

**Linked Lives**

Young Adults' Life Course and  
Relations with Parents

Bucx, A.J.E.H.

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Dissertation Utrecht University, The Netherlands,  
with references, with summary in Dutch

Cover design: Bureau Stijlzoorg, Utrecht, The Netherlands

Cover photo: Liam Bailey, London

DTP: Textcetera, Den Haag, The Netherlands

ISBN 978 90 814533 2 5 (hardcover)

ISBN 978 90 814533 1 8 (paperback)

NUR 741

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# Linked Lives

## Young Adults' Life Course and Relations with Parents

### Verbonden levens

#### De levensloop van jongvolwassenen en relaties met ouders

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan  
de Universiteit Utrecht,  
op gezag van rector magnificus prof. dr. J. C. Stoof,  
ingevolge het besluit van het college voor promoties  
in het openbaar te verdedigen  
op vrijdag 6 november 2009 des middags te 12.45 uur

door

**Alfred Jacobus Elisabeth Hubertus Bucx**  
geboren op 16 november 1971  
te Maastricht

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This dissertation was conducted within the project Status Passages and Family Ties, which is funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) as part of the research program Family Relationships: The Ties that Bind (grant 457-03-002). It is based on data from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS) and on data from the Utrecht Study of Adolescent Development (USAD).

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# Acknowledgements

In his film 'La Nuit Americaine', French director François Truffaut plays a director himself. At one point in the movie, he observes that making a movie is like a stagecoach trip through the old West: "At first you hope for a pleasant trip. Then you simply hope to reach your destination." At some times writing a dissertation is like such a stagecoach trip, or like making a film. At other times it is a fascinating journey of discovery, bringing one to new places in science and in the world. Now that this journey is almost completed, I would like to thank a number of people who have been with me the whole time, and without whom this dissertation never could have become what it now is.

Firstly, I owe many thanks to my (co-)promotors Frits van Wel, Trudie Knijn and Louk Hagendoorn. Frits, when we saw each other for the first time in 2004 it was immediately clear to both of us: We understand each other, and we want to work together on this project. I am grateful for the chance you have given me to write this dissertation, for your unconditional trust and support over the years, for your ideas that are unmistakably recognizable in this dissertation, for your sharp insight and constructive feedback on my texts, and for your personally engaged and relaxed coaching style. It brings a smile to my face to look back on the film footage of our lightning visit to the United States, with late-night automobile trips through blizzards, the descent into (and trip back up!) the Grand Canyon, and the magnificent view in Monument Valley. In short, you are the best (co)promotor I could have wished for, and more. The German term 'Doktor-Vater' offers a more apt description of your role. Trudie, thank you for the trust you put in me, for the pleasant collaboration, and for your optimism. Your attention to the (social) context of intergenerational relations raised this dissertation to a higher level. Louk, thank you for your wise advice and for the useful tips on how to deftly counter reviewers' criticism and suggestions. Louk, your contribution to this dissertation was also indirect: You were after all both Frits' undergraduate advisor and Trudie's promotor. Here too an intergenerational line!

In Fall 2007, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to spend two months at the Department of Psychology of the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz (Germany). My thanks go to Professor Inge Seiffge-Krenke for her wonderful hospitality during that period, and for our productive and pleasant collaboration, which yielded one of the chapters of this dissertation. I deeply appreciate our continued contact since then. And I thank you for sitting in the opposition. I also thank Quinten Raaijmakers for his advice in the area of structural equation modeling and for his excellent collaboration, resulting in one of the chapters of this dissertation.

Besides my (co-)promotors and co-authors, I would like to thank all the others who have contributed directly or indirectly to this research, and in so doing have played a role in my development as a scientist. I would like to thank the members of the Work & Family seminar and the Arbeid, Zorg & Welzijn department for their constructive feedback. The sessions with the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS) team members and graduate students were inspiring and very educational. Laura and Liz, thanks for your help with writing in English. I am grateful to the members of the evaluation committee for their time and effort, and for their willingness to sit in the opposition. Susan Branje, my undergraduate advisor in Nijmegen and now Associate Professor in Utrecht, I am very pleased that you have also agreed to sit in the opposition.

I have worked with great pleasure in the ASW department. With its courses and forum days, the ICS offered an inspiring academic environment. It was inspiring and sometimes much too collegial in room 15-30, which I shared with Arieke and Willem, and later with Rosanne and Peter: Roommates, my heartfelt thanks for all of your help with statistical analyses, for the interesting discussions about the value of (social) science, and for the great times at (and outside) work! Arieke, our time as graduate students unfolded largely in parallel: We were both advised by Trudie, both in the same ICS cohort, and both involved with the NKPS; Crete was the first big conference for both of us, and of course we also had shared experiences in and around Ann Arbor. Thanks for your concern and companionship! Willem, we both come from the south of the country, studied in Nijmegen as undergraduates, and have the same feeling for humor – as if that wouldn't be enough to create a bond! I am delighted that you want to be my paranympth!

I also extend my thanks to all of the colleagues I have had the privilege of working with over the past few years: the administrative staff, lecturers, PhD students, and football players (ASW Winners!). I thank all ICS 2004 classmates for the 'wildgave' good times, and especially: Anne van Putten, Erik, Rense, Arieke, Anca, Gerald, Manuela, Nicole, Jessica, and Marieke (Van de Rakt). Anne (Roeters), Renske, Borja, Arieke and Samyr, our month at the ICPSR summer school in Ann Arbor was an unforgettable experience! Marieke (van Schellen), Anne (Roeters), Arieke and Willem, it's great that you came to drink Glühwein in Mainz. Prosit! Willem and Martijn, I enjoyed our legendary performance in Finland as the three Bengtson Brothers. We want more! In Mainz, I met my German colleagues Christian and Carlosh, and the other members of the Department of Psychology. Thank you guys for your hospitality and inspiration and for the great fun I had in Mainz, Köln, Wiesbaden, Frankfurt, and at the Red Cat Club. I also thank the ASW graduate students Kaj, Debby, Mieke, Maike and Ellen for our pleasant times in the hall.

Besides my colleagues, I would also like to thank my family and friends, who have contributed indirectly to this dissertation. Thanks for your moral support and interest, for helping me relax and keep things in perspective, and for your understanding when my dissertation required that I neglect everything else. Tonny and Mariet, thank you for being in my life. Daniëlle, thanks for your optimism! Frans, Peter, Jeanine, Sabine and Karien, thanks for the fantastic interchange of theater and meditation. I thank John, Thomas, Wilma, Eric, Iris

and Sytske for the excellent distraction from work (mainly in the form of movies and games). Simone, Karin, Gabré and Robin: What a surprise, your visit to Mainz!

Robin, our friendship of many years is precious to me. In recent years our lives have undergone rapid changes. It has been wonderful and comforting to be able share these moments. Thank you for wanting to be my paranymph!

Dear Inez, what a joy that we have been family for more than thirty years. Dear Matthijs and Marnie, it's splendid that we have become family in recent years. I recall your visit in Mainz and Frankfurt in 2007 with great pleasure.

This dissertation is about intergenerational relations, and as such it is also about myself and my parents. Pap and mam, thanks for your love and support, throughout my life.

Dear Elvira, you were there for every high and low as I pursued my PhD. I never would have made it without you. Thanks for chasing cars with me, just forgetting the world, and forgetting my dissertation.



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## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 CHANGES IN THE INDIVIDUAL LIFE COURSE: THE EMERGENCE OF YOUNG ADULTHOOD

Between the nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries, young people's entry into adulthood in Western societies became more orderly and predictable (Hareven, 1994; Modell, Furstenberg, & Hershberg, 1976; Shanahan, 2000). Growing affluence resulting from industrialization reduced the need for individuals to participate in the family economy; as a consequence, the timing of life transitions became less dependent on collective family needs and obligations. At the same time, young people's pathway into adulthood was increasingly regulated by formal institutions (age rules and laws) and by informal timing norms (Kohli, 1986; Modell et al., 1976). From the period of the 1950s through the 1970s, the pathway into adulthood followed a more or less predictable sequence of life course transitions: completing formal education, entering the labor force, leaving the parental home, getting married or finding a partner, and becoming a parent (Hareven, 1994). Furthermore, most of the events making up the entry into adulthood were compressed into a relatively short period of the life course, as they occurred nearly at the same time (Corijn & Klijzing, 2001): For instance, young adults left the parents' home to marry, and their first child was born shortly after marriage. Explanations for the prevalence of such a 'standard biography' have focused on people's normative restrictions, decreasing the number of alternative pathways, processes of institutionalization by which legal and organizational rules order the life course, and financial opportunities enabling young people to start a family at a young age (Brückner & Mayer, 2005; De Jong-Gierveld, Liefbroer, & Dourleijn, 2001; Kohli, 1986).

Since the early 1980s, patterns of transitions into adulthood have again become more heterogeneous and discontinuous (Hareven, 1994; MacMillan & Copher, 2005): Young individuals follow a greater diversity of transition sequences than the earlier generation did (Fussell, Gauthier, & Evans, 2007), and it is increasingly common not to complete all life course transitions. Also, transition reversals, such as return to the parental home and divorce, are more common (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1998; Mitchell, 2006). Additionally, transitions into alternative family forms, such as single households, unmarried cohabitation, Living Apart Together, same-gender unions, and single-parenthood, have become more accepted and practiced during the past thirty years, though not at the same pace in all Western countries (Bengtson, 2001; Fokkema & Liefbroer, 2004).

Besides the fact that the sequencing of transitions has become more diversified, the variability in timing of these life course transitions has increased as well (Elzinga & Liefbroer, 2007; Hareven, 1994; Shanahan, 2000). On one hand, transitions that are associated with the end of childhood – such as having one’s first sexual and intimate relationships – are experienced earlier and earlier (Vollebergh, 2008). On the other hand, transitions that accompany the passage into adulthood and lead to the assumption of adult roles and responsibilities are generally postponed by young people until at least their mid-twenties, for example by deferring departure from the parental residence or by delaying marriage and parenthood. In a related vein, people generally have fewer children. In conclusion, the timing and sequencing of life course transitions have become less standardized and more complex during the past few decades (Arnett, 2000; Elzinga & Liefbroer, 2007; Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000; Shanahan, 2000).

This de-standardization of the life course has been linked to the ‘second demographic transition’ (Van de Kaa, 1987). Whereas the first demographic transition occurred during the early to mid-twentieth century and was associated with declines in levels of mortality and fertility, the second demographic transition – from the 1960s onwards – involved changes in marriage, childbearing, and family relationships. These changes were driven by several socioeconomic, cultural, and technological shifts in society (Inglehart, 1977, 1990; Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000). Delays in the timing of having children as well as the tendency towards smaller families have been explained by the availability of contraceptive pills, by increased levels of (female) education and employment, and by the prevalence of more individualistic value orientations (Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000; Van de Kaa, 1987). Because of processes of individualization, people increasingly choose the timing and order of transitions themselves, which has led the standard biography to be replaced by a ‘choice biography’ (Du Bois-Reymond & De Jong-Gierveld, 1993); it has been suggested that in contemporary society it has become obligatory for individuals to make their own life course choices (Beck, 1994; Giddens, 1994). From the 1960s onwards, more years of study have been required to complete (vocational) education, which has generally delayed individuals’ economic independence and family formation (Brückner & Mayer, 2005). In the 1990s and 2000s, young people’s life courses were potentially affected by processes of globalization, increasingly diverse patterns of labor contracts, and reforms and cuts in benefits to unemployed youth (Brückner & Mayer, 2005; Mills & Blossfeld, 2005).

These changes in the timing and patterning of major life course transitions have led researchers to conceptualize a new life course phase, in order to define young people who no longer can be referred to as ‘youth’, but at the same time have not yet achieved the adult status of a productive and reproductive individual. This period from the late teens through the twenties has been termed ‘post-adolescence’ (Buchmann, 1989), ‘emerging adulthood’ (Arnett, 2000), ‘early adulthood’ (Furstenberg, Rumbaut, & Setterston, 2005), the ‘boomerang age’ (Mitchell, 2006), and ‘young adulthood’ (Fussell et al., 2007). Throughout this dissertation, the latter term is used; ‘young adults’ are defined as individuals aged between 18 and 34 years. Below, we give a short description of this relatively new life course phase.

Young adulthood is characterized by a number of important life course transitions: forming an independent household, finishing school, entering the labor market, entering into romantic relationships and having children (Setterston, 2007). Through these transitions, the child's position of dependence on parental resources and membership in the family of origin is replaced by an independent position and one's own family unit, possibly including a partner and children. During this period, individuals become increasingly committed to employment, romantic partners, and children. While new commitments to institutions and people develop, this life course phase is characterized by high levels of exploration and instability (Arnett, 2000; Vollebergh, 2008). As young adulthood is characterized by a lack of strict normative expectations, young adults typically try out various alternatives before making long-term commitments and decisions.

## 1.2 CHANGES IN THE INDIVIDUAL LIFE COURSE: THE EMERGENCE OF EARLY OLD AGE

Besides their impact on the life course of young adults, sociodemographic and technological changes in recent decades have also affected people at the other end of the life span. Better hygiene and living conditions, advances in medicine and agriculture, and changes in life style (e.g., exercise, better nutrition) have improved people's health. As a consequence, the Western world has experienced dramatic increases in longevity. In 1900, life expectancy in The Netherlands was about 50 years; today, it is over 75 years (De Beer, 2006). In general, people live longer and remain healthier for a larger portion of their lives.

These increases in longevity, together with decreases in family size, have significantly extended the post-parental 'empty nest' period – defined as the period following the last child's departure from the parental home. The transition to the empty nest is characterized by important role changes which provide new challenges and opportunities. Research reveals that this transition has the potential to increase parents' marital happiness and life satisfaction, especially in the period immediately after the child's departure (White & Edwards, 1990): Just as the parental role is associated with stress, its loss may bring relief.

After World War II, public old-age social security systems were introduced in most Western European countries (Kohli & Rein, 1991). In The Netherlands, the Old Age Pensions Act (AOW) was introduced in 1957, providing state pensions for people aged 65 and over. These arrangements, supplemented with private and occupational pensions, enabled many older people to have a reasonable standard of living. During the 1970s and 1980s, many Western European countries created institutional arrangements via pension funds which made various forms of early retirement possible (Henkens, 1998; Kohli & Rein, 1991). These developments, together with rising longevity, have substantially increased the proportion of the adult life span spent in retirement during the second half of the twentieth century (Wise, 1997). More recently, however, pension reforms have been introduced in various European countries that reduce opportunities for early retirement and raise the mandatory retirement

age, in order to address the economic consequences of an aging population (De Graaf, Maier, & Frericks, 2007).

According to several authors (Knipscheer, 2006; Laslett, 1989; Van Tilburg, 2005), these changes in life expectancy, improvements in health and economic resources, and extension of the empty nest and – especially for men – the retirement period have opened up a new phase in the life course between middle age and advanced old age, namely ‘early old age’. This period of the life course is situated roughly from 50 to 75 years of age. Whereas advanced old age is marked by a decrease in health and an increase in chronic illnesses and disability, most people in early old age enjoy relatively good health (Van Solinge, 2006). As a result of non-employment (through retirement) and a decrease in caring activities (because children have left the parental home) people in this period of life are generally freed from the responsibilities and constraints associated with parenthood and work (Knipscheer, 2006; Laslett, 1989). With a greater amount of leisure time, good health, and generally adequate financial resources (Van Solinge, 2006), many older individuals enjoy this life course phase as they increasingly participate in a variety of leisure activities, pursue new hobbies and foreign travel, engage in volunteer work, and continue education (Broese van Groenou, 2006).

Not all people in early old age can be expected to enjoy this life course period, however, as the entry into the empty nest phase of parenting and the post-employment phase may entail serious adjustment problems (Van Solinge, 2006; White & Edwards, 1990). Although less prevalent than was once believed, the role adjustments associated with the post-parental period may lead some parents to experience an ‘empty nest syndrome’, characterized by feelings of identity crisis and depression (Glenn, 1975). After children have left the parental home, couples need to redefine several aspects of their relationship (Doorten, 2008; Feeney, Peterson, & Noller, 1994); in general, such experiences are more pronounced for mothers than for fathers, as mothers are generally more involved with their children. Research demonstrates that the transition to an empty nest increases the risk of marital divorce, especially for couples who experience this transition relatively early in their marriage (Hiedemann, Suhomlinova, & O’Rand, 1998). Also, the transition from work to retirement may cause adjustment problems for the retiring individual and his or her partner (Van Solinge, 2006); for instance, the greater availability of time can be a source of enjoyment but may also lead to boredom and depression. Furthermore, early old age is much less attractive for individuals who are in poor health and who have limited financial resources. Moreover, as older family members tend to live longer than in the past, a substantial number of individuals in early old age are involved in providing old age support to one or more surviving parents (De Jong-Gierveld & Dykstra, 2008).

### 1.3 THE ‘MIDDLE YEARS’ OF THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

In the previous sections, we described changes that have led to the emergence of two relatively new phases of the individual life course. First, changes in the timing and sequencing

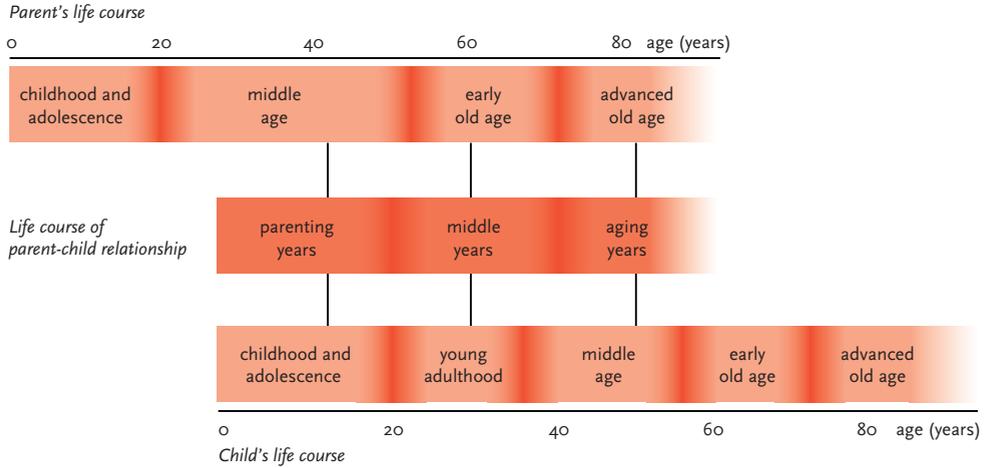
of life course transitions early in adult life have led to the appearance of young adulthood as a distinct phase in which individuals explore life course roles and increasingly take up adult responsibilities regarding family and work. Secondly, longevity and sociodemographic changes have led to the emergence of early old age, when many individuals retire from paid work as well as from major parental demands and constraints, while maintaining relatively good health and adequate financial resources.

It is important to emphasize that the emergence of young adulthood and early old age, respectively, applies to different birth cohorts in Western societies. The changes leading to the emergence of young adulthood apply to the cohort who are at present in their twenties and thirties – that is, those born in the 1970s and 1980s; the changes leading to the emergence of the early old age phase apply to individuals who are now in their fifties, sixties, or seventies – individuals born in the 1950s, 1940s, and 1930s, respectively. In general, these two birth cohorts represent successive generations: That is, most individuals who are now in young adulthood have parents who find themselves in early old age.

Figure 1.1 depicts the life courses of both of these generations, as well as the way these life courses are interrelated. The parents' life course consists of four broad phases, namely childhood and adolescence, middle age, early old age, and advanced old age; children have an additional life phase, namely young adulthood (see also Evenhuis, 2002). It is important to note that this global conceptualization of the life course as consisting of four to five phases does not contradict our earlier observation that individual life courses, especially those of the younger generations, have become increasingly diversified. Although 'standard biographies' no longer seem to exist, this does not automatically mean that the opposite is true and that no general patterns can be observed. Consistent with previous findings (Braboy Jackson & Berkowitz, 2005; Brückner & Mayer, 2005), we assert that, on a more global level, it is still possible to distinguish several age-graded life patterns. Since our distinction of life course phases is very global, it leaves room for differentiation in the timing and sequencing of more specific transitions within each phase. Nevertheless, this conceptualization of the life course might better predict the life course of parents as compared with their children, as the younger generations may experience higher levels of variability in their life course than their parents.

Analogous to the individual life courses of parent and child, we can also define a life course of the parent-child relationship (see Figure 1.1). This life course of the parent-child relationship is, by definition, an inter-cohort phenomenon as it is based on the individual life courses of both parent and child. It starts with birth of the younger generation and ends with the death of one, in most cases the older generation. As can be seen in Figure 1.1, the two generations share most of their years. Since parents of this generation live generally longer, and their children are more likely to survive into adulthood, intergenerational bonds have an unprecedented duration (Putney & Bengtson, 2003); often, the two generations may co-exist for more than 50 years (De Jong-Gierveld & Dykstra, 2008). As a consequence, the time that is spent in these family roles is generally longer than it used to be (Putney & Bengtson, 2003). In a related vein, rising life-expectancies have also led to an increase in the preva-

lence of three-, four-, and five-generation families (De Jong-Gierveld & Dykstra, 2008; Rossi & Rossi, 1990), in which aging parents have the capacity to safeguard family stability and continuity (Bengtson, 2001).



**Figure 1.1** 'Linked lives': connecting the life courses of children and their parents

As can be seen in Figure 1.1, we distinguish three broad phases of the parent-child relationship: the 'parenting years', the 'middle years', and the 'aging years'. During the 'parenting years' children are socialized by their parents; this phase ends when the child leaves the parental home. The 'aging years' are defined by parents' increasing frailty and dependence on care and support from others, including their adult children. The 'middle years' constitute the period in between these phases: Both parents and children are adults and live in separate households. We argue that the developments we have described in the individual life courses of children and parents have the most impact in the 'middle years' of the parent-child relationship. These 'middle years' have been greatly lengthened and have changed in character. Figure 1.1 shows that most of the 'middle years' of the intergenerational relationship coincide with the individual life course phases created by recent demographic and societal changes, which we have conceptualized as young adulthood and early old age, respectively.

### 1.4 AIM OF THE PRESENT DISSERTATION

The aim of the present dissertation is to expand empirical research into intergenerational relationships in the 'middle years' of the intergenerational life course. Until the 1980s, theory formation and empirical research on parent-child relationships was typically focused

either on the beginning of the life course, namely childhood and adolescence, or on its end, namely adult children's relationships with elderly, frail parents. This trend has been characterized as the 'alpha-omega tendency' (Hagestad, 1987) in parent-child research. As guiding theoretical frameworks have an important influence on which issues are given attention and which are not, the relative scarcity of empirical research on the 'middle years' might be at least partly explained by the fact that classic functionalist family theories and psychoanalytic theories dominated research on intergenerational relations during a large part of the twentieth century (Marks, Jun, & Song, 2007). Both classical functionalist family theories and psychoanalytical theories stress the importance of achieving autonomy from parents. Classical structural-functionalist family theories such as Parsons' (1942, 1943) theory of kinship in modern societies suggest that adult children establish residential, social, and psychological autonomy from parents and largely disconnect from them, in order for the nuclear family to be most functionally adapted to the requirements of a modern, industrialized society. According to classical psychoanalytical theories (Erikson, 1950; A. Freud, 1958; Blos, 1962), establishing social, emotional, and psychological autonomy from parents is a prerequisite for healthy personality development.

Only recently has more systematic research addressed intergenerational relations when children are young adults and parents are in middle or (early) old age (Allen, Blieszner, & Roberto, 2000; Galambos & Leadbeater, 2000; Mitchell, 2006). Additionally, theoretical frameworks such as the family life course theory and the intergenerational family solidarity paradigm have led family scholars to give closer attention to the development of intergenerational relations across the life-span (Treas & Lawton, 1999) and increased awareness that relationships begun in childhood remain important in later phases of the life course. Both the family life course perspective and the intergenerational solidarity model guide our research; more information on these theoretical approaches is offered in sections 1.5 and 1.6.

From a theoretical point of view, studying intergenerational relations in this phase of the parent-child relationship is especially relevant, as both young adults and parents in early old age experience important life course transitions which change their social roles and responsibilities, but in opposite directions: Whereas young adult children increasingly assume responsibilities regarding work and family, parents in early old age become freed from these responsibilities. The transitions that are central in young adulthood such as entry into the workforce, starting a household, and parenthood, are defined by a gradual change from dependence on parents' resources to an independent position; new family roles – such as those of spouse and parent – become increasingly salient for young adult children, probably at the expense of other role identities such as son or daughter (MacMillan & Copher, 2005; Roberts & Bengtson, 1993). As a consequence of these life course transitions, young adults increasingly face time-consuming demands and constraints; difficulties in balancing conflicting and competing roles may produce tension and stress. For parents, transitions such as retirement and empty nest experiences lead to a decline in work and family demands, which allows for more 'free time', more energy, and more opportunities to engage in other activities, but which may also create a sense of emptiness and decreased existential meaning (White & Edwards, 1990).

While young adults are becoming independent of their parents, their early old aged parents have sufficient financial and physical resources to remain active and independent in most aspects of their own lives. Therefore, compared to the ‘parenting years’ and the ‘aging years’, the ‘middle years’ can be characterized as a phase in which both generations are relatively free from clearly circumscribed responsibilities to provide care to each other (Van den Brink & De Vries, 2002). On the other hand, the specific characteristics of young adulthood and early old age may create new patterns of interdependence between the two generations in this phase of the parent-child relationship: Healthy parents may be an important source of emotional and instrumental support to their children, thereby enabling them to cope successfully with the demands associated with young adulthood. At the same time, parents’ involvement in their children’s lives after the latter have left home may provide parents with a sense of personal fulfillment. Furthermore, as children move into adult roles, this is also the period in which children and parents begin to establish adult-to-adult relations with each other.

In this dissertation, the main focus is on typical life course transitions in the lives of young adults – including leaving the parental home, entering the labor market, entering romantic partnerships, and family formation – and how these transitions are associated with relationships with parents. As these transitions represent important steps in the pathway to adulthood, characterized by increasing autonomy and independence, the present dissertation addresses a major theoretical issue both in family sociology (Bengtson, 2001; Daatland & Herlofson, 2003; Litwak, 1960; Parsons, 1942, 1943) and in (developmental) psychology (Blos, 1962, 1979; Buhl, 2000; Erikson, 1950; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Steinberg, 1996; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). This issue is namely how children’s increasing autonomy and assumption of adult responsibilities during adolescence and young adulthood is reflected in relationships with their parents.

The extent to which macro-level forces of industrialization and urbanization and increased geographic and occupational mobility have forced young adults to disconnect themselves from their parents as they leave home and enter marriage has become a recurrent theme in family sociology. As mentioned above, this debate has long been dominated by classical structural-functionalist family theories contending that the traditional extended family has been replaced by ‘isolated nuclear families’ (Parsons, 1942, 1943): It was considered functionally adaptive for adult children to isolate themselves geographically, socially and psychologically from the extended family. In fact, this ‘separation thesis’ (Mancini & Blieszner, 1989) was not new, but drew upon earlier sociological accounts of the disintegrating effects of modernization and industrialization on extended family relations and other traditional social bonds (Aboderin, 2004; Bengtson, 2001), including the writings of Burgess (1916), Durkheim (1893/1975), Weber (1924/1947), Tönnies (1887/1974), and Comte (1826/1974).

From the 1960s and 1970s onwards, several authors (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Litwak, 1960; Shanas et al., 1968) proposed alternatives to the separation thesis, arguing that, despite geographic mobility, adult children and their parents maintain a sense of cross-generational solidarity through the use of modern transportation and communication technologies.

According to these scholars, the traditional extended family was replaced by the 'modified extended family' (Litwak, 1960), consisting of several nuclear families that remain partially dependent on each other: Although adult children and their parents are economically and residentially autonomous, they remain in contact and continue to help each other because of feelings of obligation and affinity. As the economic and instrumental functions of the traditional extended family were increasingly fulfilled within the nuclear household or had been taken over by other institutions and formal organizations, alternative roles and functions of the extended family, in particular the provision of emotional and social solidarity and stability, became more important (Daatland & Herlofson, 2003; Litwak, 1960; Shanas et al, 1968). In general, empirical evidence has refuted the separation thesis by showing that in Western societies most adult children have frequent contact with their parents, even when geographic distances are large (Bengtson, 2001; Rossi & Rossi, 1990); moreover, important variations in patterns of intergenerational solidarity have been observed (Bengtson, 2001; Silverstein, Bengtson, & Lawton, 1997; Van Gaalen, 2007).

From the 1960s onwards, there has been debate among psychologists about whether or not young people should detach from their parents in order to attain emotional and behavioral autonomy and successfully negotiate transitions into major social roles. Psychoanalytical theorists (Blos, 1962, 1979; Erikson, 1950; A. Freud, 1958) argued that adolescents and young adults need to radically disconnect themselves from their parents and to move away from infantile idealized representations of parents in order to establish emotional autonomy from parents. Whereas classical psychoanalytical theorizing (Blos, 1962; A. Freud, 1958) emphasized that parent-adolescent conflict ('storm and stress') is a normative manifestation of this detachment process, later neo-analytical theories (Blos 1979) considerably weakened the role of parent-child conflict and rebellion: According to Blos (1979), adolescents and young adults typically undergo a second 'separation-individuation' process (the first separation-individuation process having taken place in early childhood when young children develop stable and differentiated self concepts) in which they distance themselves physically and emotionally from their parents and increasingly assume responsibility for their own feelings, thoughts, and actions, without necessarily jeopardizing the relationship with parents. Individuation theorists such as Grotevant and Cooper (1986) and Youniss and Smollar (1985) went one step further by suggesting that warm, supportive relations with parents represent a necessary condition for optimal development toward autonomy. According to these authors, the process of individuation involves the cooperative efforts of both children and parents, where children assert and parents reinforce autonomy and independence, while both remain emotionally connected to one another. As parents and children redefine themselves within the context of their relationship, the parental bond is renegotiated from an authoritarian into a more egalitarian relationship characterized by individual autonomy as well as interpersonal connectedness (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). That parent-child relationships continue to be important throughout adolescence and into adulthood is also suggested by attachment theorists (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969/1982). Like individuation theories, attachment theory emerged from psychoanalytic roots. According to attachment theorists,

infants are born with an innate tendency to develop strong, enduring affectionate bonds with their caregivers, usually their parents, in order to receive protection and care; these 'attachment relations' serve as a secure base from which children explore the environment. It is believed that parent-child attachment behaviors, albeit in a somewhat modified form, continue to be displayed throughout life, especially in times of stress (Cicirelli, 1991).

