

GIVING BETWEEN GENERATIONS IN AMERICAN FAMILIES

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This paper documents the types and amounts of aid exchanged between adults and their non-coresidential parents. Data for the study are drawn from a representative national sample survey of Americans age 19 and older conducted in 1987–1988. Exchanges of monetary and material resources, childcare, household assistance, and companionship and advice are considered.

Patterns of intergenerational exchange are found to differ by gender, family structure, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic situation. Differences in exchange between males and females and between whites and Mexican-Americans are related to other life-course characteristics, and to the availability and proximity of kin. Blacks and persons living in poverty are shown to be less involved than other groups in intergenerational exchanges. Finally, patterns of prior assistance and the available needs and resources of the respondents and their parents are found to influence current patterns of exchange.

KEY WORDS: Exchanges; Families; Intergenerational support

The exchanges of resources between generations has recently begun to receive significant theoretical and empirical attention from economists, anthropologists, and demographers. Much of this work has as its central

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thrust the development of models that link variations in kin networks to variations within and between societies in reproductive behavior, the care of children, and the care of dependent elderly (Lancaster and Lancaster 1987; Turke 1989). Because an important issue has been to understand the linkages among societal evolution, parental investment strategies, and the aforementioned outcomes, much of this work has focused on traditional or transitional societies. In contrast, comparatively little is known about exchanges between kin in developed societies, even though issues of reciprocity, directionality, and links with investment in children are probably also relevant in these societies.

Theoretical formulations based on evolutionary theory suggest that in high fertility societies, extended kin networks function to disperse the costs of childrearing. This situation permits older children and the aged to enhance their reproductive potential by assisting in the nurturance of children (siblings and grandchildren, respectively) who share their genetic heritage. In more modern societies, social and economic resources are procured outside the family. Persons who limit their family size may be better able to attain educational and socioeconomic success and therefore are able to invest more heavily in the socioeconomic success of their children. To focus their investment on fewer children, modern parents must reduce their commitment to invest in the children of extended kin. The parents, in turn, will have less access to assistance from extended kin, which will increase the cost of their own children and promote further fertility reduction. The disappearance of sibling-provided child-care accelerates this process.

In small-family societies, parents are centrally concerned with the concentration of resources for the social and economic success of their own children. Since these children represent the major focus of the parents' reproductive heritage, parental investment in these children is expected to continue well into adulthood, and it will accelerate with the birth of grandchildren. Evolutionary theory thus suggests that parental investment will be diluted when a larger number of children compete for resources, and that it will be more heavily concentrated on the children who bear them grandchildren. Based on prior human history, it also is likely that the balance of resource transfers will be from the elderly parents (with no reproductive potential) to their children and grandchildren.

These evolutionary theories have been difficult to evaluate for modern societies because of the paucity of data documenting patterns of exchange. Although the topic of intergenerational exchange has been mentioned often, this paucity of data on exchange extends to the types and amount of aid exchanged by American families. This gap in our knowledge has persisted even though public policies centering on chil-

dren, single-parent families, and the elderly are based upon the premise of this type of aid. As a first step in examining the role of kin networks in modern societies, then, this article seeks to document exchanges between American adults and their parents in the late 1980s. This analysis will also contribute to a better understanding of families in the United States and to family policy by examining the extent to which the provision of such aid is a function of the family structure of adults and whether it varies by ethnic group, is responsive to the needs of families, or depends on the resources available in the kin network.

BACKGROUND

Some studies have found that blacks, Mexican-Americans, and other Hispanic groups engage in active mutual support activities, generally at higher levels than that of whites (Mindel 1980; Mutran 1985; Stack 1974; Taylor 1986). Many scholars have suggested that kin-based support networks are particularly salient for blacks, with the strength of intergenerational ties among blacks making the higher incidence of single parenthood in this group less problematic than it would be for whites. Many of the studies that found strong kin ties among black families were based on small, possibly unrepresentative samples, however, and failed to control for other differences between black and white families that might account for the overall differences in kin ties.

Hofferth's (1984) analysis of national sample survey data supports this interpretation; she found that although black families are more likely to live in an extended family, white families are more likely to receive money from their kin. Among female-headed families, whites are much more likely than blacks to receive money, but there is no racial differential in extendedness. Hogan et al.'s (1990) analysis of kin networks and support for young mothers using longitudinal, nationally representative sample survey data for the 1980s obtained largely similar results. Black mothers have better access to kin resources (measured by income support and childcare) and are more likely to reside with kin than white mothers. Once again, most of the observed differences were a function of the greater propensity of black mothers to be single. The only persistent black advantage, taking into account marital status, was the marginally greater tendency of black mothers to reside with adult kin. Hogan et al. (1990) conclude that many young mothers were not involved in support networks, or they were involved in networks that did not offer sufficient support.

Gender differences have been found in the types of exchanges as well. A number of studies have noted that aid is more likely to flow between

families related through females than those related through males (Chatters et al. 1986; Mutran 1985). Also, females have been found to be more likely to exchange services with their kin, while males are more likely to be involved in financial exchanges (Lee 1979; Taylor 1988).

A number of researchers have noted significant age and generational differences in exchanges between kin (Troll and Bengtson 1979). In general, giving as opposed to receiving aid follows a U-shaped pattern; young and elderly adults are more likely to receive than give aid, while middle-aged adults are more likely to give aid (Lee 1979; Morgan 1982). There may be significant racial differences in exchanges of support among elderly adults within the context of intergenerational families, but the evidence on the direction and magnitude of these differences is mixed (Cantor 1979; Mutran 1985; Shanas 1979).

