Transitions affecting status similarity have been shown to be important for understanding the development and maintenance of relationships throughout the life course (cf. Bell, 1981; Feld, 1984; C. Fischer, 1982; Hetherington et al., 1976; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; Marsden, 1988; Suito, 1987a; 1987b; 1988; Suito & Keeton, 1997; Suito & Pillemer, 1993; Suito, Pillemer, & Keeton, 1995; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). In particular, this line of research has demonstrated that individuals are more likely to develop and maintain supportive relationships with those who become more similar to them on important social dimensions, such as marital status, parental status, and educational attainment.

However, a review of the literature on intergenerational relations shows that such transitions have been far less consistent in explaining parent-adult child relations than other interpersonal relationships have. For example, the transition to parenthood is generally an important predictor of patterns of contact and closeness when studying other interpersonal relationships; however, this transition does not appear to have consistent effects on parent-adult child relations. Although some studies have found greater closeness and harmony when adult children become parents themselves (Aldous et al., 1985; L. Fischer, 1981, 1986; Spitze et al., 1994; Umberson, 1992; Young & Willmott, 1957), other studies have found either no positive effects of parenthood (Brackbill et al., 1988; Lawton, Silverstein, &

Bengtson, 1994) or effects specific only to particular parent–child combinations (Rossi & Rossi, 1990), and one recent study found greater conflict when adult children were parents themselves (Aquilino, 1999). Findings regarding the effects of other transitions, such as marriage and completing college, provide an equally inconsistent picture.

We believe that these inconsistencies may be the result of the way in which parent–adult child relations has been conceptualized. As noted above, with few exceptions, the quality of these relations has been conceptualized dyadically, without taking into consideration the transitions experienced by other adult children in the family. In contrast, we are arguing that the child’s normative transitions, *relative to those of other children in the family*, will also affect the quality of parent–adult child relations.

It is useful to provide a concrete example of the way in which these processes may function. Whether an adult child’s transition to parenthood affects the quality of the relationship between that adult child and his/her mother may depend, in part, on the parental status of other adult children in the family. If the adult child is the first to become a parent, this transition may have a greater effect on parent–adult child closeness and contact than if that child is the second or third in the family to enter parenthood. Each of the other social statuses that parents and children share may also have “conditional” effects. Thus, it is not only the degree of social structural similarity between that child and his/her parent that affects their relationship, but also the degree of similarity between the parents and each of their other children.

Nonnormative Transitions

In contrast to normative transitions, which generally increase similarity between parents and children, and enhance the quality of intergenerational relations, *nonnormative* transitions are likely to reduce similarity between parents and adult children, which can be expected to decrease positive affect. Nonnormative transitions are also likely to increase children’s demands and violate parents’ expectations, further reducing relationship quality. Despite the logic of this argument, the literature on the effects of nonnormative transitions on intergenerational relations is far from consistent.

For example, some studies suggest that adult children’s divorce has little or no deleterious effect on the quality of parent–child relations (Anspach, 1976; Johnson, 1988; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997; Spanier & Thompson, 1987). However, Umberson (1992) found that children’s divorce detrimentally affected relations with parents, whereas Kaufman and Uhlenberg (1998) found that this was the case for daughters, but not sons. In contrast, other scholars (Ahrons & Bowman, 1982; Cicirelli, 1996) found an increase in parent–adult child closeness following the child’s divorce, particularly when daughters maintained custody of their children (Sprey & Matthews, 1981). We suggest that these inconsistencies may be the

result of considering the divorce of the target child alone as opposed to the marital status of that child, relative to his/her siblings.

A second factor that may condition the effects of within-family differences in adult children's nonnormative transitions is the degree to which the nonnormative transition is considered to have been voluntary. For example, Newman's (1999) study of downward mobility revealed that both kin and friends who believed that men lost their jobs through some fault of their own were more likely to be critical and less likely to be supportive. Thus, in addition to the examination of within-family differences in nonnormative transitions, it may be fruitful to consider within-family variations in the voluntariness associated with the transitions.

