

## Mechanisms for Fostering Multigenerational Resilience

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**Abstract** Family resilience is an important concept that involves both processes and outcomes. While the literature on individual resilience is vast, and that on family resilience is well supported, contemporary conversations on resilience recently included critical observations on resilience in multigenerational aging families. Given this evolution, the purpose of this paper is to explore the multigenerational nature of resilience in two ways: (1) illustrate the importance of multigenerational interdependence to family resilience processes, and (2) identify mechanisms for fostering multigenerational interdependence—both as pathways to and evidence of measurable outcomes of family resilience. We present a paradigm-to-practice manuscript that provides conceptual and practical information for family practitioners (and those who train and supervise them) to move from theories of resilience to mechanisms of resilience.

**Keywords** Resilience · Multigenerational families · Aging · Gerontology · Intergenerational families

### Introduction

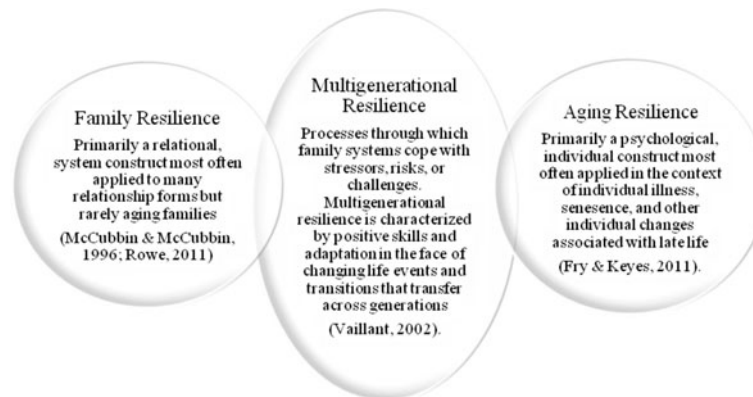
Family resilience is an important concept that involves both processes and outcomes. While the literature on individual resilience among youth is vast, and that on family resilience well

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**Fig. 1** Conceptual model of multigenerational resilience

supported, contemporary conversations on resilience recently included critical observations on resilience among older populations. Given that the literature on individual resilience processes includes multiple age group populations, the purpose of this paper is to explore the multigenerational nature of resilience as a series of processes where resilience can be fostered and transmitted among generations. To this end, the purpose of this paper is to (1) define multigenerational resilience (2) illustrate the importance of multigenerational interdependence to multigenerational resilience processes, and (3) identify mechanisms for fostering multigenerational interdependence—both as pathways to and evidence of measurable outcomes of multigenerational resilience. We present a paradigm-to-practice manuscript that provides conceptual and practical information for family practitioners (and those who train and supervise them) to move from theories of resilience to mechanisms of resilience.

Based on the literature that follows and for the purpose of this paper, we define the following terms:

- *Aging Family*: Any family system actively experiencing or planning for aging related changes.
- *Multigenerational Family*: Any family system that engages in a reciprocal exchange of support and resources among generations.
- *Aging Resilience*: Primarily a psychological, individual construct most often applied in the context of individual illness, senescence, and other individual changes associated with later life. This growing body of literature focuses on resilience processes among older adults specifically (Fry and Keyes 2011; Resnick et al. 2011) (see Fig. 1)
- *Multigenerational Resilience*: Processes through which family systems cope with stressors, risks, or challenges. Multigenerational resilience is characterized by positive skills and adaptation in the face of changing life events and transitions that transfer across generations (Vaillant 2002) (see Fig. 1).

## Resilience

Resilience has been described and applied in many ways, yet the term suffers from a lack of uniform definition. The concept of resilience was originally applied to children (Black and Lobo 2008), later considered for family study (Walsh 2011) and more recently used to explore across all ages and stages of life (Resnick et al. 2011). As we examine resilience in

its many forms, we are reminded that developmental processes are life long and remain adaptive throughout the life course (Schoon 2006). The common theme among scholarly definitions of resilience includes the ability of both individuals and systems to cope and ‘bounce back’ from crises, adversity, or other forms of stress (McCubbin and McCubbin 1996), benefiting from protection via coping capacity in the face of changing life events and transitions (Vaillant 2002; Werner and Smith 2001), Early studies of resilience focused on “successful adaptation under adverse conditions” (Luthar and Zeigler 1991:8). As applied to aging families, resilience has come to include the ability to adapt despite disease, disability or significant loss (Gutheil and Congress 2000) fostering “dyadic interdependence” through supportive relationships (Aldwin and Igarashi 2012:128).