Empirical research provides support for a growing independence and separation from parents in this life course phase as well as a continued positive and supportive relationship with parents. In the course of adolescence, children restructure their social network: The number of shared activities as well as the time that children spend with parents typically decreases, while relations with peers, friends, and romantic partners take a more prominent place in their social networks (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Despite temporary increases in conflict during early and middle adolescence, adolescents generally report satisfactory relationships with their parents (De Goede, Branje, & Meeus, 2009; Van Wel, 1994; Van Wel, Ter Bogt, & Raaijmakers, 2002), and parents remain important sources of advice and psychological support (Scholte, Van Lieshout, & Van Aken, 2001; Van Wel, Linssen, & Abma, 2000). During adolescence, the parent-child relationship is transformed into a more egalitarian one, with power balances becoming less asymmetrical (De Goede et al., 2009; Laursen & Bukowski, 1997); parental behavior that promotes emotional and behavioral independence within the context of a supportive relationship contributes to the development of healthy levels of autonomy and independence in adolescents (Baumrind, 1991; Beyers, Goossens, Vansant, & Moors, 2003; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986). Apparently, increases in autonomy and independence during adolescence go hand in hand with continued closeness with parents. Whereas empirical research has focused typically on family relationships in adolescence, much less attention has been paid to parent-child relations in young adulthood and the role that life course transitions play in that process, with some notable exceptions (Aquilino, 1997, 1999; Arnett, 2000; Buhl, 2000, 2008; Van Wel et al., 2000, 2002). In line with other authors (Buhl, 2000, 2008; Smollar & Youniss, 1989), we argue that, whereas in adolescence biological maturational processes and relationships with peers give rise to transformations in the parent-child relationship, in young adulthood the individuation process goes along with life course transitions: Through these transitions, young people assume adult responsibilities and become less dependent on their parents' resources, which creates new contexts for the parent-child relationship.

Although the main focus of this dissertation is young adults' life course, we also pay attention to the life course of parents by investigating how their age is linked to intergenerational relations. Normative life course transitions in parents' lives, such as widowhood, are considered, together with non-normative transitions, such as divorce. Furthermore, the study of young adults' life course transitions sheds light, in an indirect way, on important changes in parents' lives in this life course phase: Young adults' life course transitions affect not only their own lives, but also those of their parents. When young adults leave the parental home to form their own household, parents may face an empty nest. When a young adult enters into

a romantic partnership, this expands not only the young adult's family network but also the parents' family network to include the new partner and the new partner's family.

In this dissertation, two theoretical perspectives developed in recent decades are used as organizing frameworks: the family life course perspective and the intergenerational solidarity model. The family life course perspective (Elder, 1994; Elder & Johnson, 2002; MacMillan & Copher, 2005) has been developed to explain the interplay between the individual's life course, family members' life courses, historical contexts and family contexts. The intergenerational solidarity model (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991) identifies six dimensions of parent-child relationships. In the next two sections, these theoretical frameworks will be described.

### 1.5 THE FAMILY LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVE

After traditional life cycle approaches were heavily criticized for not sufficiently addressing the increasingly flexible and complex character of the individual life course, the life course perspective (Elder, 1985, 1994; Elder & Johnson, 2002; Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003; Heinz, 1991; Levy, 1991; MacMillan & Copher, 2005) gained popularity. The life course perspective explicitly takes into account the diversity and heterogeneity of individual life courses, as well the degree to which the life course is embedded in and affected by socioeconomic and historical contexts, the individual's position in the social structure, and the individual's biological and psychological development. According to life course theorists, an individual's life course consists of multiple transitions into and out of major social roles. The life course framework builds on insights and observations from a variety of disciplines, including history, sociology, demography, biology, and developmental psychology.

The core concepts of the life course perspective include social roles, positions, statuses, stages, transitions, and trajectories. Social roles are defined as social expectations associated with particular positions the individual may occupy within social domains and institutions, such as the family, the school, and the labor force (MacMillan & Copher, 2005). A particular position in the life course is specified by an individual's life course status: The parenthood status indicates whether or not an individual has attained parenthood, the partnership status indicates whether or not an individual has a (romantic) partner. A life course stage is defined as a particular combination of life course statuses that people have at a particular age.

The life course perspective emphasizes that these roles and positions change over time, and that these changes may constitute life course transitions. Life course transitions are critical life events associated with the assumption of new roles and positions, representing a distinct departure from prior roles and positions. Two types of transitions can be distinguished: Normative transitions are experienced by the vast majority of individuals, are expected to occur at a given time, and are sometimes regulated by social norms and conventions; non-normative transitions represent unexpected and/or unusual life events that are not regulated by norms or social pressures. Transitions occur in multiple institutional domains, such as

those of work, education, and family: Transitions in the education and work domain include entrance into college, completion of education, entrance into the labor force, dismissal, and retirement; transitions in the family domain include leaving the parental home, entrance into marriage and parenthood, divorce, remarriage, and death (Elder et al., 2003; MacMillan & Copher, 2005). Transitions may be self-initiated but can also be brought about by changes in the lives of other people: An example of such ‘counter-transition’ is grandparenthood, as this transition is a consequence of one’s children entering parenthood. Highly similar to the concept of life course transitions is the concept of ‘status passages’, which has mainly been used by European life course researchers such as Heinz (1991) and Levy (1991).

Life course transitions typically evolve over a short time span and are embedded in long-term pathways or trajectories. Trajectories represent long-term patterns of stability and change and often include multiple transitions. At their beginning and end, trajectories are marked by transitions. The individual life course consists of multiple trajectories in domains such as education, work, residence, and family; trajectories in different domains are to some extent interrelated and overlapping (Elder et al., 2003; MacMillan & Copher, 2005). Trajectories give continuity and meaning to transitions that occur in people’s lives (Elder, 1985): The birth of a child has a different meaning for an individual’s life when it occurs during marriage than when it occurs before an individual has left the parental home.

A key tenet of the life course perspective is the complex interplay between the life course and its context (Elder, 1994; Elder et al., 2003): The life course of an individual is embedded in and determined by an individual’s context; at the same time, this context is itself affected by the individual’s life course. In general, four levels of context can be distinguished. First, the life course is embedded in and shaped by the historical times and places individuals experience over their lifetime. Historical and sociogeographical conditions, such as political and economic circumstances, technological changes, and sociocultural ideologies can have an impact on people’s perceptions and can constrain their choices, for example about when to leave the parental home. Also, family interactions may be affected by the peculiar conditions of a particular historical period and by major historical events such as World War II.

Secondly, earlier developments in an individual’s life course constitute an important context for patterns of development in later life. Although human development is a life-long process and any point in life has the potential for change, options and possibilities in later phases of the life course are constrained by life course decisions made and conditions and relationships experienced in the past. For example, parenthood can hinder individuals, and in particular women, from participating and progressing in the labor market, because they may need to organize their work around child care responsibilities. Thirdly, the timing of transitions within an individual’s life course can be considered a context: Antecedents and consequences of life course transitions and events vary according to their timing in an individual’s life. This has been demonstrated by empirical research on the impact of the timing of parenthood on a woman’s life course: Whereas women who are still teenagers when they have their first child are more likely to drop out of school and have a lower income later in life, women who postpone childbearing have the opportunity to complete their education and

establish themselves on the job market, which has positive effects on their social status and economic independence (Morgan & Rindfuss, 1999). Finally, an important context is constituted by other people and other people's lives. According to the principle of 'linked lives', the opinions and behaviors of significant others in an individual's network have an effect on an individual's life course options and choices. Because individual lives are lived interdependently, changes in one person's life patterns often lead to changes in other people's lives as well (Elder et al., 2003). In addition, social networks and relationships with others are also affected by transitions in an individual's life course: Transitions into cohabitation and marriage have been found to affect the nature and composition of friendship networks (Kalmijn, 2003).

Although an individual's opportunities may be constrained by his or her age, by the social and cultural circumstances of a given historic area, by developments earlier in life, and by other people's lives, life course theorists recognize that individuals have the capacity to construct their own life course by making choices between available options. The choices individuals make, in turn, influence their social environment. This principle of 'human agency' (Elder et al., 2003) is reflected in the substantial degree of diversity in individual life patterns, even among people who share similar backgrounds (Rindfuss, Swicegood, & Rosenfeld, 1987).

During the past two decades, the life course perspective has increasingly been applied to the study of intergenerational and family relations (Allen et al., 2000; Treas & Lawton, 1999). The family life course perspective draws attention to the fact that the individual life course unfolds in the context of family relations, and that family relationships depend on the life paths of individual family members. Two principles of life course theory are especially relevant for research on intergenerational relations, namely the concept of 'linked lives' and the principle that earlier developments in an individual's life course have an important influence on outcomes in subsequent years (Putney & Bengtson, 2003).

The principle of 'linked lives' is of particular relevance to intergenerational relations, because the latter represent one of the most intimate and enduring social contexts in people's lives. As Elder (1985, p. 40) has stated: "Each generation is bound to fateful decisions and events in the other's life course". Through intergenerational ties, the experiences and the lifestyles of the older generation have an important impact on the development of the next generation: Empirical research shows for example that children of divorced parents leave the parental home at an earlier age (Aquilino, 1991; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1998), are more likely to drop out of school and to be unemployed (Amato & Keith, 1991), and are more likely to end their own marriages (Amato, 1996). Children's transitions may affect the life circumstances of their parents in a direct way: After a failed attempt to live independently or after ending a partner relationship children might return to the parental household, which has implications for parents' life plans (Elder, 1985). Furthermore, many counter-transitions occur within intergenerational relations: Parenthood produces grandparenthood, remarriage of parents leads children to become stepchildren (Mitchell, 2006).

According to the principle of ‘linked lives’, major transitions in the lives of children and parents can change intergenerational relationships. Previous research shows that stressful life events, such as divorce, illness, or death of a family member, may disrupt relationships but have also the potential to bring parents and children closer together (Aquilino, 1997; Greenfield & Marks, 2006; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998). In addition, research suggests that children and parents influence one another’s well-being (Knoester, 2003), and that adult children’s problems can threaten their parents’ psychological well-being (Greenfield & Marks, 2006).

The principle that early life influences are linked to later life outcomes and events is of particular relevance to the study of intergenerational relations and the life course (Aquilino, 2006; Caspi & Elder, 1988; Putney & Bengtson, 2003). Although the middle phase of the intergenerational life course is central in our study, it is important to keep in mind that, in most cases, parents and their adult children share a common history, in which children were dependent and grew up in the household headed by their parent(s). Research generally shows that these early parent-child interactions affect the intergenerational relationship at later phases of the life course (Aquilino, 1997, 2006; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Van Wel et al., 2000, 2002). As the primary family is for most children the first context of influence, it is plausible that early relationships with parents and early family conditions should have a crucial and long-term impact on later relationships, processes, and outcomes (Putney & Bengtson, 2003): Indeed, empirical research indicates that negative developmental effects of parental divorce and family economic hardship persist throughout the life course (Sobolewski & Amato, 2005).

Both the ‘linked lives’ concept and the principle that earlier developments and experiences influence later outcomes are central in the theoretical framework used in this dissertation. Taken together, these theoretical principles suggest that the parent-child relationship is characterized by both continuity and discontinuities: The relationship between parents and children continues to be important throughout the life course, but transitions in the lives of both generations may precipitate relationship changes.

## **1.6 CONCEPTUALIZATION OF PARENT-CHILD RELATIONS: INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY**

Based on work by Bengtson and colleagues (Bengtson & Black, 1973; Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Bengtson & Schrader, 1982; Putney & Bengtson, 2003; Roberts & Bengtson, 1990; Silverstein et al., 1997), we conceptualize parent-child relations in young adulthood in terms of ‘intergenerational solidarity’. This construct of intergenerational solidarity includes several specific dimensions of family interaction; it was developed to account for the various behaviors and sentiments that characterize the parent-child relationship over the life span, thereby focusing on issues of cohesion and integration (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Hammarström, 2005). This conceptualization explicitly incorporates the idea that families and intergenerational

ational relations offer opportunities for exchanging information, emotional support, and functional assistance, as well as contribute to social integration by providing formal roles (parent, child).

The intergenerational solidarity paradigm was developed from the 1960s onwards (Roberts & Bengtson, 1990); its development reflects the growing interest in measuring the quality of parent-child relations in modern Western societies. This increased attention to and concern for family relations can be traced back to demographic trends and socio-economic, cultural and political transformations that took place in Western societies and that were assumed to affect family solidarity (Martin, 2004; Roberts & Bengtson, 1990). Classic theorists such as Burgess (1916) and Parsons (1942, 1943) suggested that urbanization and industrialization weakened ties between parents and their adult children. Growing individualism has been assumed to weaken norms of family obligations (Lasch, 1977; Lye, 1996; Silverstein et al., 1997). Decreases in fertility, changes in family structure, rising divorce rates, and increases in the number of children living in single-parent households have led some scholars to hypothesize that families, in particular fathers, have lost most of their social functions (Lasch, 1977; Popenoe, 1993), whereas others have emphasized the increased diversity of family life (Stacey, 1996). Furthermore, it has been widely debated whether the creation and subsequent modernization of the welfare state in Western societies discourages or complements exchanges of family support (Attias-Donfut & Wolff, 2000; Knijn, 2004; Kohli, 1999; Kohli & Künemund, 2003; Künemund & Vogel, 2006). More recently, increases in longevity have led family scholars to argue that parent-child relations are gaining importance, as intergenerational bonds have an unprecedented duration (Bengtson, 2001; Putney & Bengtson, 2003).

The paradigm of intergenerational family solidarity is built on theoretical concepts and propositions from several theoretical traditions, including classic sociological theories, social psychological theories of group dynamics, and family sociological approaches (Hammarström, 2005; Katz, Lowenstein, Philips, & Daatland, 2005; Komter, 2005; Roberts, Richards, & Bengtson, 1991). Bengtson and colleagues' conceptualization of intergenerational solidarity as consisting of several dimensions is rooted in the work of classical sociologists such as Durkheim (1893/1972), Tönnies (1887/1974), Weber (1924/1947) and Parsons (1951/1970, 1973). Durkheim (1893/1972) distinguished between two types of solidarity: 'Mechanical solidarity' was based on shared values and norms and existed predominantly in pre-industrial societies; in industrial societies this type of solidarity was replaced by 'organic solidarity', characterized by functional interdependences between individuals. Tönnies (1887/1974) differentiated between highly cohesive 'Gemeinschaft' relations, which are characterized by intimate relationships based on kinship, friendship, and/or shared values, and less cohesive 'Gesellschaft' relations, which have a more instrumental nature and which are based on rational self-interest and competition. Similar to these concepts is Weber's (1924/1974) distinction between 'Vergemeinschaftung' and 'Vergesellschaftung', with 'Vergemeinschaftung' referring to social relations that are based on affective or traditional feelings of belonging together, and 'Vergesellschaftung' referring to social rela-

tions that result from rationally motivated, interest-based exchanges. According to Parsons (1951/1970), people engage in different kinds of social activities, depending on the roles they play: 'Expressive' interactions are person-oriented and marked by the exchange of feelings, emotions, and values, whereas 'instrumental' interactions are goal-oriented and primarily motivated by material needs. What all four classical sociological theories share is their distinction between solidarity that is based on internalized moral norms and subjective affections, and solidarity that arises from functional interdependencies (Katz et al., 2005; Komter, 2005). Whereas both Durkheim and Tönnies conceptualized their types of solidarity as mutually exclusive, Parsons and Weber suggested that different forms of solidarity can operate simultaneously within any social and family relationship (Hammarström, 2005; Parsons, 1973; Roberts et al., 1991).

These classical conceptualizations of solidarity were supplemented by advances in social psychology, notably the work of Homans (1961/1974) and Heider (1958). On the basis of research on dynamics and cohesion within small groups, Homans (1961/1974) identified four components of (group) solidarity. First, solidarity is represented by interactions between group members who accomplish individual goals but who are dependent on each other to achieve these goals; this type of solidarity is comparable to sociological concepts such as 'organic solidarity' (Durkheim) and 'Vergesellschaftung' (Weber). Secondly, Homans emphasized that interpersonal ties are strengthened when group members engage in joint activities, because these generally lead to informal interactions and feelings of attachment. The third component of Homans' solidarity concept is defined by mutual affection between group members: The more group members like each other and have positive sentiments towards each other, the more cohesive the group. Finally, norms for behaviors in interaction constitute a fourth aspect of solidarity: Members of cohesive groups tend to have similar normative orientations toward group membership and group activities. According to Homans' theorizing, these four components constitute distinct elements of group solidarity, but are also interrelated and interdependent: For example, mutual affection among group members increases if group members interact with each other, and affection leads to increased interaction. In addition to Homans' four components of solidarity, Heider (1958) identified a fifth element of solidarity, defined by the degree of similarity between individuals: Group solidarity is strengthened when members have similar interests or attitudes.

Although intergenerational and family relationships differ in many respects from macro-level phenomena such as societies studied by classical sociologists, and from experimental groups investigated by social psychologists, family researchers were heavily inspired by insights from both classical sociology and social psychology (Roberts et al., 1991). From the 1960s onwards, family researchers attempted to improve measurement of family processes and family relationships; more or less as a side effect, more precise conceptualizations were developed that specified the relevant components of family solidarity (Mangen, 1988). Based on the work of family researchers such as Jansen (1952), Nye and Rushing (1969) developed an individual-oriented conceptual framework for the notion of 'family integration' that included many of the aspects of solidarity identified by classical sociologists and social psy-

chologists. According to this conceptual scheme, family integration consists of six dimensions: associational integration, affectual integration, consensual integration, functional integration, normative integration, and goal integration. This taxonomy of family integration has subsequently been refined and extended by other family researchers, among whom Bengtson and his colleagues (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Bengtson & Schrader, 1982). Since then, Bengtson and colleagues' conceptualization of intergenerational solidarity has become the most widely used model of family solidarity. The most noticeable difference from Nye and Rushing's original taxonomy is that the dimension of goal integration is replaced by structural solidarity.

The paradigm of intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson & Black, 1973; Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Bengtson & Schrader, 1982) captures feelings of belonging to the other generation as well as behavioral exchanges between the two generations. These two aspects of solidarity are broken down into six distinct but interrelated dimensions of family interaction: association, affection, functional support and exchange, norms of family obligation, consensus, and structural opportunities or barriers (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991). Associational solidarity refers to patterns of interaction between parents and children, and includes several types of contact, such as face-to-face contact, telephone and (e-)mail contact. Affectual solidarity captures the emotional closeness and the degree of positive (and negative) sentiments between parents and children. Functional solidarity is defined as the exchange of intergenerational support and helping. Normative solidarity refers to the strength of internalized norms toward family roles and responsibilities. Consensual solidarity encompasses the level of agreement on values, beliefs and norms among parents and children. Structural solidarity refers to the availability of family and the opportunity structure for interaction, including the number and type of family members and their mutual geographic proximity.

Parallel to the efforts within family sociology to specify distinct elements of intergenerational family solidarity, clinical researchers and family therapists (Minuchin, 1974; Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1983) developed taxonomies to describe patterns of family functioning that contribute to the well-being and problem behavior of individual family members. Although the latter conceptualizations differ in terminology from the concept of intergenerational family solidarity, many of their elements are conceptually related or even similar (McChesney & Bengtson, 1988; Roberts et al., 1991). For example, Olson and colleagues' (1983) concept of 'family cohesion' contains the element of 'emotional bonding', which is equivalent to affectual solidarity, and the element of 'recreation/interests', which can be considered to be part of associational solidarity (McChesney & Bengtson, 1988). In general, the elements of intergenerational family solidarity are formulated at a more abstract level than the dimensions identified within family therapy approaches (Roberts et al., 1991). Another difference is that in conceptualizations developed by family therapists the emphasis is on the level of emotional involvement between family members (Olson et al., 1983), whereas dimensions identified by family sociologists focus mainly on the extent to which family members care for each other and how family relations contribute to socialization and social integration (Kalmijn, 2006; Silverstein et al., 1997). An important advantage of Bengtson

and colleagues' model over other models of family relations and functioning is that it offers a much broader operationalization of family relationships, which provides the opportunity to investigate family relations on a much more differentiated level. At the same time, by providing a single conceptual framework, Bengtson's model helps to organize previous and future findings on family relations (Roberts et al., 1991).

Bengtson and colleagues' taxonomy of intergenerational solidarity dimensions has stimulated an extensive amount of empirical research. In general, findings have demonstrated that associational, affectual, functional, normative, consensual, and structural solidarity indeed reflect different components of solidarity, and that each dimension is determined by different factors (Roberts & Bengtson, 1991; Silverstein et al., 1997), but also that these dimensions are to some extent interrelated and interdependent. For example, children's and parents' affection for each other is associated with more frequent intergenerational contact; endorsement of family norms by parents and children is associated with higher levels of intergenerational affection (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Lawton, Silverstein, & Bengtson, 1994; Rossi & Rossi, 1990).

Research based on the intergenerational solidarity construct generally reveals high levels of intergenerational solidarity (Komter, 2005; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Research consistently shows that daughters rather than sons are in more frequent contact with parents, and that daughters exchange more support with their parents than sons; children have more close relationships with their mother than with their father (Lye, 1996; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Because of women's socialization as 'kin keepers', contact among family members is generally facilitated by women (Hagestad, 1986; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). In households, women generally assume responsibility for planning and organizing gatherings with family, even in the case of in-laws: Women are the ones who maintain contact with family (by visiting, writing letters, making telephone calls), and they take responsibility for decisions to neglect or intensify particular family ties (Di Leonardo, 1987; Hagestad, 1986; Rosenthal, 1985).

## 1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Both the family life course perspective and the intergenerational solidarity paradigm provide useful conceptual orientations for understanding the association between the life courses of young adults and those of their parents, and the way intergenerational relationships are maintained. The family life course perspective directs attention to the interplay between individual life courses and family relations, in particular relations between parents and children. The intergenerational solidarity paradigm stresses the multidimensional character of relationships between adults and their parents. In accordance with the model's explicit assumption that all six dimensions represent relevant aspects of parent-child relations, the present dissertation investigates the relationship between young adults' life course and intergenerational relations for all six solidarity dimensions. Each dimension of intergenerational solidarity is investigated separately, as it is plausible to assume that, in general, the theoretic-

cal mechanisms that underlie the relationship between young adults' life course and intergenerational relations vary depending on the specific dimension under study. In sections 1.7.1 to 1.7.6, the main research questions of this dissertation are presented, classified along the different dimensions of intergenerational solidarity.

The life course framework and the intergenerational solidarity paradigm are orienting theoretical perspectives: They provide general ways of thinking about life courses and intergenerational relations, but neither is specific enough to identify mechanisms by which individual's life courses are related to parent-child relations (see also Aquilino, 1997; Glass, 2003). More specific explanatory theories are needed that can be linked to the more abstract analytic frameworks described above, and from which testable propositions can be developed; in this way, theoretical progress can be made. Therefore, additional theories and theoretical concepts are considered to enable the formulation of testable hypotheses. In sections 1.7.1 to 1.7.6, these theories and hypotheses are introduced, together with the main research questions. The description of these theories and hypotheses is kept relatively brief here; readers should note that these theories are explicated in more detail in the empirical chapters of this dissertation.

Readers should also note that the research questions, theories, and hypotheses presented in sections 1.7.1 to 1.7.6 correspond to the empirical chapters of this dissertation (Chapters 2 to 6). In each chapter, a different dimension of solidarity is examined – with the exception of Chapter 5, in which two dimensions are investigated. A brief overview of Chapters 1 to 7 is provided in section 1.9.

### **1.7.1 Associational solidarity: intergenerational contact**

From the 1940s through the 1960s, sociological theorizing and research on contact between adults and parents was dominated by Talcott Parsons' (1942, 1943) proposition of the isolation of the nuclear family. Parsons asserted that, in the Western world, parents and adult children become alienated from each other after the latter have left the parental home and formed their own (nuclear) family. Because of processes of industrialization and urbanization, extended kinship was hypothesized to lose its (economic) function and therefore to lose its significance. In order for the nuclear family to be most functionally adapted to the requirements of the economic system in modern industrial societies, adult children would have to weaken their ties with members of their family of origin, most notably their parents. Empirical research, however, revealed little support for this 'separation thesis': In general, contact between parents and adult children proves to be frequent and functional, even when intergenerational geographical distances are large (Lin & Rogerson, 1995; Lye, 1996; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Contact is maintained for purposes of support, companionship, and exchange of information on each other's lives (Mancini & Blieszner, 1989). The term 'modified-extended family' was used to describe the phenomenon that extended families maintain contact through modern transportation and communication facilities (Litwak, 1960).

Although research has extensively confirmed that parents and children do not become isolated from one another after the latter have left the parental home and have started to live an independent life, we argue that it is nevertheless plausible that the specific life course status of the young adult affects parent-child contact, albeit in a much less radical way. The family life course perspective contends that, although the parent-child relationship remains important throughout the life course, this relationship is affected by individual family members' life courses (Aquilino, 1997; Elder, 1994; MacMillan & Copher, 2005). Previous research examining young adults' life course and intergenerational contact yielded contradictory findings (Aquilino, 1997; Fischer, 1981, 1983). The main aim of Chapter 2 of this dissertation is to investigate how the frequency of intergenerational contact depends on young adults' partnership status – whether they are involved in a romantic relationship – and parenthood status – whether they have children. Additionally, we investigate underlying mechanisms, such as the role of parents-in-law and the role of grandparents who provide care to their grandchildren. Using family life course principles as a general framework, we hypothesize that young adults with a partner have less contact with parents than single young adults, and that young adults with children have more contact with their parents than young adults without children.

### **1.7.2 Affectual solidarity: the emotional bond between parents and children**

The emotional quality of the parent-child relationship shows a great deal of stability over time, but research shows that this relationship also has the potential for change (Aquilino, 1997; Van Wel et al., 2000, 2002). As is suggested by the family life course paradigm, changes are most likely to occur as a result of events and transitions that appear in the lives of both parents and children. Our second research question concerns how the bond that adolescents and young adults have with their parents is dependent on their life course stage; this research question is addressed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

Three theoretical traditions provide a basis for formulating hypotheses about the effects of life course transitions in adolescence and young adulthood on the parent-child relationship. According to individuation theory (Buhl, 2000; Smollar & Youniss, 1989; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), the relationship between parents and their children becomes less close because life course transitions decrease the young adult's dependence on parents. Following role identity theories (Bengtson & Black, 1973; Stryker, 1968), life course transitions can be expected to have a positive influence on the parental bond: Adolescents and young adults move into the same roles as their parents and their experiences become more similar to those of their parents, which could have positive effects on the extent to which parents and children understand each other and identify with each other. Other theoretical traditions emphasize that life course transitions are often associated with increased stress and uncertainty (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998; Knoester, 2003), which might put pressures on the relationship between parents and children.

Results from previous studies do not provide clear evidence in favor of one specific hypothesis (Aquilino, 1997, 1999; Berger & Fend, 2005; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998). Furthermore, longitudinal research on the bond between adolescents or young adults and their parents in the context of life course transitions is relatively scarce. In the study reported in Chapter 3, effects of life course transitions are inferred from cross-sectional and longitudinal associations between young adults' life course stage and the parental bond. Regarding adolescents' and young adults' living situation, four life course stages are compared: living with parents, living independently without a partner and without children, living together with a partner (married or cohabiting) without children, and living together with a partner (married or cohabiting) with children. Concerning their financial situation, two life course stages are compared: being financially independent of parents versus being financially dependent on parents.

### 1.7.3 Functional solidarity: intergenerational exchanges of support

Earlier research has shown that in the 'middle years' of the parent-child relationship young adults are supported by their parents in order to successfully manage transitions to independence (Aquilino, 2005; Eggebeen, 2005; Kohli, 1999). It is, however, still unclear to what degree parental assistance is continued after young adults have successfully negotiated these life course transitions. On a more general level, previous research has typically focused on parent and family correlates of patterns of intergenerational assistance; how child characteristics affect intergenerational exchanges of support is much less understood (Davey, Janke, & Savla, 2004).

Regarding support flows from children to parents, research has mainly concentrated on middle-aged children providing help to their elderly dependent parents (Eggebeen, 1992; Klein Ikkink, Van Tilburg, & Knipscheer, 1999), or on mixed-age groups ranging from young adults to individuals in old age (Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Spitze & Logan, 1992). Research on support exchanges from young adults to their parents is relatively scarce, with some notable exceptions (Aquilino, 1997; Eggebeen, 2005; Kohli, 1999); more research is needed to identify the factors leading to support flows from children to parents in the 'middle years'. Theoretically, it is of interest to find out to what extent life course transitions affect these support transfers, as these transitions are associated with changes in young adults' resources and opportunities for giving help to their parents.

Chapter 4 of this dissertation contributes to the literature in two important ways. First, we examine how the support young adults receive from their parents depends on their life course status – whether young adults live independently or with their parents, whether they are involved in a romantic relationship, whether they have children, and the extent to which they have attained financial independence. Secondly, we investigate how the support young adults provide to their parents depends on the young adult's life course status. Four different types of intergenerational support are examined: emotional support, advice, financial support, and instrumental support (help with practical matters).

In line with the life course perspective, it is assumed that young adults' life course transitions are accompanied by changes in their need for support and in their resources or opportunities for providing support (MacMillan & Copher, 2005). As exchanges of intergenerational support have been found to be at least partly dependent on the needs and resources of each generation (Bengtson, 2001; Davey & Eggebeen, 1998), we hypothesize that a young adult's life course status is related to the level of support exchanged between the young adult and his or her parents. For each type of support, we formulate more specific hypotheses taking into account both generations' needs, resources, and opportunities.

#### **1.7.4 Normative solidarity: family norms and obligations**

In the second half of the twentieth century, the Western industrialized world was characterized by processes of individualization and secularization, accompanied by an increased emphasis on personal freedom and individual autonomy (Surkyn & Lesthaege, 2004; Van de Kaa, 1987). Additionally, people's living standards have generally improved, and public programs that transfer resources from young to old and, to a lesser extent, from old to young, have been introduced (Knijn, 2004; Lye, 1996). Several family scholars have suggested that these cultural, economic, and political changes have weakened feelings of obligation of children toward parents and vice versa, and that the basis for intergenerational contact and support exchanges has shifted from moral obligation to choice (Lasch, 1977; Lye, 1996; Silverstein et al., 1997). Empirical evidence for changes in these attitudes, however, is weak: In general, attitudes towards family obligations are relatively strong (Fokkema, Ter Bekke & Dykstra, 2008; Lye, 1996; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Feelings of obligation towards parents and children are found to be strongest among family obligations; obligations toward one's children are generally stronger than obligations toward one's parents (Lye, 1996; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). In general, adult children and parents feel more obliged to provide each other with companionship and emotional support than to give each other financial and instrumental help (Lye, 1996; Rossi & Rossi, 1990).

