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Research on Aging 2007; 29; 410

DOI: 10.1177/0164027507303636

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Within-Family Differences in Mothers' Support to Adult Children in Black and White Families

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Data collected from a representative sample of 157 Black and 394 White older women is used to explore within-family differences in mother-to-child support. High rates of differentiation in both Black and White families were found. Within-family analyses revealed more similarities than differences in the effects of adult children's characteristics on mothers' likelihood of providing support. For both groups, mothers were most likely to provide support to children who had fewer resources, greater need, and who had provided the mothers with support. Children's health problems were better predictors of support among Black than White mothers, whereas children's gender played a larger role in White than Black mothers' provision of support; however, both groups of mothers favored daughters and children with poor health. In sum, these patterns provide little support for the argument that family solidarity is substantially more important in explaining intergenerational exchanges in Black than White families.

Keywords: *within-family differences; intergenerational support; African-American family relations; Black families; parent-adult child relations; race and family*

For several decades, the exchange of support between parents and their adult children has been a major focus of the literature on intergenerational relations. This line of research has explored the prevalence of intergenerational support and the conditions under which families are most likely to engage in such exchanges. However, there has been little attention to variations in parent-child exchanges *within* families and no consideration of

whether within-family differences vary by race. In this paper, we explore parent-to-child support within Black and White families, focusing on race differences in mothers' differentiation among their children.

Shedding light on the factors that lead mothers to allocate resources differentially within the family in later life contributes to our understanding of intergenerational relations. The differential allocation of resources within the family has been a major focus of parent-child relations in earlier stages of the life course (Downey 1995; Hertwig, Davis, & Sulloway 2002; Majoribanks 1999; Powell & Steelman 1990); only recently has this issue received attention in the gerontological literature (Davey, Janke, & Savla 2005; McGarry & Schoeni 1997; Suitor, Pillemer, & Sechrist 2006). However, such differentiation is consequential. Because norms regarding equal treatment within families are strong, deviation from these norms in childhood and early adulthood is associated with conflict among siblings and between parents and children (Bedford 1992; Brody et al. 1998; Boer, Goedhart, & Treffers 1992). It is likely that differentiation has similar effects in the middle and later years; thus, shedding light on these processes has implications for clinical practice.

Increasing our understanding of the patterns and predictors of differentiation in support in Black and White families also has theoretical importance. Much of the literature on race differences has argued that Black families have higher levels of solidarity—particularly functional solidarity (Laditka & Laditka 2001; Lawton, Silverstein, & Bengtson 1994). However, Hogan, Eggebeen, & Clogg (1993) find instead that White families are more likely to provide support to other family members. All of these studies use data on only one parent-child dyad in the family, or ask mothers about support provided to their children in the aggregate, rather than asking about support provided to each child in the family. Yet, the only way in which it is possible to determine whether, in fact, there is greater solidarity within families is to have data on all mother-child dyads. Thus, only studies that make within-family comparisons between Blacks and Whites can explore race variations in functional solidarity.

In this article, we address these issues using data collected from 157 Black mothers and 394 White mothers aged 65–75 regarding the provision of both emotional and instrumental support. We pose two questions: (1) Do Blacks and Whites differ in the degree to which instrumental and emotional support from mother to child varies within families? (2) Can patterns of within-family differences in support be explained by the same combination of similarity, family solidarity and contextual factors in Black and White families?

Within-Family Differences in Parent-Adult Child Relations

The literature on families with young and adolescent children has shown that parents differentiate among their offspring across a range of feelings and behaviors, including affection, disapproval, one-on-one interaction, and supervision (Brody & Stoneman 1994; Brody, Stoneman, & McCoy 1992; Daniels et al. 1985; Kowal & Kramer 1997; McHale et al. 1995; Seff, Gecas, & Frey 1993). The few studies that have focused on within-family differences in later life suggest that older mothers also differentiate among their adult children in terms of closeness, confiding, preferences for support, and ambivalence (Aldous, Klaus, & Klein 1985; Brackbill, Kitch, & Noffsinger 1988; Pillemer & Suito 2006; Suito & Pillemer 2000, 2006, 2007; Suito, Pillemer, & Sechrist 2006).

Thus, there is evidence that mothers differentiate among their children on a wide range of relationship dimensions across the life course. However, there have been few attempts to explore whether such within-family differences in support vary by race. A substantial body of work exists on race differences in intergenerational support in the middle and later years (cf. Benin & Keith 1995; Gerstel & Gallagher 1994; Hogan, Eggebeen, & Clogg 1993; Laditka & Laditka 2001; Silverstein & Bengtson 1994; Wong, Kitayama, & Soldo 1999), almost all of which has taken a between-families approach or focused on child-to-parent support; hence, there is no direct evidence on which to base hypotheses regarding variations in Black and White mothers' differentiation among their children in terms of support.