In considering *aging* resilience, we recognize developmental considerations of adaptations that have helped define unique dimensions of resilience in later life (Resnick et al. 2011). There have been recent scholarly contributions to our understanding of developmental factors that influence resilience. In 2011, two books were published on aging resilience with each providing a specific review of resilience among older persons. *Resilience in Aging: Concepts, Research, and Outcomes* (Resnick et al. 2011) is an edited volume that examines individual, relational, and family resilience in adulthood including chapters on resilience in the workplace as well as in chronic illness. The second, *New Frontiers in Resilient Aging: Life Strengths and Well-being in Late Life* (Fry and Keyes 2011) is another edited volume that includes chapters on the reconstruction of successful aging and psychological resilience, to name a few. These are a few examples of the trend toward a truly life course perspective of resilience. However, “while the internal (person-specific) factors that influence resilience are being extensively studied, more attention can be productively applied to the external or societal factors.” (Rowe 2011:xxi). As a result, the expansion of the resilience literature lends itself to the application of multigenerational resilience, with further attention to the transmission of resilience across generations. Finally, Lambert-Shute and Fruhauf’s 2011 call to the profession makes it very clear that there is a dearth of information about older citizens and their families in the Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) literature, making this discussion of multigenerational resilience among MFTs timely and important.

### Key Elements of Multigenerational Resilience

Multigenerational processes of resilience are rooted in multigenerational families. It is widely held that processes of resilience are moderated by personal agency and internal adaptive factors such as autonomy, as well as external protective factors of reciprocal and supportive exchanges of resources and support (Werner 1990). However, we know little about how advancing age might further moderate these processes, but recent inquiry indicates there may be important variation (Gooding et al. 2012). Through a life course lens, the familial *interdependence* of ‘linked lives’ is considered an important aspect of family solidarity (Bengtson and Roberts 1991; Bengtson et al. 2005) and here forms a basis for exploring multigenerational resilience.

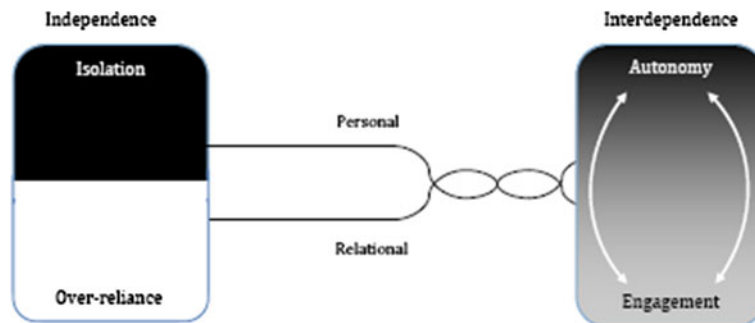
The aging family provides a way to study what it means to age in today’s world. Recent discussion on multigenerational households has focused on the ‘boomerang’ cohort of college graduates who are returning home to live and save money in times of uncertainty (Pew Research Center Publications 2010). Grandparents assume parenting roles of their grandchild(ren) in the absence or lapse of the parents: their adult children (Bailey 2005). Older adults increasingly maintain a desire to age in place and fully participate in family and community life, even as they encounter increasing stressors related to function and loss

(Gutheil and Congress 2000). In these and other ways, family members of all ages encounter risks and barriers, negotiate expected and unexpected change, giving ways to examine adaptation and resilience across the life course. We recognize the ecological approach to understanding aging resilience using traits (autonomy, optimism) and relational processes (engagement, support, communication) to draw in the environment in the proximal/distal contexts of family and society, echoing recent views that promoting the resilience of elders promotes the resilience of their communities (Aldwin and Igarashi 2012).

In order to fully understand pathways to multigenerational resilience, we must first explore the constructs, independence and interdependence. Independence and interdependence are often pitted as opposing constructs. For example, independence is defined as being self sufficient and completely autonomous from necessary support. Yet, it can also be an unrealistic standard that denies the reality that all humans are necessarily reliant on others (Plath 2008). In contrast, interdependence connotes the interplay of intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics (Raefl 2006; Rusbult and van Lange 2003) founded on reciprocal dimensions of sharing and support. Interdependence is characterized, in part, by the balance between autonomy and engagement, two elements presented in Fig. 2.