In Chapter 5, we examine intergenerational obligations among young adults and their parents. Intergenerational obligations refer to normative expectations or attitudes that people have about how adult children and their parents should behave toward each other, in particular about what each generation should do when the other generation needs assistance. Following Rossi and Rossi (1990), two kinds of intergenerational obligations are distinguished: Filial obligations refer to the expectations of adult children to provide support to their (aging) parents, whereas parental obligations refer to the expectations of parents to support their children. In particular, we investigate to what extent the strength of these obligations as perceived by young adults and their parents depends on the life course stage of the young adult. Four life course stages are compared: living with parents, living independently without a partner and without children, married (or cohabiting) without children, married (or cohabiting) with children.

In general, life course transitions have the potential to affect individual attitudes, for the following reasons. First, life course changes produce new (family) experiences that are associated with these life course changes and which might produce attitude changes: Both positive and negative experiences may lead individuals to rethink their attitudes. Secondly, role theoretical approaches (Stryker, 1968) suggest that, through adopting a role, individuals develop a deeper understanding and commitment to it, leading them to adopt the attitudes that are congruent with it. Another mechanism that underlies attitude change as a consequence of life course transitions stems from cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), which proposes that individuals change their attitudes to make them consistent with their behavior. Previous research supports the view that life transitions can change attitudes, as it has been found that marriage and childbirth lead to more traditional attitudes on gender roles (Jansen & Kalmijn, 2000; Knijn, 1997; Morgan & Waite, 1987). In line with cognitive dissonance theory, previous research indicates that experiences with cohabitation produce more tolerant attitudes toward unmarried cohabitation among young adults (Axinn & Thornton, 1993; Cunningham & Thornton, 2005).

Regarding intergenerational obligations, it can be expected that young adults' feelings of obligation depend on their life course stage: Life course transitions lead to the adoption of new family roles, such as the roles of spouse and parent, which probably reduces the salience of other role identities, such as son or daughter (Roberts & Bengtson, 1993). Moreover, young adults' feelings of obligation may change in response to life course transitions that change their capacity to provide care (see also section 1.7.3). In a similar vein, parents' feelings of obligation may be related to young adults' life course stage as well. Parents' attitudes can change in response to the life course transitions of their young adult children, reflecting changes in their children's needs and resources. Furthermore, young adults' transitions bring about changes in parents' lives and roles as well (e.g., transition to the empty nest phase, becoming parents-in-law, entrance into grandparenthood), which may decrease or increase the salience of parental role identities.

### **1.7.5 Consensual solidarity: intergenerational congruence in attitudes**

During the 1960s and 1970s, the term 'generation gap' or 'generation conflict' came into use to describe differences between the attitudes or values of young individuals and those of their elders. Rapid changes in the value climate in Western societies led sociologists such as Inglehart (1977, 1990) to suggest the emergence of a generation gap: As individuals' values and attitudes were supposed to develop during the formative adolescent years, and as a consequence, to reflect the value climate in society during those formative years, rapid changes in value climate would produce large differences in values and attitudes between people of different generations. Psychoanalytical theorists such as Erikson (1950) and Blos (1962, 1979) suggested that large intergenerational discrepancies during adolescence and young adulthood are a prerequisite for successful resolution of the developmental task of attaining (social, emotional, and cognitive) autonomy and acquiring identity. In general, however,

empirical research revealed only limited support for such a generation gap: When the core values and attitudes of parents and young people were compared, only few differences were found to exist (Acock & Bengtson, 1978; Glass, Bengtson, & Dunham, 1986; Miller & Glass, 1989; Vollebergh, Iedema, & Raaijmakers, 2001).

Substantial agreement or congruence in the attitudes and behavior of parents and children has been explained on the basis of socialization and status inheritance (Bandura, 1977; Glass et al., 1986). First, socialization theories have proposed that attitudes of parents are directly transmitted to their children and vice versa (Miller & Glass, 1989; Vollebergh et al., 2001), via processes of internalization and imitation (Bandura, 1977; Moen, Erickson, & Dempster-McClain, 1997). Secondly, attitudes are transmitted in an indirect way, namely via parental social positions: Parents transmit social and cultural positions to their children, which in turn influence children's attitudes (Acock & Bengtson, 1978; Glass et al., 1986; Vollebergh et al., 2001). Empirical research provides support for both explanations (Glass et al., 1986; Vollebergh et al., 2001).

In Chapter 5 of this dissertation, we investigate the degree of congruence between the attitudes of parents and those of their young adult children in two domains of family life: intergenerational relations and intimate partner relationships. Attitudes toward intergenerational relations or intergenerational obligations refer to beliefs about solidarity within the extended family, and include filial obligations and parental obligations (see section 1.7.4 for a definition of these two types of obligations). Attitudes regarding intimate partner relationships refer to attitudes and beliefs about partner relationships and nuclear family configurations; they include attitudes toward alternative living arrangements, and attitudes toward more egalitarian gender roles regarding the division of paid and unpaid labor.

In particular, we determine how intergenerational attitude congruence depends on a young adult's life course stage. The following four life course stages are compared: living with parents, living independently without a partner, married (or cohabiting) without children, married (or cohabiting) with children. Alternative hypotheses are formulated based on different theories. In line with socialization theories, and assuming that life course transitions produce different socialization contexts (Bandura, 1977; Miller & Glass, 1989), it can be expected that intergenerational attitude congruence decreases after young adults have left the parental home and enter into cohabitation or marriage: It is plausible to assume that, after young adults have left the parental home and have married, the frequency of intergenerational contact decreases (see section 1.7.1), which creates fewer opportunities for young adults and their parents to influence each other's attitudes. In contrast, young adults with children of their own might experience higher levels of attitude congruence with their parents, as it is plausible that the entrance into parenthood is associated with increased intergenerational contact (see section 1.7.1). Alternatively, inspired by the intergenerational similarity hypothesis (Aquilino, 1997, 1999; Bengtson & Black, 1973), we can expect that intergenerational attitude congruence increases after young adults have left the parental home, have started cohabiting or have married, and have entered parenthood: After moving into the same adult roles as those held by their parents, young adults come to identify more with them.

### 1.7.6 Structural solidarity: intergenerational geographic proximity

Intergenerational geographic proximity can be regarded as an important aspect of structural solidarity, because it represents the opportunity structure of contact and exchanges of support (Lawton et al., 1994). Although contact and support are to a large extent affected by proximity, intergenerational proximity itself is also an endogenous variable (Kalmijn, 2007; Mulder, 2007; Tomassini, Wolf, & Rosina, 2003): Children and parents actively decide where to live, and consequentially, how far they live from each other.

During childhood and adolescence, children and parents usually reside together. Late adolescence and young adulthood is the life course phase in which children typically leave the parental home and become responsible for their own residence. In general, establishing residential independence is seen as an important marker of the entry into adulthood, together with other related transitions such as completing school, entering into (full-time) employment, establishing financial independence, getting married, and becoming a parent (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006; Shanahan, 2000). Between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the timing of the transition to independent living became more attuned to the needs of individual family members, rather than collective family needs (Hareven, 1994; Modell et al., 1976). During this period, the average age at which people left the parental residence declined (Modell et al., 1976; Shanahan, 2000), although this general trend shows considerable fluctuations due to changing economic circumstances (the Great Depression) and historical events (World War II) (De Jong-Gierveld, Liefbroer, & Beekink, 1991; Shanahan, 2000).

Since the 1980s, the age at which individuals leave the parental home has started rising again (Arnett, 2000; De Jong-Gierveld et al., 1991; Shanahan, 2000). Explanations have focused on macro-level social and political changes (White, 1994), housing and labor market conditions (Holdsworth, 2000; Mulder & Hooimeijer, 2002), the prolongation of education and the postponement of marriage and parenthood (Corijn & Klijzing, 2001; White, 1994), changes in religious and cultural norms (Buchman, 1989), decreases in young adults' drive for independence (Arnett, 2000), and the influence of resources provided by parents to their children (De Jong-Gierveld et al., 1991; Holdsworth, 2000). Two types of parental resources can be distinguished: resources that can be transferred to children, and resources that are tied to the parental home (De Jong-Gierveld et al., 1991). Higher transferable parental resources, such as parents' socioeconomic status and level of education, make it easier for young people to live on their own, whereas non-transferable resources, including in-kind support such as cleaning and preparation of meals, and the presence of a caring family climate, generally delay the process (De Jong-Gierveld et al., 1991).

Leaving the parental household generally (but not always) leads to an increase in geographic separation from parents (Rogerson, Burr, & Lin, 1997); subsequent residential moves may increase or decrease intergenerational proximity. Processes of modernization and urbanization have generally increased mobility; as a result, parents and children today live at greater distances from each other than they did fifty years ago. In general, however, children still live relatively close to their parents (Mulder & Kalmijn, 2006; Rogerson, Weng,

& Lin, 1993; Warnes, 1986). Earlier research examining family correlates of patterns of leaving home and intergenerational geographic distance focused on the influence of childhood family structure, such as household size, parental divorce, and the presence of stepparents (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1998; Shelton & Grundy, 2000; White, 1994). Less attention has been paid to the impact of family interactions in childhood and the emotional and affective climate of the parental home (Mulder, 2007).

In Chapter 6, we investigate the timing of leaving home and the geographic proximity of young adults and their parents. Two research questions are central. First, we examine how family relations in adolescence predict the timing of departure from the parental home. In accordance with the principles of the family life course perspective, we hypothesize that young adults who experienced warm and close family relationships in adolescence leave the parental home at a later age. Secondly, we examine to what extent family relations in adolescence predict the geographic proximity of young adults who have left the parental home. We expect that young adults who experienced close and caring family relationships in adolescence live closer to their parents than young adults with less favourable family relations. In explaining intergenerational geographic proximity, we also consider other factors in the life course of young adults, such as whether they cohabit or are married, and whether they have become parents.

## 1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA

Hypotheses concerning the relationship between young adults' life course and relations with parents are empirically tested by means of data from two studies: the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (Dykstra et al., 2005, 2007) and the Utrecht Study of Adolescent Development (Meeus & 't Hart, 1993).

### 1.8.1 Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS)

The Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS; Dykstra et al., 2005, 2007) is a large-scale panel survey on family relations in The Netherlands. Information on solidarity within family relationships has been gathered from a random address sample of 8,161 primary adult respondents aged 18 to 79, residing in private households in The Netherlands. These primary respondents are referred to as 'anchors'. They were interviewed face-to-face by trained researchers, using a structured questionnaire; additionally, respondents filled out a self-completion questionnaire. The overall anchor response rate for measurement Wave 1 was 45%, which is about average for family studies in The Netherlands (see Dykstra et al., 2005). The current dissertation focuses on selected samples of respondents, who were between 18 and 34 years of age and who had at least one living parent at the time of the interview. The *N* of the resulting samples ranges from 851 (Chapter 6) to 1,911 (Chapters 2 and 4) to 2,128 (Chapter 5) young adults, depending on the scope of the respective research question.

The NKPS has a multi-actor design: Besides the primary (anchor) respondents, their family members were also involved. After the anchor respondents had given permission, their partner, their mother or father, a maximum of two children aged 15 and over, and a sibling aged 15 or older were sent a self-completion questionnaire. This group of respondents is referred to as '(survey) alter' respondents. Wave 1 response rates for these alter respondents ranged from 38% (siblings) to 72% (partners).

Two chapters include data from both anchor and alter respondents. In Chapter 2, we investigate mediation of parental contact by the partner; to that end, we analyze the responses of (alter) partners of anchor respondents who completed a questionnaire. In Chapter 5, multi-actor information is used to investigate consensual solidarity (consensus in attitudes between parents and children): To that end, we examine parent-child dyads in which the anchor respondent is the child, as well as parent-child dyads in which the anchor is the parent.

In all other empirical chapters in which NKPS data are analyzed, intergenerational relations are investigated using information provided by young adult children who were the main (anchor) respondents; information from their mother and father is not included, for the following three reasons. First, although discrepancies have been observed in characterizations of the parent-child relationship as reported by parents and children, respectively, empirical research generally reveals high levels of agreement (Aquilino, 1999; Mandemakers & Dykstra, 2008). Secondly, all chapters based on NKPS data provided only by young adult children investigate behavioral aspects of the intergenerational relationship, such as frequency of contact, exchange of support, and intergenerational proximity: It is plausible to assume that such behavioral attributes are less colored by personal feelings and sentiments than are evaluations of the quality of the intergenerational relationship. Thirdly, if we used information from young adults as well as their parents, our sample would be restricted to parent-child dyads in which information from both anchors and alters is available. As a result, there may be an overrepresentation of high-quality relations, in view of two additional sources of selection bias: Anchors with a poor or less close relationship with the alter respondent were less likely to grant permission to contact this alter respondent and to give this person's address; and alter respondents with a poor or less close relationship with the anchor respondent were less likely to complete and return the questionnaire (Dykstra et al., 2005; Kalmijn & Liefbroer, 2008). The main focus of this dissertation is the life course of young adults; we decided to select parent-child dyads in which young adults (not their parents) were the anchor respondents because more detailed information is available on anchor respondents as compared with alter respondents.

The NKPS has a prospective, longitudinal design: The same respondents and family members were interviewed at successive points in time. At this moment, two measurement waves have been conducted: Wave 1 was carried out between 2002 and 2004, and Wave 2 in 2006 and 2007. The response rate in Wave 2 – calculated as a percentage of Wave 1 anchor respondents who completed the Wave 2 interview – was 73.8%, which is slightly lower than that of earlier studies (Dykstra et al., 2007). Chapters 2, 4, and 5 make use of information from Wave 1; Chapter 6 uses data from Wave 2. We decided not to use the longitudinal prop-

erties of the NKPS dataset in any of these chapters, for the following reasons. First, most of the chapters were written at a time when only information from Wave 1 was available. Secondly, the time lapse between Wave 1 and Wave 2 is relatively short – 3 years between measurements. Preliminary analyses indicated that this time lapse is not large enough to investigate longitudinal life course changes in a substantial proportion of young adults. More importantly, investigating effects of life course transitions longitudinally would necessitate the use of a sample of young adults who had not undergone these life course transitions at Wave 1. Because the NKPS sample contains respondents who were 18 years and older at Wave 1, such a procedure is likely to introduce sample selection bias: It is very likely that such a sample disproportionately excludes young adults who have experienced life course transitions relatively early, and disproportionately includes young adults who have postponed these life course changes. Preliminary analyses indeed indicated that a relatively large number of the young adults in the dataset had already undergone important life course transitions; for example, almost 91% of the young adult sample (18 to 34 years) had left the parental home by Wave 1.

### 1.8.2 Utrecht Study of Adolescent Development (USAD)

The Utrecht Study of Adolescent Development (USAD; Meeus & 't Hart, 1993; Van Wel et al., 2000) is a three-wave six-year panel study among adolescents and young adults in The Netherlands. The respondents were drawn from an existing Dutch panel of about 9,000 households (the National Script Panel), which was maintained by an organization for consumer research. In this original household sample young people living independently from their parents were underrepresented; in order to correct for this underrepresentation, a selection of households from another Dutch panel study (National Mini Census, 10,000 households) was added. From this total sample, all households containing at least one adolescent or young adult aged between 12 and 24 years were selected; of these 3,926 households, 2,471 households (62.9%) participated in the first wave of the USAD, in 1991. This household sample contained 3,392 adolescents and young adults (12 to 24 years old). Analyses (Meeus & 't Hart, 1993) revealed that the first wave sample was representative of the Dutch indigenous population of adolescents and young adults of the early 1990s, in terms of gender, age, religious affiliation, residential status, and level of education.

Adolescent and young adult respondents were interviewed face-to-face in their home environment by trained interviewers; additionally, they filled out a self-completion questionnaire in the presence of the interviewer. Respondents were then given a set of written questionnaires to be filled out on their own at a later point in time and returned to the researchers. Respondents provided information about their life course, their general well-being, their social and emotional development, school achievement, professional career, and relationships with parents and friends.

Longitudinal data were collected in three waves, in 1991, 1994, and 1997. At the second measurement wave in 1994, 1,966 respondents again participated; when these respondents

were contacted again in 1997, 1,301 responded. The Wave 2 and Wave 3 samples were smaller compared to the Wave 1 sample for two reasons. First, in order to reduce costs, a smaller but random selection of the original Wave 1 sample was used for the longitudinal part of the study. Secondly, 822 respondents in the original Wave 1 sample refused to participate in Wave 2 and/or Wave 3 (see for more information: Landsheer, Oud, & Van Dijkum, 2008). Our study includes those adolescents and young adults who had participated at all three measurement waves, and who had provided responses to questions about their relationship with living parents. The resulting sample used in the analyses contains 1,064 adolescents and young adults.

## 1.9 OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation contains five empirical chapters (Chapters 2 to 6) in which six dimensions of the parent-child relationship are studied. In each chapter, a different dimension of solidarity is examined – with the exception of Chapter 5, in which two dimensions are investigated. A brief overview of each of these chapters is provided below. (See also Table 1.1 for an outline of the dissertation.)

In Chapter 2, the relationship between young adults' partnership or parenthood status and intergenerational contact is examined. The main focus is on face-to-face contact, but other types of contact, such as telephone, regular mail, and e-mail are also considered.

Chapter 3 investigates the effects of the life course stage of an adolescent or young adult on the emotional quality of the parent-child relationship. In operationalizing the quality of the parent-child relationship we incorporate several aspects of the parental bond, including the degree of communication between parents and children and the extent to which parents serve as role models for their children.

**Table 1.1** Outline of the dissertation

Chapter	Title	Dimension of intergenerational solidarity
1	Introduction	
2	Intergenerational contact and the life course status of young adult children	Associational solidarity
3	Parental bond and life course stage from adolescence to young adulthood	Affectual solidarity
4	Life course status and exchanges of support between young adults and their parents	Functional solidarity
5	Life course stage in young adulthood and intergenerational congruence in family attitudes	Normative solidarity Consensual solidarity
6	The impact of family relations on leaving home and intergenerational proximity in young adulthood	Structural solidarity
7	Conclusion and discussion	

In Chapter 4, we examine how the level of support that is exchanged between young adults and their parents is associated with life course status: whether young adults live independently or with their parents, whether they have a partner, whether they have children of their own, and the extent to which they have attained financial independence. Four kinds of intergenerational support are investigated: emotional support, advice, financial support, and instrumental support (help with practical matters).

In Chapter 5, the relationship between life course stage and consensual solidarity is investigated by testing to what extent congruence between the attitudes of young adults and their parents depends on the young adult's life course stage. Intergenerational attitude congruence is investigated in two family domains: the domain of intergenerational relations and the domain of intimate partner relationships.

The main focus of Chapter 5 is on consensual solidarity, but normative solidarity is also investigated. The relationship between normative solidarity and young adults' life course stage is examined by empirically testing whether the strength of intergenerational obligations perceived by young adults and their parents depends on the young adult's life course stage, after controlling for the influence of age, education, and religiosity.

In Chapter 6, it is examined to what extent family relations in adolescence predict the timing of a young adult's departure from the parental home, and – after this departure – to what extent family relations and life course factors predict whether young adults live close to or farther away from their parents. Besides structural aspects of the family of origin (such as family size and parental divorce), the quality of relations within the family of origin (relationships between children and parents and between mother and father) is considered.

Chapter 7 summarizes the most important findings of this study and discusses the main conclusions. We consider our findings in relation to past research and theorizing on intergenerational relationships in the 'middle years' and interpret them in light of recent macro-level societal and historical developments, micro-level parent-child relationship histories, and micro-level changes in the lives of young people. Finally, we evaluate strengths and weaknesses of our study and discuss directions for future research.

Because each dimension of intergenerational solidarity is investigated separately in Chapters 2 to 6, problems with interpretation may arise when different dimensions are strongly correlated. In order to overcome such problems, we control for each dimension when necessary and possible. In Chapters 2, 4, and 6, we investigate young adults' life course *status*; primarily because of methodological considerations, Chapters 3 and 5 focus on young adults' life course *stage* (defined as a particular combination of life course statuses). Research has consistently shown that women are more family oriented than men (Lye, 1996; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). In line with this finding, separate analyses of relations with mothers and fathers are performed whenever the dataset and the design allows us to distinguish between these relationships (Chapters 2, 4, 5, 6). The results presented in tables generally do not differentiate between sons and daughters; whenever possible, in additional analyses (reported in the text), we investigate whether the relationship between life course status/stage and relations with parents is different for sons and daughters.

Readers should note that Chapters 2 to 6 have been written in the form of journal articles: They were written so as to be readable in isolation from one another, necessitating a certain degree of overlap between these chapters, as well as between Chapter 1 and the remainder of the dissertation.



## CHAPTER 2

# Intergenerational contact and the life course status of young adult children

This chapter is co-authored by Frits van Wel, Trudie Knijn, and Louk Hagendoorn (Utrecht University, The Netherlands). A slightly different version of this chapter is published as: 'Bucx, F., Van Wel, F. W., Knijn, G. C. M., & Hagendoorn, L. (2008). Intergenerational contact and the life course status of young adult children. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70, 144 – 156.'



## 2 Intergenerational contact and the life course status of young adult children

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Young adulthood is the life course phase in which romantic relationships and family formation are typically initiated. Classic functionalist family theories (Parsons, 1942, 1943) suggest that it is through these transitions that children and their parents separate and go on to live independent lives. Research, however, has revealed little support for a strict interpretation of this ‘separation thesis’ (Mancini & Blieszner, 1989): Parents and young adults typically remain involved in each other’s lives after the latter have left the parental residence (Litwak, 1960; Lye, 1996; Silverstein et al., 1997).

Nevertheless, it is plausible that the specific life course status of young adults – whether they are involved in a romantic relationship and whether they have children – affects parent-child interactions, albeit in a less radical way. The family life course perspective (Elder, 1994; MacMillan & Copher, 2005) suggests that the relationship between parents and children remains important throughout the life course, but that changes in the lives of children and parents have consequences for their interactions. Research on the relationship between the young adult’s life course and parent-child contact is however relatively scarce, with some notable exceptions (Aquilino, 1997; Fischer, 1981, 1983).

The present study considers the relationship between a young adult’s life course status and the frequency of contact with parents. The main focus is face-to-face contact, although contacts by telephone, regular mail, and e-mail are also considered. Contact may be initiated for reasons of companionship as well as for exchange of support and information on each other’s lives (Mancini & Blieszner, 1989). Research suggests that the frequency of contact between parents and children offers a good indirect measure of intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Kalmijn, 2006) as well as a good overall indicator of the strength of the parent-child relationship (Lye, Klepinger, Hyle, & Nelson, 1995).

The first aim of this study is to examine how the young adult’s life course status is related to intergenerational contact, as prior research in this domain has yielded contradictory findings. Some studies (Fischer, 1981, 1983) have shown parenthood to be positively related to frequency of contact between daughter and mother and negatively related to contact between son and mother, whereas in others (Aquilino, 1997) no relationships were observed. Aquilino (1997) found marriage and cohabitation to increase the frequency of parent-child interactions; no such relationships were observed by Fischer (1981).

The second main objective of this study is to provide new insight into mechanisms underlying the relationship between life course status and intergenerational contact. The family life course perspective offers theoretical arguments regarding how involvement in a partnership and having children may affect interactions with parents.

We use information from a sample of 1,911 young adults (aged 18 to 34 years) who participated in a recent large-scale study on family relations in The Netherlands. Like most other Western countries, The Netherlands has been characterized in recent decades by decreases in marriage and fertility rates and increases in solitary living and cohabitation among young adults. Currently, 17% of all cohabiting couples are not married (Latten, 2004). The current total fertility rate is 1.7; on average, mothers have their first child at the age of 29 (Central Bureau of Statistics Netherlands, n.d.). The Netherlands has a relatively high-density population: More than 50% of adults and their parents live within 20 kilometers (= 12 miles) of each other (Kalmijn, 2006). The frequency of intergenerational contact in The Netherlands is similar to that in other Western European countries (Germany, Great Britain) and somewhat higher than in the United States (Kalmijn, 2006).

## 2.2 THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

The family life course perspective (Elder, 1994) has inspired a considerable amount of research on family relations. One of its main premises is that individuals acquire or lose social roles and role positions in the domains of work and family as they develop across the life span (MacMillan & Copher, 2005). Changes in roles and positions are indicated by specific life course transitions. The family life course perspective includes the concept of 'linked lives' (Elder, 1994): Family relationships change in response to the individual developmental paths of family members, and changes in family interactions affect individual family members' lives. Research has shown that life course transitions, such as marriage (Aquilino, 1997; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998), as well as transitions experienced by one's parents, such as divorce (Aquilino, 1994), affect one's relationship with parents.

In sum, the family life course perspective suggests that the relationship between children and their parents remains salient throughout the life course, but that this relationship is affected by the life course status of individual family members. Using these principles as a general framework, we consider more specifically how a young adult's entrance into partnership and parenthood affects the frequency of intergenerational contact.

Young adults' transitions to partnership and parenthood generally increase the size of the family network. When young adults enter into a romantic relationship, the family networks of young adults and their parents expand to include not only the new partner, but also the partner's family. In the case of parenthood, a new family member is born. When entering into partnership, young adults assume the roles of romantic partner and son-in-law or daughter-in-law, whereas their parents become parents-in-law. Entrance into parenthood entails adoption of the parental role; the young adult's parents acquire the grandparent role.

As the size of the family network increases, the young adult's social resources within the family are likely to increase. The adoption of additional roles, however, could also decrease time available for specific family relationships. Moreover, both young adults and their parents may experience an increased or decreased need for contact as a result of life events. Below, we use the concepts of opportunities, resources, and needs in a heuristic way to formulate our hypotheses.

### 2.2.1 Partnership status

Having a partner leads individuals to become embedded in a larger social network including not only their own family and friends, but also those of their partner. Parents compete for their children's limited time with a larger network of social actors (most notably parents-in-law, who fulfill a more or less comparable role). Because visiting family appears to be an activity that couples generally do together (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001), the division of attention over both families further reduces time available for contact with each family. Research suggests that parents-in-law can play an important role: Married men have less contact with their own parents when their parents-in-law live relatively nearby (Lee, Spitze, & Logan, 2003).

Other arguments for predicting negative effects of having a partner focus on the role of the partner in mediating contact with parents. Especially when it is assumed that visiting family is an activity that couples tend to engage in together (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001), frequency of parent-child contact may be influenced by both the child's and the partner's sentiments. Children-in-law may experience conflicts and adjustment problems with their parents-in-law, as is the subject of popular stereotypes, leading them to draw partners away from their parents. Such negative sentiments can make interactions between young adults and their parents less rewarding, reducing the likelihood of future contacts.

In conclusion, we hypothesize young adults with a partner to have less contact with parents than single young adults (Hypothesis 1.1). Our analyses distinguish between young adults who live with a partner and those who are dating. It seems reasonable to argue that when couples start to live together, the number of shared activities – including family contacts – increases; hence, the role of parents-in-law and the partner's influence may become more prominent. We further discriminate between cohabiting and married young adults: Unmarried cohabiting individuals are assumed to have fewer shared (family) activities, spending more leisure time without their partner compared to married people (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001).

Additionally, we test hypotheses regarding underlying mechanisms. Specifically, we hypothesize that young adults have less contact with their own parents when they have better relationships with their parents-in-law (Hypothesis 1.2). Furthermore, we expect less parental contact when partners report a good relationship with their own parents (Hypothesis 1.3) and more contact when partners report a positive relationship with their parents-in-law (i.e., the respondent's parents) (Hypothesis 1.4).

### 2.2.2 Parenthood status

Young adults' entrance into parenthood can lead to a variety of changes. On the one hand, parenting may limit a young adult's opportunity to invest time in relationships with parents. On the other hand, frequency of contact may increase, as a new birth creates benefits of intergenerational contact for both sides. The grandparent role is associated with behavioral expectations such as visiting grandchildren and providing childcare (Aldous, 1995). Moreover, grandparents can be expected to enjoy seeing their grandchildren, which can lead to increased contact with their children as a by-product. For young adults, grandparents' provision of childcare may be a financially attractive alternative to professional childcare.

For both parents and young adults, we expect the benefits of contact to prevail. As such, we hypothesize that young adults with children have more contact with their parents than young adults without children (Hypothesis 2.1). We test whether this relationship is related to the age of grandchildren, as benefits of contact are especially high when grandchildren are relatively young and grandparents can fulfill a caretaking role. Regarding underlying mechanisms, we expect contact frequency to be positively related to grandparents' provision of childcare (Hypothesis 2.2) and negatively related to reliance on paid childcare (Hypothesis 2.3).

### 2.2.3 Control variables

We control for age because younger people tend to have more contact with their parents than older people (Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1992). We adjust for family size because people with more siblings tend to have less contact with parents (Logan & Spitze, 1996). We also adjust for prior divorce of the young adult, as divorce generally decreases contact with parents (Kalmijn, 2007). We also control for the level of education of the young adult and of parents (Kalmijn, 2006), and for parents' marital status (Aquilino, 1994; Kalmijn, 2007). Furthermore, geographic proximity (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Rossi & Rossi, 1990) is included in our analyses, because proximity facilitates contact; this variable is also used to represent whether young adults live with their parents. In analyses of underlying mechanisms of partnership status, we control for quality of the relationship between respondents and their own parents: It is plausible that quality of the respondent's relationship with parents-in-law and quality of the partner's relationship with both sets of parents are related to how respondents view the relationship with their own parents; hence, controlling for the latter variable is necessary if effects of different intergenerational relationships are to be distinguished.

## 2.3 METHOD

### 2.3.1 Data

The data in this study were drawn from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (Dykstra et al., 2005), a large-scale study of family relations in a random address sample of 8,161 adults aged 18 to 79 and residing in private households in The Netherlands. The data were collected between 2002 and 2004; information was obtained through computer-assisted personal interviews. The overall response rate was 45%, which is about average for family studies in The Netherlands (see Dykstra et al., 2005). In recent years, response rates in household surveys have decreased sharply. Response rates are generally lower in The Netherlands as compared to other countries (De Leeuw & De Heer, 2002); Dutch people seem to be particularly careful about revealing personal information.

From this total sample, we selected all individuals between 18 and 34 years old (25.2% of the total sample) with at least one (biological) parent living in The Netherlands (92.9% of the young adult sample). We excluded parent-child dyads in which parents lived abroad, as this situation introduces unusual constraints for intergenerational contact. The resulting sample – referred to as the ‘anchor’ sample – included 1,911 young adults (757 men, 1,154 women), 1,832 with a living mother and 1,662 with a living father. In 1,589 cases (83.2%), both parents were alive. Previous analyses revealed that young adult men, young adults living in single households, and young adults living with parents were underrepresented; in the descriptive analyses, we used weights to adjust our sample of young adults to the gender and household composition of the Dutch population of young adults.