Additional important influences on exchanges between parents and their children are availability, proximity, reciprocity, and resources. One has to have kin in order to exchange goods and services with them. Access to kin varies considerably; for example, migratory groups, such as Mexican-Americans, frequently live long distances from some of their kin. Furthermore, the extent of resource exchanges undoubtedly is conditioned by the affective relationship among the kin, independent of other factors.

A number of researchers have noted that geographical distance significantly alters the nature of exchanges. Exchanges that involve face-to-face interactions, such as childcare or performance of household tasks, diminish with distance. Other forms of exchange, such as financial support, appear less affected by distance between kin (Lee 1979). Improved transportation and communication systems may facilitate the maintenance of close ties with geographically distant kin (Litwak and Kulis 1987).

Some scholars note that a norm of reciprocity operates in our culture: people are obligated to return the benefits they receive from others (Gouldner 1960). The reciprocal nature of kin exchanges and their potential long-term costs have been noted among low-income blacks (Stack 1974). Others see accumulated obligations as one explanation for the observed pattern of flows of support across generations (Lee 1979). Thus, participation in a support network implies the incurring of obligations that are likely to be reciprocated.

In sum, it is believed that family support networks vary significantly by race, family structure, gender, and age, but we have little solid information about the size, magnitude, and direction of the exchanges. Research to date has only rarely been based on representative samples of the population. With few exceptions, factors affecting patterns of exchange have been considered in isolation.

An additional problem with previous work is that most of the discussions of intergenerational exchanges are written as though such patterns are timeless ones, unaffected by the character of social environments and the forces of social history. Several trends have emerged during the 1980s, however, which suggest that exchanges of support among kin may be increasing in importance as mechanisms that ensure adequate care for family members. First, the growth in family incomes has stalled since the early 1970s, and the modal source of family income has shifted from a single earner (male) to two earners. The increase in the number of single-parent families means that many families have only a single earner, raising questions about how embedded these families are in support networks (Hofferth 1984; Hogan et al. 1990). Second, a decline in government spending on child-oriented programs, associated with an increase in the mean age of the population, suggests a weakening of public commitment to the needs of children relative to the needs of the elderly (Preston 1984); increased intergenerational exchanges within families might counter this decline. Third, changes in life expectancy have dramatically increased the number of multigenerational families, and the years of life that any individual can expect to be part of a multigenerational family situation (Watkins et al. 1987).

DATA AND METHODS

The data for this study are drawn from the 1987–1988 National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH 1988). This survey includes interviews with a representative national sample of 13,017 respondents age 19 and older. The NSFH respondents consist of a main sample of 9643 respondents, plus double samples of minorities (blacks and Hispanics), single-parent families, families with stepchildren, cohabiting couples, and recently married couples.

NSFH instructions for the questions eliciting information about assistance and support directed respondents to answer only for parents not living in the same household. Thus, the present study is restricted to exchanges between adults and non-coresidential parents. Of the 8475 NSFH respondents who have at least 1 living parent and provided information about patterns of intergenerational exchange, 1532 are black, 6215 are white (non-Hispanic), and 728 are Hispanic.

The NSFH used personal interviews and supplemental self-administered questionnaires to gather detailed information on the respondents' family and socioeconomic life histories, and on their kinship and social networks. The names, definitions, means, and standard deviations for the variables used in this analysis are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Definitions, Means, and Standard Deviations of NSFH Variables used in the Present Study ($n = 8475$).

| <i>Variable</i> | | <i>Mean</i> | <i>s.d.</i> |
|-------------------------|---|-------------|-------------|
| Ethnicity: | | | |
| BLACK | | 0.12 | 0.32 |
| MEXICAN | | 0.05 | 0.22 |
| OTHHISP | 1 = Puerto Rican, Cuban, other hispanic (reference category: white) | 0.03 | 0.18 |
| Parental Status: | | | |
| NCORESP | 1 = only a parent of child living elsewhere | 0.03 | 0.16 |
| KIDL5 | 1 = youngest child aged 5 or younger | 0.22 | 0.41 |
| KID5-18 | 1 = youngest child aged 5-18 | 0.27 | 0.44 |
| KID19 | 1 = youngest child aged 19 or older (reference category for all models except receiving childcare in Table 2: not a parent) | 0.16 | 0.37 |
| AGE | age of respondent | 35.40 | 12.25 |
| GENDER | 1 = male | 0.49 | 0.50 |
| MARSTAT | 1 = married, spouse present | 0.59 | 0.49 |
| POOR | 1 = family income is below official U.S. government poverty threshold | 0.10 | 0.29 |
| COMPLED | years of completed education | 12.80 | 2.67 |
| PARAGE | age of oldest surviving parent | 63.09 | 11.80 |
| PROX | level of contact (visits, letters, phone calls) between respondent and parent they interact with the most. Range: 1 = not at all, 6 = several times a week | 4.87 | 0.98 |
| NUMPAR | number of parents alive at interview | 1.66 | 0.47 |
| NUMSIBS | number of siblings alive at interview | 3.16 | 2.47 |
| EVGCORES | 1 = if respondent has ever provided coresidence to his/her parents | 0.05 | 0.21 |
| POORHLTH | health status of sickest parent. Range from 1 = excellent to 5 = very poor | 2.63 | 0.97 |
| PARED | number of years of education of highest educated surviving parent | 11.86 | 3.28 |
| HMORT | 1 = if respondent has ever received help with their first mortgage from parents | 0.06 | 0.24 |
| CAREPAR | 1 = if respondent has cared for seriously ill or disabled parent in past 12 months | 0.04 | 0.21 |
| RHEALTH | health status of respondent. range: 1 = very poor to 5 = excellent | 4.12 | 0.76 |

(continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

| <i>Variable</i> | | <i>Mean</i> | <i>s.d.</i> |
|-----------------|---|-------------|-------------|
| PROXMISS | 1 = missing value on PROX | 0.26 | 0.43 |
| POVMISS | 1 = missing value on POOR | 0.31 | 0.46 |
| PAGEMISS | 1 = missing value on PARAGE | 0.05 | 0.21 |
| PHLTHMIS | 1 = missing value on POORHLTH | 0.04 | 0.20 |
| RHLTHMIS | 1 = missing value on RHEALTH | 0.06 | 0.24 |
| REDMISS | 1 = missing value on COMPLETED | 0.003 | 0.05 |
| GMONEY | 1 = gave or loaned parent at least \$200 in past five years | 0.04 | 0.20 |
| RMONEY | 1 = received gift or loan of at least \$200 from parent in past five years | 0.17 | 0.37 |
| GADVICE | 1 = gave advice, encouragement, moral or emotional support to parent in past month | 0.25 | 0.43 |
| RADVICE | 1 = received advice, encouragement, moral or emotional support from parent in past month | 0.27 | 0.44 |
| GCARE | 1 = gave help with childcare or babysitting to parent in past month | 0.02 | 0.14 |
| RCARE | 1 = received help from parent with childcare for preschool child in past week or babysitting of any age child in past month | 0.13 | 0.34 |
| GASSIST | 1 = gave help with transportation, repairs to house or car, or work around the house | 0.32 | 0.46 |
| RASSIST | 1 = received help with transportation, repairs to house or car, or work around the house | 0.17 | 0.38 |
| TVOLGIVE | total volume of giving | 0.62 | 0.79 |
| TVOLREC | total volume of receiving | 0.74 | 0.98 |
| TVOLEXCH | total volume of exchanges | 1.37 | 1.52 |
| NETVSUP | net volume of exchanges (receiving-giving) | 0.00 | 1.00 |

Of particular importance for this study are the definitions of exchange. Four dimensions of exchange are distinguished—monetary and material resources, childcare, household assistance, and companionship and advice. For each of the four dimensions of exchange, giving support and receiving support were separately ascertained. Respondents were classified as exchanging monetary or material support with their parents if they reported giving or receiving a gift or loan worth \$200 or more

during the previous 5 years (excluding any help with a mortgage payment). Childcare assistance is measured by the receipt of help with babysitting or childcare from the respondent's parents in the last month, or the designation of grandparents as childcare providers for the young children of working mothers. Household assistance was measured by parent-child exchanges of help with transportation, repairs to the home or car, or other kinds of work around the house during the past month. Finally, emotional support or advice is recorded for respondents who indicated they had given to parents (or received from them) "advice, encouragement, moral or emotional support" during the past month.

In addition to giving and receiving support on each of these four dimensions, we defined three summary measures of intergenerational exchange. The total volume of support exchanged was calculated by counting the number of dimensions on which giving and receiving occurred, and dividing that number by the maximum value of 8 (giving and receiving on each dimension) multiplied by 100. The resulting value represents the percentage of the maximum possible dimensions of involvement in an intergenerational exchange network. Analogous procedures were used to calculate the percentage of maximum giving, and the percentage of maximum receiving, that were recorded. (Note that this "percentage of maximum" refers to the maximum number of dimensions on which exchange occurred, not the actual volume of exchange, for which we have no measure.) Finally we constructed a variable to indicate the net exchange that occurred (the number of dimensions on which support was given minus the number of dimensions on which support was received). To provide a meaningful metric, the measure of net support was converted to a standardized score with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

We begin the analysis with a description of overall differences in each type of provision and receipt of support by gender, ethnicity, age, marital status, parental status, education, poverty status, and age of oldest parent. These data are presented in Figure 1, with the *y*-axis of each graph showing the plot of percentage of maximum possible giving or receiving observed in that group. The elements in the bar graphs show the portion of giving or receiving associated with a particular type of exchange. The number of *y*-axis units recorded for a particular type of exchange multiplied by 4 equals the percentage of respondents for whom that type of exchange was observed. The portion of the bar above the 0 line measures the receipt of support, and the portion of the bar below the 0 line measures giving of support. The relative size of the giving and receiving portions of the bar indicate net exchange, with the overall involvement in support networks indicated by the height of the giving and receiving portions of the bar combined.