*Interdependence* Definitions of interdependence range from ideas of joint “control over outcome” (Guth et al. 2010:132) to a more interactional understanding for how “social situations shape intrapersonal and interpersonal processes” (Rusbult and van Lange 2003:353). One commonality among definitions of interdependence is that they refer to some relational component of functioning and mutual reliance.

One specific theory of interdependence with significant theoretical and empirical support is Social Interdependence Theory, originally posited by Morton Deutsch in 1949. Social Interdependence Theory has primarily been applied to goal-oriented business and education settings (Johnson 2003). This theory defines social interdependence as existing when the outcomes of individuals’ goals are impacted by one another’s actions, and it is manifested in two valences: *positive interdependence* exists when individuals have joint or mutually beneficial goals and *negative interdependence* occurs when one person’s goals are detrimental to the accomplishment of the other individual’s goals (Johnson 2003). In a meta-analysis, positive social interdependence—represented in many studies by cooperation—has been demonstrated to have many psychological and social benefits (Johnson and Johnson 2005), including increased self-esteem, greater self-acceptance, and specific positive interaction patterns between individuals, including helping and assisting one another, exchanging needed resources, and acting in trustworthy ways (Johnson and Johnson 2005).



**Fig. 2** Conceptual model contrasting independence and multigenerational interdependence

However, several of Deutsch's assumptions are incompatible with applying this theory to family functioning. First, the theory is very goal oriented and as such considers such outcomes in isolation as if there is one goal to be accomplished at any one time (Johnson and Johnson 2005). While this assumption may be possible in systems of education or business, it does not address the complicated structure of rules and roles that exists within family and relational systems. Deutsch also assumed that all individuals in the scenarios described by social interdependence had equal power (Johnson and Johnson 2005), a situation that is rarely true in families. Finally, Deutsch operated under the assumption that the target situation is independent from past and present interactions (Johnson and Johnson 2005) also untrue in interpersonal dynamics.

In the context of a multigenerational family, with legacies, loyalties, and history, the assumptions of Social Interdependence Theory are problematic as familial dynamics shift and grow across the life course. Further, the discussion becomes more complex when considering personal control and autonomy, particularly among older members of the family (Montalvo et al. 1998). This creates a challenge regarding how *independence*—often considered the gold standard by which we measure functional health for older adults—undermines or, at the very least, impacts how aging families negotiate the inherent tasks of multigenerational family life (Plath 2008).

#### Independence: An Inherent Double Bind

The construct of independence has been discussed from a number of different perspectives, including how it relates to adolescents (Romich et al. 2009; Soenens et al. 2007); those living with disability (Tamaru et al. 2007) and aging adults (Baltes et al. 1994). Independence is often discussed as a goal to be attained by those who currently have some dependence on others. Particularly in older adult populations, independence is typically defined in terms of functional ability as with an older adult's physical capability of accomplishing daily tasks. Many helping professionals assist clientele in gaining greater independence from relying on others through programs or interventions designed to maintain functional independence (Jobe et al. 2001; Mynatt and Rogers 2002). Functional independence is often measured by an individual's ability to complete activities of daily life (ADLs). ADLs are a frequently used standard to measure independence and they are at times the only measure of independence utilized in research. Differences in understanding of independence based on culture (Chirkov et al. 2003) and gender (Nagurney et al. 2004) have been explored.

However, despite the differences in nuances across groups, times, or cultures, independence is often considered to be a positive outcome and the gold standard for individual functioning (Cotterell 2008; Good et al. 2008). Yet, according to Plath (2008) the pursuit of independence as a traditionally youth and young adulthood developmental task can be limiting and isolating for older adults. It is important to note that the pursuit of independence as defined by mainstream society (the ability to function outside of assistance from others) can create symptoms of anxiety and depression among older adults, therefore threatening individual and family resilience. This is especially so when the natural progression of normative aging occurs and older members isolate others regarding their needs. As described by Patten and Piercy (1989), "unique developmental crises in old age may lead to social withdrawal that negatively affects the individual and his/her marital and family relationships." (p. 131). Simply put, the unrealistic pursuit of independence can create a combination of vulnerability and fear (Boss 2011; Walsh 2011), manifesting

symptomology in older adults because this pursuit is youth based and developmentally unrealistic.