The anchor sample was used to investigate the relationship between partnership and parenthood status and the frequency of intergenerational contact. For the analysis of underlying mechanisms associated with partnership and parenthood status, specific subsamples of this main anchor sample were used. For the analysis of mechanisms of partnership status, we included those anchor respondents who were involved in a romantic relationship, whether dating, cohabiting, or married (68.6%,  $N = 1,310$ ). For the analysis of mechanisms of parenthood status, we selected anchor respondents with children (30.9%,  $N = 591$ ).

To test hypotheses concerning mediation of parental contact by the partner, we used an additional sample of young adults, namely the partners of anchor respondents who were in the relevant life course period and who had completed a questionnaire. If anchor respondents had given permission, a questionnaire was left behind for their partner. Among all eligible partners, the overall response rate was 71.6%. This group is referred to as the ‘(survey) alter’ respondents. For this alter sample, we had the necessary information to test our hypotheses about the mediating influence of the partner, namely information about how anchors experienced the relationship with their parents and parents-in-law.

The alter sample included all alter respondents between 18 and 34 years old (20.2% of the total alter sample) with at least one (biological) parent living in The Netherlands (93.5% of the young adult sample). Our final alter sample included 794 young adults (376 men,

418 women), 759 with a living mother and 716 with a living father. In the case of 681 alter respondents (85.8%), both parents were alive.

This alter sample was used to assess the partner's influence on the frequency of inter-generational contact. For these analyses, contact with parents of the alter respondent was the dependent variable. We considered relationships with characteristics of the alter respondents and their partners (i.e., the anchor respondents). In other words, these analyses considered a totally different sample of parent-child dyads, although the young adults in this sample were related to the respondents in the original anchor sample via romantic relationships. Descriptive analyses (not reported here) indicated that the sample of alter respondents did not substantially differ from the main anchor sample on important characteristics, except that all alter respondents – by definition – had a partner (namely, the anchor respondent).

### 2.3.2 Measures

The two *dependent variables* were ordinal-level measures of (a) frequency of face-to-face contact and (b) frequency of telephone, regular mail, and/or e-mail contact between young adults and their parents. For *frequency of face-to-face contact*, respondents answered the following question: "How many times have you seen your mother in the past twelve months?" The same question was asked for contact with father. The originally seven answer categories were recoded into three groups: 1 = *less than weekly*, 2 = *less than daily but at least once a week*, 3 = *daily contact*. People living with parents were not explicitly asked these questions; instead, they were assigned to the highest category, as in this case daily contact was plausible (see also Tomassini et al., 2004).

*Frequency of telephone and/or (e-)mail contact* was measured by asking respondents: "How many times have you had contact with your mother by telephone and/or (e-)mail in the past twelve months?" The same question was asked for contact with father. Again, the originally seven answer categories were recoded into three groups: 1 = *less than weekly*, 2 = *less than daily but at least once a week*, 3 = *daily contact*.

*Independent variables*. Concerning the child's life course status, the following variables were computed. To represent *partnership status*, four categories of young adults were defined: (a) single, (b) in a dating relationship, (c) cohabiting, and (d) married. Concerning *parenthood status*, four categories of young adults were constructed: (a) no children in the household, (b) youngest child less than two years old, (c) youngest child two years or older but younger than six years, and (d) youngest child aged six or older.

To enable investigation of underlying mechanisms of partnership status, the following variables were assessed. The *quality of the relationship with parent(s)-in-law* was measured with the question: "How do you judge the overall quality of your relationship with your parent(s)-in-law?" Answers were given on a four-point scale, ranging from 0 = *poor* to 3 = *very good*. For analyses of the mediating influence of the partner, measures of the *quality of partner's relationship with own parent(s)* and *with respondent's parent(s)* were included. Partners were asked to judge the overall quality of their relationships with their own parent(s), with

the respondent's mother and with the respondent's father. Answers were on a four-point scale, ranging from 0 = *poor* to 3 = *very good*.

For investigating mechanisms of parenthood status, the following variables were used. To assess *provision of childcare by grandparent(s)*, respondents were asked how often their mother and father had provided childcare during the past three months. Answer categories were: 0 = *not at all*, 1 = *a few times*, 2 = *several times*. *Use of paid childcare* was represented by a dummy variable (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*).

*Control variables*. Respondents reported on their own and their parents' level of *education*. To construct an appropriate interval scale, we applied a standard recoding procedure (De Graaf, De Graaf, & Kraaykamp, 2000) whereby the original categories were transformed into new categories defined by the approximate number of years of education completed. The resulting variable ranged from 6 = *completion of elementary school but not secondary or vocational education* to 21 = *completion of postgraduate education*.

*Geographic proximity* was represented as the geographic distance (in kilometers) between the parent's and the child's place of residence; for young adults living in the parental home, a distance of 0 was assigned. On average, the young adult respondents (main anchor sample) lived about 22 kilometers (= 13.75 miles) from their parents (i.e., a 30-minute drive).

*Quality of relationship with parent(s)* was measured by asking respondents to assess the overall quality of relationships with their mother and their father. Answers were on a four-point scale, ranging from 0 = *poor* to 3 = *very good*.

The young adult's *age* (in years) and *gender* (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*) were included, as was *number of living siblings*. Young adult's *prior divorce* indicated whether respondents were ever divorced in the past (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*), regardless of their current partnership status. *Parents' marital status* was defined as: (a) parents living together, (b) separated and/or divorced parents, currently single, (c) separated and/or divorced parents, currently remarried, (d) widowed parents, currently single, (e) widowed parents, currently remarried. Our analyses did not control for *age of the parent*, in view of high correlations between this variable and child's age.

For the (main) anchor sample, means and standard deviations for the independent and control variables are presented in Table 2.1. Frequencies of missing data were low (ranging from 0 to 2%).

In the alter sample, rates of missing data were generally low (ranging from 0 to 4%), except in the case of parents' education (for mother, 11% missing; for father, 12% missing). The relatively large number of missing values for parents' education may be attributable to the fact that this information was not provided by the parents' own children (i.e., the alters), but instead by the partners of their children (i.e., the anchors). In these instances, mean substitution was used and a dummy variable (indicating whether this variable was missing, with 0 = *no* and 1 = *yes*) was included in the analyses.

**Table 2.1** Descriptive information on child and parent characteristics (main anchor sample)

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Child's characteristics (N = 1,911<sup>a</sup>)</i>		
Age (years)	26.57	5.06
Gender		
Male	.50	
Female	.50	
<i>N</i> of living siblings	2.06	1.67
Education (years)	12.65	2.75
Prior divorce (1 = yes)	.03	
Partnership status		
Single	.38	
Dating	.16	
Cohabiting	.21	
Married	.25	
Parenthood status		
Have no children	.75	
Youngest < 2 years old	.10	
Youngest 2 – 6 years old	.12	
Youngest ≥ 6 years old	.03	
Parents living		
Both	.88	
Only mother	.09	
Only father	.03	
<i>Mother's characteristics (N = 1,832<sup>a</sup>)</i>		
Age (years)	54.29	7.00
Education (years)	10.64	2.92
Marital status		
Live with child's father	.76	
Divorced, single	.09	
Divorced, remarried	.06	
Widowed, single	.07	
Widowed, remarried	.02	
Proximity (km)	21.90	40.29
<i>Father's characteristics (N = 1,662<sup>a</sup>)</i>		
Age (years)	56.51	7.11
Education (years)	11.51	3.58
Marital status		
Live with child's mother	.82	
Divorced, single	.07	
Divorced, remarried	.08	
Widowed, single	.02	
Widowed, remarried	.02	
Proximity (km)	22.59	41.17

Note: *SDs* are given for continuous variables only. Data are weighted.

<sup>a</sup>Unweighted.

### 2.3.3 Method of analysis

Findings are reported in three major steps. First, we briefly offer descriptive information on frequency of intergenerational contact in the anchor sample. Second, we tested hypotheses concerning the relationship between partnership and parenthood status and frequency of contact. Because the dataset contained cross-sectional information, we inferred effects of life course transitions from comparisons between young adults differing in their life course status. Finally, we tested hypotheses about underlying mechanisms of partnership and parenthood status with specific subsamples (for more information on these subsamples, see section 2.3.1). For the analyses of telephone/(e-)mail contact, we excluded young adults living with parents.

Taking into consideration the nature of our dependent variables and following practice in previous research (e.g., Hank, 2007), we estimated multinomial logistic regression models to investigate the relationship between the independent variables and our three categories of contact frequency. Relative risk ratios (*rrr*) are reported, representing the likelihood that an observation falls into the comparison category rather than the baseline category. Risk ratios higher than 1 indicate that the comparison category is more likely than the baseline category. In all models, the baseline category is *daily contact*; the comparison categories are respectively *less than daily but at least once a week* and *less than weekly*.

## 2.4 RESULTS

### 2.4.1 Descriptive results

Analyses revealed that 29.5% of the young adults currently lived with their parent(s); their mean age was 21 years ( $M = 21.30$ ,  $SD = 3.13$ ). For young adults living independently, 7.5% had daily face-to-face contact with their mother, 51.3% saw their mother less than daily but at least once a week, and 41.2% saw their mother less than weekly. For young adults living independently, 4.9% saw their father on a daily basis, 48.8% had face-to-face contact with their father less than daily but at least weekly, and 46.3% saw their father less than weekly.

Concerning telephone and (e-)mail contact, 10.1% of young adults had daily contact with their mother, 61.1% spoke with or (e-)mailed to their mother less than daily but at least once a week, whereas 28.8% had phone/(e-)mail contact with their mother less than weekly. Furthermore, 4.1% of young adults had daily telephone/(e-)mail contact with their father, 47.8% spoke or (e-)mailed with their father less than daily but at least once a week, whereas 48.1% had phone/(e-)mail contact with their father less than weekly.

### 2.4.2 Life course status and intergenerational contact

Regression analyses of face-to-face contact are presented in Tables 2.2 – 2.4; results concerning telephone and (e-)mail contact are discussed in the text. The results reported in the tables do not differentiate between sons and daughters. Additional analyses for sons and daughters separately revealed generally similar relationships between life course status and face-to-face contact for sons and daughters. For telephone/(e-)mail contact, some differences were observed; in the latter case, results are reported separately for sons and daughters.

Our models controlled for geographic proximity between parents and children. As has been suggested by some authors (e.g., Grundy & Shelton, 2001; Kalmijn, 2007), geographic proximity might not be entirely exogenous to contact: Both proximity and contact appear to be affected by other variables such as level of education (Kalmijn, 2006). Furthermore, young adults' and parents' preferences for contact might influence their decisions to live closer or further away from each other. In that sense, geographic proximity may mediate the relationship between young adults' life course status and frequency of contact. For this reason, we performed additional analyses in which geographic proximity was omitted. In general, the explained variance in these models was much smaller than in the models including proximity; the estimates of independent variables and significance values, however, were highly similar. Therefore, results from these additional analyses are not reported here.

Table 2.2 shows the results for face-to-face contact with mother and father. As expected, the probability of having less than daily or less than weekly face-to-face contact increased with young adults' age. Daughters were less likely to see their mother less often than once a week. The probability of having face-to-face contact with parents less than weekly increased with the number of living siblings. More highly educated young adults were more likely to see their mother less than daily or less than weekly. Intergenerational geographic proximity was strongly associated with face-to-face contact: With larger distances, the probability of having less than daily or less than weekly contact increased. Divorced mothers who lived alone were more likely to see their children less than weekly than mothers who lived together with the child's father; widowed mothers living alone were less likely to see their children less than daily. Divorced fathers, whether currently single or remarried, and widowed fathers who were currently remarried, were more likely to see their children less than weekly than fathers who lived with the child's mother.

With regard to young adults' partnership status, both cohabiting and married young adults were more likely than single young adults to see their parents less than daily or less than weekly. No differences were observed between dating and single young adults. No relationships were observed between young adults' partnership status and telephone/(e-)mail contact. Concerning young adults' parenthood status, young adults with children younger than two years old were less likely to see their parents less than once a week than young adults with no children in the household; young adults with children between two and six years old were less likely to report less than daily or less than weekly contact. No differences were found between young adults with children aged six or older and young adults without children, which suggests that parenthood is associated with more frequent contact with parents only when grandchildren are very young.

**Table 2.2** Multinomial logistic regression results for frequency of face-to-face contact between young adults and their parents

Predictor	Daily contact with mother		Daily contact with father	
	≥ Once a week	< Weekly	≥ Once a week	< Weekly
<i>Child's characteristics</i>				
Age (years)	1.25*** (.03)	1.33*** (.04)	1.25*** (.03)	1.33*** (.04)
Gender (1 = female)	.75 (.22)	.50** (.26)	1.37 (.25)	1.18 (.29)
N of living siblings	1.01 (.06)	1.18* (.07)	1.07 (.07)	1.27** (.08)
Education (years)	1.09* (.04)	1.23*** (.05)	1.03 (.05)	1.11 (.06)
Prior divorce (1 = yes)	.83 (.48)	.82 (.61)	.71 (.63)	.96 (.74)
<i>Parent's characteristics</i>				
Education (years)	1.07 (.04)	1.09 (.05)	1.04 (.04)	1.08 (.04)
Proximity (log of km)	8.13*** (.17)	22.58*** (.18)	13.66*** (.24)	36.43*** (.25)
Marital status				
Live with other parent <sup>a</sup>				
Divorced, single	1.61 (.39)	2.98* (.45)	1.46 (.27)	2.79*** (.30)
Divorced, remarried	.99 (.15)	1.15 (.17)	.95 (.19)	1.61* (.20)
Widowed, single	.83* (.09)	.87 (.11)	.83 (.25)	.92 (.27)
Widowed, remarried	1.03 (.13)	.99 (.16)	1.45 (.23)	1.74* (.25)
<i>Child's life course status</i>				
Partnership status				
Single <sup>a</sup>				
Dating	1.13 (.31)	.97 (.42)	1.11 (.36)	1.12 (.46)
Cohabiting	5.35*** (.30)	5.65*** (.36)	12.52*** (.40)	12.87*** (.45)
Married	5.53*** (.35)	5.03*** (.42)	5.89*** (.46)	4.98** (.51)
Parenthood status				
Have no children <sup>a</sup>				
Youngest < 2 years old	.55 (.37)	.26** (.43)	.50 (.47)	.37* (.52)
Youngest 2 – 6 years old	.33** (.35)	.20*** (.41)	.28** (.46)	.23** (.51)
Youngest ≥ 6 years old	.45 (.49)	.64 (.60)	.88 (.70)	.93 (.79)
R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	.68		.70	
% Daily contact	34.8		34.7	
N	1,773		1,623	

Note: Relative risk ratios (standard errors). Baseline category is *daily contact*; comparison categories are *≥ once a week* respectively *< weekly*.

<sup>a</sup>Reference category.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed).

Additional analyses of telephone/(e-)mail contact showed that young adult daughters with children younger than two years old were less likely to have less than weekly phone/(e-)mail contact with their mother ( $rrr = .36, p < .01$ ) than young adult daughters with no children in the household; the same held for daughters with children between two and six years old ( $rrr = .18, p < .001$ ). No differences were found between daughters with children aged six years or older and daughters without offspring. We found no relationship between son's parenthood status and telephone/(e-)mail contact with mother. Furthermore, no significant relationships were found between young adults' parenthood status and telephone/(e-)mail contact with father, either for sons or for daughters.

### 2.4.3 Mechanisms underlying partnership and parenthood status

To test hypotheses concerning underlying mechanisms of partnership status, we performed regression analyses on two samples of young adults with a partner: the anchor (sub)sample and the alter sample. Regarding parenthood status, underlying mechanisms were studied in an anchor (sub)sample of young adults with children. Results for face-to-face contact are shown in Tables 2.3 and 2.4.

#### *Partnership status*

First, relationships involving the child's contact with parents-in-law are discussed (for Tables 2.3 and 2.4, Column 1). We found no evidence that face-to-face contact (with mother or father) is associated with the quality of a young adult's relationship with parents-in-law. Analyses of telephone/(e-)mail contact suggested that the probability of having less than weekly telephone/(e-)mail contact with mother increases if young adults have good relationships with their parents-in-law ( $rrr = 1.54, p < .01$ ); no relationships were found for telephone/(e-)mail contact with father.

The mediating influence of the partner was examined with information from the alter sample (for Tables 2.3 and 2.4, Column 2). As hypothesized, the likelihood of having less than daily and less than weekly face-to-face contact with mother was higher when partners reported a good relationship with their own parents. The probability of having less than weekly face-to-face contact with father was higher when partners had a good relationship with their own parents. No such association was found for telephone/(e-)mail contact, either with mother or with father.

Less than daily and less than weekly face-to-face contact with parents was less likely when the respondent's partner had a good relationship with the respondent's parents; this result held for contact with mother as well as father. No such relationships were found for telephone/(e-)mail contact, with either mother or father. These results suggest that the frequency of young adults' face-to-face contact with their parents depends not only on the quality of their own relationship with their parents, but also on the quality of their partner's relationship with their parents (i.e., the partner's parents-in-law).

**Table 2.3** Multinomial logistic regression results for mechanisms underlying the relationship between partnership and parenthood status and face-to-face contact between young adults and their mother

Predictor	Anchor sample with partner		Alter sample with partner		Anchor sample with children	
	Daily contact		Daily contact		Daily contact	
	≥ Once a week	< Weekly	≥ Once a week	< Weekly	≥ Once a week	< Weekly
<i>Mechanisms of partnership status</i>						
Quality of relationship with parent(s)-in-law	1.13 (.14)	1.26 (.17)				
Quality of partner's relationship with own parent(s)			1.91** (.22)	2.36*** (.25)		
Quality of partner's relationship with respondent's mother			.52** (.23)	.41*** (.26)		
<i>Mechanisms of parenthood status</i>						
Provision of childcare by grandmother					.99 (.23)	.26*** (.30)
Use of paid childcare (1 = yes)					1.09 (.36)	2.56* (.46)
R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	.63		.54		.51	
% Daily contact	20.5		14.0		12.6	
N	1,182		729		535	

Note: Relative risk ratios (standard errors). Baseline category is *daily contact*; comparison categories are *≥ once a week* respectively *< weekly*. Control variables include young adults' age, gender, number of living siblings, education, prior divorce, and mother's education, geographic proximity, marital status. When estimating mechanisms of partnership status, we also controlled for the quality of the relationship between young adults and their mother and for young adults' parenthood status.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed).

### *Parenthood status*

To test our hypotheses concerning underlying mechanisms of parenthood status, we performed regression analyses on an anchor (sub)sample of young adults with children (for Tables 2.3 and 2.4, Column 3). When grandparents provided childcare, young adults were more likely to see their parents at least weekly. Also, telephone/(e-)mail contact with both mother ( $rrr = .35$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and father ( $rrr = .47$ ,  $p < .01$ ) was less likely to occur less than once a week when grandparents provided childcare. When young adults made use of paid childcare, they were less likely to see their mother at least weekly. No relationships were observed between paid child care and face-to-face contact with father, or between paid child care and telephone/(e-)mail contact with either parent.

**Table 2.4** Multinomial logistic regression results for mechanisms underlying the relationship between partnership and parenthood status and face-to-face contact between young adults and their father

Predictor	Anchor sample with partner		Alter sample with partner		Anchor sample with children	
	Daily contact		Daily contact		Daily contact	
	≥ Once a week	< Weekly	≥ Once a week	< Weekly	≥ Once a week	< Weekly
<i>Mechanisms of partnership status</i>						
Quality of relationship with parent(s)-in-law	1.13 (.16)	1.18 (.19)				
Quality of partner's relationship with own parent(s)			1.46 (.22)	1.80* (.24)		
Quality of partner's relationship with respondent's father			.64* (.23)	.46** (.24)		
<i>Mechanisms of parenthood status</i>						
Provision of childcare by grandfather					.82(.26)	.30*** (.31)
Use of paid childcare (1 = yes)					1.06(.43)	1.94 (.52)
R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	.64		.51		.50	
% Daily contact	19.8		14.0		8.7	
N	1,087		679		464	

Note: Relative risk ratios (standard errors). Baseline category is *daily contact*; comparison categories are *once a week* respectively *< weekly*. Control variables include young adults' age, gender, number of living siblings, education, prior divorce, and father's education, geographic proximity, marital status. When estimating mechanisms of partnership status, we also controlled for the quality of the relationship between young adults and their father and for young adults' parenthood status.  
 \**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001 (two-tailed).

## 2.5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

An important general finding of this study is that the young adults in our sample had frequent contact with their parents, even after they had left the parental home. Slightly more than half of the nonresident young adults reported seeing both their parents at least once a week. Similar frequencies were observed for telephone and/or (e-)mail contact with father, whereas more than 70% of the young adults spoke with their mother at least weekly via phone or (e-)mail. Similar patterns of intergenerational contact have been observed in Germany (Szydlik, 2000) and Great Britain (Grundy & Shelton, 2001). Face-to-face contact is less frequent in the United States, yet still about 40% of adults see their parents at least once

a week (Lye, 1996; Lye et al., 1995). These findings support the idea that 'modified extended family relations' (Litwak, 1960) are still relevant in modernized Western societies.

Our research was organized around two main goals. First, we examined how a young adult's partnership and parenthood status is related to frequency of intergenerational contact. Second, we investigated mechanisms underlying the relationship between life course status and intergenerational contact.

### **2.5.1 Life course status and intergenerational contact**

The young adults in our study reported seeing their parents less frequently after having entered into marriage or cohabitation. Another important finding is that face-to-face contact with parents was more frequent for young adults with offspring. Furthermore, young adult daughters with children of their own tended to have more telephone/(e-)mail contact with their mother than young adult daughters without offspring. These findings are consistent with the family life course perspective, which contends that family relationships are related to the life course status of individual family members.

Our results differ from earlier findings among young adults (Aquilino, 1997). Whereas we found cohabitation and marriage to be negatively related to contact between young adults and parents, Aquilino's study revealed small positive effects on shared intergenerational activities. Also, whereas we found young adults' parenthood to be positively related to contact with parents, Aquilino's study found no such relationship.

The discrepancies between our findings and those of Aquilino (1997) may be partly attributable to the operationalization of intergenerational contact. We defined contact as any interaction between parent and child – whether for purposes of support, companionship, or exchange of information. In contrast, Aquilino (1997) focused more on activities eliciting positive emotions ('shared activities'), in which parents and children share enjoyable times and leisure activities. It is plausible that parenthood leads to more frequent functional contact, for instance parents providing childcare and advice. Some of these functional interactions might not be perceived as shared activities in Aquilino's sense, as grandparents' attempts to provide support may sometimes be interpreted as interference by the adult child.

The positive relationship we observed between parenthood and intergenerational contact seems to conflict with results from earlier studies (Lawton et al., 1994; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). In the latter studies, however, respondents (and their children) were generally much older than in our study. Research suggests that involvement of grandparents changes with the age of the family unit: In households with young children, grandparents have a more active and caring role, whereas they are more passive in families with older children (Silverstein & Marengo, 2001). Our finding that contact is more frequent only when the youngest grandchild is below the age of six is consistent with this interpretation.

### 2.5.2 Mechanisms underlying partnership and parenthood status

Young adults were found to have less telephone/(e-)mail contact with their mother if they had good relationships with their parents-in-law. Neither contact with father nor face-to-face contact with mother was related to the quality of young adults' relationships with parents-in-law. As expected, we found that frequency of face-to-face contact with mother and father was predicted by the quality of the relationship not only between the respondents and their parents, but also between the respondents' partner and the respondents' parents (i.e., the partner's parents-in-law). Furthermore, young adults tended to have less face-to-face contact with their parents when their partner reported a good relationship with the partner's own parents.

Our results suggest that contact is more frequent when parents provide childcare support to their young adult children. Young adults who made use of paid childcare saw their mothers less than those not using these services. These results are in line with previous findings on intergenerational support (Hogan, Eggebeen, & Clogg, 1993). Because of the cross-sectional nature of our study we were not able to identify the direction of causality of these relationships. It is possible that increased intergenerational contact is a by-product of grandparents' provision of childcare, yet equally possible that such provision of childcare is a result of grandparents' more frequent contact with their children.

### 2.5.3 Additional factors associated with intergenerational contact

Young adults tended to see their mother less frequently when the latter was divorced and lived alone. Young adults reported less face-to-face contact with divorced fathers, whether the latter were currently single or remarried. In general, these results are in line with previous research (Aquilino, 1994; Kalmijn, 2007).

Death of one parent appeared to have different effects on contact with surviving mothers as compared with fathers. For widowed mothers who lived alone, more frequent contact with children was observed, probably reflecting the mother's increased need for support. No such positive effects were found for father's widowhood. A possible explanation for these differences is that, in general, mothers are more involved in the lives of children than are fathers (Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1990; Kalmijn, 2007); norms of reciprocity may lead children to provide more support to their mother than to their father in times of need.

Furthermore, young adults reported less frequent contact with widowed and remarried fathers; for widowed and remarried mothers, no such relationship was found. Prior research revealed that negative effects of remarriage are stronger for fathers than for mothers (Kalmijn, 2007). These differences can probably be explained by the kin-keeping role of women (Di Leonardo, 1987; Hagestad, 1986): In households, women assume responsibility for organizing family contacts, including contacts with their husband's family. Stepmothers, however, may be less involved in kin-keeping with stepchildren as compared with mothers' involvement with their own children.

#### 2.5.4 Limitations and future research

Mechanisms thought to underlie the relationship between partnership and parenthood status and contact were tested in specific subsamples (respectively, young adults with a romantic partner and young adults with offspring). We did not explicitly test why young adults with a partner would have less contact with parents than would singles, or why young adults with children would have more contact than those without children. Such analyses were not possible given the cross-sectional nature of our research design. In the future, it would be desirable to replicate our findings in a longitudinal study including measures of these mediating variables; such research could provide more direct evidence for these factors as underlying mechanisms.

In view of the low response rate in this study, results should be interpreted cautiously. Individuals with a poor relationship with their parents and – as a consequence – less frequent intergenerational contact, may be underrepresented. Nevertheless, the distribution of contact frequency was in line with prior research in The Netherlands and in other Western European countries (Grundy & Shelton, 2001; Hank, 2007; Szydlik, 2000). The reader should also take into account that the study was carried out in The Netherlands, a country with a relatively high-density population. Parents and children live in relatively close geographic proximity, and differences in residential distance are relatively small. It is not clear to what extent our results can be generalized to countries with different structural characteristics.



## CHAPTER 3

# Parental bond and life course stage from adolescence to young adulthood

This chapter is co-authored by Frits van Wel (Utrecht University, The Netherlands). A slightly different version of this chapter is published as: 'Bucx, F., & Van Wel, F. W. (2008). Parental bond and life course transitions from adolescence to young adulthood. *Adolescence*, 43, 71 – 88.'



# 3 Parental bond and life course stage from adolescence to young adulthood

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Whereas the parent-child bond has been studied extensively in children and adolescents, its nature and course in late adolescence and young adulthood have received less empirical attention (Arnett, 2000; Hagestad, 1987; Van Wel et al., 2002). Particularly scarce are longitudinal studies tracking continuity and changes in the parental bond from adolescence to young adulthood (Berger & Fend, 2005). Based on the small number of studies to date, it can be roughly concluded that adolescents and young adults maintain reasonably good relationships with their parents over time, and that their well-being remains affected by the quality of their relationship with parents (Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Thornton, Orbuch, & Axinn, 1995; Van Wel et al., 2002).

This general conclusion may require some refinement, however, as several studies point to fluctuations or changes in the parent-child relationship during late adolescence and young adulthood. Several authors (Aquilino, 1997, 1999; Buhl, 2000; Smollar & Youniss, 1989) have identified life course transitions as giving rise to such fluctuations or changes. Late adolescence and especially young adulthood are characterized by important transitions involving increased social integration within two important life domains: the domain of romantic relationships and family formation, and the domain of occupation (Cooksey & Rindfuss, 2001).

The present study investigates how the emotional quality of the relationship that adolescents and young adults have with their parents depends on their life course stage. We present the results of a three-wave longitudinal study of the parental bond and the life course of Dutch adolescents and young adults (aged 12 – 24 years at Wave 1) over a six-year period.

## 3.2 THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

### 3.2.1 Life course stage and parental bond

Hypotheses concerning effects of adolescents' and young adults' life course transitions on the parental bond can be derived from three prominent theoretical perspectives with psychological and sociological origins: individuation theory, role identity theory, and theories concerning stressors on the parent-child relationship. According to individuation theory

(Blos, 1979; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), a key developmental task in adolescence is the attainment of (social, emotional, and cognitive) autonomy in various life domains, and in this process, the formation of one's own identity. Biological and cognitive maturational processes in early adolescence, together with having more close contacts with peers, are assumed to give rise to processes of individuation and transformation of the parent-child relationship (Steinberg, 1996).

Individuation theory states that individuation and transformation of the parental bond is an important task not only in adolescence, but also in young adulthood (Buhl, 2000; Smollar & Youniss, 1989; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Transitions such as leaving the parental home, getting married, becoming a parent, entering the labor market, and establishing financial independence can be seen as 'motors' (Buhl, 2000) in a more general process whereby young people take up adult responsibilities and become increasingly less dependent on their parents' resources. These theoretical notions of individuation suggest that the relationship between parents and their children becomes less close and less important during this life course phase, as the young adult's dependence on parents decreases and his or her concerns shift to career advancement, to romantic relationships, and to family formation. However, it seems unlikely that such processes lead to radical disengagement, as earlier individuation theorists (Blos, 1962) have hypothesized.

On the other hand, role identity theory (Stryker, 1968) suggests that emotional closeness between children and their parents is positively influenced by life course transitions. As adolescents and young adults move into the same adult roles as their parents, their experiences become similar to those of their parents. As a consequence, young people will be more likely to understand their parents and to identify with them, which should in turn have favorable effects on the closeness of their relationship with their parents. Bengtson and Black (1973) were the first to put forward this intergenerational similarity hypothesis.

Other theories have focused on stress and uncertainties invoked by life course transitions, as these changes in the lives of young people require significant adjustment (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998; Knoester, 2003). From this perspective, the changes produced by life course transitions can be expected to produce a temporary disequilibrium and worsening of the parent-child relationship. Old patterns of interaction are no longer satisfactory (for one or both parties), are perceived by parents and/or children as inappropriate for the new life phase, or are obstructed by practical barriers (e.g., increased geographic distance). New patterns of interaction suited to the needs of both young people and their parents must be developed. It is plausible that this phase will lead in the short term to mutual tensions and to communication about how both parties should adjust their behavior to the new circumstances. In most cases the relationship between parents and children will again improve over time, once adjustments to the new situation have been made.