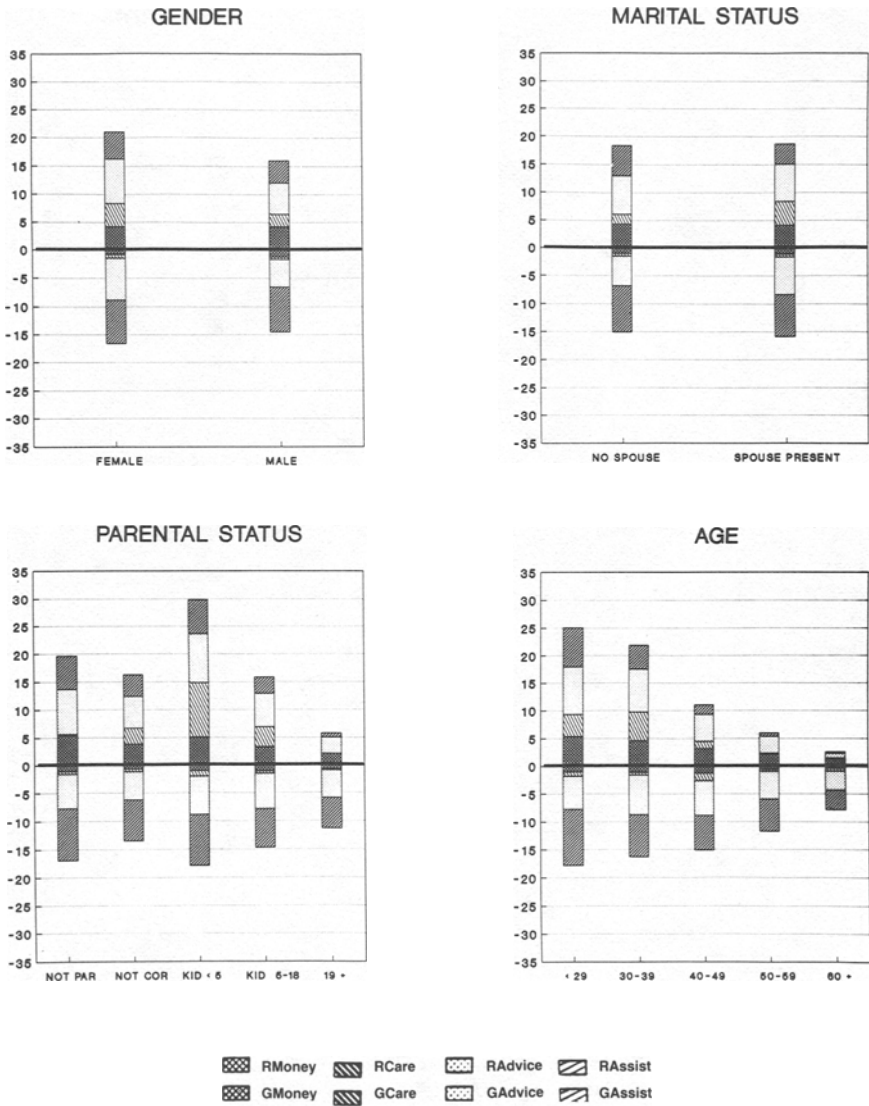


Figure 1. Exchanges of support with parents by selected characteristics.

After describing overall differences, we present the results of logistic regression models of the involvement in each type of exchange. These models estimate the effects of each of the independent variables on each type of exchange, taking into account all other independent variables

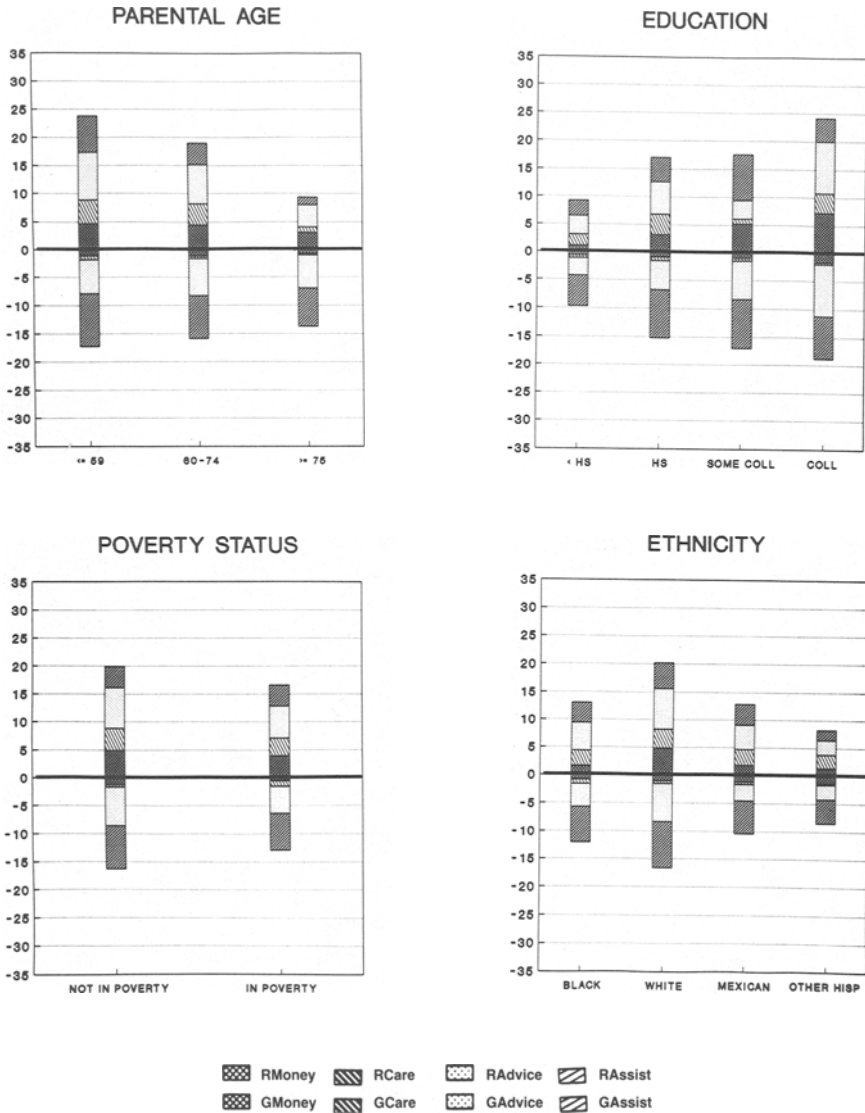


Fig. 1. (continued).

and measures of availability, proximity, reciprocity, and resources. Ordinary least-squares regression models are used for parallel multivariate analyses of the effects of these variables on the volume of giving and receiving, net exchange, and overall exchange.