The literature points to differences in Black and White families that may shed light on this issue; however, the conclusions that can be drawn from this work lead to competing hypotheses rather than to a single position regarding the role of race in within-family differences. On the one hand, it could be argued that Black parents may find it more necessary to differentiate among their children because resources are more limited in Black than White families. Black women have, on average, lower incomes, lower educational attainment and higher rates of being single (U.S. Census Bureau 2003a, 2003b, 2004), resulting in fewer resources to share with network members (Lee & Aytac 1998). In addition, Black mothers' support networks tend to be larger, more complicated and more demanding than are the networks of White mothers (Ajrouch, Antonucci, & Janevic 2001; Newman 1999, 2003; Peek & O'Neill 2001; Taylor, Chatters, & Jackson 1993).

Given these patterns, it is not surprising that the Black low-income mothers in Newman's (2003) study indicated that they found it difficult to provide sufficient resources to their immediate families and meet the requests of members of their larger networks. Thus, it is possible that the combination of limited resources and high demands placed on Black mothers necessitate that these women allocate their support to adult children differentially to a greater extent than do White mothers, for whom resources are more plentiful. In addition, because Black women have greater health problems (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention 2005; Fiscella et al. 2000; Institute of Medicine 2003; Williams 2003), they may have fewer interpersonal resources to distribute among their adult children, further increasing their likelihood of differentiating, relative to Whites.

Alternatively, the cultural resiliency approach suggests that the stronger norms of solidarity in Black families as compared with White families would override the tendency to differentiate in response to fewer resources and greater demands (cf. Sarkisian & Gerstel 2004). Although the literature provides an inconsistent picture regarding race differences in actual exchanges (Davey, Janke, & Savla 2005), Black family members have been found to have higher levels of familism and filial responsibility than Whites, and are more likely to believe that children and parents should provide assistance to one another (Burr & Mutchler 1999; Hill 1997; Horwitz & Reinhardt 1995; Sarkisian & Gerstel 2004). Further, there is evidence that such strong feelings of familism often lead to higher levels of support to adult children (Lee, Netzer, & Coward 1994). Thus, it is not surprising that when the exchanges under consideration involve time or affect, as opposed to financial or other instrumental resources, Black families are often found to have greater solidarity (Laditka & Laditka 2001; Lawton, Silverstein, & Bengtson 1994; Newman 2003). These normative patterns may counterbalance the need to selectively allocate resources to specific children, resulting in Black mothers being more likely than White mothers to provide help to all children equally.

In summary, although there is no direct evidence regarding race and within-family differences in parents' support to adult children, the literature leads to two competing hypotheses—Black mothers may be more likely to differentiate among their children because of limited resources, or they may be less likely to differentiate than White mothers in response to stronger normative expectations regarding high levels of support to kin. We will explore these alternative hypotheses.

Explaining Mothers' Support to Adult Children

The argument we made above regarding race differences in family solidarity can be extended to provide a basis for developing hypotheses about which children mothers will favor in terms of support. Studies of intergenerational exchange have focused on the effects of such structural factors as gender, marital status, and age (Aquilino 1997; Carpenter 2001; Lawton, Silverstein, & Bengtson 1994; Umberson 1992). Although this line of research has demonstrated that these factors affect exchanges in both Black and White families, it cannot speak to race differences in patterns of support, because studies have generally used race as a control rather than examined differences between these subgroups.

Further, this line of work provides little information regarding within-family differences in support, regardless of race, because almost all studies have taken a between-family rather than a within-family approach to this issue. Research using a within-family design suggests that predictors of support may differ depending upon which approach is employed. For example, consistent with the literature, Sutor, Pillemer, & Sechrist's (2006) investigation of within-family differences found that mothers were most likely to provide emotional and instrumental assistance to daughters and to children who had a history of health problems, lived closer, and had provided the mothers with support in the previous year. However, other factors that had been hypothesized to predict support, based on between-family studies, such as value similarity, child's age, marital status, and educational level, were of little or no value in explaining which children mothers favored. Further, McGarry & Schoeni's (1995, 1997) study of substantial intergenerational financial transfers also revealed different effects of children's characteristics, depending upon whether the data were analyzed using ordinary least squares regression, logistic regression or a within-family (i.e. fixed-effects) approach. Thus, these findings suggest that predictors of intergenerational support may differ depending upon whether the approach is focused on differences between or within families. However, even studies using within-family designs have, thus far, provided little information regarding how within-family differentiation in support varies by race.

Wong, Kitayama, & Soldo (1999) provide an important exception, in which a within-family design was used to explore race differences in parent-adult child exchange of support. The authors used the Health and Retirement survey to explore adult children's assistance to their older parents. This study found that there was unobserved heterogeneity among

Black and White families, indicating that there are important issues that affect the exchange relationship between adult children and their parents that do not appear to have been measured in the data available. The authors suggest that the unobserved heterogeneity in Black and White families may be because of family attributes such as affect between generations and family values that were not measured. However, some studies of within-family differences do provide measures of interpersonal relations. In this paper, we build upon those studies by exploring whether the effect of these relational factors varies by race.

It might seem logical that the findings of theoretically grounded within-family studies, such as those presented by Suitor et al. (2006), would provide the most sound basis for developing hypotheses regarding mothers' differentiation in both Black and White families. However, the theoretical models upon which Suitor et al.'s hypotheses were based were developed without taking race into consideration.