In summary, these three theoretical perspectives discussed above lead to different expectations about the effects of life course transitions. On the one hand, individuation theory suggests that life course transitions should have a negative influence on the bond between parents and children (Hypothesis 1), because these transitions increase young people's inde-

pendence from their parents. On the other hand, role identity theory implies a positive influence (Hypothesis 2) because life course transitions lead to a situation in which parents and children have more similar roles and experiences. When life course transitions are viewed as potential stressors, temporary pressures can be expected to arise in the parent-child relationship, which are usually subsequently resolved (Hypothesis 3). In our analyses, effects of life course transitions are inferred from cross-sectional and longitudinal associations between young adults' life course stage and the parental bond.

Results from previous studies do not provide clear evidence for one specific hypothesis. In accordance with individuation theory, it has been observed that the parent-child bond is negatively influenced by departure from the parental home (Aquilino, 1997, 1999) and the transition to parenthood (Aquilino, 1997, 1999; Berger & Fend, 2005). Marriage has been found to have negative effects (Berger & Fend, 2005) as well as positive effects (Aquilino, 1997, 1999; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998). In line with role identity theory, the parent-child bond appears to be positively influenced by the transition to employment (Aquilino, 1997; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998) and financial independence (Berger & Fend, 2005).

Our literature review revealed that the parental bond of adolescents and young adults has scarcely been studied longitudinally in the context of one or more life course transitions. Moreover, the theoretical implications of certain inconsistent findings require further clarification. Finally, it is unclear whether certain effects observed to date represent temporary fluctuations or more meaningful long-term changes, as most prior longitudinal studies have investigated changes over a relatively short time span. Because in the present longitudinal study we have information from three waves over a six-year period, we are able to distinguish between short-term and long-term effects of life course transitions on the parental bond.

In addition to our main research question, we investigate to what extent the parental bond is related to children's well-being during adolescence and young adulthood. Previous research, mostly of cross-sectional nature, revealed that in adolescence and young adulthood parents remain important for children's well-being (Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Thornton et al., 1995; Van Wel et al., 2002), but also that the benefits of the parental bond diminish as new social roles begin to take priority in young adulthood (Roberts & Bengtson, 1993).

### 3.2.2 Control variables

In our analyses, we control for age as it has been found that age affects the parental bond, especially at the beginning and end of the adolescence phase (Van Wel et al., 2002). Also, respondent's gender is included, as some studies found gender differences in the parental bond during adolescence and young adulthood (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998; Thornton et al., 1995; Van Wel et al., 2002). Finally, we include parental divorce: Research has shown that parental divorce negatively affects the parental bond (Amato & Booth, 1996) and children's well-being (Amato, 2000). Also, parental divorce has been found to influence the timing of children's life course transitions such as leaving the parental home (Juang, Silbereisen, & Wiesner, 1999), cohabitation, and marriage (Amato, 1996).

### 3.3 METHOD

#### 3.3.1 Data

The data used in this study were drawn from the Utrecht Study of Adolescent Development (USAD), a three-wave longitudinal project (Meeus & 't Hart, 1993). The participants were randomly selected from two representative national panels. A total of 3,394 youngsters (aged 12 to 24 years) participated in the first measurement wave in 1991 (26% of those invited did not participate). When these respondents were contacted again in 1994, 1,966 responded; at the third measurement wave in 1997, 1,301 respondents (now aged 18 to 30 years) participated. The Wave 2 and Wave 3 samples were smaller compared to the Wave 1 sample for two reasons. First, in order to reduce costs, a smaller but random selection of the original Wave 1 sample was used for the longitudinal part of the study (Landsheer et al., 2008). Secondly, 822 respondents in the original Wave 1 sample refused to participate in Wave 2 and/or Wave 3.

A total of 1,133 adolescents and young adults provided responses to questions about their relationship with living parents at all three measurement waves. Of these respondents, 1,078 had no missing scores on any of the variables in the conceptual model under investigation. Moreover, a small group of 14 respondents with an atypical life course stage (mostly single mothers) were excluded from our analyses. The resulting sample included 1,064 respondents (455 male, 609 female) and had a mean age of 17.5 years at Wave 1.

Previous analyses (Meeus & 't Hart, 1993) revealed that the Wave 1 sample was representative of the Dutch population of adolescents and young adults of the early 1990s, in terms of gender, age, religious affiliation, residential status, and level of education. We verified that the respondents lost between Wave 1 and Wave 3 did not differ from those who participated at all three measurement waves on the two dependent variables (parental bond, general well-being). At both re-measurement points, however, male respondents and older respondents dropped out at a higher rate than respectively female respondents and younger respondents. Therefore, in the descriptive analyses, we used weights to adjust our sample to the gender and age distribution of the Dutch population of adolescents and young adults of the early 1990s.

#### 3.3.2 Measures

A *parental bond* scale developed by Van Wel (1994) was used to examine youth-parent relations. This eight-item scale measured the degree to which respondents (a) identified with their parents in matters of opinion and taste (“I often have the same opinions as my parents”; “My taste and preferences are usually the same as those of my parents”); (b) viewed their parents as a good role model in their lifestyle and approach to child rearing (“In the future, I want to adopt my parents’ way of living”; “Someday I will raise my own children just as my parents have raised me”); (c) accepted their parents as educators from whom they can accept criticism and learn (“When my parents criticize my behavior, I take it to heart”; “I can still

learn a lot from my parents”); and (d) valued their parents as friends and as persons with whom they can communicate (“I count my parents among my best friends”; “I can communicate extremely well with my parents”). In psychoanalytic terms, the scale indicates the extent to which parents serve as their child’s identification object or ego-ideal, as well as the degree to which parental authority is viewed as an instrument of learning. The currently more egalitarian quality of relations between the generations is captured in scale items concerning the degree of friendship and communication between youth and parents. Responses ranged from 1 = *entirely disagree* to 5 = *entirely agree*. Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for the parental bond scale was .87, .86, and .87 at Waves 1, 2, and 3, respectively. (The means at Waves 1, 2, and 3 were respectively 3.2, 3.2, and 3.3.)

The *well-being* of the respondents was examined using the Cantril ladder (Cantril, 1965). Adolescents and young adults evaluated their general well-being on a scale from 0 = *very bad* to 10 = *very good*. (Mean scores at Waves 1, 2, and 3 were respectively 8.0, 7.7, and 7.7.)

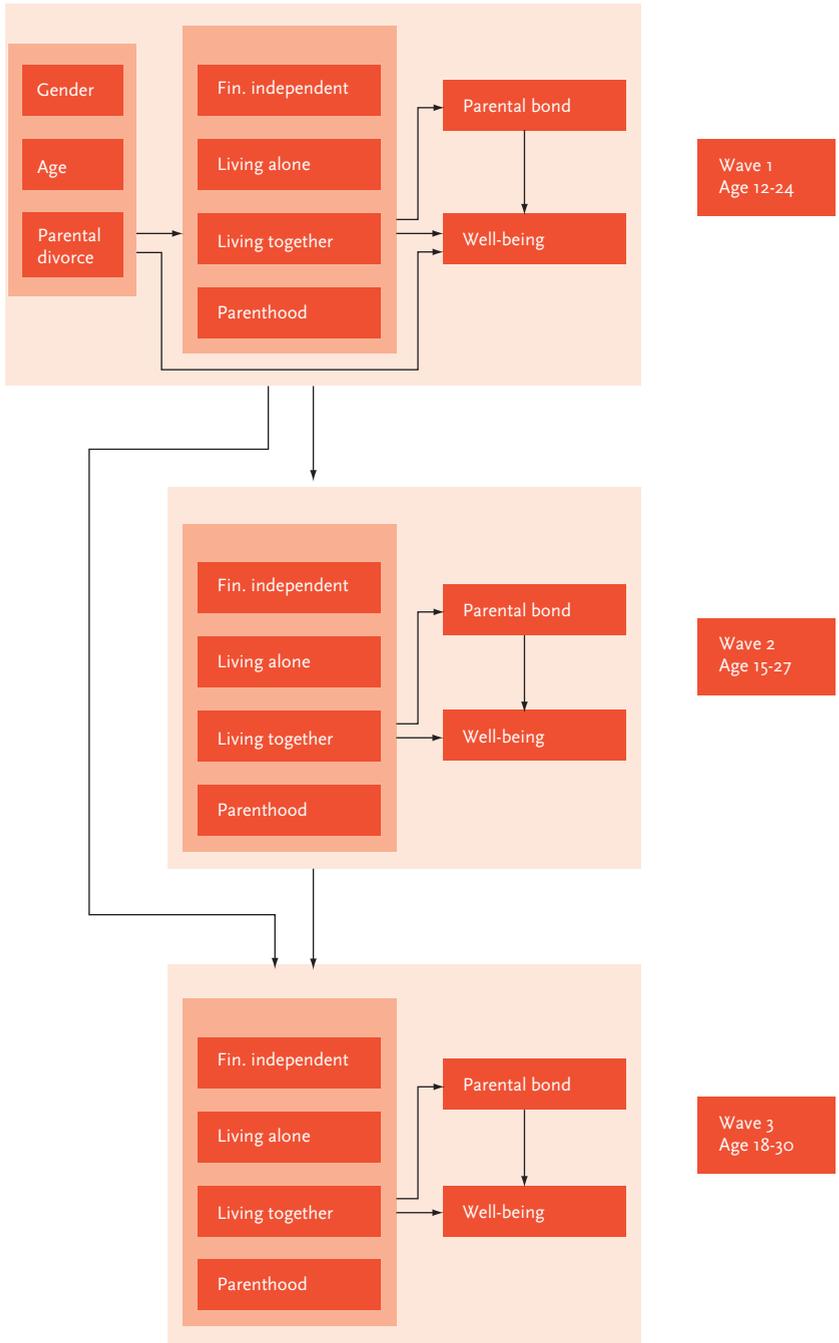
Concerning their *living situation*, adolescents’ and young adults’ *life course stage* was measured by asking respondents whether they lived with their parents, lived alone, lived with a romantic partner and whether they had children of their own. On the basis of this information, four life course stages were distinguished: (a) living with parents; (b) living alone without a partner and without children; (c) living together with a partner (married or unmarried) without children; (d) living together with a partner (married and unmarried) and having children. In our analyses, respondents in the latter three stages were compared to a reference group of respondents still living with their parents, who had not yet made any of the transitions under investigation.

Concerning their *financial situation*, adolescents’ and young adults’ *life course stage* was measured by asking respondents whether they had a source of income independent of their parents (from employment or from welfare). Two groups were constructed: (a) those with a main source of income independent of their parents; and (b) those without such an income independent of their parents.

*Control variables.* Gender (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*) as well as *age* of the respondents were included; at Wave 1, there were four age groups, ranging from 1 = *early adolescence* [12 – 14 years], 2 = *middle adolescence* [15 – 17 years], 3 = *late adolescence* [18 – 21 years], to 4 = *early adulthood* [21 – 24 years]. *Parental divorce* indicated whether parents had divorced and/or were living separated. At Wave 1, 10.2% of the respondents had divorced parents or parents that were living separated.

### 3.3.3 Method of analysis

The conceptual model developed for our three-wave longitudinal analysis of the relationship between control variables, life course stage, the parental bond and well-being of adolescents and young adults is presented in Figure 3.1. For Wave 1, the cross-sectional relationships were specified between the control variables and the life course stages. Next, cross-sectional relationships between these control variables and life course stages and the parental bond were



**Figure 3.1** Conceptual model: life course stages, parental bond and well-being of adolescents and young adults

estimated. Finally, relationships between these variables and well-being were specified. Please note that we did not examine any cross-sectional relationships among the life course stages. The same cross-sectional relationships were investigated for Wave 2 (three years later) and for Wave 3 (another three years later). Furthermore, longitudinal relationships were investigated between the Wave 1 and Wave 2 variables, between the Wave 1 and Wave 3 variables, and between the Wave 2 and Wave 3 variables. In this way, effects of life course stages could be investigated over the course of time.

The relationships between the variables included in the conceptual model (see Figure 3.1) were examined using LISREL 8.80 statistical software (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2006). Calculations are based on correlation matrices generated by PRELIS 2.3 statistical software (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996). For discrete measures, product-moment correlations of optimal scores or canonical correlations and polychoric correlations were computed; for continuous variables Pearson correlations were used. Our observations were to some extent dependent because about one-third of our sample (35.4%;  $N = 377$ ) was comprised of siblings residing in the same household at Wave 1 (see also section 1.8.2). Clustered data yield an underestimation of standard errors and  $p$ -values; to deter the inflation of 'type I errors', a more stringent alpha level was used in our analyses ( $p < .01$  instead of  $p < .05$ ).

Model fit was measured using the chi-squared statistic ( $\chi^2$ ), which is a significance test of the null hypothesis that the model is consistent with the observed data. Because this test statistic is influenced by sample size, we also used the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) to judge goodness-of-fit. Following the recommendations by Hu and Bentler (1995), CFI and AGFI values over .95 and RMSEA values below .06 are considered an indication of close model fit. Due to the complexity of the model, a large sample size was required; therefore, it was not possible to split the sample and to conduct analyses for sons and daughters separately. Instead, we included gender as a control variable in our analyses.

## 3.4 RESULTS

### 3.4.1 Descriptive results

Descriptive results are presented in Table 3.1. The majority of the adolescents and young adults (73.1%) was living with their parents at Wave 1; six years later only 36.0% were doing so. On average, those who had left the parental home had done so at 20.7 years of age. The group of adolescents and young adults living alone (i.e., not living with parents nor with a partner) grew from 8.9% (Wave 1) to 19.4% (Wave 3), while the group who was living together with a partner (without children) rose from 13.7% to 30.0% in the same period. Finally, the group with children expanded from 4.4% to 14.6%.

**Table 3.1** Descriptive information: percentages of adolescents and young adults in each life course stage and life course transitions, for three measurement waves ( $N = 1,064^a$ )

	Wave 1 age 12 – 24	Wave 2 age 15 – 27	Wave 3 age 18 – 30
<b>Life course stages</b>			
<i>Living situation:</i>			
Living at parental home	73.1	58.4	36.0
Living alone	8.9	12.7	19.4
Living with a partner	13.7	21.2	30.0
Parenthood	4.4	7.7	14.6
<i>Work:</i>			
Financially independent	35.6	61.0	81.3
	Wave 1 → Wave 2	Wave 2 → Wave 3	
<b>Life course transitions</b>			
<i>Living situation:</i>			
Living at parental home → living alone	6.4	10.4	
Living at parental home → living with a partner	7.9	11.6	
Living at parental home → parenthood	0.8	0.8	
Living alone → living with a partner	2.8	4.2	
Living alone → parenthood	0.0	0.1	
Living with a partner → parenthood	2.6	5.9	
<i>Work:</i>			
Financially dependent → financially independent	29.2	24.6	

Note: Data are weighted.

<sup>a</sup>Unweighted.

All in all, nearly half of the respondents (48.7%) experienced a change in life course stage involving their living situation over the six-year period, 20.5% during the first three years and 33.0% during the last three years. (Some respondents experienced a change in living situation during both periods.) Nearly all of these changes (96.8%) concerned one of the following four transitions: (a) from living in the parental home to living alone; (b) from living in the parental home to living together with a partner; (c) from living alone to living together with a partner; and (d) from living together with a partner to being a parent. With regard to their financial situation, the group of respondents with a source of income independent of their parents grew from 35.6% (Wave 1) to 81.3% (Wave 3).

**Table 3.2** Path analysis for life course stages, parental bond, and well-being of adolescents and young adults (*N* = 1,064)

Predictor	Wave 1								
	Life course stage (living situation)			Life course stage (work)		Parental bond		Well-being	
	Living alone	Living with a partner	Parenthood	Financially independent		<i>D</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>T</i>
Gender (1 = <i>female</i> )	-.09	.11	n.s.	n.s.		n.s.	n.s.	-.14	-.13
Age	.34	.50	.32	.71		n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-.20
<i>Wave 1</i>									
Divorce parents (1 = <i>yes</i> )	n.s.	.07	n.s.	n.s.		-.19	-.19	-.23	-.27
Life course stage (living situation)									
Living with parents <sup>a</sup>									
Living alone	–	–	–	–		n.s.	n.s.	-.32	-.32
Living with a partner	–	–	–	–		n.s.	n.s.	-.18	-.18
Parenthood	–	–	–	–		n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Life course stage (work)									
Financially independent (1 = <i>yes</i> )	–	–	–	–		n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Parental bond	–	–	–	–		–	–	.18	.18
Well-being	–	–	–	–		–	–	–	–
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.12	.28	.10	.51		.04		.26	

*Note:* Standardized coefficients. For life course stage (living situation), the baseline category is *living with parents*; comparison categories are *living alone*, *living with a partner*, and *parenthood*. For life course stage (work), the baseline category is *financially dependent on parents*. *D* = direct effect; *T* = total effect; n.s.: not significant [significant relationships: *t*-value > | 2.58 |, *p* < .01 (two-tailed)]. Symbol ‘–’: paths excluded from the model.

<sup>a</sup>Reference category.

**Table 3.2** Continued

Predictor	Wave 2 (3 years after Wave 1)											
	Life course stage (living situation)						Life course stage (work)		Parental bond		Well-being	
	Living alone		Living with a partner		Parenthood		Financially independent		D	T	D	T
	D	T	D	T	D	T	D	T	D	T	D	T
Gender (1 = female)	n.s.	n.s.	.08	.11	n.s.	n.s.	-.08	-.08	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Age	.32	.21	.33	.51	n.s.	.38	.44	.44	.20	n.s.	-.23	n.s.
<i>Wave 1</i>												
Divorce parents (1 = yes)	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.05	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-.11	n.s.	-.08
Life course stage (living situation)												
Living with parents <sup>a</sup>												
Living alone	.28	.32	n.s.	-.02	n.s.	-.03	-.14	-.14	-.14	-.14	n.s.	n.s.
Living with a partner	-.19	-.17	.33	.32	.22	.21	-.13	-.13	-.14	-.14	n.s.	.06
Parenthood	-.14	-.14	-.20	-.20	.73	.73	-.23	-.23	-.16	-.20	n.s.	.13
Life course stage (work)												
Financially independent (1 = yes)	-.11	-.11	.13	.13	n.s.	n.s.	.25	.25	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.03
Parental bond	n.s.	-.02	n.s.	.01	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.52	.52	n.s.	.12
Well-being	-.11	-.11	.07	.07	.10	.10	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.28	.32
<i>Wave 2</i>												
Life course stage (living situation)												
Living with parents <sup>a</sup>												
Living alone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Living with a partner	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	n.s.	n.s.	.25	.25
Parenthood	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	n.s.	n.s.	.30	.30
Life course stage (work)												
Financially independent (1 = yes)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Parental bond	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.14	.14
Well-being	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
R <sup>2</sup>	.23		.45		.61		.26		.31		.17	

Note: Standardized coefficients. For life course stage (living situation), the baseline category is *living with parents*; comparison categories are *living alone*, *living with a partner*, and *parenthood*. For life course stage (work), the baseline category is *financially dependent on parents*. D = direct effect; T = total effect; n.s.: not significant [significant relationships: t-value > |2.58|, p < .01 (two-tailed)]. Symbol '-': paths excluded from the model.

<sup>a</sup>Reference category.

**Table 3.2** Continued

Predictor	Wave 3 (6 years after Wave 1)											
	Life course stage (living situation)						Life course stage (work)		Parental bond		Well-being	
	Living alone		Living with a partner		Parenthood		Financially independent		D	T	D	T
	D	T	D	T	D	T	D	T	D	T	D	T
Gender (1 = female)	n.s.	n.s.	.11	.12	n.s.	.04	n.s.	-.05	.07	n.s.	n.s.	-.08
Age	-.28	-.11	.42	.33	n.s.	.47	.63	.33	.16	n.s.	n.s.	-.04
<i>Wave 1</i>												
Divorce parents (1 = yes)	n.s.	.04	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.04	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-.10	.12	n.s.
Life course stage (living situation)												
Living with parents <sup>a</sup>												
Living alone	n.s.	.20	-.08	-.07	n.s.	-.03	n.s.	-.07	n.s.	-.09	n.s.	-.06
Living with a partner	n.s.	-.08	-.11	-.09	.07	.29	-.18	-.25	n.s.	-.13	n.s.	n.s.
Parenthood	n.s.	-.07	n.s.	-.24	n.s.	.45	-.14	-.27	n.s.	-.20	n.s.	n.s.
Life course stage (work)												
Financially independent (1 = yes)	n.s.	n.s.	-.10	n.s.	.07	.10	-.12	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Parental bond	-.09	-.11	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.16	.42	n.s.	.10
Well-being	n.s.	-.10	-.07	n.s.	n.s.	.09	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.16	.26
<i>Wave 2</i>												
Life course stage (living situation)												
Living with parents <sup>a</sup>												
Living alone	.38	.37	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-.20	-.19	-.15	-.11	n.s.	n.s.
Living with a partner	n.s.	-.05	.22	.24	.25	.25	-.16	-.14	-.17	-.14	n.s.	.11
Parenthood	n.s.	-.06	-.26	-.23	.69	.69	-.20	-.17	-.26	-.19	-.20	n.s.
Life course stage (work)												
Financially independent (1 = yes)	n.s.	n.s.	.10	.10	n.s.	n.s.	.23	.23	n.s.	n.s.	-.08	-.08
Parental bond	n.s.	-.03	n.s.	.02	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.48	.49	n.s.	.08
Well-being	-.19	-.19	.11	.11	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.30	.30
<i>Wave 3</i>												
Life course stage (living situation)												
Living with parents <sup>a</sup>												
Living alone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.08	.08	n.s.	n.s.
Living with a partner	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Parenthood	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	n.s.	n.s.	.19	.20
Life course stage (work)												
Financially independent (1 = yes)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Parental bond	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.09	.09
Well-being	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
R <sup>2</sup>	.23		.27		.59		.27		.41		.19	

Note: Standardized coefficients. For life course stage (living situation), the baseline category is *living with parents*; comparison categories are *living alone*, *living with a partner*, and *parenthood*. For life course stage (work), the baseline category is *financially dependent on parents*. D = direct effect; T = total effect; n.s.: not significant [significant relationships:  $t$ -value > |2.58|,  $p < .01$  (two-tailed)]. Symbol '-': paths excluded from the model.

<sup>a</sup>Reference category.

### 3.4.2 Results from path analyses

A suitable model was obtained for the associations within and between Waves 1, 2, and 3 ( $\chi^2 = 89.569$ ,  $df = 93$ ,  $p = 0.581$ ; CFI = 1.000; AGFI = .980; RMSEA = .000). The results from the path analyses are presented in Table 3.2. Our discussion of the results begins with the control variables (child's age and gender, parental divorce) and then proceeds to the cross-sectional and longitudinal associations found between life course stages, the parental bond, and well-being. We will not highlight the longitudinal connections of the life course stage variables to one another, as these are fairly evident.

#### *Control variables*

At Wave 1, male respondents were more often living alone than were female respondents; this was not the case at Waves 2 and 3. At all three waves, female respondents were more often living together with a partner than male respondents. No direct relationship was found between gender and parenthood. At Wave 2, male respondents were more often financially independent than were female respondents. At Waves 1 and 2, no difference was observed between male and female respondents in terms of their relationship with parents; at Wave 3, female respondents reported a slightly more positive parental bond than did male respondents. At Wave 1, female respondents reported lower well-being than did male respondents.

At each measurement wave, there were positive relationships between age and the life course variables, with two exceptions. At Wave 3, age was negatively related to living alone; at Waves 2 and 3, no direct age effect on parenthood was found. At waves 2 and 3, a positive relationship between age and the parental bond was observed. At Wave 2, age had a direct negative relationship with well-being, with higher levels of well-being reported by younger respondents.

Young people whose parents had divorced were more often living together with a partner at Wave 1, and they were also more often having children of their own at Wave 2 than young people whose parents lived together. Parental divorce showed a direct negative relationship with the parental bond at Wave 1 – when the respondents were still relatively young – but not at later waves. A direct negative relationship between parental divorce and well-being was found at Wave 1, whereas a positive relationship was found at Wave 3.

#### *Parental bond*

We will now consider the various life course stages in relation to the parental bond. At Wave 1 and Wave 2, no cross-sectional relationships between life course stages and the parental bond were observed, whereas one association was observed at Wave 3: Youth who were living alone reported a better bond with parents than those still living at the parental home.

Longitudinal relationships will now be discussed. Financial independence showed no effects over time on the parental bond. However, the life course stages involving the living situation showed unequivocally negative effects: Compared to young people living with their parents, young people living alone and those living together with a partner – with or without

children – reported a relatively weak parental bond three years later. This was true for the comparisons between Waves 1 and 2 as well as between Waves 2 and 3. These results suggest an adverse long-term effect of departure from the parental home on the parental bond. Additional analyses (not shown in the tables) revealed that the negative effect of parenthood at Wave 2 on the parental bond three years later was significantly different from the effect of living alone ( $p < .01$ ), and significantly different from the effect of living together with a partner ( $p < .01$ ). This finding suggests that, on top of the effect of leaving the parental home, the transition into parenthood also has a negative effect on the parental bond. All together, the negative longitudinal effects of these life course variables neutralized the positive age effect on the parental bond mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, the quality of the parental bond showed considerable stability from Wave 1 to Waves 2 and 3, and from Wave 2 to Wave 3.

On the other hand, the quality of the parental bond itself appeared to have few direct longitudinal effects on the later life course transitions of the respondents: Respondents at Wave 1 with a weak parental bond were more often living alone six years later than were those with a stronger parental bond.

### *Well-being*

The well-being of the adolescents and young adults was relatively stable over the six-year research period, albeit to a lesser extent than was observed for the parental bond. At Wave 1, living together with a partner showed a negative relationship with well-being, whereas the same variable showed a positive relationship at Wave 2 and no significant direct relationship at Wave 3. These findings suggest that there is a particular life course phase – not too young, not too old – when living with a partner has a favorable effect on well-being. Similarly, only at Waves 2 and 3 we found a positive relationship between parenthood and well-being; only at Wave 1, living alone was negatively associated with general well-being. Financial independence showed no direct association with enhanced well-being at any measurement wave.

At all three measurement waves, the parental bond showed a positive cross-sectional relationship with well-being. This suggests that parents continue to play a meaningful role in relation to the well-being of their children. The estimates in our model suggest that the strength of this association decreased somewhat over time. We tested whether the differences across the three waves in the estimates of the relationship between the parental bond and well-being were significant, by comparing our model with a second model ( $\chi^2 = 94.577$ ,  $df = 95$ ,  $p = 0.493$ ) in which the corresponding parameters were constrained to be equal across the three waves. The chi-square difference test revealed no significant fit differences between the constrained and the unconstrained model ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 5.010$ ,  $\Delta df = 2$ ,  $p > .01$ ). This result indicates that the strength of the relationship between the parental bond and well-being is relatively stable over time.

Longitudinally, our results suggested few direct effects of life course stages on well-being: Young people with children at Wave 2 reported relatively lower levels of well-being three years later as compared to those living with parents; financial independence at Wave 2 was associated with decreased well-being three years later. Furthermore, longitudinal effects

of well-being on life course variables were found. Respondents with higher levels of well-being at Wave 1 were less likely to live alone and more likely to live together with a partner and to have children themselves three years later than those with lower levels of well-being; respondents with higher levels of well-being at Wave 2 were less often living alone and more often living together with a partner three years later than those with lower levels of well-being. These results suggest that, in general, young people with higher levels of well-being start with partnership and family formation at an earlier age than those with lower levels of well-being.

### 3.5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

An important overall finding in this study is the considerable continuity observed in the relationship between parents and children. This is consistent with prior research suggesting that adolescents and young adults have relatively close and stable relationships with their parents (Aquilino, 1997; Thornton et al., 1995; Van Wel et al., 2002). Moreover, after middle adolescence, age appears to have a positive effect on the parental bond (Van Wel et al., 2002).

Nevertheless, our longitudinal results suggest that this strengthening of the parental bond with age is tempered by the life course transitions that adolescents and young adults undergo. After children had left the parental home and after they had become parents themselves, they reported feeling less close to their parents. This appeared to be not an immediate effect, however, but one which manifests itself over the longer term (i.e., after three years). These results are in line with results from previous studies (Aquilino, 1997, 1999; Berger & Fend, 2005). No effects of financial independence were observed.

These findings are inconsistent with role identity theory, which would predict positive effects of life course transitions as a result of increased similarity in the experiences and social roles of parents and children. Broadly speaking, the present results are also inconsistent with theories emphasizing the effects of potential stressors on the parental bond during life course transitions. Instead, our results appear most in line with individuation theory (Buhl, 2000; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), which posits that life course transitions enhance autonomy and independence, and that the latter in turn necessitate a transition to a less close parent-child relationship. However, it is important to note that although the parent-child relationship becomes less close, there is certainly no radical detachment as suggested by earlier perspectives on individuation (Blos, 1962): The overall quality of the parental bond remains rather high.

In our model, we also investigated whether life course transitions are affected themselves by the quality of the parental bond. Another recent study concluded that a negative relationship with parents can be a push factor for leaving the parental home (Mitchell, Wister, & Gee, 2004). In line with these findings, we observed that young people with a weak parental bond were more likely to live alone than to live with parents six years later.

Furthermore, a positive relationship between the parental bond and well-being was observed at all three measurement waves. This suggests that the relationship with parents remains important for the psychological well-being of adolescents and young adults, which is consistent with previous research (Umberson, 1992). In line with prior research (Roberts & Bengtson, 1993), the association between the quality of the parent-child relationship and adolescents' and young adults' well-being became weaker over time; this trend was, however, not statistically significant.

The relationship between life course stage and transitions, on one hand, and well-being, on the other hand, has been the subject of several recent studies (Kohler, Behrman, & Skytthe, 2005; Woo & Raley, 2005). Our findings suggest that an important moderating variable in this relationship may be the particular phase of the life course in which a transition takes place: Whether living together with a partner is associated with enhanced well-being appeared to be linked to a specific life course phase – when individuals are not too young, but not too old – whereas the transition to parenthood is experienced as positive as long as individuals are not too young.

In conclusion, our findings suggest that adolescents and young adults alike generally experience close relationships with their parents, and that the parent-child bond remains important for the child's general well-being. Following the frictions of early and middle adolescence (De Goede et al., 2009; Van Wel et al., 2000, 2002), children tend to have increasingly close ties with their parents as they grow older. However, this age-related effect is counteracted by a tendency towards a weakened parent-child bond in response to important life course transitions experienced in adolescence and young adulthood. Future research is needed to establish whether the negative effects of departure from the parental home and from becoming a parent on the relationship between children and parents represent lasting changes.



## CHAPTER 4

# Life course status and exchanges of support between young adults and their parents

This chapter is co-authored by Frits van Wel and Trudie Knijn (Utrecht University, The Netherlands) and is currently under review at an international journal. Earlier versions of this chapter have been presented at the International Association for Relationship Research Conference, July 2006, Rethymnon (Greece), and at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference on Emerging Adulthood, February 2007, Tucson, AZ (USA).