Children's Physical or Psychological Problems

Within-family differences in adult children's problems may also help to explain the quality of intergenerational relations. Research has demonstrated that major problems in adult children's lives have detrimental effects on the parent-child relationship. For example, several studies have found that parents whose children had mental, physical, substance-abuse, or stress-related problems experienced poorer intergenerational relationships than did those who had not had these problems (cf. Cook, 1988; Cook & Cohler, 1986; Greenberg & Becker, 1988; Pillemer & Sutor, 1991b). Based on this line of research, we expect relationship quality to be lower in parent-child dyads in which children experience major problems. However, we believe that equally important is each individual child's developmental history *relative to those of his/her siblings*.

Further, as in the case of nonnormative transitions, we would suggest that there is a consistent difference between the effects of problems for which the child was perceived as not responsible (involuntary problems) and those for which he/she was perceived as responsible (voluntary problems), relative to those of his/her siblings.

Studying Within-Family Differences in Parent-Adult Child Relations

To summarize, we are arguing that the quality of parent-adult child relations could be explained much more fully if scholars took into consideration within-family variations in the status transitions and developmental characteristics that are generally the focus of studies of intergenerational relations. To shed preliminary light on this issue, we examine one dimension of parent-adult child relations that is especially salient to this entire approach—parental favoritism. Findings from the developmental psychology literature have demonstrated that parental favoritism exists in many families in earlier stages of the life course (Brody et al., 1992; Brody & Stone, 1994; Daniels et al., 1985; Kowal & Kramer, 1997; McHale

et al., 1995); however, little is known as to whether these patterns persist into adulthood.

Aldous and colleagues (1985) and Brackbill and colleagues (1988) touched on this issue in two studies of later life families in the 1980s. Both sets of scholars reported that a substantial proportion of the elderly parents they studied felt more pride in some of their children than others, and were more likely to turn to some children than others as confidants. However, neither of these studies directly asked parents to make comparisons among their children. Thus, we do not know whether parents are willing to make such direct comparisons—particularly about highly sensitive issues such as emotional closeness.

Essentially, if there is little or no variation in parents' emotional closeness toward their children, then there can be no basis for our argument that a key to understanding other dimensions of parent–adult child relations lies in understanding parental favoritism. Therefore, we will begin by examining whether mothers report that they are closer to some of their children than to others, and then turn to within-family differences in status transitions and developmental histories as possible explanations.

One additional issue that we will examine is the extent to which there is intergenerational agreement on the factors that are central to our conceptual framework, such as children's transitions and the history of children's problems. If explaining the quality of intergenerational relations rests on within-family differences in these events, accurate reporting is essential. Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to assess the actual accuracy of the reporting of events, triangulating by asking multiple members of the same family about the same set of events can increase the confidence that the events occurred, and that they occurred at a particular point in the life course.

METHODOLOGY

Procedures

Our research design was similar to those that have been used by developmental psychologists, such as Dunn and colleagues (Dunn, 1988; Dunn & Kendrick, 1982; Dunn & Plomin, 1991) in studying within-family differences among siblings in earlier stages of the life course. Thirty mothers ranging from 65 to 75 years of age participated in the study.⁵ All the women lived in the Boston area. We decided to collect data in that area primarily because of the ease with which we could draw a sample of women in our target age group. Under the Massachusetts Law, each

⁵The data used in the present paper were collected as part of a pilot study completed as preparation to conduct a study of parent–child relations in 600 families. The larger project is expected to begin in January of 2001.

municipality is required to compile and publish an annual listing of the residents of each dwelling. These lists contain the name, birth date, and occupation of all residents.

With the assistance of the Center for Survey Research at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, we selected Waltham, which is a suburb of Boston, as our data collection site. Waltham has a good mix of income levels, and, unlike many towns, has a very up-to-date town list. We selected three distinct neighborhoods within Waltham. In each neighborhood, we selected 30–40 addresses that listed a female with a year of birth of 1921 to 1931. We then had interviewers from the Center for Survey Research contact the women by telephone, screen them to determine their eligibility for participation, and try to schedule face-to-face interviews with women who met the study criteria.

The interviewers continued contacting potential respondents until they had completed interviews with 30 mothers, which represented about 70% of those who had been eligible for participation.

We attempted to collect data from all of the children whose mothers participated in the study. At the time that we interviewed the mothers, we asked whether we could have their permission to contact their adult children. Twenty-two of the 30 mothers granted us permission and provided the names and addresses of a total of 65 children, 46 of whom we were able to contact and interview within three weeks after we interviewed the mothers (71%). We believe that the adult children's participation rate could have been raised considerably if we had not been working within very rigid time constraints; we were attempting to collect all of the data from both mothers and adult children within a 6-week period.