We believe that there are reasons to anticipate that the factors that have the greatest predictive value for Whites may differ from those with the greatest value for Blacks. For example, given the greater emphasis on solidarity in Black than White families (Aquilino 1999; Burr & Mutchler 1999; Kaufman & Uhlenberg 1998; Kulis 1992; Lawton et al. 1994; Sarkisian & Gerstel 2004) factors that emphasize normative helping may be more important for Black than White families. If this is the case, Black mothers will be more likely than White mothers to be responsive to issues involving children's needs, including those precipitated by health problems and those associated with fewer resources, such as being single, less educated, unemployed, and younger. Further, the higher solidarity and normative expectations of assistance in Black families could be expected to lead Black mothers to be more supportive than White mothers even when adult children engage in deviant behaviors as adults.

Conversely, some factors may be substantially more important for White than Black mothers in choosing which children to favor. For example, because White women hold more traditional gender-role attitudes than Black women (Powers et al. 2003), gender may be more important in White mothers' choices. Thus, Suitor and colleagues' (2006) findings that gender was the most important factor explaining mothers' choices may have been because their sample was disproportionately White. Separation of the sample by race may have shown a much greater effect of gender for White than Black mothers. Further, the greater normative solidarity in Black than in White families may lead to less emphasis on other dimensions of similarity; if this is the case, similarity of values, as well as similarity of gender, would

be less important in Black than in White families. Support from children may also play a larger role in White than in Black mothers' differentiation among their offspring because Black mothers may realize that their adult children have highly demanding networks and few resources, making their support come at higher "cost". Thus, Black mothers may expect less support from their children, and therefore be less likely to penalize those who cannot provide their mothers with assistance. Finally, because adult children in White families are more likely to live at substantial distances from their parents, compared to children in Black families (Choi 1995; Kamo 2000), proximity may be of greater importance in predicting White mothers' differentiation among their children in terms of support.

In summary, we hypothesize that there will be race differences in the factors that predict which children mothers favor in terms of emotional and instrumental support. We hypothesize that for Black mothers, the factors that will best predict differentiation will be those that are associated with greater normative solidarity and fewer resources—health problems, education, marital status, age, and children's deviant behaviors as adults. In contrast, for White mothers, differentiation will be best predicted by similarity and children's provision of support to their parents. It is important to note that we are not arguing that issues involving solidarity are unimportant in the White mothers' choice; rather, that they are less important for White mothers than for Black mothers. Further, we anticipate that these patterns will hold for both instrumental and emotional dimensions of support.

Focusing on Within-Family Differences

Finally, it is important to reiterate that the present study takes a within-family approach, in which detailed data were collected from mothers about all living adult children. Almost all investigations of support to adult children have used between-family designs, focusing typically on a single child in the family; hence, comparisons among all offspring have not been possible. Fundamental to the within-family approach is the view that the characteristics of individual children and of mother-child dyads will, relative to those of other children and dyads in the family, explain patterns of mothers' support to a particular adult child. For example, whether an adult child's health problems affect his or her receipt of support from the mother may depend on the child's health, relative to the health statuses of other adult children in the family. Within-family designs, such as the one used here, also eliminate confounding between-family differences such as socioeconomic status, family structure, and religion (Dick et al. 2002).

Methods

Design Goals

The project was designed to provide data on within-family differences in parent–adult child relations in later life. The approach was similar to those that have been used by developmental psychologists such as Dunn and colleagues (Dunn & Plomin 1991) and McHale and colleagues (McHale et al. 2000) in studying within-family differences in earlier stages of the life course. The design involved selecting a sample of mothers 65–75 years of age with at least two living adult children and collecting data from mothers regarding each of their children. A further decision was including only community-dwelling mothers in the sample to reduce the likelihood that the women would be in need of extensive assistance; thus, allowing us to study relationships outside of the context of caregiving.

Sampling

Massachusetts city and town lists were the source of the sample. Massachusetts requires communities to keep city/town lists of all residents by address. Town lists also provide the age and gender of residents. The first step was to randomly select 20 communities from the total of 80 that were available. With the assistance of the University of Massachusetts, Boston, we drew a systematic sample of women aged 65–75 from the town lists from 20 communities in the greater Boston area, specifically the Census-designated Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area (PMSA). Once communities were selected and appropriate town lists obtained, an equal number of women in the target age group were selected from each community. We then sent a letter of introduction to each woman describing the study and explaining that an interviewer would contact her from the Center for Survey Research to screen her to determine her eligibility for participation and attempt to schedule a face-to-face interview if she met the study criteria.

The interviewers began contacting potential respondents and continued until they had completed interviews with 566 mothers, which represented 61% of those who were eligible for participation. Comparison of responders and nonresponders indicated that Blacks were slightly more willing to participate than were Whites (64% versus 60%, respectively); this difference is too small to have affected our findings. The interviews were conducted between August of 2001 and January of 2003.

Each of the mothers was interviewed in person for between one and two hours using a combination of closed-ended and open-ended items. More

than 90% of the interviews were taped and fully transcribed. Field notes were prepared for each interview that was not fully taped.