### Social Breakdown Model

The idea that the pursuit of independence can lead to isolation is also reflected in the Social Breakdown Model (Kuypers and Bengtson 1973), which serves as a framework to examine how roles in social context can affect outcomes for older adults. This model functions as a reminder of what can lead to negative outcomes (e.g. poor nutritional behaviors/health) and allows issues to be viewed through both micro and macro influences. Specifically, we conceptualize how individuals are *disempowered* by society, particularly through proximal social supports, fueled by the effects of internalized implicit and explicit messages, which can exacerbate symptomology in older members. In short, personal biases and attitudes about normative and non-normative changes create a social system that often leaves older individuals susceptible to social breakdown by assigning worth through more youth-based definitions of social utility—including the idea that individuals must remain independent throughout their later years.

Additionally, as Plath (2008) discussed, the unrealistic pursuit of independence can lead to negative outcomes. Thus the dichotomy can be created where an individual pursues independence to a point of isolation or, as needs are expressed, an overcompensation of care is launched which can result in over-reliance on others. Therefore, older adults feel a push-pull between the expectations for independence and the deference to family members. Ideally, considering the mechanisms presented in this paper, families and the practitioners who work with them will begin to discuss independence as an aspect of various activities rather than a way of life. For example, it is more realistic to discuss the dimension of independence relative to household activities, yard work, and travel separately rather than saying, someone is ‘losing their independence.’ Early childhood development work in resilience used simplicity in definitions of positive adaptation under adversity. However, understanding of adaptation as a measure of aging resilience has more complexity including using humor as coping under stress (Reich and Zautra 2010); optimizing opportunities for successful aging using constructs of health, participation and security (Hochhalter et al. 2011) and calling upon spiritual/religious beliefs in lieu of close relationships following loss (Granqvist and Hagekull 2000).

Scholars have suggested that perhaps the best way to move away from the more limiting and, at times, detrimental consequences of independence is to promote the goal of interdependence (White et al. 2010). Integrating existing theories and research, we present a conceptual model (see Fig. 2) of multigenerational interdependence in an effort to challenge the traditional standard of independence as a goal for multigenerational families. This underscores a focus on the relational nature of interdependence as well as the personal elements of functioning as they relate to aging resilience. With this as the conceptual basis, we move to offer five key mechanisms for practitioners to facilitate in families, which will bring the interdependence elements of the model to life.

Based on previous research (Kuypers and Bengtson 1973; Plath 2008) and our collective 25 + years of clinical practice, we assert that while the assumptions of Social Interdependence Theory are limiting to family systems, the constructs of the theory should be applied. We feel strongly that the pursuit of interdependence, as opposed to unidirectional independence, is a much more realistic and appropriate goal for multigenerational families, their aging members, and the practitioners who facilitate multigenerational resilience.

## Mechanisms

Above we describe the two complex elements of the conceptual model. It is critical to understand that the interdependence part of the model is characterized by interplay between autonomy and engagement. This is an ever-changing *process* that occurs over time and is negotiated among multiple individuals. It is the ability to negotiate, change and adapt over time between engagement and autonomy that epitomizes interdependence. Through this process, the role of autonomy is placed in context of social relationships and the process of interdependence emerges—a key process to resilience. We recognize the need to bring the model to practice and we propose five mechanisms that exhibit interdependence processes.

Based on the literature review above, we've identified mechanisms including: personal agency, communication, family paradigm or rules, network of relationships, and exchange of support as key processes of multigenerational interdependence. All five of these mechanisms are inherent to moving individuals to the adaptive side of the model, underscoring multigenerational interdependence as a pathway to resilience.

The table of mechanisms (Table 1) illustrates the contrast between traditional interdependence and our model of multigenerational interdependence. To better illustrate how these mechanisms might play out in typical family fashion, we introduce a typical multigenerational rural family, The Richardson's. Using vignettes, we capture the experiences and interactions of Ellen, the 75-year-old widowed matriarch, her four adult children and their respective families including oldest son Adam, wife Catherine and children Molly and Alex. Ellen's network of relationships also extends to neighbor, Melissa, a 50-year old single woman. Specifically, through these stories, we elucidate the behavioral processes that comprise the adaptive segment, all of which contribute to multigenerational interdependence.