RESULTS

Observed Differences

Americans exchange support with their non-coresident parents to a limited extent (Table 1). Only 17% of the respondents receive money from their parents, and only 4% give money to their parents. About 13% receive childcare, 17% receive household assistance, and 32% give household assistance. Advice and emotional support is one of the most common dimensions of exchange, with 27% of the respondents receiving such support and another 25% giving such support. Overall, only about 19% of the total possible receipt of aid and 16% of the total possible giving occurs.

Large numbers of non-coresident American adults are not regularly involved in any exchange of support with their living parents (41% of the sample neither give nor receive aid on any of the four dimensions). Fifty-five percent receive no support and 56% provide no support. This situation is only in small part associated with estrangement from parents—only 1% of the respondents report that they have no contact with their parents, while 88% have contact (letter, phone call, or visit) with a parent at least once a month.

Females are considerably more involved in exchanges with parents than males (Figure 1). Women give slightly more support to their parents; the biggest component of this difference is on the dimension of advice and emotional support. Women are considerably more likely to receive support than men, with childcare and advice from their parents being the biggest components of this difference. On balance, women receive somewhat more support than they give, while men give and receive support to an equal degree.

Persons who are married and living with their spouse engage in exchanges with their parents in about the same proportion as single, separated, divorced, or widowed persons. Married persons, however, are somewhat more likely to give advice or emotional support to their parents and to receive childcare, whereas the unmarried are more likely to exchange household services.

These patterns characteristic of marital status are reflections of the strong differences in patterns of exchange determined by parental status and age. Persons with young children are much more involved in exchange with parents than their counterparts, and they are the recipients of the largest net amounts of aid. This pattern is partly a result of the greater likelihood of persons with young children to receive financial assistance, but it is mainly associated with occasional babysitting or childcare—nearly 40% of the parents of children under 5 years of age

reported receiving this type of help from their parents. Adults with grown children are the only ones who report that they give more assistance to their parents than they receive (mainly advice and encouragement, and assistance around the house).

If we assume that no intercohort differences exist in exchange patterns, involvement in exchange with parents appears to decrease over the life course. Respondents under age 29 receive about one-quarter of the types of support possible, but this figure declines to 11% by age 40–49 and to less than 6% by age 50–59. The provision of aid also decreases with age, but the reduction is less pronounced. More aid is provided than received up to middle age; after age 40 the balance shifts to the net advantage of the parents. Most types of support show these patterns, with childcare being the most strongly age-related and the receipt of financial assistance declining least with age.

Part of these differences in support are a function of the age of the parents. Parents continue to provide money to their adult children over their lifetimes, but they are less able to provide other forms of assistance as they grow older. This declining ability is particularly true for the very old. Surprisingly, however, American adults do not report a significantly increased level of support for very old parents.

Involvement in exchange networks is positively associated with socioeconomic status. Highly educated persons are more involved in exchange; persons without a high school diploma report few intergenerational exchanges (fewer than 10% of the possible exchanges), whereas the college-educated report the most extensive exchange (19% of the possible giving and 24% of the possible receiving). All education groups except the lowest more often receive than give monetary support. The tendency to receive monetary support from parents is especially pronounced among the college-educated.

Respondents whose families are living in poverty do not have high levels of aid—only 17% of the possible exchanges that would bring aid to these poor families occur. Only 16% of poor families receive money, compared to 20% of those living above the poverty threshold. Overall, poor people who do not reside with their parents are less frequently involved in exchanges of aid than persons with higher incomes.

Blacks on average are less involved in exchange with their parents than are whites, being less likely both to provide and to receive aid. These differences are especially pronounced in the case of monetary aid, but they apply to babysitting/childcare, advice, and household services as well. Mexican-Americans are even less involved in exchanges with parents than are blacks. Other Hispanics are seldom involved in exchanges of support; only 8% of the maximum level of giving or receiving was reported.

Table 2. Determinants of Receiving from Parents

| <i>Variables</i> | <i>Money</i> | <i>Advice</i> | <i>Assistance</i> | <i>Childcare^a</i> |
|---|--------------|---------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| Intercept | -4.43 | -4.36 | -5.26 | -4.32 |
| Black (BLACK) | -0.87*** | -0.40*** | -0.41*** | -0.53*** |
| Mexican (MEXICAN) | -0.17 | -0.06 | -0.07 | -0.26 |
| Other Hispanic (OTHHISP) | -0.75** | -0.98*** | -0.97*** | -0.45 |
| Parent of child living elsewhere (NCORESP) | -0.04 | 0.19 | 0.22 | -1.40*** |
| Youngest child 5 or younger (KIDLT5) | 0.01 | 0.07 | 0.37*** | — |
| Youngest child 5–18 (KID5-18) | -0.11 | 0.07 | 0.17 | -0.73*** |
| Youngest child 19+ (KID19) | -0.03 | -0.16 | -0.51* | — |
| Age (AGE) | -0.05*** | -0.03*** | -0.05*** | -0.07*** |
| Gender (GENDER) | -0.04 | -0.54*** | -0.15* | -0.26** |
| Married, spouse present (MARSTAT) | -0.20** | -0.03 | -0.08 | -0.18* |
| Poor (POOR) | -0.21* | -0.41*** | -0.11 | -0.63*** |
| Years of completed education (COMPLED) | 0.15*** | 0.15*** | 0.08*** | 0.12*** |
| Age of oldest surviving parent (PARAGE) | 0.02*** | -0.01* | 0.0002 | 0.01 |
| Level of contact with parents (PROX) | 0.16*** | 0.43*** | 0.69*** | 0.71*** |
| Number of living parents (NUMPAR) | 0.30*** | 0.30*** | 0.78*** | 0.37*** |
| Number of living siblings (NUMSIBS) | -0.13*** | -0.01* | -0.04** | -0.02 |
| Provision of coresidence to parents (EVGCORES) | -0.22 | 0.06 | -0.01 | 0.36 |
| Health status of sickest parent (POORHLTH) | -0.12*** | -0.11*** | -0.15*** | -0.14** |
| Years of education of most educated parent (PARED) | 0.08*** | 0.06*** | -0.01 | 0.02 |
| Receipt of help with mortgage (HMORT) | 0.47*** | 0.26** | 0.29* | 0.11 |
| Provision of care for parent (CAREPAR) | 0.19 | 0.04 | -0.11 | -0.29 |
| Health status of respondent (RHEALTH) | -0.08* | -0.05 | -0.06 | -0.04 |
| <i>n</i> | 9164 | 8615 | 8634 | 5054 |
| Proportion | 0.17 | 0.28 | 0.18 | 0.26 |
| Chi-square | 1013.16 | 1155.22 | 954.51 | 934.32 |
| df | 28 | 28 | 28 | 26 |