Sample Characteristics

The sample used in this analysis includes 157 women who identified themselves as Black or African American, and 394 who identified themselves as White. The Black subsample includes two women who identified themselves as Black *and* Hispanic and one woman who identified herself as Black *and* Asian. Eight women identified themselves as Hispanic (only), six identified themselves as Asian (only), one identified herself as Native American (only); we excluded these women from the analyses.

Table 1 presents the mothers' and children's demographic characteristics for both the combined sample ($n = 551$) and the subsamples of Blacks and Whites. It is important to note that although the mean number of living children in this subsample is higher than would be found in a nationally representative sample of women in this age group, this is due primarily to the criterion that all participants must have at least two living adult children. The mean number of children of women in the subsample is similar to that found in national samples, such as the National Survey of Families and Households (Sweet & Bumpass 1996), when comparing specifically to mothers in the same age group who have two or more children.

Measures

Mother-to-Child Support

Mothers were asked a series of questions about the instrumental and emotional support they had provided to each of their adult children. The interview was structured such that mothers would discuss each child at length, beginning with the eldest, then moving on with the same set of questions about their second eldest and so on through the set of children. To measure emotional support, the mothers were asked: In the past year, have you given [child's name] comfort during a personal crisis? To measure instrumental support, the mothers were asked: (a) In the past year, have you given [child's name] help during an illness (he/she) had; and (b) In the past year have you given [child's name] help with regular chores, such as shopping, yard work, or cleaning? For the analysis at the mother-child dyad level, each child received a score of zero (no support provided) or one (support provided) for each form of support.

Table 1
Sample Characteristics by Race

Mother	Total (<i>n</i> = 551)	Race	
		White (<i>n</i> = 394)	Black (<i>n</i> = 157)
Age (mean in years)	69.9 (s.d. = 3.1)	70.0 (s.d. = 3.1)	69.7 (s.d. = 3.1)
Marital Status (in %)			
Married	47.7	59.6	17.8
Divorced/Separated	16.0	7.9	36.3
Widowed	35.2	32.5	42.0
Never Married	1.1	—	3.8
Education (in %)			
Less Than High School	23.1	14.7	44.2
High School Graduate	42.3	45.2	35.9
Some College	14.3	15.5	11.5
College Graduate	20.0	24.7	8.3
% Employed	25.4	27.4	20.5
Number of Children	3.8 (s.d. = 1.8)	3.6 (s.d. = 1.5)	4.5 (s.d. = 2.2)
Adult Children	Total (<i>n</i> = 2068)	White (<i>n</i> = 1393)	Black (<i>n</i> = 675)
Age (mean in years)	42.9 (s.d. = 5.9)	42.2 (s.d. = 5.6)	44.4 (s.d. = 6.2)
% Daughters	49.9	49.5	50.7
Marital Status (in %)			
Married	56.9	66.0	38.0
Cohabiting	5.4	4.1	8.0
Divorced/Separated	14.1	10.8	20.9
Widowed	1.1	0.9	1.5
Never Married	22.6	18.2	31.6
Education (in %)			
Less Than High School	8.5	2.8	20.2
High School Graduate	35.3	30.6	45.1
Some College	13.0	12.3	14.4
College Graduate	42.2	54.1	20.4
% Employed	81.7	85.0	74.8
% Who are Parents	70.2	67.1	76.6
Mean Number of Children	1.8 (s.d. = 3.4)	1.5 (s.d. = 1.3)	2.4 (s.d. = 5.5)

The mothers were asked only whether they had provided support to each of their children during the previous year, rather than the frequency of that support. We realize that some information is lost by using a dichotomous measure of support. Because we asked mothers about multiple types of support to each of their children, we felt that it was necessary to compromise on the frequency of helping, considering that mothers were reporting on as many as 13 children in some families.

For the analysis at the mother level, support to children within the family was aggregated to create a variable measuring whether the mother provided each dimension of support to none, all, or only some of her adult children.

Race

Each respondent was first asked whether she was of Hispanic or Latina origin. Regardless of the response to that question, she was then asked: (In addition to being Hispanic [if appropriate]) What is your race? Please select one or more of the following—White, Black or African American, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, or Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander? For the purposes of this analysis, we are including only those individuals who identified themselves as Black or White.

Independent Variables

Mothers' Characteristics

Mothers' characteristics that were included in the multivariate analyses were educational attainment, marital status, age, number of living children, and physical health. Mothers were asked into which category their education fell: (1) less than high school; (2) some high school; (3) high school graduate; (4) post-high school vocational; (5) some university; (6) university graduate; or (7) completed graduate school. Marital status was measured by whether or not the mother was currently married (0 = not married; 1 = married). Age was calculated by the year the mother reported she had been born, subtracted from the year in which she had been interviewed. Each mother was asked how many children she had living. Mothers' physical well-being was measured using a single item of subjective health: Would you say that your physical health is excellent (5), very good (4), good (3), fair (2), or poor (1)?