### *Acknowledge and Respect Adaptations in Personal Agency*

The notion of agency asserts that individuals, through their choices and actions, actively construct their own life course within limitations and opportunities of their circumstances (Elder 1978, 1995). This perspective gives understanding to how a set of nested influences, beginning with the individual, can move outward to take in the social perspective of "linked lives" (Elder 1995), representing the blend of personal and relational balance involved in multigenerational interdependence. Through our model, we assert that personal agency must not only be present but the members must be able to recognize their levels of personal agency. The interplay of such affects the relational element of multigenerational interdependence. We begin with this mechanism deliberately because it is at the core of multigenerational interdependence.

This mechanism may be illustrated through the following vignette. The Richardson family had a tradition of holding a Christmas celebration at the home of the family matriarch, Ellen. As Ellen aged, she began to recognize that hosting the festivity was becoming taxing. She identified that she was becoming fatigued and overwhelmed with the idea of hosting the family and asked her daughters to hold the celebration somewhere else. However, her children did not respect Ellen's expression of her personal agency, and they insisted upon maintaining the traditional setting for their celebration. This example demonstrates that it is necessary for someone to recognize and identify their personal agency. However, although Ellen expressed her desires, her family did not respect her wishes, illustrating the necessity for family members to respect and adapt to changes in personal

**Table 1** Mechanisms for functioning: contrasting traditional independence and multigenerational interdependence

Independence		Interdependence	
Personal agency	Lack of realism Lack of adaptation or flexibility	Isolation	Autonomy
Communication	Communication is absent, limited or superficial Ignoring communication efforts from other family members	Over-reliance	Engagement
Family paradigm or rules	To seek independence to one's own detriment. Family values this over balance of needs.	Personal	
Network of relationships	Limited, closed, or low expression of needs among relationships Relationships may be plentiful but they are not deep and rewarding.	Relational	
Exchange of support	Unidirectional (giving) Limited or ill-matched support Don't view a need for		
Personal agency	Deferring agency to others Not being own agent		
Communication	Communication is poor Expecting others to understand and fulfill needs without stating them (expectation for mind reading)		
Family paradigm or rules	One need/event can create an assumption that an individual is inept. Reliance on others without discernment about their contributions, or		
Network of relationships	Over-reliance by others due to the presentation of self as highly independent Unidirectional (receiving) Overcompensation; giving more than needed (Social Breakdown Syndrome)		
Exchange of support			
Independence	Independence	Interdependence	Interdependence
	Mutual recognition and expression of changes (adaptation)		Mutual recognition and expression of changes (adaptation)
	Identification and ability to articulate wishes, wants and needs		Identification and ability to articulate wishes, wants and needs
	Multi-directional; active listening		Multi-directional; active listening
	Spoken and/or unspoken rules change over time while family members adapt and remain connected		Spoken and/or unspoken rules change over time while family members adapt and remain connected
	Realistic assessment of network in place;		Realistic assessment of network in place;
	Determine a match between needs and available resources		Determine a match between needs and available resources
	All members contribute and benefit (give and receive) across time;		All members contribute and benefit (give and receive) across time;
	Goes beyond network of relationships, quality, mutuality and shared goals.		Goes beyond network of relationships, quality, mutuality and shared goals.
	Expression of support adapts over time		Expression of support adapts over time



agency. When this does not occur, members may experience isolation or give in and become over-reliant upon others to make personal decisions.

### *Communicate Needs*

This involves the ability to verbally communicate needs and listen to others. While we recognize that nonverbal communication is a key family dynamic, the identification and verbal expression of wishes, wants and needs are vital as well and serve as the focus of this mechanism. In order to contribute to multigenerational interdependence, communication must be multi-directional, with each member contributing to the process. As we've seen in the first mechanism—personal agency—individuals must be prepared to express their personal needs and wants. Additionally, it is necessary for loved ones and family members to understand and hear a person's expression of personal agency. We recognize that in order for the mechanism of personal agency to contribute to multigenerational interdependence, that each member must be able to recognize and express personal agency.

In the hypothetical Richardson family, Ellen, the aging mother, lived in the same town as Adam, her grown son. In Ellen's front yard, there was a rotting tree that was precariously positioned over her home. Although Adam and Ellen were both aware that the tree posed a potential danger to Ellen's home, neither of them talked about the need to have it removed. Eventually, the tree fell and it remained in Ellen's yard for some time before her neighbor, Melissa, asked Adam to have it removed. In this example, poor communication originated from both family members. The need to have the tree removed was never clearly expressed, recognized nor understood, making effective problem solving impossible. Poor communication may manifest through isolation as evidenced by family members unwilling to express their desires or ignoring other's communication efforts. Likewise, through over-reliance, family members expect others to "mind read" or anticipate their needs without clear communication.