Significance levels: *0.05 **0.01 ***0.001

Other variables in model: POVMISS, PROXMIS, PAGEMISS, PHLTHMIS, RHLTHMIS, REDMISS

^aThis model is limited to those respondents who are parents of children less than 19 years of age. The reference category for the family status dummy variables is having at least one child 5 years of age or less.

Table 3. Determinants of Giving to Parents

| <i>Variables</i> | <i>Money</i> | <i>Advice</i> | <i>Assistance</i> |
|--|--------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Intercept | -4.20 | -5.22 | -5.24 |
| Black (BLACK) | 0.22 | -0.43*** | -0.39*** |
| Mexican (MEXICAN) | 0.57* | -0.23 | -0.14 |
| Other Hispanic (OTHISP) | 0.45 | -0.89*** | -0.57** |
| Parent of child living elsewhere (NCORESP) | -0.44 | 0.20 | 0.00 |
| Youngest child 5 or younger (KIDLT5) | -0.22 | 0.0004 | 0.04 |
| Youngest child 5-18 (KID5-18) | -0.15 | 0.14 | 0.02 |
| Youngest child 19+ (KID19) | -0.31 | 0.11 | 0.25 |
| Age (AGE) | 0.001 | -0.18*** | -0.04*** |
| Gender (GENDER) | 0.53*** | -0.48*** | 0.20*** |
| Married, spouse present (MARSTAT) | -0.11 | 0.16** | 0.09 |
| Poor (POOR) | -0.69*** | -0.19* | -0.14 |
| Years of completed education (COMPLED) | 0.14*** | 0.17*** | 0.06*** |
| Age of oldest surviving parent (PARAGE) | -0.02 | 0.003 | 0.01* |
| Level of contact with parents (PROX) | 0.11* | 0.39** | 0.79*** |
| Number of living parents (NUMPAR) | -0.07 | 0.03 | 0.15* |
| Number of living siblings (NUMSIBS) | 0.05* | -0.04** | -0.02 |
| Provision of coresidence to parents (EVGCORES) | 0.56* | 0.34** | -0.06 |
| Health status of sickest parent (POORHLTH) | 0.20*** | 0.06* | 0.03 |
| Years of education of most educated parent (PARED) | -0.02 | 0.05*** | -0.001 |
| Receipt of help with mortgage (HMORT) | -0.03 | 0.04 | 0.10 |
| Provision of care for parent (CAREPAR) | 0.17 | 0.75*** | 1.02*** |
| Health status of respondent (RHEALTH) | 0.11 | 0.06 | 0.10** |
| <i>n</i> | 9143 | 8644 | 8668 |
| Proportion | 0.04 | 0.25 | 0.31 |
| Chi-square | 158.98 | 867.00 | 1098.48 |
| df | 28 | 28 | 28 |

Significance levels: *0.05 **0.01 ***0.001

Other variables in model: POVMISS, PROXMIS, PAGEMISS, PHLTHMIS, RHLTHMIS, REDMISS

Multivariate Models

We next built a series of multivariate models to assess the extent to which the overall differences in exchange persist when related characteristics of the groups are taken into account (Tables 2-4). When all other factors are controlled for, adults who are in frequent contact with their parents (PROX) are much more likely to receive support than those with less frequent contacts (Table 2). Frequent contacts between parents and children increase the overall volume of exchange (both giving and receiving) but have little impact on the net volume of exchange (Table 4).