Child and Dyad-Level Characteristics

Similarity

A child's gender was coded 0 = son and 1 = daughter. Perceived value similarity was measured by the item: Parents and children are sometimes similar to each other in their views and opinions and sometimes different from each other. Would you say that you and [child's name] share very similar views (4), similar views (3), different views (2), or very different views (1) in terms of general outlook on life?

Support from Child

Support from children was measured using the same items used to measure mother-to-child support, only in this case asking whether the child had provided the mother with each of the four dimensions of support during the previous year. For the analyses, we used what we have termed “context-specific” measures, which consider support on a dimension by dimension basis (e.g., mother received comfort, mother received help with chores, etc.).

Children’s Need

Marital status was measured by whether the adult child was currently married (0 = child not married; 1 = child married). Child’s age was measured in years, based on the mothers’ reports. Mothers were asked into which educational category each of their adult children fell: (1) less than high school; (2) some high school; (3) high school graduate; (4) post-high school vocational; (5) some college; (6) college graduate; or (7) completed graduate school. Mothers were asked whether their children were employed, but not the number of hours that they worked; thus, employment was coded 0 = not employed, 1 = employed. Children’s number of offspring was reported by the mothers. To measure children’s problems, we asked mothers whether each of their adult children had experienced any of a series of problems that individuals might face as children or adults. The problems we included in the present analysis were (1) children’s serious illnesses or injuries in adulthood; and (2) children’s deviant behaviors in adulthood, specifically, “problems with drinking or drugs” or “problems with the law.”

Proximity

We included proximity as a control. Proximity was measured as the distance that the child lived from the mother in terms of travel time by ground transportation. Categories were: (1) same house; (2) same neighborhood; (3) less than 15 minutes away; (4) 15–30 minutes away; (5) 30–60 minutes away; (6) more than an hour but less than two hours; and (7) and two or more hours away.

Statistical Approach to Studying Within-Family Differences

We use two different units of analysis in the paper. First, in the analysis in which we examine differences in Black and White mothers’ likelihood of

differentiating among their children, the mother is the unit of analysis. For this analysis, we present the findings from a logistic regression analysis to investigate whether there are race differences in mothers' likelihood of differentiating, controlling on mothers' sociodemographic characteristics and subjective health.

In the second set of analyses, we explore whether there are race differences in the predictors of mothers' provision of support to particular children in the family. In this case, the unit of analysis is the parent-child dyad. In other words, the 2068 parent-child dyads that are the units of analysis are nested within the 551 mothers on whose reports the present analysis is based; thus the observations are not independent. To address this concern, we used binary logistic regression with robust standard errors to correct for dependence among children in the same family. This approach allowed us to take into consideration family-level as well as child and dyad-level factors (Maas & Hox 2004; Szinovacz & Davey 2001; Suito et al. 2006). It is important to note that this statistical approach allows for more than one "positive case"—thus, in families in which mothers report providing support to only one child, this procedure will identify the predictors of which individual child was chosen, and in cases in which mothers provided support to multiple children, it will identify predictors of all of those children, relative to those to whom mothers did not provide support. Given our focus on within-family differences in support, families in which no children or all children were provided support are not included in the multivariate analysis. Throughout this set of analyses, we control on mothers' characteristics. We do not present these characteristics in the regression tables because within-family differences in *children's* characteristics are the substantive foci of these analyses and because mother's characteristics were found to have no consistent effects on their choices.

Chi-square values were calculated to test the significance of differences between the coefficients across the logistic regression models (Allison 1999). The variations observed between the coefficients across models were potentially confounded with differences in residual variance; thus, in order to be sure that the variations in coefficients were true differences, it was necessary to test the models for equal residual variances between groups (Allison 1999). This analysis revealed that for comfort during crises and help in illness, the unobserved heterogeneity did not differ significantly between models; thus, it was appropriate to test for the significance between coefficients across models using chi-square values. In the case of help with chores, there was a significant difference in unobserved

Table 2
Within-Family Differences in Support from Mothers to Children by Race as Shown by Percent who Provided Support

Dimension of Support	Total (<i>n</i> = 551)	Race	
		White (<i>n</i> = 394)	Black (<i>n</i> = 157)
Comfort to Children in Face of Personal Crisis			
Gave to no children	16.2	15.0	19.1
Gave to some children	61.7	61.4	62.4
Gave to all children	22.1	23.6	18.5
Help with Household Chores			
Gave to no children	49.5	46.4	57.3
Gave to some children	46.1	48.7	39.5
Gave to all children	4.4	4.8	3.2
Help to Child When Ill			
Gave to no children	53.5	54.6	51.0
Gave to some children	45.0	44.7	45.9
Gave to all children	1.5	0.8	3.2

heterogeneity between models, indicating that any apparent differences between coefficients across models could be accounted for by unequal residual variation between the groups. Thus, we test for differences in coefficients for comfort and help in illness, but not help with chores.

We used listwise deletion throughout the multivariate analysis; thus, only cases on which we had data for all of the variables in each equation were included.