# 4 Life course status and exchanges of support between young adults and their parents

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Young adulthood is the life course phase in which individuals face many life course transitions, such as leaving the parental home, starting a career, initiating romantic partnerships, establishing a nuclear household, and having children. Research generally revealed that parents continue to be an important source of support when children enter young adulthood (Aquilino, 2005; Kohli, 1999; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Silverstein et al., 1997): Parental advice and financial support enable youngsters to make a successful transition into independent housing, union formation and employment (Eggebeen, 2005; Goldscheider, Thornton, & Yang, 2001). In this phase of the family life course more support flows from parents to children than vice versa, which is not surprising as parents generally have more resources to share. Nevertheless, research suggests that a relative high proportion of young adults provide routine support to their parents (Eggebeen, 2005).

In the present research, both the support flows from young adults to parents and vice versa are investigated. Our study contributes in two important ways to our knowledge on support exchanges between young adults and their parents. First, although it has been shown that in this phase of the family life course parents support their children to successfully negotiate transitions to independence, it remains unclear to what extent parental assistance remains high after young adults have successfully completed these life course transitions. More generally, previous research has focused on identifying parent and family correlates of patterns of intergenerational assistance (Aquilino, 1994; Eggebeen, 1992, 2005; Hogan et al., 1993; Kalmijn, 2007), while much less is known about how child characteristics affect intergenerational exchanges of support (Davey et al., 2004). First aim of our research is therefore to investigate how the level of support that young adults receive from their parents depends on young adults' life course status: whether young adults live independently or with their parents, whether they have a romantic relationship, whether they cohabite or are married, whether they have children, and the extent to which they have reached financial independence.

Research on support flows from young adults to their parents is relatively scarce, although there have been some notable insights (Aquilino, 1997; Eggebeen, 2005). Research has focused instead on middle-aged children giving assistance to dependent parents (Eggebeen, 1992; Klein Ikkink et al., 1999), or on mixed-age groups ranging from young adults to individuals in old age (Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Spitze & Logan, 1992). More research is needed to

clarify which factors lead to support transfers from children to parents in this life course period. In particular, it is relevant to find out to what extent life course transitions affect these exchanges, as these transitions are associated with changes in young adults' resources and opportunities for providing support to parents. Second purpose of the present study is therefore to examine the relationship between young adults' life course status and the support young adults provide to their parents.

Information is used from a sample of 2,022 young adults (aged between 18 and 34 years), taken from a recent large-scale study on family relations in The Netherlands. Like most other countries in the modernized Western world, the Dutch context has been characterized in recent decades by decreases in marriage and increases in solitary living and unmarried cohabitation. Four types of intergenerational support are studied: emotional support, advice, financial support, and instrumental support (i.e., help with practical matters, such as chores in and around the house, housework, taking care of children). There are two types of financial support to children: inter-vivos transfers (i.e., transfers involving living parents) and bequests; in this chapter, we focus on inter-vivos transfers because in this phase of the family life course the majority of parents are alive. Our dataset contains cross-sectional information; in this context, we infer effects of life course transitions from comparisons between young adults differing in their life course status. Due to the cross-sectional nature of our study, we are not able to investigate reciprocal patterns of intergenerational exchanges: to what extent young adults provide support to parents in return for support they have received earlier, and vice versa.

## 4.2 THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

According to the family life course perspective (Elder, 1985; MacMillan & Copher, 2005), the life course is a sequence of social roles or role positions that individuals occupy in the domains of education, work, family, and residence (MacMillan & Copher, 2005). Changes from one social position or role to the other are represented by life course transitions or life events. The life course principle of 'linked lives' (Elder, 1994) draws attention to how family relationships change in response to the individual life course transitions of family members, and how changes in family interactions have an effect on family members' lives. Research provides evidence that transitions in one's life, such as marriage and parenthood (Aquilino, 1997; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998), as well as transitions experienced by one's parents, such as divorce (Aquilino, 1994), have the potential to affect one's relationship with parents.

Individuals who occupy different positions in the life course differ in the amount of their resources and in their potential need for support; life course transitions have the potential to affect individuals' psychological, social and financial resources, as well as resources in terms of time and energy (MacMillan & Copher, 2005). Transitions such as entrance into romantic relationships and parenthood confront young adults with new challenges and behavior expectancies that provide opportunities for learning psychosocial skills in important

domains of adult life and for the promotion of psychosocial maturity (Caspi & Moffitt, 1993). In line with this, research shows that young adults' experiences with first partner relationships lead to personality maturation, manifested in increases in self-esteem and emotional stability (Neyer & Lehnart, 2007). Parents' reports support this picture, as parents describe that their children's psychological independence and maturity increases during young adulthood (Proulx & Helms, 2008). By entering cohabitation and marriage, individuals' social resources are likely to increase, as the size of the family network increases (MacMillan & Copher, 2005). Parenthood, on the other hand, is generally associated with decreases in resources: Raising children is not only costly in terms of money, but also includes high demands on parental time.

Research has provided evidence that exchanges of intergenerational support are, at least partly, dependent on the needs and resources of each generation (Becker, 1974; Bengtson, 2001; Davey & Eggebeen, 1998). Support given in times of need, or received when unneeded, has no positive or even adverse effects on the psychological well-being of each generation (Davey & Eggebeen, 1998). The observation that, over the life course, parents give more resources to their children than vice versa (Lye, 1996; Rossi & Rossi, 1990) is also consistent with such a view. Because, as we stated earlier, young adults' life course transitions are accompanied by changes in young adults' need for support and in their resources or opportunities for providing support, it is plausible to argue that these life course transitions affect the intergenerational exchange relationship. Below, we theorize more specifically how and why a young adult's life course status is related to the level of support exchanged between young adults and their parents.

#### 4.2.1 Residential status

Establishing residential independence is an important marker point of the entry into adulthood. Leaving the parental home reflects a decreasing need for exchanges of emotional support and advice between the generations (Hank, 2007; Kalmijn, 2007). This transition typically leads to an increase in intergenerational geographic distance (Rogerson et al., 1997), which poses an important constraint on routine exchanges of support (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991). Accordingly, this transition is associated with changes in young adults' networks: Important others in young adults' networks, including same-age friends, take over relevant functions, including the provision of emotional support and advice (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Therefore, we hypothesize that young adults who have left the parental home receive less often emotional support (Hypothesis 1.1) and less advice (Hypothesis 1.2) from their parents than those living with their parents.

Regarding support flows from children to parents, young adults' entrance into independent living can lead to a variety of changes. On one hand, the challenges associated with living independently have the potential to enhance personality maturation, leading young adults to become more relevant for the parents as a source of information and emotional support. On the other hand, exchanges of support are likely to decrease, because the increased geographic

distance is an important obstacle for having regular contact. We expect the negative effects of increased geographic distances to prevail; we hypothesize that young adults who have left the parental home give less often emotional support (Hypothesis 1.3) and less advice (Hypothesis 1.4) to their parents than those living with their parents.

In our analyses on financial and instrumental support exchanges, we exclude young adults living at the parental home, as these types of support are typically exchanged between households rather than within households. Therefore, no hypotheses are formulated on the relationship between residential status and these types of support exchanges.

#### 4.2.2 Partnership status

There are two reasons why entering a romantic relationship decreases young adults' need for emotional support and advice from parents. First, this transition is accompanied by new experiences, which foster psychological maturity and increase young adults' knowledge in several important domains of adult life (Neyer & Lehnart, 2007). Although young adults' need for (parental) advice may initially increase when confronted with these new situations, this need for advice may significantly decrease after having successfully dealt with these challenges. Secondly, this life course transition is associated with an important change in network structure, as it is plausible that the partner takes over many of the support functions of the parents. Therefore, young adults in a romantic relationship are expected to be less supported emotionally by their parents than single young adults (Hypothesis 2.1) and to obtain less advice from their parents than single young adults (Hypothesis 2.2). By entering a romantic relationship, social resources within the family include not only own family and friends, but also those of the partner. As a consequence, young adults can be expected to be less dependent on their parents for financial and practical help. Therefore, we hypothesize that young adults in a romantic relationship obtain less financial support (Hypothesis 2.3) and less instrumental support (Hypothesis 2.4) from their parents than single young adults.

When young adults become involved in romantic relationships, their roles and experiences become more similar to those of their parents. This may lead to more understanding of each other's lives, which in return may make young adults' emotional support more relevant for their parents. Therefore, we expect that young adults in romantic relationships provide more emotional support to their parents than single young adults (Hypothesis 2.5). Since these life course transitions increase adult experiences, young adults' life experience can become more relevant for the parents as a source of information. Therefore, we expect young adults in romantic relationships to provide more advice to their parents than single young adults (Hypothesis 2.6).

It is plausible to assume that when young adults have entered into cohabitation and marriage, financial resources are shared. As a consequence, the young adult child has not the only say in decisions to allocate financial resources to parents, but instead these decisions are dependent on the partner's preferences and sentiments as well. Furthermore, as young adults' family network increases, parents with financial needs might compete with a larger

network of individuals who require financial assistance. Therefore, we expect that young adults in romantic relationships provide less financial support to their parents than single young adults (Hypothesis 2.7).

Whereas emotional support and advice can be provided over the telephone or via (e)mail, instrumental support typically involves face-to-face contact with parents. This type of support is generally more time-consuming than emotional support and advice, and is therefore more constrained by the time an individual has available for leisure activities. Spending time with a romantic partner limits young adults' time available to family and friends. The time available for contact with parents further decreases as young adults' family network includes not only the new partner but also the partner's family. Therefore, we expect young adults in romantic relationships to provide less instrumental support to their parents than single young adults (Hypothesis 2.8). In our analyses, we discriminate between single, dating, cohabiting, and married young adults.

#### **4.2.3 Parenthood status**

As mentioned above, parenthood can be considered a resource-depleting role (MacMillan & Copher, 2005). Because it is plausible that the greater the number of children young adults have, the fewer resources they have available and, as a consequence, the more support they need from their parents and the less support they can provide to their parents, our hypotheses and analyses focus on the number of children young adults have in their household. Becoming a parent and raising children is generally associated with high levels of psychological stress and with uncertainties about the best way to care for one's children (McLanahan & Adams, 1987). Having already raised their own children, grandparents can offer emotional support and advice on child rearing and parenting. Therefore, we hypothesize that the more children young adults have the more emotional support (Hypothesis 3.1) and advice (Hypothesis 3.2) they receive from their parents. Because raising children places high demands on parental money and time, we expect that the more children young adults have the more financial support (Hypothesis 3.3) and instrumental support (Hypothesis 3.4) they receive from their parents. Because raising children is costly and time-consuming, it is expected that the more children young adults have, the less emotional support (Hypothesis 3.5), less advice (Hypothesis 3.6), less financial support (Hypothesis 3.7), and less instrumental support (Hypothesis 3.8) they provide to their parents.

#### **4.2.4 Financial status**

Successful completion of the transition from financial dependence to independence is another important hallmark of the entry into adulthood. Young adults' increasing financial resources will decrease their need for monetary assistance. Therefore, we hypothesize that young adults with a higher income are less likely to receive financial support from their parents than those with a lower income (Hypothesis 4.1). Because children with higher incomes

may be able to purchase substitutes for unpaid work (e.g., by hiring nannies or housekeepers), we expect that young adults with a higher income are less likely to receive these types of instrumental support from their parents than those with a lower income (Hypothesis 4.2). Along a similar vein, emotional help and advice can be provided by family and friends as well as by trained professionals (such as psychologists and psychotherapists), with the latter services being more affordable for individuals with higher incomes; therefore, we hypothesize that young adults with a higher income are less likely to receive emotional support (Hypothesis 4.3) and advice (Hypothesis 4.4) from their parents than those with a lower income.

Although financial resources of young adults are generally smaller than those of their parents and financial support from children to parents is generally low (Kohli & Kühnemund, 2001; Rossi & Rossi, 1990), yet the opportunities of children to support their parents financially increase in young adulthood, which may be significant if parents are in financial need. Therefore, we hypothesize that young adults with a higher income are more likely to provide financial assistance to their parents than those with a lower income (Hypothesis 4.5). It can be assumed that young adults make trade-offs between financial and time-related resources when providing support to parents: Lower-income young adults are generally less able to provide financial help to their parents and might opt instead to offer other types of support, whereas young adults with higher incomes might substitute time-related transfers with financial assistance (Couch, Daley, & Wolf, 1999). Hence, we expect that young adults with a higher income are less likely to provide instrumental support to their parents than those with a lower income (Hypothesis 4.6). Although financial support to parents might be perceived much less an alternative to exchanges of emotional support and advice, we nevertheless test the hypotheses that young adults with a higher income are less likely to provide emotional support (Hypothesis 4.7) and advice (Hypothesis 4.8) to their parents than those with a lower income. In our analyses, we distinguish between (college) students and non-students, because parents are generally motivated to invest in their children's (college) education (Aquilino, 2005).

#### 4.2.5 Control variables

We include several background characteristics of the child found to be related to both support exchanges and life course status, such as the young adult's age (Rossi & Rossi, 1990), gender (Aquilino, 1997; Rossi & Rossi, 1990), level of education (Eggebeen, 2005), and number of siblings (Rossi & Rossi, 1990). In addition to current partnership status, we also include the young adult's marital history, as divorce has been found to negatively affect support exchanges with parents (Kalmijn, 2007). As exchange of support is a dyadic phenomenon, we also control for characteristics of the parents. Parental divorce and widowhood, in the past shown to be important predictors of intergenerational exchanges of support (Aquilino, 1994; Eggebeen, 1992, 2005; Knijn & Liefbroer, 2006), are included. Further, we control for parents' age, because this is a proxy for parents' physical health, which is generally related to

the need for support. We also include the parents' educational level and their occupational status as important resources (Eggebeen, 2005; Hogan et al., 1993).

### 4.3 METHOD

#### 4.3.1 Data

The data in this study were drawn from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (Dykstra et al., 2005), a large-scale study of family relations in a sample of 8,161 persons aged 18 to 79 and residing in private households in The Netherlands. The data were collected between 2002 and 2004; information was obtained through computer-assisted personal interviews. The overall response rate was 45%, which is about average for family studies in The Netherlands (Dykstra et al., 2005). From this total sample, we selected all individuals between 18 and 34 years old (25.2% of the total sample) with at least one (biological) parent (98.3% of the young adult sample). The resulting sample included 2,022 young adults (801 men, 1,221 women), 1,952 with a living mother and 1,805 with a living father. In 1,737 cases (84.4%), both parents were alive. In our analyses on financial and instrumental support exchanges, we included only those young adults who lived independently from their parents ( $N = 1,810$ ; 89.5% of the young adult sample). In our sample, young adult men, young adults living in single households, and young adults living with parents were underrepresented; in the descriptive analyses, sample weights were used to make the sample representative of the Dutch population of young adults.

#### 4.3.2 Measures

*Dependent variables.* We distinguished between four types of support: emotional support, advice, financial support, and instrumental support. *Emotional support received from parents* was measured by asking respondents to indicate how often their mother respectively their father had shown interest in their personal life during the last three months. Answers were on a three-point scale (0 = not, 1 = once or twice, 2 = frequently). For *emotional support provided to parents*, the same question was asked about the provision of this kind of support to each parent. Answering categories were 0 = not, 1 = once or twice, 2 = frequently.

*Advice received from parents* was measured by asking respondents how often they had received counsel or personal advice from their mother respectively their father during the last three months. Answers were on a three-point scale (0 = not, 1 = once or twice, 2 = frequently). For *advice provided to parents*, the same question was asked about the provision of this kind of support to each parent; answering categories were 0 = not, 1 = once or twice, 2 = frequently.

For *financial support received from parents*, respondents were asked whether they had received a substantial amount of money or a larger gift in kind from their mother respec-

tively their father during the last twelve months (0 = *no financial support received*, 1 = *financial support received*). For *financial support provided to parents*, the same question was asked about the provision of financial aid to their mother respectively their father during the last twelve months (0 = *no financial support provided*, 1 = *financial support provided*). In case where parents lived together and shared the same household, it was assumed that parents pooled their financial resources. Therefore, if young adults reported having received financial support from their mother, they were ‘automatically’ coded as having received support from their father as well, and vice versa. The same procedure was used when measuring financial support that is provided to parents living together.

*Instrumental support received from parents* was measured with three questions: Respondents were asked to indicate how often they had received support from their mother respectively their father during the last three months concerning (a) practical matters (e.g., chores in and around the house, lending things, transportation, moving things), regarding (b) housework (e.g., preparing meals, cleaning, grocery-shopping, doing laundry), and for (c) taking care of children (e.g., babysitting, care, bringing and fetching). Answering categories were 0 = *not*, 1 = *once or twice*, 2 = *frequently*. Following practice in previous research (Eggebeen, 2005; Voorpostel & Van der Lippe, 2007), a dummy variable was constructed, with 1 = *any of these three types of instrumental support was received at least once* and 0 = *no instrumental support received*. For *instrumental support provided to parents*, the same questions were asked about the provision of this kind of support to mother and father. Again, scores were dichotomized whereby 1 = *any of these three types of instrumental support was provided at least once* and 0 = *no instrumental support provided*.

*Independent variables.* For young adults’ *residential status*, a dummy variable was constructed indicating whether young adults lived independently from their parents (0 = *living with parents*, 1 = *living independently*). To measure *partnership status*, three dummy variables were constructed indicating whether respondents had a partner (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*), whether they lived together with that partner (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*) and whether they were married (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*). On the basis of these variables, four groups were defined: (a) singles, (b) those dating, (c) those cohabiting, and (d) those married. For *parenthood status*, we included the number of children in the young adults’ household. Regarding *financial status*, we distinguished between (college) students and non-students; young adults were defined as students who received most of their earnings from student grants. For non-students, four income groups were distinguished; their average monthly income was computed based on their earnings from employment and welfare benefits. On the basis of this information, five categories were constructed: (a) (college) students, (b) non-students with an income lower than or equal to € 1,000, (c) non-students, income higher than € 1,000 but lower than or equal to € 1,500, (d) non-students, income higher than € 1,500 but lower than or equal to € 2,000, and (e) non-students, income higher than € 2,000. The highest income category was used as the reference category.

*Control variables.* In our analyses, *gender* (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*) of the respondents was included, as well as *age of the respondents* and *of their parents* (both in years), and respon-

dents' *number of living siblings*. Respondents reported on their own and their parents' completed level of *education*. To get an appropriate interval scale, we applied a standard recoding procedure (De Graaf et al., 2000) by transforming the original categories into a new variable defined by the approximate number of years of education followed. Young adults' *prior divorce* indicated whether respondents were ever divorced in the past (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*), regardless of their current partnership status. *Parents' marital status* was defined as: (a) parents living together, (b) separated and/or divorced parents, currently single, (c) separated and/or divorced parents, currently remarried, (d) widowed parents, currently single, (e) widowed parents, currently remarried. Furthermore, *parents' occupational status* was measured by the International Socioeconomic Index of Occupational Status developed by Ganzeboom, De Graaf, and Treiman (1992). Higher values represented higher socioeconomic status of the occupation; if both parents lived together and worked the higher status occupation was used. Means and standard deviations of the independent and control variables are presented in Table 4.1. Frequencies of missing data were low (ranging from 0 to 2%).

### 4.3.3 Method of analysis

Different methods of regression analysis are chosen, depending on the scale of the dependent variables. For emotional support and advice, multinomial logistic regression models were estimated. Relative risk ratios (*rrr*) are reported, which reflect the change in the likelihood of being in the comparison category versus the baseline category associated with a one unit change in the independent variable. Risk ratios higher than 1 indicate that the comparison category is more likely than the baseline category. In all models, the baseline category is *no support*; the comparison categories are respectively *once or twice* and *frequently*. For financial and instrumental support, binary logistic regression analyses were conducted; the baseline category is *no support*.

## 4.4 RESULTS

### 4.4.1 Descriptive results

Analyses revealed that 82.2% of the young adults received frequent emotional support from their mothers, 13.0% received this type of support once or twice, and 4.8% received no support. 68.6% of young adults received frequent emotional support from their fathers, 21.4% once or twice, and 9.8% received no support. 71.8% of young adults gave frequent emotional support to their mothers, 22.4% once or twice, and 5.8% never; 61.0% of young adults provided frequent emotional support to their fathers, 28.6% once or twice, and 10.4% never. Analyses on exchanges of advice showed that 48.1% of young adults received advice from their mothers frequently, 37.2% once or twice, and 14.7% none; 39.9% of young adults received frequent advice from their fathers, 39.9% once or twice, and 20.2% never. Exchanges of advice

**Table 4.1** Descriptive information on child and parent characteristics

Variables	M	SD
<i>Child's characteristics (N = 2,022<sup>a</sup>)</i>		
Age (years)	26.67	5.03
Gender		
Male	.50	
Female	.50	
N of living siblings	2.09	1.73
Education (years)	12.65	2.80
Prior divorce (1 = yes)	.03	
Residential status		
Living with parent(s)	.28	
Living independently	.72	
Partnership status		
Single	.37	
Dating	.16	
Cohabiting	.21	
Married	.26	
Parenthood status		
N of children in the household	.44	.84
Employment/financial status		
Non-student; > € 2,000	.09	
Non-student; ≤ € 2,000 - > € 1,500	.14	
Non-student; ≤ € 1,500 - > € 1,000	.26	
Non-student; ≤ € 1,000	.30	
Student	.21	
Parents living		
Both	.88	
Only mother	.09	
Only father	.03	
<i>Mother's characteristics (N = 1,952<sup>a</sup>)</i>		
Age (years)	54.36	6.99
Education (years)	10.62	2.97
Occupational status	46.74	18.84
Marital status		
Live with child's father	.76	
Divorced, single	.09	
Divorced, remarried	.06	
Widowed, single	.07	
Widowed, remarried	.02	
<i>Father's characteristics (N = 1,805<sup>a</sup>)</i>		
Age (years)	56.59	7.12
Education (years)	11.53	3.62
Occupational status	51.09	16.24
Marital status		
Live with child's mother	.81	
Divorced, single	.05	
Divorced, remarried	.10	
Widowed, single	.02	
Widowed, remarried	.02	

Note: SDs are given for continuous variables only. Data are weighted.

<sup>a</sup>Unweighted.

to parents were less frequent, but still on a high level: 23.1% of young adults provided frequent advice to their mothers, 48.9% once or twice, and 28.0% never; 17.4% of young adults gave advice to their fathers frequently, 45.0% once or twice, and 37.6% never.

Regarding financial support, 31.0% of young adults received financial support from their mothers, while 69.0% got no financial help. 31.4% of young adults received financial support from their fathers, 68.6% received no financial aid. Financial transfers from children to parents were rather scarce: 7.1% of young adults gave financial assistance to their mothers, 92.9% provided no financial help to their mothers; 5.7% of young adults gave financial support to their fathers, 94.3% gave no financial assistance to their fathers. For instrumental help, 69.4% of young adults reported having received this kind of help at least once from their mothers, while 30.6% received no instrumental help; 63.5% of young adults received instrumental support from their fathers at least once, while 36.5% of young adults got no instrumental help from their fathers. Frequencies of instrumental support from children to parents were relatively similar: 65.5% of young adults provided instrumental help to their mothers, while 34.5% did not provide this type of support; 54.3% of young adults gave instrumental help to their fathers, while 45.7% gave no instrumental help.

#### 4.4.2 Intergenerational exchanges of emotional support

Regression analyses of different types of intergenerational support are reported in Tables 4.2 – 4.4. Our analyses did not differentiate between sons and daughters. In additional analyses, we verified that relationships between young adults' life course status and intergenerational support were not significantly different for sons and daughters.

Table 4.2 shows the results for intergenerational exchanges of emotional support. Estimates of control variables indicated that young adult daughters were more likely to receive frequent support from their mother and were also more likely to give frequent support to their mother than sons. Young adults' level of education was positively associated with providing frequent support to their mother, and with receiving frequent support from and providing frequent support to their father. Young adults from larger families were less likely to receive emotional support from and to provide emotional support to their father than did young adults from smaller families. Young adults who were ever divorced were less likely to receive emotional support from their fathers than did young adults who had not divorced; divorced young adults were less likely to provide support to their parents. Highly educated mothers were more likely to support their children frequently than less highly educated mothers; highly educated parents were more likely to receive frequent support from their children than less highly educated parents. Young adults were more likely to receive emotional support from parents with higher occupational status than from parents with lower status. Young adults from divorced families were less likely to receive emotional support from and to provide emotional support to their parents than young adults from intact families. Young adults were less likely to provide frequent support to their widowed, remarried fathers.

**Table 4.2** Multinomial logistic regression results for the exchanges of emotional support between young adults and their parents

Predictor	Emotional support received from parents				Emotional support provided to parents			
	No support from mother		No support from father		No support to mother		No support to father	
	Once or twice	Frequently	Once or twice	Frequently	Once or twice	Frequently	Once or twice	Frequently
<i>Child's characteristics</i>								
Age (years)	1.07 (.05)	1.00 (.04)	.98 (.03)	.95 (.03)	1.00 (.04)	.97 (.04)	1.03 (.03)	1.01 (.03)
Gender (1 = female)	1.00 (.29)	1.89* (.26)	.89 (.22)	1.06 (.20)	1.18 (.26)	2.73*** (.24)	.91 (.21)	1.29 (.20)
Education (years)	.98 (.05)	1.08 (.05)	1.01 (.04)	1.10* (.04)	1.01 (.05)	1.10* (.04)	.98 (.04)	1.08* (.04)
N of living siblings	1.12 (.07)	.98 (.06)	.95 (.05)	.87** (.05)	.94 (.06)	.93 (.06)	.91 (.05)	.89* (.05)
Prior divorce (1 = yes)	.47 (.57)	.72 (.44)	.36* (.49)	.56 (.40)	.35* (.50)	.55 (.41)	.18*** (.51)	.48 (.38)
<i>Parent's characteristics</i>								
Age (years)	.97 (.02)	.99 (.02)	1.03 (.02)	1.03 (.02)	1.01 (.02)	1.04 (.02)	1.00 (.02)	1.01 (.02)
Education (years)	1.04 (.06)	1.13* (.05)	.96 (.04)	1.03 (.03)	1.07 (.05)	1.15** (.05)	1.05 (.03)	1.08* (.03)
Occupational status	1.01 (.01)	1.02* (.01)	1.02** (.01)	1.02** (.01)	1.01 (.01)	1.00 (.01)	1.01 (.01)	1.01 (.01)
<i>Marital status</i>								
Live with other parent <sup>a</sup>								
Divorced, single	.35* (.42)	.38** (.35)	.62 (.33)	.24*** (.31)	.37** (.36)	.41** (.33)	.28*** (.33)	.25*** (.30)
Divorced, remarried	.21** (.57)	.55 (.44)	.35*** (.25)	.15*** (.23)	.38* (.44)	.51 (.39)	.21*** (.25)	.14*** (.23)
Widowed, single	.47 (.46)	.83 (.38)	.86 (.62)	.40 (.60)	.63 (.44)	.99 (.40)	.44 (.89)	1.33 (.76)
Widowed, remarried	.84 (.88)	.87 (.78)	1.88 (.79)	.80 (.77)	1.63 (1.11)	2.12 (1.05)	.56 (.56)	.29* (.55)

Note: Relative risk ratios (standard errors). Baseline category is no emotional support; comparison categories are once or twice respectively frequently.

<sup>a</sup>Reference category.

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001 (two-tailed).

**Table 4.2** Continued

<i>Child's life course status</i>									
Residential status									
Live with parent(s) <sup>a</sup>									
Live independently	.35 (.64)	.39 (.59)	.27* (.54)	.20** (.51)	.33* (.49)	.41 (.47)	.38* (.43)	.39* (.41)	
Partnership status									
Single <sup>a</sup>									
Dating	1.18 (.51)	1.54 (.45)	1.10 (.34)	1.18 (.31)	1.46 (.44)	2.38*	.67 (.32)	1.44 (.29)	
Cohabiting	1.14 (.38)	.84 (.34)	1.02 (.29)	1.07 (.26)	1.30 (.32)	1.14 (.29)	1.21 (.28)	1.47 (.26)	
Married	1.51 (.41)	1.09 (.37)	1.18 (.31)	1.07 (.29)	2.27* (.37)	2.10*	.35 (.30)	1.28 (.29)	
Parenthood status									
N of children in the household	.72* (.16)	.78 (.14)	.91 (.14)	.94 (.13)	.82 (.15)	.76*	.81 (.14)	.88 (.13)	
Financial status									
Non-student; > € 2,000 <sup>a</sup>									
Non-student; ≤ € 2,000 - > € 1,500	.77 (.56)	.85 (.50)	1.30 (.44)	1.31 (.41)	.91 (.48)	.96 (.45)	.89 (.41)	.88 (.38)	
Non-student; ≤ € 1,500 - > € 1,000	1.80 (.54)	1.49 (.49)	1.11 (.39)	1.18 (.37)	1.43 (.45)	1.13 (.43)	1.40 (.38)	.98 (.35)	
Non-student; ≤ € 1,000	.72 (.52)	.57 (.47)	.69 (.40)	.70 (.37)	.82 (.46)	.79 (.43)	1.15 (.39)	.80 (.36)	
Student	.85 (.72)	.74 (.64)	.57 (.52)	.80 (.47)	.60 (.59)	.87 (.54)	.80 (.49)	.91 (.45)	
R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)		.09		.14		.10		.13	
N		1,910		1,751		1,910		1,751	

Note: Relative risk ratios (standard errors). Baseline category is no emotional support; comparison categories are once or twice respectively frequently.

<sup>a</sup>Reference category.

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001 (two-tailed).