Table 4. Determinants of Patterns of Exchange with Parents

| <i>Variables</i> | <i>Total Receiving</i> | <i>Total Giving</i> | <i>Total Exchanges</i> | <i>Net Exchanges</i> |
|--|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Intercept | -15.53 | -13.91 | -14.72 | -0.21 |
| Black (BLACK) | -5.89*** | -3.05*** | -4.47*** | -0.12*** |
| Mexican (MEXICAN) | -0.35 | -0.53 | -0.44 | 0.01 |
| Other Hispanic (OTHHISP) | -6.60*** | -3.56** | -5.08*** | -0.13* |
| Parent of child living elsewhere (NCORESP) | 2.84* | 0.01 | 1.43 | 0.12 |
| Youngest child 5 or younger (KIDLT5) | 10.56*** | 0.30 | 5.43*** | 0.44*** |
| Youngest child 5-18 (KID5-18) | 3.34*** | -0.01 | 1.67** | 0.15*** |
| Youngest child 19+ (KID19) | 0.78 | 0.61 | 0.69 | 0.01 |
| Age (AGE) | -0.32*** | -0.20*** | -0.26*** | -0.01** |
| Gender (GENDER) | -3.78*** | -0.73 | -2.25*** | -0.13*** |
| Married, spouse present (MARSTAT) | -1.34* | 0.94* | -0.20 | -0.10*** |
| Poor (POOR) | -4.02*** | -1.51* | -2.77*** | -0.11** |
| Years of completed education (COMPLED) | 1.07*** | 0.87*** | 0.97*** | 0.01 |
| Age of oldest surviving parent (PARAGE) | -0.02 | 0.01 | -0.01 | -0.001 |
| Level of contact with parents (PROX) | 5.22*** | 4.60*** | 4.91*** | 0.03** |
| Number of living parents (NUMPAR) | 5.37*** | 0.74 | 3.05*** | 0.20*** |
| Number of living siblings (NUMSIBS) | -0.51*** | -0.14 | -0.33*** | -0.02*** |
| Provision of coresidence to parents (EVGCORES) | 0.48 | 2.01* | 1.24 | -0.07 |
| Health status of sickest parent (POORHLTH) | -1.60*** | 0.56* | -0.52** | -0.09*** |
| Years of education of most educated parent (PARED) | 0.55*** | 0.20** | 0.37*** | 0.02*** |
| Receipt of help with mortgage (HMORT) | 5.59*** | 1.14 | 3.37*** | 0.19*** |
| Provision of care for parent (CAREPAR) | -0.81 | 10.08*** | 4.64*** | -0.47*** |
| Health status of respondent (RHEALTH) | -1.04*** | 0.56* | -0.24 | -0.07*** |
| <i>n</i> | 8391 | 8391 | 8391 | 8391 |
| R ² | 0.2423 | 0.1380 | 0.2373 | 0.1087 |
| F | 95.49 | 47.82 | 92.94 | 36.42 |
| df | 28 | 28 | 28 | 28 |

Significance levels: *0.05 **0.01 ***0.001

Other variables in model: POVMISS, PROXMIS, PAGEMISS, PHLTHMIS, RHLTHMIS, REDMISS

Proximity to parents is especially important in exchanges that involve physical contact (household assistance and childcare); smaller but statistically significant effects on financial exchange are also indicated (Tables 2, 3).

Women on average have more frequent contact with their parents than do men (GENDER), producing some of the overall gender differences in exchange. Even when this difference is taken into account, however, women are substantially more likely than men to be involved in exchange because of the greater assistance parents give to their daughters (Table 4). The female advantage in receipt of assistance applies to household assistance and childcare, but not to financial assistance (Table 2). Women generally are more involved in both giving and receiving advice and emotional support with their parents than are men (Tables 2, 3).

Marital status (MARSTAT) bears minimal relation to patterns of intergenerational exchange, though single persons have a slight edge in the receipt of monetary assistance and babysitting. Married respondents are more likely to provide advice to their parents. With regard to related characteristics, persons with children (NCORESP, KIDLT5, KID5-18, KID19) more frequently receive assistance (especially babysitting and household services) from their parents. Since persons with children are about equally likely to give assistance to their parents as persons without children, this pattern results in significantly greater resource flows from parents to their adult children in families where grandchildren are present.

Exchanges between parents and their adult children are more common in early adulthood. As children age, the level of exchange with parents (both giving and receiving) declines, and the net value of the exchange becomes more equal. Older parents (PARAGE) somewhat more often provide financial assistance to their adult children, but as long as they are in good health, parental age has little effect on established patterns of exchange.

This situation changes dramatically if either parent or the adult child is in poor health. Respondents in poor health (RHEALTH) provide less household assistance to their parents and more often receive financial assistance. Children with a parent in poor health (POORHLTH) are much more likely to provide financial assistance to their parents, and the children more often give their parents advice. As the health of parents worsens, they less frequently provide support of any kind to their children, becoming, on balance, net recipients of aid.

Patterns of assistance established over the life course of adults and their parents are important determinants of current patterns of exchange. Parents who helped their children with the purchase of a home (HMORT) continue this assistance, more often providing financial sup-

port and advice. Children who have helped their parents in the past by giving them a place to live (EVGCORES) subsequently are more likely to provide financial support or advice. Children who have helped their parents by taking care of them during illness (CAREPAR) are subsequently more likely to provide advice or emotional support and help around the house. There is, thus, considerable continuity over the life course in the level and form of assistance exchanged between parents and their adult children.

There is, on the other hand, very little evidence of reciprocity in intergenerational exchange. Children who receive mortgage assistance from their parents are no more likely to provide financial assistance, emotional support, or household services to their parents than children who do not. Parents who received help from their children do not transfer financial resources to their children or provide them with more assistance.

The level of resources of parents and their children, and the demands on those resources, are important factors in intergenerational exchange. Adults with higher levels of schooling (COMPLED) more often give and receive each type of assistance, involving them in substantially greater exchange. Persons with poverty-level incomes (POOR) are less involved in exchange, particularly financial support and childcare. Surprisingly, poverty also reduces the exchange of advice and emotional support. Better-educated parents more often lend money to and exchange advice with their children. The provision of household assistance is less subject to socioeconomic resource constraints than is financial assistance, childcare, or advice.