Results

Describing Within-Family Differences in Support

To explore the extent to which mothers differentiated in the support they provided their adult children, we examined the distribution of mothers who provided support to none, some, or all of their children. As shown in Table 2, more than six in ten mothers gave comfort in a crisis to some, but not all of their children, whereas almost half of the mothers gave help with household chores or help during illness to some, but not all of their children. Thus, it appears that differentiating among adult children regarding support is common among older mothers; in fact, few mothers gave instrumental support to all of their adult children, and less than one-quarter

Table 3
Logistic Regression of Whether Mothers Differentiate Among Their Children Regarding Support

	Comfort During Crisis			Household Chores			Help During Illness		
	B	s.e.	Odds Ratio	B	s.e.	Odds Ratio	B	s.e.	Odds Ratio
Black	-0.24	0.24	0.79	-0.35	0.23	0.72	-0.09	0.23	0.91
Number of Children	.40**	0.07	1.49	0.17**	0.05	1.18	0.16**	0.05	1.18
Education	-0.09	0.06	0.91	-0.06	0.06	0.94	0.03	0.06	1.03
Married	0.11	0.20	1.11	0.03	0.19	1.03	-0.07	0.19	0.94
Employed	0.06	0.06	1.06	-0.05	0.05	0.95	-0.07	0.05	0.93
Age	-0.04	0.03	0.96	-0.03	0.03	0.97	-0.02	0.03	0.98
Health	0.07	0.10	1.07	0.23*	0.09	1.25	-0.07	0.09	0.93
Model χ^2		55.09**			23.74**			13.30 ⁺	
df		7			7			7	
n		542			542			542	

** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$. ⁺ $p < .10$.

gave comfort in a crisis to all of their children. It is interesting to note that about half of the mothers reported that they had given no help with chores or assistance during illnesses to any of their adult children.

To examine race variations in differentiation, we compared the distributions of helping provided by Black and White mothers. This analysis revealed no consistent patterns by race regarding help during illness and comfort during a crisis. A small difference was found regarding help with chores; nearly 40% of Black mothers differentiated among their children in the provision of help with chores, compared to about 49% of White mothers. None of these differences was statistically significant.

We questioned whether the absence of race differences in mothers' helping would remain when controlling on other characteristics that might be related to either helping or race, such as mothers' age, marital status, educational attainment, employment, number of living children, and subjective health. To explore this question, we conducted a series of logistic regression analyses in which we classified mothers as helping some or all of their children on each dimension of support. (Mothers who provided none of their children with support were omitted from these analyses.) As shown in Table 3, these analyses revealed no effects of race on mothers' likelihood of differentiating among her children regarding comfort in a crisis, help in the face of illness, or help with household chores. In fact, the

only factor on which mothers who differentiated diverged from those who helped all or none of their adult children was family size; mothers who had a larger number of adult children were consistently more likely to provide support to only some of their children. The only other factor that predicted differentiation was mothers' health in the context of providing help with household chores; mothers in better health were more likely to differentiate. Further analysis revealed that mothers who were in poor health were only about half as likely to provide help with household chores as were mothers in very good or excellent health.

In sum, it appears that there was substantial within-family variation in intergenerational support in both Black and White families. Further, the absence of race effects was maintained when controlling on mothers' other demographic characteristics.

Explaining Race Variations in Within-Family Differences in Support

Table 4 presents the within-family analyses of factors explaining mother-to-child comfort in a crisis for Whites and Blacks. An examination of the two models reveals differences by race in the factors explaining patterns of mother-to-child support, however, not to the extent hypothesized. Consistent with our hypotheses, White, but not Black mothers, were substantially more likely to provide comfort to daughters than sons ($p < .05$). In most other respects, predictors of support were similar for Black and White mothers. For example, although we hypothesized that support from children would be substantially more important to White than Black mothers, the odds ratios were nearly identical. We anticipated that Black mothers would be more responsive to their children's needs than would White mothers, but our hypothesis received little support. Serious illness or disability was a stronger predictor of support for Black than White mothers, as hypothesized ($p < .05$), although this factor predicted support for both groups of mothers. Contrary to our expectations, children's marital and parental statuses were stronger predictors for White than Black mothers; White mothers were substantially more likely to comfort children who were single ($p < .05$), and somewhat more likely to help offspring with several children. Further, Black mothers were more likely to help children with higher educational attainment, whereas White mothers were slightly less likely to help better educated children; although this difference was not statistically significant, it is noteworthy because it is in the opposite direction from our expectations.