All of the adult children were interviewed by telephone, regardless of residence. We felt that it was especially important to avoid confounding proximity and mode of interview for the present study, because proximity is related to many of our variables of interest.

Sample Characteristics

Mothers

The mothers were between 65 and 75 years of age ($M = 70.5$; $SD = 3.2$). The number of their living children ranged from 2 to 8 ($M = 3.6$; $SD = 1.6$). Sixty-three percent were currently married, 33% were widowed, and 3% were divorced. Twenty-seven percent of the mothers had completed less than high school, 40% had completed high school, and 33% had completed at least some college. Thirty-four percent had a total family income of less than \$20,000 in the previous year, 41% had an income between \$20,000 and \$29,000, none had an income between \$30,000 and \$39,000, and 24% had an income higher than \$40,000. Sixty-two percent of the women were Catholic, 34% were Protestant, and 3% were Greek

Orthodox. (We believe that the unusually high percentage of Catholic mothers was the result of collecting data from only Waltham.) Only 10% of the mothers were employed, and all of these women were employed less than 20 hr a week. All of the women were white and non-Hispanic.

The adult children ranged from 29 to 54 years of age ($M = 42.3$; $SD = 4.7$). Forty-eight percent were daughters; 52% were sons. Eighty percent of the adult children were themselves parents (M (number of children) = 1.8; $SD = 1.2$). Seventy-four percent were currently married, 11% were divorced or separated, 13% were never married, and 2% were widowed. Forty-four percent of the adult children had completed high school, 9% had completed some college, and 33% were college graduates. Of those who were willing to disclose their income (91%), 10% had a total family income of less than \$20,000 in the previous year, 10% had an income between \$20,000 and \$29,000, 17% had an income between \$30,000 and \$39,000, 5% had an income between \$40,000 and \$49,000, 33% had an income between \$50,000 and \$59,000, and 26% had an income higher than \$60,000. Sixty-five percent of the children were employed full-time, 20% were employed part-time, and 15% were not employed.

Measures

We began by asking the mothers about the demographic characteristics of each of their children, followed by a lengthy series of questions about their three eldest children. This series of items asked about the quality of the mother's current and past relationships with each of her three eldest children, the degree to which they viewed the child as similar to themselves across several dimensions, whether the child had experienced any physical, psychological, or social problems at any point in his/her life, how frequently she and the child relied upon one another for a variety of forms of instrumental and emotional support, and how emotionally close the mother felt to each child.

The adult children were asked the same questions that we asked the mothers, modified to take the child's perspective into consideration (e.g., "Which child does your mother feel the most emotionally close to?" compared with "To which of your children do you feel the most emotional closeness?"). Each adult child was also asked a set of detailed questions about his/her contact, exchange, and relationship quality with the two siblings closest to him/her in age.

FINDINGS

Explaining Parental Favoritism

We began by examining the question of whether mothers were willing to make explicit comparisons among their adult children. We found that the large

majority of mothers were not only willing to differentiate, but also willing to name particular children to whom they were more emotionally close, to whom they were most likely to confide, and who were the most similar to the mothers themselves. Eighty percent of the mothers named at least one specific child as the one to whom they felt most emotionally close, and 70% identified a specific child with whom they were the most likely to talk about a personal problem. Having found that the mothers were willing to differentiate among their children in terms of closeness, confiding, and similarity, we turned to the explanation for these variations.

The patterns revealed by the data suggested that within-family variations played a role in which children were named. In particular, within-family variations in children's problems, both in childhood and at more recent times, appeared to affect mothers' choices for closeness and confiding. Further, the type of problem, rather than the existence of a problem, appeared to determine the direction of the effects. Mothers were most likely to say that they were closest to children who had experienced physical or psychological illnesses at some point—illnesses that the mothers viewed as beyond the child's control. Their statements suggested that this was because these children had "needed them more" at some point in their lives than had their other children. As one mother explained, when comparing her eldest daughter with her other children: "Sharon was born with a rare skin disease. Blisters develop and leave lesions, and it's affected her life so much." These problems resulted in an increase in the mother's closeness to Sharon, relative to her other children.