**Table 4-3** Multinomial logistic regression results for the exchanges of advice between young adults and their parents

Predictor	Advice received from parents				Advice provided to parents			
	No advice from mother		No advice from father		No advice to mother		No advice to father	
	Once or twice	Frequently	Once or twice	Frequently	Once or twice	Frequently	Once or twice	Frequently
<i>Child's characteristics</i>								
Age (years)	1.00 (.03)	.95 (.03)	.99 (.02)	.95 (.03)	1.01 (.02)	1.02 (.03)	.99 (.02)	1.02 (.03)
Gender (1 = female)	1.40* (.16)	2.32*** (.16)	.84 (.15)	1.04 (.16)	1.53*** (.12)	2.38*** (.15)	.93 (.12)	1.04 (.16)
Education (years)	1.04 (.03)	1.03 (.03)	1.06 (.03)	1.07* (.03)	1.06* (.03)	1.09** (.03)	1.05* (.02)	1.09** (.03)
N of living siblings	.99 (.04)	1.00 (.04)	.96 (.04)	.98 (.05)	1.02 (.04)	.99 (.04)	.95 (.04)	.92 (.05)
Prior divorce (1 = yes)	.54 (.35)	1.02 (.33)	.41* (.39)	1.12 (.35)	.92 (.31)	1.34 (.33)	1.16 (.31)	1.09 (.42)
<i>Parent's characteristics</i>								
Age (years)	.98 (.01)	.99 (.01)	.98 (.01)	.98 (.01)	1.00 (.01)	1.00 (.01)	1.01 (.01)	1.01 (.02)
Education (years)	1.07* (.03)	1.10** (.03)	1.00 (.02)	1.03 (.03)	1.06* (.02)	1.06* (.03)	.98 (.02)	.98 (.03)
Occupational status	1.01 (.01)	1.01* (.01)	1.01 (.01)	1.02** (.01)	1.00 (.00)	1.00 (.01)	1.00 (.00)	1.00 (.01)
<i>Marital status</i>								
Live with other parent <sup>a</sup>								
Divorced, single	.59* (.25)	.60* (.24)	.31*** (.26)	.31*** (.28)	.97 (.21)	1.55 (.24)	.72 (.23)	1.04 (.30)
Divorced, remarried	.93 (.32)	1.20 (.32)	.30*** (.20)	.22*** (.22)	.80 (.25)	1.35 (.28)	.43*** (.18)	.48** (.26)
Widowed, single	1.32 (.27)	1.14 (.27)	.75 (.48)	1.10 (.48)	1.37 (.25)	3.15*** (.27)	1.45 (.47)	3.04* (.51)
Widowed, remarried	1.33 (.54)	1.42 (.54)	.55 (.45)	.50 (.49)	1.02 (.45)	1.79 (.48)	.55 (.42)	1.27 (.46)

Note: Relative risk ratios (standard errors). Baseline category is no advice; comparison categories are once or twice respectively frequently.

<sup>a</sup>Reference category.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001 (two-tailed).

**Table 4.3** Continued

<i>Child's life course status</i>									
Residential status									
Live with parent(s) <sup>a</sup>									
Live independently	.28** (.44)	.22*** (.43)	.28** (.41)	.17*** (.41)	.72 (.21)	.80 (.26)	.74 (.21)	.50* (.27)	
Partnership status									
Single <sup>a</sup>									
Dating	1.42 (.28)	1.09 (.27)	.84 (.24)	.77 (.24)	1.04 (.18)	1.11 (.21)	.95 (.17)	1.16 (.23)	
Cohabiting	.93 (.21)	.58** (.21)	.83 (.20)	.72 (.21)	1.15 (.17)	1.32 (.19)	1.26 (.16)	1.43 (.21)	
Married	.78 (.23)	.54** (.23)	.63* (.22)	.60* (.23)	1.23 (.19)	1.28 (.22)	1.01 (.18)	1.23 (.24)	
Parenthood status									
N of children in the household	1.01 (.10)	.83 (.10)	.99 (.09)	.85 (.11)	.92 (.09)	.80* (.10)	1.05 (.09)	.98 (.11)	
Financial status									
Non-student; > € 2,000 <sup>a</sup>									
Non-student; ≤ € 2,000 - > € 1,500	1.01 (.27)	1.04 (.27)	.73 (.28)	.89 (.29)	1.02 (.23)	1.08 (.27)	.94 (.22)	.98 (.28)	
Non-student; ≤ € 1,500 - > € 1,000	1.27 (.26)	.90 (.26)	.77 (.26)	.53* (.27)	.93 (.21)	.85 (.26)	.99 (.21)	.67 (.27)	
Non-student; ≤ € 1,000	1.01 (.27)	1.00 (.27)	.71 (.27)	.63 (.29)	.79 (.23)	1.01 (.27)	.69 (.22)	.78 (.28)	
Student	1.04 (.39)	.84 (.39)	.62 (.36)	.53 (.37)	.89 (.28)	1.32 (.33)	.97 (.27)	1.17 (.35)	
R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)		.12		.15		.06		.06	
N		1,910		1,751		1,910		1,751	

Note: Relative risk ratios (standard errors). Baseline category is no advice; comparison categories are once or twice respectively frequently.

<sup>a</sup>Reference category.

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001 (two-tailed).

In line with our hypothesis, we found that young adults who had left the parental home were less likely to receive emotional support from their father than young adults living at the parental home; no such effects were found for emotional support received from mothers. Furthermore, young adults who lived independently were less likely to provide support to their parents. In line with our hypotheses on partnership status, dating and married young adults were more likely to provide support to their mothers than did single young adults. Contrary to our expectations, the greater the number of children young adults had, the less emotional support they received from their mothers. Consistent with our expectations, young adults with more children were less likely to give frequent support to their mother than young adults with fewer children. No relationship was found between young adults' financial status and exchanges of emotional support.

#### 4.4.3 Intergenerational exchanges of advice

Results presented in Table 4.3 revealed that young adult daughters were more likely than sons to get advice from as well as to provide advice to their mother. Highly educated young adults were more likely to receive advice from their father and were also more likely to give advice to their parents than did less highly educated young adults. Young adults who were ever divorced were less likely to receive advice from their fathers than did young adults who had not divorced. Young adults were more likely to receive advice from and provide advice to highly educated mothers compared to less highly educated mothers. Young adults were more likely to get frequent advice from parents with higher occupational status than from parents with lower status. Young adults were less likely to receive advice from divorced mothers living alone; young adults were less likely to get advice from divorced fathers, whether the latter were currently single or remarried. Young adults were less likely to provide advice to their father when the latter was divorced and remarried; young adults were more likely to give frequent advice to widowed parents living alone.

In accordance with our hypothesis, young adults who lived independently were less likely to receive advice from both their parents than did young adults living at the parental home; young adults living independently were less likely to provide frequent advice to their father than did young adults living at the parental home. In line with our expectations, cohabiting and married young adults were less likely to receive frequent advice from their mother than single young adults; married young adults were less likely to receive advice from their father than single young adults. Contrary to our hypotheses, we found no relationship between young adults' partnership status and giving advice to parents. As expected, young adults with more children were less likely to give frequent advice to their mother than young adults with fewer children. No evidence was found in favor of our hypothesis that young adults with a higher income are less likely to provide advice to their parents.

#### 4.4.4 Intergenerational exchanges of financial support

In Table 4.4, the results of the regression analyses are given for financial and instrumental support. Estimates of control variables indicated that the probability of receiving financial help from parents decreased with young adults' age. Young adults from larger families were less likely to receive financial support from their parents than did young adults from smaller families. The likelihood of getting financial support increased with parents' age, with father's education, and with parents' occupational status. Young adults were less likely to receive financial support from their mother when the latter was divorced and currently single; divorced fathers who had since remarried provided less financial help to their children. Young adults were more likely to support their mother financially when the latter was divorced and remarried; in contrast, divorced and remarried fathers were less likely to be supported financially by their young adult children. The likelihood of getting financial help from mother was higher when the latter was widowed and currently remarried.

In accordance with our hypothesis on partnership status, we found that cohabiting young adults were less likely to give financial help to their mother than did single young adults. Regarding parenthood status, the likelihood of providing financial assistance to their mother decreased with the number of children young adults had, which was in line with our expectations. Regarding financial status, students were more likely to be subsidized by their parents than non-students with high incomes. Among the non-students, those with lower incomes were more likely to be supported by their parents. It has been suggested that children with fewer resources receive more financial assistance from parents because they provide more instrumental support to parents (Kalmijn, 2005); additional analyses in which we controlled for exchanges of instrumental support did, however, not change the original result.

Limited support was found for our expectation that financial support flows to parents are dependent on children's financial status: Young adults with an income between € 1,000 and € 1,500 were less likely to help their mothers than did young adults with an income higher than € 2,500.

#### 4.4.5 Intergenerational exchanges of instrumental support

Table 4.4 reveals that the likelihood of getting instrumental help from their mother decreased with young adults' age. Daughters were more likely than sons to receive instrumental help from their mother; daughters were less likely to assist their fathers than sons. Young adults from larger families were less likely to receive instrumental support from their parents and less likely to provide instrumental help to their father than did young adults from smaller families. Young adults were less likely to receive instrumental support from divorced mothers living alone. Young adults from divorced families were less likely to receive instrumental help from and provide instrumental support to their father, whether the latter was currently single or remarried. In line with our hypothesis, cohabiting and married young adults were less likely to give instrumental support to their father than single young adults. Young adults

**Table 4.4** Binary logistic regression results for the exchanges of financial and instrumental support between young adults and their parents

Predictor	Financial support received from parents		Financial support provided to parents		Instrumental support received from parents		Instrumental support provided to parents	
	No support from mother vs. support	No support from father vs. support	No support to mother vs. support	No support to father vs. support	No support from mother vs. support	No support from father vs. support	No support to mother vs. support	No support to father vs. support
<i>Child's characteristics</i>								
Age (years)	.94** (.02)	.95* (.02)	.99 (.04)	1.05 (.04)	.95** (.02)	1.02 (.02)	.97 (.02)	.98 (.02)
Gender (1 = female)	1.21 (.13)	1.23 (.13)	1.10 (.21)	.81 (.25)	1.51*** (.12)	1.16 (.13)	.91 (.12)	.46*** (.12)
Education (years)	1.05 (.03)	1.05 (.03)	.98 (.04)	.96 (.05)	1.00 (.02)	1.03 (.03)	.98 (.02)	1.00 (.02)
N of living siblings	.91* (.04)	.88** (.05)	1.06 (.06)	1.07 (.08)	.82*** (.04)	.79*** (.04)	.95 (.03)	.93* (.04)
Prior divorce (1 = yes)	.87 (.31)	.73 (.36)	.99 (.50)	1.71 (.57)	.87 (.28)	1.10 (.34)	.94 (.26)	.88 (.30)
<i>Parent's characteristics</i>								
Age (years)	1.03** (.01)	1.03* (.01)	1.00 (.02)	.98 (.02)	1.01 (.01)	.98 (.01)	1.01 (.01)	1.00 (.01)
Education (years)	1.04 (.02)	1.04* (.02)	.96 (.04)	.99 (.04)	1.03 (.02)	.99 (.02)	1.01 (.02)	.98 (.02)
Occupational status	1.02*** (.00)	1.02*** (.01)	1.00 (.01)	1.01 (.01)	1.00 (.00)	1.00 (.01)	1.00 (.00)	1.00 (.00)
Marital status								
Live with other parent <sup>a</sup>								
Divorced, single	.59* (.23)	.78 (.26)	1.42 (.34)	.59 (.54)	.57** (.20)	.30*** (.23)	.87 (.19)	.43*** (.23)
Divorced, remarried	1.16 (.24)	.67* (.20)	3.01*** (.33)	.30* (.53)	.80 (.23)	.19*** (.18)	.74 (.22)	.30*** (.18)
Widowed, single	1.11 (.23)	1.14 (.41)	1.62 (.37)	.63 (1.04)	.70 (.21)	.62 (.39)	1.13 (.21)	1.61 (.40)
Widowed, remarried	2.45* (.38)	1.34 (.41)	1.60 (.64)	1.47 (.64)	1.85 (.45)	.47 (.39)	1.39 (.39)	.64 (.39)

Note: Relative risk ratios (standard errors). Baseline category is no support. Young adults living with parents are excluded.

<sup>a</sup>Reference category.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed).

**Table 4.4** Continued

<i>Child's life course status</i>																
Partnership status																
Single <sup>a</sup>																
Dating	1.03	(.19)	1.00	(.20)	1.07	(.29)	1.51	(.34)	1.25	(.20)	.89	(.20)	1.36	(.20)	1.06	(.19)
Cohabiting	.99	(.16)	1.00	(.16)	.57*	(.27)	1.02	(.31)	.88	(.15)	1.04	(.16)	.86	(.15)	.73*	(.15)
Married	1.07	(.18)	1.12	(.19)	.79	(.30)	.88	(.38)	1.19	(.18)	.92	(.19)	.78	(.17)	.59**	(.17)
Parenthood status																
N of children in the household	.85	(.09)	.85	(.10)	.64*	(.18)	.77	(.20)	1.66***	(.09)	1.25*	(.09)	.96	(.07)	1.11	(.08)
Financial status																
Non-student; > € 2,000 <sup>a</sup>																
Non-student; ≤ € 2,000 - > € 1,500	1.42	(.22)	1.27	(.22)	.95	(.34)	1.19	(.39)	1.30	(.21)	1.03	(.22)	1.33	(.20)	.97	(.21)
Non-student; ≤ € 1,500 - > € 1,000	1.84**	(.21)	1.53*	(.21)	.49*	(.34)	.66	(.41)	1.21	(.20)	1.10	(.21)	1.39	(.19)	.92	(.20)
Non-student; ≤ € 1,000	1.58*	(.23)	1.44	(.23)	.70	(.36)	.85	(.43)	1.11	(.21)	.89	(.22)	1.10	(.20)	.83	(.21)
Student	4.69***	(.30)	3.65***	(.30)	.56	(.47)	1.80	(.51)	1.44	(.29)	1.42	(.30)	1.71	(.29)	1.41	(.29)
R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	.11		.10		.02		.02		.02		.08		.12		.03	
N	1,680		1,539		1,680		1,539		1,680		1,539		1,680		1,539	

Note: Relative risk ratios (standard errors). Baseline category is no support. Young adults living with parents are excluded.

<sup>a</sup>Reference category.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001 (two-tailed).

with more children were more likely to receive instrumental assistance from their parents than young adults with fewer children. No relationship was found between young adults' financial status and exchanges of instrumental help.

## 4.5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

An important general finding of this study is that the young adults and their parents in our sample were an important source of support for each other. This observation is consistent with results from previous research (Aquilino, 2005; Eggebeen, 2005; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). The most frequent type of intergenerational support was emotional, followed by instrumental support, advice, and financial support. Overall, support transfers were more likely to flow from parents to young adults than in the reverse direction; this applied in particular for the exchange of financial support and advice. Previous research (Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1992; Kohli & Kunemund, 2001; Spitze & Logan, 1992) has shown that such asymmetrical patterns are not confined to this period of the family life course. In most phases of the family life course more support flows from parents to their children than vice versa; at least until parents are near the end of life, when it is common that their children provide support and care to their dependent elders (Klein Ikkink et al., 1999).

Main purpose of our study was to investigate the relationship between young adults' life course status and intergenerational support exchanges. We discuss our findings in the following order. First, we consider the relationship between young adults' life course status and the support that young adults receive from their parents. Second, we discuss the relationship between young adults' life course and the support that young adults provide to their parents.

### 4.5.1 Life course status and support from parents to young adult children

We theorized that young adults receive less support from parents after having completed important life course transitions such as leaving the parental home, union formation and attaining financial independence; these hypotheses were partly supported by our study. Our findings indicate that after young adults have left the parental home they receive less frequent emotional help from their father and less frequent advice from both their parents. Furthermore, cohabiting and married young adults received less advice from their parents than did single young adults. These results can be explained by the fact that transitions such as leaving the parental home, cohabiting, and marriage are associated with important changes in network structure (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Leaving the parental home leads to increased geographical distance, which enlarges costs – in terms of time and money – and therefore impedes interactions with parents (Eggebeen, 2005; Kalmijn, 2007). Additionally, other persons in young adults' networks, in particular the partner, take over many of the support functions of the parents, which reduces the need for parental support. When young

adults had experienced a divorce, exchanges of emotional support with parents were likely to decrease, which is in line with earlier findings (Kalmijn, 2007).

Young adults who were involved in (college) education were generally subsidized by their parents: Parents appeared to be motivated to invest in their children's human capital development, which is in line with earlier research (Aquilino, 2005). Whether young adults who are not involved in education receive financial support from their parents, appeared to be dependent on their financial need: Young adults with fewer financial resources were more likely to get financial support from their parents than young adults with greater resources.

We hypothesized that parenthood leads young adults to receive more support from their parents; our hypotheses were partly confirmed. The greater the number of children young adults had, the more instrumental support (childcare, practical support, household assistance) they received from their parents, which is in line with previous findings (Hogan et al., 1993). As dual-earnership and sole-parent households have risen, in particular among the younger generations, (grand)parents enable young adults to hold paid jobs by providing these kinds of support. No relationship was found between young adults' parenthood and advice and financial help from parents. In contrast to our expectations, we found that the greater the number of children young adults had, the less emotional support they received from their mothers. These results suggest that, whereas functional contact with parents typically increases as young adults transition into parenthood, there is a concomitant decrease in the intimate moments that parents and their young adult children have together. This finding is in line with earlier research which shows that this transition leads to less affective closeness and more conflicts between children and parents (Aquilino, 1997, 1999; Bucx & Van Wel, 2008; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Probably, the decrease in intergenerational closeness results from young adults' decreased time and energy available for having intimate contact with parents and from difficulties adapting to the stressful demands that are associated with parenthood, which also have been found to have a negative effect on the couples' relationship quality and intimacy (Demo & Cox, 2000). Furthermore, it has been suggested that the transition to parenthood leads individuals to put their own needs for intimacy aside temporarily and to accept less intimate contact with relevant others in order to meet the needs of their children (Ambert, 1992).

In our study, only few differences in exchange of intergenerational support were found between cohabiting and married young adults. This finding contrasts with American results found by Eggebeen (2005), in which cohabiting young adults were observed to receive less support from their parents than married young adults, probably because of having more strained intergenerational relationships. The data used in the latter research were, however, from 1987/1988. In the meantime, cohabitation has become a relatively normal part of the life course of young adults, both in the United States (Fields & Casper, 2001) and in The Netherlands (Latten, 2004). Our findings may indicate that generational differences in opinion on cohabiting relationships have decreased in the past decades. Differences between our own results and those of Eggebeen (2005) might also reflect cultural differences between The Netherlands and the United States regarding attitudes towards unmarried cohabitation.

#### 4.5.2 Life course status and support from young adult children to parents

Our hypotheses on the relationship between young adults' life course and support to parents received mixed support. After young adults had left the parental home, they were less inclined to give emotional support to their parents and advice to their father, which can be explained by the increased geographic constraints. As expected, dating and married young adults gave more emotional support to their mothers than did single young adults. Cohabiting young adults gave less financial help to their mothers; cohabiting and married young adults were less likely to give instrumental support to their fathers. The latter findings can probably be explained by referring to the role of the partner: It seems plausible that the partner has a say in how to spend a couple's money and how to spend a couple's leisure time. Previous research indicated that respondents' interactions with parents are reduced when the partner has negative sentiments towards the respondents' parents (Bucx, Van Wel, Knijn, & Hagendoorn, 2008). In line with our expectations, the greater the number of children young adults had, the less emotional and financial support they provided to their mother.

Our finding that support transfers from young adult children to their parents were much less dependent on the young adults' life course status compared to support transfers in the other direction, supports the view that intergenerational support exchanges are determined not only by a family member's resources but foremost by the other generation's needs (Hogan et al., 1993). Although young adults' resources generally increase as they move through their twenties and thirties, it is plausible that parents' need for kin support remains relatively limited. The parents in our study were generally in their fifties and sixties; because of changes in life expectancy and increases in health and economic resources, most of these parents are still in good health and have adequate financial resources (Van Solinge, 2006). However, when focusing on the parents' specific living situation, conditions under which parents are supported by their children could be detected, as will become apparent from the next section.

#### 4.5.3 Parents' characteristics associated with intergenerational exchanges of support

Parents' marital status appeared to be an important predictor of exchanges of support. In general, intergenerational exchanges of emotional support, advice, and instrumental support were negatively affected by parents' divorce, and effects were stronger for fathers than for mothers. These results are in line with earlier research (Aquilino, 1994, 1997; Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1992; Kalmijn, 2007). Regarding financial support exchanges, divorced mothers who were currently single and divorced and remarried fathers were less likely to give financial help to their children. Divorced mothers who had remarried were more likely to receive financial support from their children, which can be explained in terms of the greater financial problems that divorced mothers have (Kalmijn & Broese van Groenou, 2005); divorced and remarried fathers were less likely to get financial support. These differential effects of divorce for financial help that young adults provide to mothers and fathers may reflect

fathers' lower investments in their children during marriage (Kalmijn, 2007): These lower investments of fathers in young children lead divorced fathers to receive less support than mothers because of norms of reciprocity.

Widowed mothers who had remarried were more likely to provide financial assistance to their children. This finding can probably be explained by the fact that, after a parent's death, children in financial need have only one parent left to ask for help; remarried mothers generally have greater financial resources than mothers who did not remarry after their spouse's death. Widowed parents, currently single, tended to receive more advice from their children, probably reflecting parents' increased need for this kind of support as they no longer receive support from their partner. Widowed fathers, currently remarried, received less emotional support from their children, which can be explained by the tendency that remarriage leads fathers and children to disengage from each other's lives (Kalmijn, 2007). These results are in line with previous findings (Aquilino, 1994, 1997; Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1992; Eggebeen, 1992, 2005; Kalmijn, 2007). In general, our findings suggest that the support young adults receive and offer is dependent on the parents' life course needs and resources.

#### 4.5.4 Limitations and future research

We inferred effects of life course transitions by comparing individuals who were in different life course statuses. Regarding the future, it is important to validate our cross-sectional findings with longitudinal information; then, changes in patterns of support exchanges due to life course transitions can be examined. Moreover, such an analysis would allow to draw conclusions on the causal relationship between life course status and support exchanged, which was not possible with our cross-sectional data. When interpreting our results, readers should take into account that our study was carried out in The Netherlands, a country with a relatively high-density population. That is, parents and children live relatively close to each other and differences in residential proximity are relatively small. It is not clear to what extent our results can be generalized to countries with different structural constraints.



## CHAPTER 5

# Life course stage in young adulthood and intergenerational congruence in family attitudes

This chapter is co-authored by Quinten Raaijmakers and Frits van Wel (Utrecht University, The Netherlands). A slightly different version of this chapter is forthcoming in the *Journal of Marriage and Family*. An earlier version has been presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dutch Demography Day, October 2007, Utrecht (The Netherlands).



# 5 Life course stage in young adulthood and intergenerational congruence in family attitudes

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the second half of the twentieth century, processes of individualization, secularization, and emancipation in the Western world led to marked changes in attitudes toward family relations (Surkyn & Lesthaege, 2004; Thornton, 1989; Van de Kaa, 1987). There is increasing tolerance of divorce and alternative types of cohabitation (e.g., unmarried and same-gender partners), and more egalitarian gender roles regarding the division of paid and unpaid labor have become more widely accepted and practiced (Bengtson, 2001; Elzinga & Liefbroer, 2007). In line with these changes, marriage rates have declined sharply, while rates of solitary living, unmarried cohabitation, and divorce have increased. Furthermore, women's labor participation has increased steadily in recent decades (Van Wel & Knijn, 2006).

Regarding relations within the extended family, family scholars have suggested that norms of obligation concerning relationships between parents and adult children have weakened in recent decades, and that the basis for contact and support has shifted from moral obligation to choice (Lasch, 1977; Lye, 1996; Silverstein et al., 1997). Empirical evidence of changes in these attitudes is, however, weak. Among family obligations, feelings of obligation between parents and children appear to be strongest; and feelings of obligation toward children are generally stronger than feelings of obligation toward parents (Lye, 1996; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). In general, adult children and their parents feel more obliged to provide each other with companionship and emotional support than to give each other financial and instrumental help (Lye, 1996; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Furthermore, norms of reciprocity play an important role in parent-child relations (Hogan et al., 1993; Lye, 1996).

In the present study, we investigate the degree of congruence between the attitudes of parents and those of their young adult children in two domains of family life: intergenerational relations and intimate partner relationships. Attitudes toward intergenerational relations or intergenerational obligations refer to beliefs about solidarity within the extended family, and include filial obligations and parental obligations. Attitudes regarding intimate partner relationships refer to attitudes and beliefs about partner relationships and nuclear family configurations; they include attitudes toward alternative living arrangements, and attitudes toward more egalitarian gender roles regarding the division of paid and unpaid labor in marriage and cohabitation.

Most prior research has shown a substantial degree of parent-child attitude congruence (Acock & Bengtson, 1978; Glass et al., 1986; Miller & Glass, 1989; Styskal & Sullivan, 1975; Vollebergh et al., 2001). Intergenerational attitude congruence or agreement is recognized as an important aspect of intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991) as well as an

important source of stability in society (Miller & Glass, 1989). Psychological and sociological explanations for correspondence between the worldviews of children and their parents have focused on processes of transmission in which parents and children directly influence each other's attitudes (Bandura, 1977; Miller & Glass, 1989; Vollebergh et al., 2001). Also, indirect types of congruence have been identified: Education and religiosity are transmitted from parents to children, which leads to intergenerational attitude congruence as a by-product (Acock & Bengtson, 1978; Glass et al., 1986).

The present study contributes to the existing literature on intergenerational attitude congruence in two important ways. First, most research on intergenerational congruence has focused on political and religious attitudes (e.g., Acock & Bengtson, 1978; Miller & Glass, 1989; Styskal & Sullivan, 1975; Vollebergh et al., 2001); research on attitude congruence regarding family issues is relatively scarce, with some notable exceptions (De Vries, Kalmijn, & Liefbroer, 2009; Glass et al., 1986; Mangen & Westbrook, 1988). Also, it is unclear to what extent direct and indirect types of intergenerational congruence and transmission apply to family-related attitudes. Therefore, the first aim of this study is to examine direct and indirect types of intergenerational attitude congruence concerning family-related issues.

Secondly, although it is popularly believed that adolescents and young adults distance themselves from their parents and develop radically different opinions, research has shown a considerable degree of attitude congruence between parents and their children in these phases of the family life course (Acock & Bengtson, 1978; Glass et al., 1986; Miller & Glass, 1989; Styskal & Sullivan, 1975; Vollebergh et al., 2001). Nevertheless, it is plausible that the life course transitions that are typical in young adulthood produce elasticity in intergenerational attitude congruence, albeit in a less radical way. Life course transitions such as leaving the parental home, entering romantic partnerships, and family formation create new (family) experiences that might affect young adults' attitudes, thereby increasing or decreasing congruence with parents' attitudes. Compared with attitudes in other domains (e.g., politics, religion), attitudes toward family issues might be particularly strongly affected by these new experiences because they are more related to daily living. Additionally, life course transitions create new socializing contexts, which may interfere with parental influence. Therefore, our second research question concerns how intergenerational attitude congruence regarding family issues depends on the young adult's life course stage. To address this research question, we draw on the life course perspective on family relations (Elder, 1994; MacMillan & Copher, 2005). Although the main focus of this chapter is on attitude congruence, in additional analyses we investigate whether the strength of attitudes perceived by young adults and their parents depends on the young adult's life course stage, by examining differences in mean scores on intergenerational obligations and partnership attitudes and controlling for the influence of age, education and religiosity.

The present study uses information from a sample of 2,128 dyads of young adults (aged 18 to 34 years) and their parents who participated in a recent large-scale study on family relations in The Netherlands. As in most other Western societies, attitudes toward family-related issues and life styles have changed dramatically in The Netherlands since the 1950s (Social and Cultural Planning Office of The Netherlands, 1998). Because our dataset contains cross-

sectional information, we infer effects of life course transitions from comparisons between young adults differing in their life course stage. The following set of life course stages is compared: living with parents, living independently without a partner, married (or cohabiting) without children, married (or cohabiting) with children.

## 5.2 THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

### 5.2.1 Explaining intergenerational attitude congruence: direct and indirect types of attitude congruence

Theoretical accounts of parent-child attitude congruence have identified two distinct types of intergenerational attitude transmission. First, socialization theories have suggested that parents transmit their cultural orientations directly to their children, and vice versa, via communication processes (Bandura, 1977; Miller & Glass, 1989; Vollebergh et al., 2001). Several mechanisms have been proposed through which such socialization processes occur, including internalization and modeling or imitation (Bandura, 1977; Moen et al., 1997). In traditional approaches to socialization, it is assumed that the effects of parental socialization are especially strong during early childhood (Glass et al., 1986; Miller & Glass, 1989; Vollebergh et al., 2001). Empirical research suggests that intergenerational transmission processes also play a role in adolescence and young adulthood; in these life phases parental influence on children is generally much stronger than children's influence on parents (Glass et al., 1986; Vollebergh et al., 2001).

Besides such direct intergenerational transmission processes, more indirect mechanisms of attitude transmission have been suggested, namely via transmission of parents' education and religiosity (Glass et al., 1986). It is widely acknowledged that educational and religious background affects individuals' attitudes toward a wide range of issues. In general, more highly educated persons have weaker feelings of obligation toward family members (Gans & Silverstein, 2006) and have less traditional attitudes toward cohabitation, marriage (Vollebergh et al., 2001), and gender roles (Moen et al., 1997) as compared with less highly educated persons; religious individuals have stronger feelings of family obligation (Daatland & Herlofson, 2003) and have more traditional attitudes regarding cohabitation, marriage (Cunningham & Thornton, 2005), and gender roles (Thornton, Alwin, & Camburn, 1983) than non-religious individuals. Explanations for these relationships have focused on living conditions and opportunities associated with particular educational and religious backgrounds, which function as frames for the adoption of certain attitudes (Hello, Scheepers, Vermulst, & Gerris, 2004). Additionally, individuals with differing educational and religious backgrounds are socialized within different social groups and contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Kulik, 2002). Because parents give their children access to their social, cultural, and material resources, children are likely to acquire levels of education and religious affiliations similar to those of their parents, leading to high levels of intergenerational attitude congruence as a by-product.

This theoretical overview suggests two types of causal accounts of intergenerational congruence. First, we can expect a direct path to attitude congruence, resulting from direct socialization processes between children and parents, in both the past and the present (Hypothesis 1.1). Secondly, we hypothesize that there is an indirect path to attitude congruence, namely as a by-product of intergenerational transmission of education and religiosity (Hypothesis 1.2). In previous research on intergenerational attitude congruence concerning political and religious issues and gender roles, both types of transmission were found to be valid and complementary (Glass et al., 1986; Vollebergh et al., 2001).

### 5.2.2 Intergenerational attitude congruence and young adults' life course stage

One of the main premises of the life course perspective (Elder, 1994) is that individuals acquire or lose social roles and positions in the domains of work and family as they develop across the life span (MacMillan & Copher, 2005). These changes in roles and positions constitute specific life course transitions. In young adulthood, there is a dense clustering of such life course transitions: In a rather short period, numerous important changes may occur in the lives of young adults, such as leaving the parental home, entering partner relationships, and having children. The family life course perspective includes the concept of 'linked lives' (Elder, 1994); according to this principle, major transitions in the lives of children and parents can change intergenerational relationships. Using this principle as a general framework, we consider more specifically how young adults' life transitions might affect intergenerational attitude congruence.