Table 4
Logistic Regression Analysis of Mother-to-Child Support for Comfort in a Crisis

Children and Dyad Characteristics	White			Black		
	B	s.e.	Odds Ratio	B	s.e.	Odds Ratio
Similarity						
Daughters	0.79**	0.17	2.19	0.28	0.22	1.32
Outlook	0.01	0.09	1.01	-0.17	0.13	0.84
Support from Child	0.77**	0.14	2.15	0.80**	0.22	2.23
Children's Need						
Married	0.80**	0.18	0.45	0.02	0.27	1.02
Education	-0.08	0.05	0.92	0.13*	0.06	1.14
Employment	-0.20	0.22	0.82	-0.56	0.29	0.57
Age	-0.02	0.01	0.98	-0.03	0.02	0.97
Number of Children	0.14*	0.06	1.15	-0.02	0.07	0.98
Deviant Behavior as Adult	0.48	0.29	1.61	0.59	0.31	1.81
Ill or Disabled as Adult	0.50**	0.18	1.64	1.70**	0.36	5.46
Distance	0.06	0.04	1.06	-0.09	0.06	0.91
Model χ^2		111.45**			60.30**	
df		16			16	
n ^a		884			336	

** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

a. The *N* of cases differs across support dimensions because the cases included in the analyses are only those in which mothers differentiated among their children.

Table 5 presents the findings for help with household chores. This analysis also provides little support for our hypotheses regarding race differences in predictors of mother-to-child assistance. As expected, proximity was a better predictor of support for White than Black mothers; however, the difference was modest. Other hypotheses received even less support. For example, both Black and White mothers were more likely to help daughters than sons, and support from children predicted both groups' likelihood of helping. Further, although we hypothesized that children's needs would be substantially stronger predictors for Black than White mothers, there was no consistent support for this argument. Although it might appear from the magnitude of the odds ratios that the effect of child's gender, health

Table 5
Logistic Regression Analysis of Mother-to-Child Help with Household Chores

Children and Dyad Characteristics	White			Black		
	B	s.e.	Odds Ratio	B	s.e.	Odds Ratio
Similarity						
Daughters	0.69**	0.19	1.99	1.73**	0.47	5.63
Outlook	0.01	0.11	1.01	-0.21	0.24	0.81
Support from Child	0.55**	0.19	1.73	0.86*	0.40	2.37
Children's Need						
Married	-0.14	0.20	0.87	0.28	0.43	1.33
Education	0.05	0.06	1.05	0.03	0.12	1.03
Employment	-0.69**	0.23	0.50	-0.93*	0.43	0.39
Age	-0.05*	0.02	0.95	-0.05	0.03	0.95
Number of Children	0.08	0.07	1.08	0.12	0.12	1.13
Deviant Behavior as Adult	-0.04	0.30	0.96	-0.51	0.44	0.60
Ill or Disabled as Adult	0.27	0.20	1.31	0.92	0.51	2.52
Distance	-0.24**	0.05	0.79	-0.15	0.10	0.86
Model χ^2		96.32**			53.47**	
<i>df</i>		16			16	
<i>n</i>		703			198	

** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

problems, and support from children were substantially greater in Black than White families, further analysis indicated that these differences could be accounted for by unequal residual variation across groups (Allison 1999); thus, the differences between the coefficients are not substantively meaningful.

Table 6 presents the analysis of mother-to-child support when children were ill. As was the case for the other relational contexts, there was inconsistent support for our hypotheses regarding differences by race. Children's health problems were substantially stronger predictors of Black than White mothers' responsiveness ($p < .05$); however, it is important to note that children's health problems were still one of the strongest predictors of White mothers' support. Similarity of gender and outlook were better predictors of White mothers' support than of Black, as was proximity; however, these differences were modest and not statistically significant. None

Table 6
Logistic Regression of Mother-to-Child Support During Illness

Children and Dyad Characteristics	White			Black		
	B	s.e.	Odds Ratio	B	s.e.	Odds Ratio
Similarity						
Daughters	0.88**	0.22	2.42	0.42	0.37	1.52
Outlook	0.28*	0.13	1.33	0.02	0.18	1.01
Support from Child	0.47*	0.19	1.61	1.02**	0.31	2.79
Children's Need						
Married	-0.81**	0.24	0.44	-0.15	0.29	0.86
Education	-0.14*	0.06	0.87	0.06	0.09	1.06
Employment	-0.22	0.26	0.80	0.05	0.09	1.05
Age	-0.01	0.02	0.99	-0.03	0.03	0.97
Number of Children	0.10	0.09	1.11	-0.12	0.12	0.89
Deviant Behavior as Adult	0.86**	0.27	2.37	0.53	0.36	1.70
Ill or Disabled as Adult	0.96**	0.22	2.51	1.81**	0.39	6.14
Distance	-0.11*	0.05	0.89	-0.05	0.07	0.95
Model χ^2		122.73**			48.38**	
<i>df</i>		16			16	
<i>n</i>		612			253	

** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

of the other hypotheses received even marginal support; in fact, several findings were directly contrary to our expectations. For example, although there were small race differences in the effects of children's marital status, educational attainment, and deviant behaviors, White mothers were more, rather than less responsive to these factors.

Taken together, the findings across all three relational contexts provide little support for our hypotheses. In fact, the only pattern that consistently supported our expectations was the effect of children's serious health problems; such problems were a substantially better predictor of support from Black mothers. However, other patterns differed considerably from our expectations. Both Black and White mothers' likelihood of helping was predicted by whether their children had provided them with the same form of support during the previous year, and, in some cases, children's neediness predicted White mothers' support more strongly than Black mothers' support.