Another mother described the child to whom she was most close as having been plagued by a series of problems. At the age of 18, he had been dragged by a horse and had broken his leg, requiring a prolonged recuperation. He later married and had two children. When he was 29 years of age, his wife filed for divorce and left with their two daughters. His wife "turned his daughters against him . . . and now they don't speak to him," causing him psychological distress. In contrast, her other children's lives had continued without such stresses, placing them in the position of "needing her less."

In contrast, mothers were unlikely to say that they were closest to children who had experienced more voluntaristic problems, such as substance abuse, serious problems in school, or trouble with the law, which might reflect on the parents themselves—this was especially the case if there were children in the family who had not engaged in these problematic behaviors.

Taken together, these findings suggest that, from the mothers' perspective, parental favoritism exists. Further, the findings suggest that favoritism within the family may be explained by within-family differences in both status transitions and developmental histories. However, contrary to our expectations, the mothers' reports suggested that nonnormative transitions played a larger role in explaining relationship quality than did the sorts of normative transitions that increased intergenerational similarity.

Reporting Consistency

Thus far, the findings appear both straightforward and consistent with our hypotheses. However, we have examined the data from only the mothers. Perhaps we would find a very different picture if we focused on the children's perspectives regarding both favoritism and the factors explaining favoritism.

The few studies that have attempted to investigate parental favoritism from the children's perspectives have shown that a substantial proportion of adult children feel that their parents favored some children in the family over others (Bedford, 1992; Baker & Daniels, 1990). However, we do not know whether mothers and adult children within the *same* family agree in their perceptions of favoritism, either in terms of its existence, or who the "favored" children are.

Examination of the data collected from the children was, in some important respects, consistent with the pattern reported by their mothers. For example, three quarters of the adult children were able to name one child in the family to whom the mother was most emotionally close. Further, the adult children were consistent with the mothers in reporting that daughters were named as favorites more often than were sons.

Thus, the findings appear to suggest that it might not be necessary to interview members of both generations to study patterns of within-family differences—perhaps a member of either generation could serve as an informant for the other. However, important discrepancies began to emerge when we compared mothers' and adult children's reports about which specific child was viewed to be the most emotionally close to the mother. Among those cases in which the mother named a specific child, mothers and children named the same child only 41% of the time. Further, adult children greatly overestimated how likely their mothers were to name *them* the "closest child." (Only 47% of those who believed they were the ones to whom their mother was closest were actually correct.)

Other important differences in mothers' and children's perceptions were revealed when we compared their responses to questions about problems in the children's lives. Adult children and their mothers were almost equally likely to report that the child had experienced serious physical illness or psychological problems; however, the adult children were far more likely than their mothers to reveal problems that were more voluntaristic in nature. For example, the adult children were two times more likely than their mothers to reveal that they had ever had a problem with drinking or drugs, or been in trouble with the police. Further, the children were three times more likely to report that they had ever had serious problems in school, and five times more likely to say that they had problems with peers.

The magnitude of the discrepancies in parents' and children's reports becomes particularly striking when we examine the detailed notes taken by the interviewers about individual families, rather than analyzing the families in the aggregate. Three of the families provide the clearest examples.

Ms. Adams⁶ is a mother of four who became divorced when her eldest child was 13 and her youngest child was an infant. She raised five children, one of whom died as a young adult; her ex-husband is also now deceased. Ms. Adams reported that her relationships with her three eldest children were very close; in fact, the mean level of closeness that she reported was among the highest of the women we interviewed—6.7 on a 7-point scale. Further, she described each of her four children's personalities very thoughtfully and positively. When asked about problems her children had experienced, she reported that each had experienced some difficulties, but they sounded relatively modest and far in the past—the eldest son had found it difficult when she and her ex-husband were having marital problems prior to their divorce, her second son had been ill at some point, and her eldest daughter had a drinking problem during one summer several years earlier.

In contrast, her children reported the lowest mean closeness score of the 22 families in which we interviewed both generations—only 2.7 on the 7-point scale for closeness to the mother. Further, the adult children reported the least closeness within their own generation of any family. The interview with the eldest son revealed little reciprocity of his mother's warmth toward him, but was otherwise unremarkable. However, the interview with the second eldest revealed that, at least from his perspective, there was a high level of hostility between himself and his mother, in contrast to her reports of closeness.