Widows and widowers less frequently provide assistance to their adult children than do two surviving parents (NUMPAR), and they are somewhat less likely to receive household assistance. The likelihood of adult children giving advice or financial support to their surviving parent does not increase after the death of a mother or father. These patterns suggest that widowhood (unlike poor health) does not place a parent in a situation of obvious need; widowhood does not result in any automatic increase in support from an adult child.

Parental assistance is strongly constrained by competing demands of other children (NUMSIBS). Each additional child reduces the amount of money and household assistance a child receives from his or her parents (although not necessarily the total aid provided by the parents to their children). Parents with a larger number of children more often receive financial assistance from each child. Surprisingly, the exchange of advice and emotional support is also constrained by the number of children—adults with more brothers and sisters less often receive advice from their parents and are less likely to provide advice. This finding is

not simply a result of competition for parental time, since these models control for frequency of contact with parents.

Once their greater distance from parents is taken into account, Mexican-Americans (MEXICAN) do not differ from other whites in their overall level of exchange, or in the components of that exchange. The only exception is the greater tendency of Mexican-Americans to provide financial support to their parents, presumably reflecting the tendency for immigrants from Mexico to send financial assistance to the family members who remained behind. The much lower level of exchange observed among other Hispanic (OTHHISP) groups persists even though the models control for proximity to parents.

When number of siblings and likelihood that only one parent is alive is taken into account, African-Americans (BLACK) report significantly less assistance from their parents than do whites or Mexican-Americans. They less often receive assistance of each type from their parents, and they less often provide advice or household assistance to their parents.

The consistently lower level of intergenerational support reported among blacks in these national sample-survey data is inconsistent with the ethnographic research portrait of exceptionally strong family support networks among blacks. One major difference is that these results refer to all blacks—males and females—whereas the ethnographic literature on black support networks has tended to focus on female-headed families. To make a more exact comparison of results, we produced similar estimates of intergenerational exchange for black and white respondents who were female, unmarried, age 19–29, with one or more children under age 5. The white advantage in support network involvement persisted.

Both ethnographic and survey-based research on family support networks have emphasized the greater role of coresidence (as contrasted with support to non-coresident kin) among blacks. Among these young mothers, coresidence with a parent is certainly more common among blacks (34%) than among whites (21%). The focus in this study on intergenerational exchanges among those who do not coreside may have biased the results for these young mothers. Because of the form of the NSFH questionnaire, we do not have direct data on exchanges of support between coresident adults and their parents. As a check on possible bias we assumed that *all* young mothers coresiding with a parent engaged in *each* type of intergenerational exchange, and we then included them with non-coresident mothers in an analysis of intergenerational exchange.

Under this very stringent test the racial differences in support network involvement disappear but are not reversed. We identified no statistically significant differences in black and white behavior on any of

the dimensions of exchange, or in overall patterns of exchange. Most noteworthy is the large proportion of these young mothers who do not receive any form of support from their parents—31% of the young black single mothers and 23% of the whites. Only 37% of the black mothers and 38% of the white mothers received financial support. Advice, child-care, and household assistance are more common but never involve more than 61% of the single mothers of either race.

CONCLUSIONS

During the 1980s American adults were in frequent contact with their non-coresident parents, but these contacts are not characterized by a high level of regular exchange. Instead, support tends to be episodic and to be concentrated in periods of need. Thus, parents more often provide support to their adult children when they are young and getting started, when they have young children, or when they are ill. Children increase support to their parents when they are ill. The amount and type of support depends on the resource levels of each generation, and on competing demands for their support.

But the provision of support is not automatic—very old parents and widows who are in good health and socioeconomically secure do not receive much additional support from their children. Even in the case of a high-risk group for whom national policy assumes strong parental support—young, single mothers with young children—substantial portions receive no support.

Intergenerational exchanges are characterized by several regularities. The receipt of support tends to be balanced by levels of giving, except when the needs of the parent or adult child make such equivalent exchanges impossible. Once established, patterns of exchange tend to persist through time, with past support continuing into the present. But past support does not elicit reciprocity in current exchanges.

Exchanges more commonly involve females, in part because of their closer contacts with parents. The types of intergenerational exchanges in which women are especially involved (advice and emotional support, babysitting) reflect traditional sex roles in families.

We do not find evidence for unique ethnic patterns of exchange. Ethnographic research has emphasized the greater familism of Mexican-Americans and strong mother-daughter ties in black families. This research does not address these issues, but our results do suggest that it is a mistake to assume that strong kin ties automatically translate into kin support networks. Mexican-Americans are less involved in intergenerational exchanges, in large part because many live great distances

from their parents. Blacks are less involved than whites in the exchange of financial assistance, household services, childcare, and advice and emotional support. Even among single black mothers with young children—the focus of so much earlier, small-scale research—the advantages in kin support claimed for blacks do not occur.

As described in the introduction to this paper, recent research on intergenerational support networks using nationally representative sample data from two other quite different surveys also yielded results that do not confirm the idea of black support networks being especially strong. These findings suggest the need for a systematic reexamination of the soundness of earlier research and of the conclusions drawn from ethnographic work about black support networks.

This analysis offers little comfort to those policy makers who would abandon public policies or formally organized private-sector initiatives in favor of family resolutions to the variety of social and economic pressures facing American families in the 1990s. Family support clearly helps, but family exchanges alone are inadequate to deal with problems of teen pregnancy, single parenthood, aging parents, or poor health. Too often traditions of family support are absent, the conditions under which such support would begin are unmet, or the extended kin group itself lacks the resources to make a significant difference in times of need. Clearly, other options for dealing with the many challenges facing American families must be investigated.

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