In sum, the analyses of both whether mothers differentiated and the children whom they favored indicated there was considerably more convergence than divergence between Black and White mothers. Both Black and White mothers often differentiate among their children, providing support to some, but not all of their offspring; further, contrary to our hypotheses, both Black and White mothers tend to favor children who have been a source of support and, in most cases, daughters, and offspring who experience greater problems than their siblings.

Discussion

This article provides the first exploration of race differences in within-family variations in mothers' support to adult children. We posed two specific research questions: (1) Are there race differences in mothers' likelihood of differentiating among their adult children regarding the provision of mother-to-child support? (2) Can patterns of within-family differences in support be explained by the same combination of similarity, family solidarity and contextual factors in Black and White families? We believe that our findings shed light on both of these questions.

Based upon the literature, we developed competing hypotheses regarding race and within-family differences in mothers' support to adult children. We suggested that, on the one hand, Black mothers might be more likely than White mothers to differentiate among their children because of the diffusion of resources across the complex and demanding support networks experienced by many Black mothers (cf. Taylor et al. 1993; Newman 1999, 2003). On the other hand, we suggested that the cultural norms of providing support to family might counterbalance limited resources, resulting in Black mothers providing support to all of their children. However, contrary to expectations, Black and White mothers were almost equally likely to differentiate among their adult children in the provision of both instrumental and emotional support. Thus, it appears that mothers often differentiate among their adult children regardless of race.

The framework for the analyses predicting mothers' support to a particular child was similar to the one that we developed for predicting whether mothers differentiated. We suggested that Black mothers would be more likely than White mothers to differentiate among their adult children on the basis of factors associated with normative solidarity. Specifically, we anticipated that Black mothers would be more responsive to children with more limited resources, such as those who were single, less educated, or

unemployed. Conversely, we anticipated that White mothers' differentiation would be more responsive to issues of similarity and proximity, and that solidarity would be a less influential factor. However, in only one case did the findings support our hypotheses strongly regarding race differences in the effects of children's resources and neediness: children's serious health problems were better predictors of support among Black than White mothers. Contrary to our expectations, the findings indicated that in some cases, children's needs better predicted White than Black mothers' support, such as the effect of children's marital status and educational attainment.

Taken together, the two sets of findings that we have presented reveal surprisingly few race variations in mother-to-child support, given the patterns of family solidarity reported in other studies (Aquilino 1999; Burr & Mutchler 1999; Kaufman & Uhlenberg 1998; Kulis 1992; Lawton Silverstein, & Bengtson 1994; Sarkisian & Gerstel 2004). In particular, our findings suggest that race differences in family solidarity do not lead to a greater responsiveness to children's neediness in Black families than in White. Perhaps the issue is not that Black mothers are more likely to differentiate on the basis of their children's neediness, but simply that Black mothers may be called on with greater frequency than White mothers to assist children who experience need because of their scarce resources.

It is also possible that family solidarity plays a greater role in explaining race differences in mother-to-child support *between* than *within* families. Black mothers may be more likely to provide support to their children because of a combination of greater family solidarity and their children's heightened vulnerability to negative life events (cf. Allen 1995; Heaton & Jacobson 1994; Hill 1993). However, these factors may not translate into race differences in the factors that explain variations in support *within the family*. In fact, the analysis we have presented suggests that both Black and White mothers are influenced by their children's problems.

It is possible that different patterns, both within and across race, might have been found if we had included data from other family members. Studies involving multiple members of the same family often reveal substantial discrepancies in reporting (cf. Aquilino 1999; Fingerma 1995, 1996; Giarrusso, Stallings, & Bengtson 1995; Suito et al. 2006), particularly regarding the provision of support. Thus, to understand within-family patterns of intergenerational support and its predictors, it is necessary to collect data from both parties who are involved in the exchange. Further, within-family patterns may differ by parent's gender; future studies should compare mothers' and fathers' patterns of within-family differences in support by race.

The study is also limited by issues involving measurement of mothers' provision of assistance. In particular, because we were collecting data on each child in the family (as many as 13 children in some cases), we were unable to include a set of contingency items that would have allowed us to determine the extent to which each child needed assistance during the previous year and the amount of assistance the mothers provided. Further, we asked only about support during the previous year, whereas some of the dimensions of children's neediness that we measured (e.g. health problems, deviant behaviors), might not have been relevant during that period. These factors might have played a more important role in explaining patterns of support for both Blacks and Whites if we had asked about children's problems specifically over the past year.

In summary, the present paper contributes to a growing literature showing that parents often differentiate among their children in terms of resources in the later years of the life course, mirroring patterns shown in earlier years (Aldous, Klaus, & Klein 1985; Brody & Stoneman 1994; Kowal & Kramer 1997; McHale et al. 1995; Seff, Gecas, & Frey 1993; Suitor & Pillemer 2006, 2007; Suitor, Pillemer, & Sechrist 2006). Further, our analyses reveal that differentiation in parents' provision of interpersonal resources is common in both Black and White families in later life. Equally important, the findings we have presented demonstrate that when patterns of favoritism differ between Black and White families, they cannot be accounted for by race discrepancies in family solidarity.

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