### *Recognize and Understand Family Paradigm/Rules*

Individual and family understanding of family paradigm and rules is characterized by the unspoken and/or spoken rules that dominate the way the family members relate to one another. The family paradigm and related rules permeate all aspects of family functioning, including communication, decision-making, connectedness, alliances and trust. We assert that the quest for independence is a mainstream rule within families across the life course. Within multigenerational interdependence, family members recognize that their paradigm and related rules will and should shift with time. Further, they are able to adapt to such changes and continue to remain connected despite changes.

In the Richardson family, for example, there was an unspoken paradigm that "we take care of our own," connected to the rule that "we don't put family members in nursing homes." Although Adam, the grown son, and his siblings who lived out of state all shared this paradigm, it began to cause problems. Adam was the sole caregiver for his aging mother, Ellen. As Ellen's needs became increasingly complex, Adam began to be overwhelmed in trying to provide for all of her needs. He began to have trouble monitoring whether she was eating meals and he had trouble managing her complicated medication schedule on his own. Despite these difficulties, Adam continued his attempts to care for his mother because of pressure he felt from the unspoken family rule. In this mechanism of existing paradigms and rules, family history and decision-making meet. Often these intersecting elements can be detrimental for members to cope with historical family

paradigms as requirements shift and adaptations are needed. Family paradigms may be restrictive if they remain unspoken, yet can continue to dictate decisions without flexibility.

#### *Assessing an Individual's Network*

This mechanism highlights the importance of assessing an individual's network of relationships. This involves a dynamic process whereby an individual determines the types and depth of relationships, specifically focusing on the match between their needs and the resources in their network. An individual's network should be diverse and include individuals and groups that are equipped to meet a variety of needs. It is important to recognize that the network of relationships must evolve over time and that this mechanism is critical to planning for life changes.

Ellen lived alone in the rural home she had shared with her husband throughout their marriage until she was widowed. Although she was able to maintain her independence, she and her family worried that if something happened to Ellen no one would know or discover the problem, as the family did not visit in person every day. Ellen and her neighbor Melissa worked out a system in which Ellen raised her garage door when she awoke in the morning and put it down in the evening before she went to bed. Melissa, who lived several hundred yards away, would check with her binoculars to see whether the garage door had been raised and lowered. In this way, Ellen accessed her network to satisfy her and her family's need for security in knowing that someone was checking on her, while maintaining her independence and protecting her sense of personal agency.

#### *Engaging in an Exchange of Support*

This mechanism is rooted in the idea that all members have something to contribute to relationships across time. Simply put, individuals continue to give, as well as receive, at all points in the life course. It is also important that individuals and family members resist falling into the idea that an older adult's network be centered exclusively around their specific care needs. The literature falls short by focusing primarily, in some cases exclusively, on the delivery of care support to older family members. However, the mutual benefits experienced by both members (i.e. reciprocity) are often lost. Measurable tasks and provisions of support are not the only indicators of exchange (Antonucci et al. 1998). Multigenerational interdependence mandates that exchange of support goes beyond assessing the network of relationships in that it encompasses quality, mutuality and shared goals. Further, true support is fostered by consistency in the exchange of support and adaptation in how support is manifested over time.

Ellen enjoyed having her grandchildren, Alex and Molly, live in the same town as she did. Frequently, Alex and Molly would visit their grandmother after school and help her work in the small garden she cultivated behind her home. While they were working in the garden, the children were able to learn not only practical lessons about growing food and hard work, but Ellen also took advantage of the opportunity to share lessons of wisdom through small moments of connection and identification. In turn, she received help weeding her garden and processing the food that she grew. Alex and Molly's parents enjoyed receiving baskets of produce from the garden as well. In this way, support was exchanged across generations. The grandmother was able to take on a role that the parents did not have time for at that stage in their lives, demonstrating adaptability to needs and abilities throughout the life course.