She was a very difficult mother. After [she was in therapy for many years], she informed me that she disliked me most of my life because of a post-partum depression and suicidal feelings that she had [after my birth] and that she never got over it.

According to the son's report, he had suffered from depression from the earliest time he could remember until he was in his early thirties. During his teenage years he had also had serious problems getting along with peers and had been in trouble with the police several times when he was about 14 or 15. Again, this is in contrast to his mother's report, which had included none of this information.

The discrepancies continued to expand when we interviewed the eldest daughter in the family. Although Ms. Adams had reported that her daughter had a drinking problem during one summer, she did not reveal that her daughter had been in trouble with the law two times, 3 years apart. Further, it was not until we interviewed this child that we learned that the father was deceased because he had been murdered—an event that we would certainly expect would have had an impact on the entire family!

Substantial discrepancies were revealed by the data from other families as well. For example, in one family, a son reported that he had been diagnosed with AIDS, yet neither the mother nor the other siblings in the family told us about the illness, or about the conflict and resentment among family members regarding the son's gay identity. Another family had also experienced a great deal of family

⁶All of the names used in the paper are pseudonyms.

conflict and turmoil over a son's gay identity, a series of events that all of the children discussed with the interviewer, but which was never mentioned by the mother.

Altogether, there were substantial discrepancies in the reports of mothers and adult children in almost one third of the families we studied. Taken together, these findings suggest that substantial discrepancies between elderly parents' and adult children's reports may be very common, and must be considered when attempting to study the effects of within-family differences on intergenerational relationship quality.

DISCUSSION

In summary, the findings presented here provide support for considering within-family differences as an important conceptual framework for shedding new light on the study of intergenerational relations. Elderly mothers not only differentiate among their adult children in terms of closeness, but are willing to admit to such differentiation. Further, within-family differences in children's status transitions and developmental histories appear to help account for this variation.

The findings also demonstrate a great deal of discrepancy in parents' and children's reports regarding closeness, favoritism in the family, and children's developmental histories. These discrepancies raise important questions about studying both the effects of parent-child relationships on parents' well-being and intergenerational relationship quality more generally. For example, several studies, including our own (Pillemer and Suitor, 1991a, 1991c) and those by Umberson (1992), have suggested that children's problems negatively affect their parents' well-being, in part through increased intergenerational conflict. However, thus far, these findings have been based on the parents' reports of the children's problems. If, in fact, parents underreport that their children have had voluntaristic problems that might reflect poorly on the parents, such as substance abuse and arrests, the relationship between children's problems and parents' well-being has probably been underestimated.

Bengtson and Kuypers (1971) raised some of these issues almost 30 years ago when they began to discuss what they referred to as the "developmental or intergenerational stake" hypothesis. Specifically, they suggested that typically there are discrepancies in parents' and children's perceptions of similarity and closeness. In particular, parents tend to report greater closeness and similarity and less conflict than do their adult children.

Remarkably, few researchers have taken these issues into consideration when designing studies of parent-child relationships—most work in this area is still based on the reports of only one generation. Further, with the exception of some of

the scholars who have worked with Bengtson, there has been little consideration of the possibility that the intergenerational stake may vary within the family, as well as systematically across families.

However, we found that there was a great deal more discrepancy in reporting of family histories in highly conflictual families. Further, we found much greater agreement in reports between mothers and some of their adult children—in particular, “favored” children’s reports were far more consistent with their mothers’ reports than were “unfavored” children’s reports. Thus, the “generational stake” may function far more strongly for some relationships within the family than others.

Taken together, we believe that the findings revealed by this exploratory study raise some interesting issues that are seldom considered when examining relations between parents and their adult children. In particular, the findings suggest that most mothers are closer to some children in the family than to others, and are willing to admit to such differentiation. Further, within-family differences in both children’s status transitions and developmental histories may help explain mothers’ favoritism. Last, there may be much greater discrepancies between adult children and elderly parents’ perceptions of family history than has been recognized, and these discrepancies may be important to understanding intergenerational relations and parental well-being.

Our small number of cases precluded addressing some of the questions that we view as most important. For example, we hypothesize that it is likely that parents’ well-being is not affected by just whether their adult children have problems, but by *which* adult children have problems. Such questions are important to address if we are going to understand the quality of intergenerational relations and their effects on the well-being of both generations.

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