Considering the quest for independence within the social context of significant others forms the basis of this paper. Finding and maintaining a balance between personal and relational elements of families, in particular, is at the heart of this offered model of *multigenerational interdependence* defined as the dynamic relational exchange of support that is mutually beneficial to all members (Brosi et al. 2009). To that end, we examine a set of push-pull dynamics that impact aging families, challenging that independence—bordering on the unrealistic as we seek to ‘hold on’ through the years—is not enough and that the conventional notion of interdependence is incomplete. As the earlier quest for independence shifts, autonomy and agency increasingly are subsumed by reliance on others with even the most basic tasks. But we challenge that, while the descriptors of interdependence (reciprocity, shared goals and equitable power) are at the heart of healthy family functioning, the quest for independence often runs counter.

### Implications for Practice

As found by Lambert-Shute and Fruhauf (2011), there is a dearth of information in the family therapy literature to prepare practitioners or researchers to work with aging families. This contrast is striking given the well-documented demographic shift and changing family structure. Simply put, there have been several calls to the profession to prepare trainees more explicitly in both coursework and clinical settings. Even early articles in *Contemporary Family Therapy* (Todd and Armstrong 1984) call for community engagement and empowerment through the work of community social networks with the goal of supporting frail elders. Lambert-Shute and Fruhauf (2011) conclude that the profession as a whole is not responding to this need in an integrated way.

We challenge professionals, trainees, and educators in the field to do several things. First, identify your own tools and techniques that can be broadened to foster multigenerational interdependence. Simply expand what you are already doing to be more inclusive to older clients and multigenerational families. For example, if Bowenian concepts guide your therapeutic paradigm, consider how multigenerational interdependence as described in Fig. 2 manifests differently in aging families and how the Bowenian concepts of enmeshment and cutoff, to name a few, are unique to these families. Maybe the dynamics are more or less functional in aging families and, if so, how? Therapists who rely on a Structural model should consider how the boundaries for aging members shift and how decisions are made differently in later life than in earlier stages. Second, Marriage & Family Therapists (MFT) in all areas of work are encouraged to consider the notion of ‘linked lives’ (as described by Elder) and challenge yourself and others to bridge your work toward a truly multigenerational model. Using a genogram tool for a family history is a great start but we encourage MFTs to ask themselves what they might be missing by focusing on younger generations rather than a truly integrated, multigenerational approach. Is there hesitance to bring in older members to session? Is there an age bias or an assumption of frailty that makes a practitioner or supervisor less apt to invite an older member into the system? What considerations are made for family history and the truly important values that are passed between and among generations? How does the concept of multigenerational resilience influence therapeutic goals, modalities, and implementation of techniques? Third, researchers are encouraged to consider issues such as parenting, decision-making, family rules and traditions, and frankly, resilience as truly multigenerational issues. Lambert-Shute and Fruhauf (2011) report that while MFTs focus on “intergenerational family experiences” much of the emphasis and inclusion is with “the youngest and middle generations with few references made to explaining behavior of the oldest

generation” (p. 28). Finally, practitioners and university clinics are strongly encouraged to consider what barriers exist to older family members accessing their facilities. What real and/or perceived barriers exist that may send the message that older clientele are not the focus of care? How might a client get the message that the clinic is more of a youth service entity? What pictures are on the walls? Are resource materials inclusive to all ages? Are trainees prepared to tap into referral resources for aging clientele?

The purpose of this paper is to explore the multigenerational nature of resilience in two ways: 1) illustrate the importance of multigenerational interdependence to family resilience processes, and 2) identify mechanisms for fostering multigenerational interdependence—both as pathways to and evidence of measurable outcomes of family resilience. We present a paradigm-to-practice manuscript that provides conceptual and practical information for family practitioners (and those who train and supervise them) to move from theories of resilience to mechanisms of resilience. We encourage all MFTs to explore the Gerontology literature, namely the Family Gerontology literature, for resources and information that augment family therapy models. We agree with Lambert-Shute and Fruhauf (2011) that “it is not enough....to rest on the fact that couple and family therapy programs are including aging issues in their courses” (p. 35). Nor is it adequate to say that a program is “play therapy focused and therefore doesn’t need multigenerational or aging content.” It is absolutely critical that this generation of MFT professionals be prepared to work on the complex shifts in individual and family resilience processes across the life course. The needs of families demand it and if MFT professionals are unprepared to reach aging clientele and/or multigenerational families, they limit their scope of practice significantly. Understanding the unique dimensions of interdependence in later life as needs change and dynamics evolve is central to the call to serve families across generations and across the life course.

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