Regarding the question of whether life course transitions increase or decrease intergenerational attitude congruence, alternative hypotheses can be formulated based on different theories. Socialization theories (Bandura, 1977; Miller & Glass, 1989) suggest that young adults are directly influenced by their parents' attitudes, but also that parents compete with other socialization agents. This line of reasoning suggests that agents of socialization can change throughout the life course as life course transitions produce different socialization contexts. As young adults leave the parental home and enter romantic relationships, intergenerational attitude congruence may decrease: Young adults become socialized into other social groups, such as their partner's social groups and family, whose attitudes may differ from those of their parents. At the same time, interactions between young adults and their parents typically become less frequent as young adults leave the parental home and get married (Bucx et al., 2008), which generally leads to less mutual reinforcement of parents' and children's attitudes. A different picture might emerge for young adults who have entered parenthood: As previous research has shown that parenthood is associated with increased interactions with parents (Bucx et al., 2008) and decreased contact with friends (Munch, McPherson, & Smith-Lovin, 1997), parents may become more important as socializing agents, leading to higher levels of attitude congruence.

Alternatively, based on the intergenerational similarity hypothesis (Aquilino, 1997, 1999; Bengtson & Black, 1973), life course transitions can be expected to increase congruence in the attitudes of young adults and their parents. As young adults move into the same adult roles

their parents have occupied for years (e.g., partner, parent), their experiences become similar to those of their parents, leading to greater understanding and identification. In a related vein, Cunningham (2001) hypothesized that attitudes and behavior learned through early socialization by parents become 'activated' when entering a specific context: When entering parenthood, young adults' attitudes toward childbearing and the division of gender roles may change in the direction of attitudes transmitted by their parents during childhood and adolescence.

In sum, the following alternative hypotheses are formulated. Based on the assumption that life course transitions produce different socialization contexts (Bandura, 1977; Miller & Glass, 1989), intergenerational attitude congruence should decline after young adults have left the parental home and have started cohabiting, but congruence should increase again when young adults enter parenthood. Following this line of reasoning, we hypothesize that attitude congruence is higher for young adults who live with their parents and young adults who live with a partner with children as compared with young adults who live alone and young adults who live with a partner without children (Hypothesis 2.1). Based on the intergenerational similarity hypothesis (Aquilino, 1997, 1999; Bengtson & Black, 1973), attitude congruence between young adults and their parents should increase after young adults have left the parental home, entered into cohabitation or marriage, or become parents themselves. Therefore, our alternative hypothesis states that attitude congruence is lower for young adults who live with their parents as compared with young adults who live alone, young adults who live with a partner without children, and those who live with a partner with children (Hypothesis 2.2). Our hypotheses concern intergenerational congruence that is not produced by congruence of educational and religious background. Nevertheless, we also empirically test whether the intergenerational congruence that is constituted by congruence of education and religiosity is related to young adults' life course stage.

To our knowledge, three studies have examined whether attitude congruence between young adults and their parents is dependent on the young adult's life course: Miller and Glass (1989) did not find any changes in attitude similarity of young adults and their parents over time, whereas Dalhouse and Frideres (1996) found both positive and negative effects of young adults' age on parent-child attitude similarity. Vollebergh and colleagues (2001) found that parents' influence on their children's cultural attitudes decreases during the transition into adulthood.

### 5.2.3 Control variables

In our models, we control for age of both young adults and their parents. Age has been found to affect attitudes (Moen et al., 1997); although the variability in timing of life course transitions has increased in recent decades (Elzinga & Liefbroer, 2007), many life course transitions are still highly correlated with age (Elder, 1994). In additional analyses, we take the gender composition of specific dyads into account: It has often been suggested that, because of same-gender identification processes, attitudinal agreement is greater in same-gender intergenerational pairs than in opposite-gender intergenerational dyads (Acock & Bengtson, 1978; Glass et al., 1986). Furthermore, because mothers have more contact with their children

than fathers, mother-child agreement may be higher than father-child agreement (Acock & Bengtson, 1978). In further additional analyses, we examined differences between young adults in the four different life course stages in mean scores on intergenerational obligations and partnership attitudes as well as differences between their parents in their mean scores, as earlier research found individuals' attitudes to be influenced by life course transitions (Axinn & Thornton, 1993; Cunningham & Thornton, 2005; Jansen & Kalmijn, 2000; Knijn, 1997; Morgan & Waite, 1987).

## 5.3 METHOD

### 5.3.1 Data

The data in this study were drawn from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (Dykstra et al., 2005), a large-scale study of family relations in a sample of 8,161 adults aged 18 to 79 and residing in private households in The Netherlands. The data were collected between 2002 and 2004; information was obtained through computer-assisted personal interviews and self-completion questionnaires. The overall response rate was 45%, which is about average for family studies in The Netherlands (see Dykstra et al., 2005). This sample of respondents is referred to as 'anchor' respondents. In addition, questionnaires were sent to family members of these anchor respondents, including one randomly selected parent and two randomly selected children aged 15 or older. In 68% of the cases, anchor respondents gave permission to send a questionnaire to family members; 72% of these family members completed the questionnaire. The latter group of respondents is referred to as '(survey) alter' respondents.

In our study, the multi-actor structure of the dataset was fully utilized by combining information from two subsamples. The first subsample included parent-child dyads where the anchor respondent was the child and the alter was the parent. For this sample, we selected all respondents between 18 and 34 years old (25.2% of the total sample) who returned the self-completion questionnaire on attitudes (90.0% of the resulting sample) and who had a parent who completed the alter questionnaire (52.4% of the resulting sample); dyads in which the young adult child was experiencing an atypical life course stage (e.g., single parenthood) were excluded (6.6%). The resulting subsample consisted of 906 parent-child dyads. For the second subsample, we included parent-child dyads where the anchor respondent was the parent and the alter was the child. For this sample, we selected all individuals with at least one child between 18 and 34 years of age (30.3% of the total sample). We selected only those dyads in which the parent returned the self-completion questionnaire on attitudes (91.6% of the resulting sample) and in which at least one child aged between 18 and 34 years, selected as a survey alter respondent, completed the alter questionnaire (55.2% of the resulting sample); in cases where information on two young adults within the same family was available, we randomly assigned one to our sample (33.1% of the sample). We excluded dyads in which the young adult was experiencing an atypical life course stage (e.g., single parenthood; 2.3%). The second subsample included 1,222 parent-child dyads. Both subsamples consisted of a

young adult connected to one parent; these subsamples were combined into a total sample of 2,128 parent-child dyads.

Although the multi-actor nature of our dataset provided a unique opportunity to examine the attitudes of parents and children within the same family, a major disadvantage of multi-actor designs is selective alter response. In the data used for our analyses, 52.4% of the alter parents responded, and 55.2% of the alter children. Because the alter response rate is dependent on whether the anchor respondent is willing to give permission to send a questionnaire to the alter respondent, and on whether the alter is willing to fill out the questionnaire, our sample may overrepresent parent-child dyads with positive relationships. Indeed, previous research on the same dataset showed that dyads with poor relationships were underrepresented (Dykstra et al., 2005). In another study using the same dataset, Kalmijn and Liefbroer (2008) used Heckman estimation procedures to correct for selective alter response; their analyses demonstrated that estimates of parental correlates of children's attitudes were not affected by selective alter participation, which suggests little need to correct for selection bias in our analyses of attitude congruence. In our sample, young adult men and young adults living in single households were underrepresented; in the descriptive analyses, weights were used to adjust our sample of young adults to the gender and household composition of the Dutch population of young adults.

### 5.3.2 Measures

*Attitudes.* Young adults' and their parents' attitudes were investigated with four scales. For all scales, statements were evaluated on a five-point Likert scale, varying from 0 = *completely disagree* to 4 = *completely agree*. *Attitudes toward filial obligations* were measured with four items, representing children's obligations toward parents (Hamon & Blieszner, 1990; Seelbach & Sauer, 1977). Examples of these items include: "Children should look after their sick parents" and "Children who live close to their parents should visit them at least once a week". Reliabilities of these items were  $\alpha = .73$  (for young adults) and  $\alpha = .74$  (for their parents). *Attitudes toward parental obligations* were measured with three items (Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988), for example: "Parents should support their adult children if they need it" and "Parents should help their adult children financially if they need it". Internal consistencies were  $\alpha = .76$  (for young adults) and  $\alpha = .77$  (for their parents). *Traditional attitudes toward cohabitation and marriage* were measured with six items representing the extent to which respondents adhere to more traditional living arrangements, for instance: "Men and women should be allowed to live together outside of marriage" and "Two men or two women should be allowed to live together". Items were (re)coded so that they represented favorable attitudes toward traditional forms of cohabitation and intolerance toward alternative forms of cohabitation. Internal consistencies ranged from  $\alpha = .76$  (for young adults) to  $\alpha = .77$  (for their parents). *Traditional gender role attitudes* were measured with three items representing the extent to which respondents adhere to more traditional variants of gender role division, for instance: "It's best to divide tasks and responsibilities in a relationship according to the customs, traditions, and rules that have always been in force." Internal consistencies were acceptable, ranging from  $\alpha = .65$  (for young adults) to  $\alpha = .66$  (for parents).

Concerning the *young adult's life course stage*, the following four groups of young adults were distinguished: (a) living in the parental home (27.9%), (b) living independently, without a partner and without children (25.7%), (c) living together with a partner, without children (22.9%), (d) living together with a partner and with children (23.5%). For the group who lived together with a partner without children, 83.8% lived in unmarried cohabitation, whereas 16.2% were married; for the group living together with a partner and with children, 78.2% were married, and 21.8% were not married.

Parents and children reported on their level of *education*. To construct an appropriate interval scale, we applied a standard recoding procedure (De Graaf et al., 2000) whereby the original categories were transformed into new categories defined by the approximate number of years of education completed. The resulting variable ranged from 6 = *completion of elementary school but not secondary or vocational education* to 21 = *completion of postgraduate education*. *Religiosity* was measured by asking both parents and their children how often they go to church, on a four-point scale ranging from 0 = *never* to 3 = *every week*. Because this variable was skewed, the natural logarithm was used in the regression analyses (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Furthermore, we included *age of young adults* as well as *age of parents* (in years). Frequencies of missing data were generally low (ranging from 0 to 1%).

### 5.3.3 Method of analysis

To answer our research questions, latent variable structural equation modeling techniques were performed, using AMOS software and maximum likelihood estimation procedures (Arbuckle, 2006). This technique has three important advantages over multiple regression that are relevant in view of our research aims. First, it introduces latent variables or constructs measured by multiple indicators, which generally leads to reduced measurement error. Second, our theoretical overview indicated that attitude congruence is the result of two transmission processes: direct transmission from parents to young adults, and indirect transmission via transmission of education and religiosity. Structural equation modeling allowed us to estimate these two types of congruence within one model. Third, it enabled us to test coefficients across multiple between-subject groups, namely young adults in different life course stages.

Our research questions were addressed in two major steps. In the first step, we sought to identify the best-fitting model for the relationships between parents' age, education, religiosity, and attitudes, and young adults' age, education, religiosity, and attitudes, by comparing a series of hierarchically related models; this procedure enabled us to disentangle direct and indirect types of attitude congruence. In the second step, we investigated whether this pattern of relationships was dependent on young adults' life course stage, using a multiple group comparison approach (Byrne, 2001).

Model fit was assessed with the chi-squared statistic ( $\chi^2$ ), which is a significance test of the null hypothesis that the model fits the data perfectly. This test statistic is, however, sensitive to sample size; therefore, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) were also used to assess model fit. For the CFI, values over

.90 indicate good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1995). The RMSEA calculates the standardized residuals that result from fitting a model to the data; RMSEA values below .06 are considered an indication of good model fit, and values between .06 and .08 represent acceptable fit (Byrne, 2001).

**Table 5.1** Correlations, means, and standard deviations among the (indicator) variables for young adults and their parents ( $N = 2,128^a$ )

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	M	SD
<i>Young adults</i>								
1. Age (years)							27.34	4.71
2. Education (years)	.34***						13.34	2.70
3. Religiosity	-.03	.05*					.49	.85
<i>Intergenerational obligations</i>								
4. Attitudes toward filial obligations	-.08***	-.14***	.10***				1.93	.72
5. Attitudes toward parental obligations	-.26***	-.16***	.01	.45***			2.33	.73
<i>Partnership attitudes</i>								
6. Traditional attitudes toward cohabitation and marriage	-.12***	-.18***	.49***	.23***	.13***		.69	.59
7. Traditional attitudes toward gender roles	-.10***	-.21***	.19***	.22***	.17***	.59***	.88	.72
<i>Parents</i>								
1. Age (years)							55.98	6.58
2. Education (years)	-.01						11.87	3.31
3. Religiosity	.13***	-.07***					.93	1.10
<i>Intergenerational obligations</i>								
4. Attitudes toward filial obligations	-.06*	-.14***	.14***				1.66	.73
5. Attitudes toward parental obligations	.15***	-.06*	.03	.25***			2.59	.75
<i>Partnership attitudes</i>								
6. Traditional attitudes toward cohabitation and marriage	.15***	-.22***	.46***	.30***	.11***		1.06	.67
7. Traditional attitudes toward gender roles	.11***	-.25***	.18***	.31***	.12***	.58***	1.11	.76

Note: Variables 4 and 5 are indicator variables for the latent construct of Intergenerational Obligations; variables 6 and 7 are indicator variables for the latent construct of Partnership Attitudes. Data are weighted.

<sup>a</sup>Unweighted.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed).

## 5.4 RESULTS

### 5.4.1 Descriptive results

Correlations, means and standard deviations for all variables are provided in Table 5.1. Table 5.1 shows that both young adults and their parents had moderate filial obligations and moderately strong parental obligations. Additional paired sample t-tests (not shown in the tables) indicated that parental obligations were more strongly endorsed than filial obligations (for young adults:  $t(1, 2,120) = 24.44, p < .001$ ; for parents:  $t(1, 2,112) = 47.67, p < .001$ ). Parents perceived stronger parental obligations than did their young adult children ( $t(1, 2,106) = 11.81, p < .001$ ); filial obligations were more strongly endorsed by young adults than by their parents ( $t(1, 2,108) = 13.18, p < .001$ ). Both young adults and their parents had relatively tolerant views toward cohabitation and marriage and toward egalitarian gender roles. Paired sample t-tests indicated that attitudes toward gender roles were more traditional than attitudes toward alternative living arrangements (for young adults:  $t(1, 2,116) = 14.78, p < .001$ ; for parents:  $t(1, 2,107) = 2.94, p < .01$ ). In general, parents were more traditional than young adults in their views on cohabitation and marriage ( $t(1, 2,098) = 25.05, p < .001$ ) and on gender roles ( $t(1, 2,096) = 11.34, p < .001$ ).

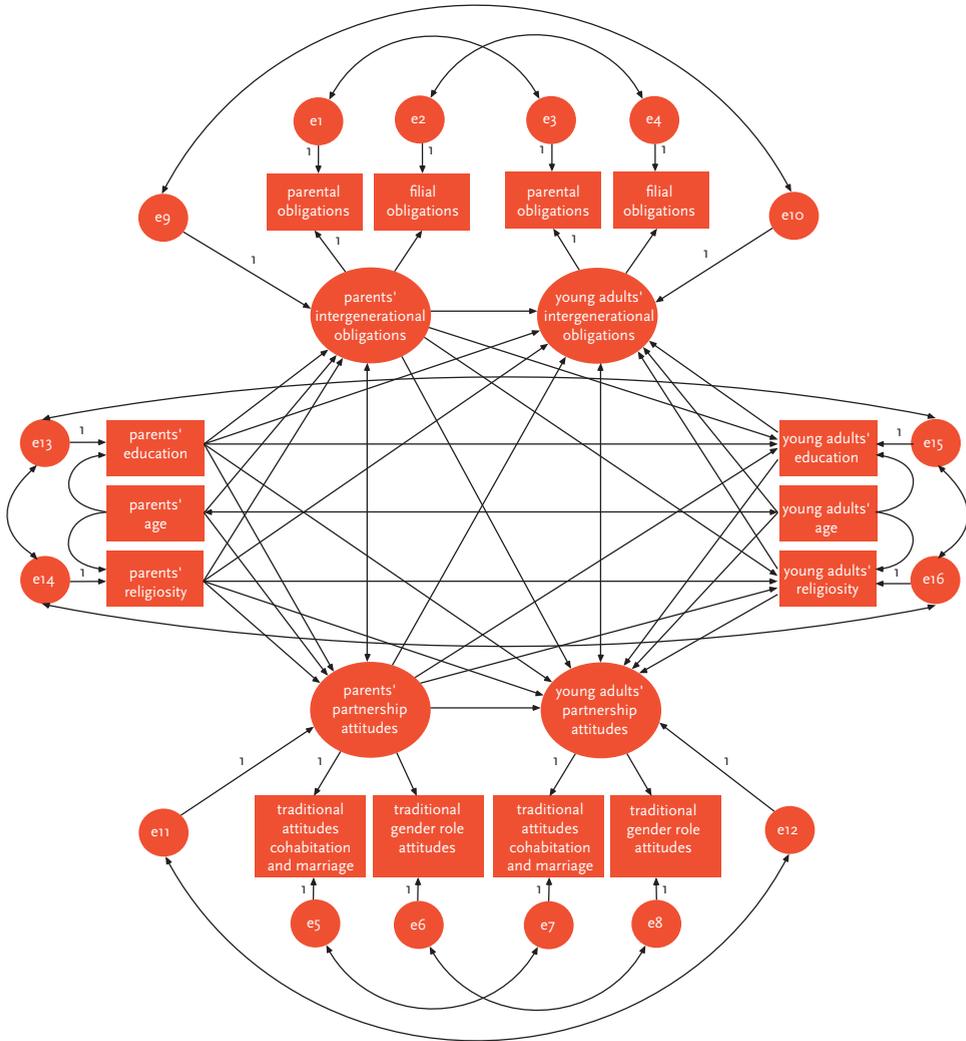
### 5.4.2 Direct and indirect types of attitude congruence

The starting point for our analyses was the model shown in Figure 5.1. The model consisted of a measurement part and a structural part. The measurement part of the model consisted of four latent variables representing intergenerational obligations and partnership attitudes of young adults and their parents. For both young adults and parents, these latent constructs were represented by observed scores on the attitude scales described in section 5.3.2. Given the complexity of the model, the items comprising each attitude scale were combined prior to their use as measured indicators (MacCallum & Austin, 2000): This ‘parcelling’ technique provides important advantages over use of single items as indicators, including more stable parameter estimates, greater reliability, and more optimal variable to sample size ratios (Bandalos, 2002). Covariances were permitted among the latent variables representing young adults’ perceptions of intergenerational obligations and partnership attitudes, as well as among the latent variables representing parents’ perceptions of these obligations and attitudes.

To investigate whether the observed data reflected the hypothesized underlying latent structure, confirmatory factor analyses were performed prior to testing of the full structural equation model, as is generally recommended (Byrne, 2001; Kline, 1998); separate analyses were conducted to assess the attitudes of young adults and those of their parents. Results revealed that model fit was adequate for young adults ( $\chi^2 = 5.186, df = 1, p = .023, CFI = .997, RMSEA = .045$ ), as well as for their parents ( $\chi^2 = 2.473, df = 1, p = .116, CFI = .999, RMSEA = .027$ ).

In the model, covariances were permitted between the measurement errors of each pair of observed variables for young adults and parents (Kline, 1998). Furthermore, loadings between the latent and the observed variables were constrained to be equal for young adults

and parents; this was necessary to ensure that the same latent constructs were measured for both young adults and parents (Glass et al., 1986). This strategy was justified by the results of our confirmatory factor analyses, which showed similar loadings for young adults and their parents.



**Figure 5.1** Conceptual model of the associations between young adults' and their parents' age, education, religiosity, intergenerational obligations, and partnership attitudes

In the structural part of the model, the paths between parents' attitudes and young adults' attitudes indicated the level of intergenerational congruence attributable to direct transmission processes between parents and children; the paths between parents' education and religiosity and young adults' education and religiosity showed intergenerational congruence

of educational and religious background. Furthermore, relationships among age, education, and religiosity were estimated, for both parents and young adults. Finally, our model included paths between parents' education and religiosity and the latent variables representing young adults' attitudes, as well as between the latent variables representing parental attitudes and young adults' education and religiosity.

We tested the fit of the path structure depicted in Figure 5.1 by comparing a series of hierarchically related models. In the first model, we tested the assumption that parents' age, education, religiosity, and attitudes were not related to their children's age, education, religiosity, and attitudes by constraining these parameters to 0. Next, we tested whether setting free specific sets of paths resulted in an improved model. We subsequently relaxed the following parameters: (a) relationships among parents' age, education, and religiosity; (b) relationships among young adults' age, education, and religiosity; (c) relationships between parents' attitudes and their age, education, and religiosity; (d) relationships between young adults' attitudes and their age, education, and religiosity; (e) relationships between parents' and young adults' education and religiosity; (f) relationships between on the one hand parents' education and religiosity, and on the other hand young adults' attitudes; (g) relationships between parents' attitudes and young adults' education and religiosity; (h) relationships between parents' attitudes and young adults' attitudes.

Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) difference tests were used to compare the relative fit of these nested models; we considered a model to be a significant improvement over the previous model if the resulting  $\chi^2$  differed significantly (i.e.,  $p < .05$ ) from the  $\chi^2$  of the previous model. If setting free parameters improved the fit, these parameters were estimated freely in subsequent models. Our analyses revealed that each step represented a significant improvement; the model in which all paths depicted in Figure 5.1 were represented was the best fitting model. Fit indices indicate that the fit of this model was satisfactory:  $\chi^2 = 603.451$ ,  $df = 46$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .925, RMSEA = .077. That the fit of this model was adequate but not optimal might be attributable to the hypothesized differences between the life course stages; differences between life course stages were investigated in subsequent multiple group analyses, which will be reported later in this chapter.

Parameter estimates for this model are presented in Table 5.2 (Column 1). Indirect relationships (via mediating variables) are reported in the text rather than in tables; to test the significance of indirect relationships, we used Sobel's formula (see Baron & Kenny, 1986). Regarding our first research question, our results identified both direct and indirect types of attitude congruence between young adults and their parents. Table 2 (Column 1) shows that the path between parents' and young adults' intergenerational obligations as well as the path between parents' and young adults' partnership attitudes were significantly different from zero, which suggests that attitude congruence is the result of direct transmission of attitudes between parents and children. Additionally, significant indirect relationships were found between parents' education and young adults' attitudes, mediated by young adults' education, for intergenerational obligations ( $\beta = -.02$ ,  $p < .01$ ) as well as for partnership attitudes ( $\beta = -.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Also, significant indirect relationships were observed between

parents' religiosity and young adults' attitudes, mediated by young adults' religiosity, both for intergenerational obligations ( $\beta = .05, p < .001$ ) and for partnership attitudes ( $\beta = .13, p < .001$ ). These indirect relationships between parents' education and religiosity, on one hand, and young adults' attitudes, on the other hand, indicate that attitude congruence also results from intergenerational transmission of educational and religious background.

#### 5.4.3 Intergenerational attitude congruence and young adults' life course stage

A multiple group comparison approach (Byrne, 2001) was used to test whether the paths between parents' and young adults' attitudes – representing direct intergenerational attitude congruence – differed significantly between the four life course stages. In this approach, parameters were simultaneously estimated for four groups of young adults: young adults living with parents, young adults living alone, young adults living with a partner, young adults living with a partner and with child(ren). Equivalence among groups was evaluated by imposing and relaxing cross-group equality constraints for the model's parameters. In the multiple group analyses, different models were compared and tested using a procedure similar to the one used for evaluating the fit to the data for the whole group. The final model that resulted from the latter analyses was used as a basis for the multiple group analyses.

In the first model (model 1), all parameters were constrained to be identical in the four different groups. Next, we tested models in which specific relations were allowed to vary between these groups, and investigated whether this resulted in improved fit. We subsequently freed the following parameters: (a) relationships among parents' age, education, and religiosity (model 2); (b) relationships among young adults' age, education, and religiosity (model 3); (c) relationships between parents' attitudes and their age, education, and religiosity (model 4); (d) relationships between young adults' attitudes and their age, education, and religiosity (model 5); (e) relationships between parents' and young adults' education and religiosity (model 6); (f) relationships between on one hand parents' education and religiosity, and on the other hand young adults' attitudes (model 7); (g) relationships between parents' attitudes and young adults' education and religiosity (model 8); and finally, (h) relationships between parents' attitudes and young adults' attitudes (model 9). Again, chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) difference tests were used to compare the relative fit of these models. In cases where setting free parameters improved the fit, these parameters were estimated freely in subsequent models.

The results for the multiple group comparison analyses are presented in Table 5.3. Our analyses demonstrated that the groups were significantly different with respect to the magnitude of the path weights for the relationships among young adults' age, education, and religiosity (model 3), for the relationships between parents' and young adults' education and religiosity (model 6), and for the relationships between parental attitudes and young adults' attitudes (model 9); all other covariances were similar across groups. Model 9 was the best-fitting model; all fit indices indicated that the model fits the data well:  $\chi^2 = 725.972, df = 256, p < .001, CFI = .930, RMSEA = .030$ . Parameter estimates for this model are presented in Table 5.2 (Columns 2 to 5).

**Table 5.2** Structural equation model analyses of the model in Figure 5.1, for the total sample and specified for young adults' life course

	Total sample <sup>a</sup>		Life course stage <sup>b</sup>			
	(N = 2,041)	(N = 560)	Living alone (N = 535)	Living with a partner (N = 474)	Living with a partner and child(ren) (N = 472)	
<i>Paths between parents' age, education, and religiosity</i>						
Parents' age → parents' education	.00 (.01)	.02 <sub>a</sub> (.01)	.02 <sub>a</sub> (.01)	.02 <sub>a</sub> (.01)	.02 <sub>a</sub> (.01)	.02 <sub>a</sub> (.01)
Parents' age → parents' religiosity	.14*** (.00)	.13 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)	.11 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)	.11 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)	.11 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)	.11 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)
<i>Paths between young adults' age, education, and religiosity</i>						
Young adults' age → young adults' education	.41*** (.01)	.50 <sub>a</sub> *** (.02)	.35 <sub>b</sub> *** (.03)	.30 <sub>b</sub> *** (.03)	.12 <sub>c</sub> ** (.04)	.12 <sub>c</sub> ** (.04)
Young adults' age → young adults' religiosity	-.10*** (.00)	-.07 <sub>a</sub> * (.00)	-.13 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)	-.10 <sub>a</sub> ** (.00)	-.07 <sub>a</sub> (.01)	-.07 <sub>a</sub> (.01)
<i>Paths between parents' age, education, religiosity and attitudes</i>						
Parents' age → parents' intergenerational obligations	-.05 (.00)	-.04 <sub>a</sub> (.00)	-.03 <sub>a</sub> (.00)	-.03 <sub>a</sub> (.00)	-.04 <sub>a</sub> (.00)	-.04 <sub>a</sub> (.00)
Parents' age → parents' partnership attitudes	.10*** (.00)	.10 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)	.09 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)	.10 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)	.09 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)	.09 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)
Parents' education → parents' intergenerational obligations	-.18*** (.00)	-.15 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)	-.16 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)	-.14 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)	-.18 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)	-.18 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)
Parents' education → parents' partnership attitudes	-.22*** (.00)	-.18 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)	-.20 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)	-.22 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)	-.20 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)	-.20 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)
Parents' religiosity → parents' intergenerational obligations	.14*** (.03)	.13 <sub>a</sub> *** (.03)	.13 <sub>a</sub> *** (.03)	.12 <sub>a</sub> *** (.03)	.15 <sub>a</sub> *** (.03)	.15 <sub>a</sub> *** (.03)
Parents' religiosity → parents' partnership attitudes	.40*** (.02)	.37 <sub>a</sub> *** (.02)	.39 <sub>a</sub> *** (.02)	.43 <sub>a</sub> *** (.02)	.41 <sub>a</sub> *** (.02)	.41 <sub>a</sub> *** (.02)
<i>Paths between young adults' age, education, religiosity, and attitudes</i>						
Young adults' age → young adults' intergenerational obligations	-.07** (.00)	-.01 <sub>a</sub> (.00)	-.01 <sub>a</sub> (.00)	-.00 <sub>a</sub> (.00)	-.00 <sub>a</sub> (.00)	-.00 <sub>a</sub> (.00)
Young adults' age → young adults' partnership attitudes	-.10*** (.00)	-.05 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)	-.07 <sub>a</sub> ** (.00)	-.06 <sub>a</sub> ** (.00)	-.04 <sub>a</sub> ** (.00)	-.04 <sub>a</sub> ** (.00)
Young adults' education → young adults' intergenerational obligations	-.10*** (.01)	-.08 <sub>a</sub> *** (.01)	-.08 <sub>a</sub> *** (.01)	-.07 <sub>a</sub> *** (.01)	-.08 <sub>a</sub> *** (.01)	-.08 <sub>a</sub> *** (.01)
Young adults' education → young adults' partnership attitudes	-.15*** (.00)	-.11 <sub>a</sub> *** (.00)	-.14 <sub>a</sub> ** (.00)	-.14 <sub>a</sub> ** (.00)	-.12 <sub>a</sub> ** (.00)	-.12 <sub>a</sub> ** (.00)

Note: Standardized coefficients (standard errors). Coefficients in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at  $p < .05$  (two-tailed).  
<sup>a</sup>Model fit statistics:  $\chi^2 = 603.451$ ,  $df = 46$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .925, RMSEA = .077. <sup>b</sup>Model fit statistics:  $\chi^2 = 725.972$ ,  $df = 256$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .930, RMSEA = .030.  
<sup>\*</sup> $p < .05$ . <sup>\*\*</sup> $p < .01$ . <sup>\*\*\*</sup> $p < .001$  (two-tailed).

Table 5.2 Continued

Young adults' religiosity → young adults' intergenerational obligations	.11 <sup>***</sup> (.05)	.10 <sup>***</sup> (.05)	.08 <sup>a</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.05)	.11 <sup>a</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.05)
Young adults' religiosity → young adults' partnership attitudes	.28 <sup>***</sup> (.03)	.27 <sup>a</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.03)	.27 <sup>a</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.03)	.27 <sup>a</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.03)
<i>Paths between parents' and young adults' education and religiosity</i>				
Parents' education → young adults' education	.18 <sup>***</sup> (.02)	.17 <sup>b</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.03)	.21 <sup>b</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.03)	.26 <sup>b</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.03)
Parents' religiosity → young adults' religiosity	.47 <sup>***</sup> (.02)	.44 <sup>a</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.03)	.37 <sup>c</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.03)	.47 <sup>b</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.03)
<i>Paths between parents' education, religiosity and young adults' attitudes</i>				
Parents' education → young adults' intergenerational obligations	-.02 (.01)	-.02 <sub>a</sub> (.01)	-.02 <sub>a</sub> (.01)	-.02 <sub>a</sub> (.01)
Parents' education → young adults' partnership attitudes	-.04 <sup>*</sup> (.00)	-.05 <sup>*</sup> (.00)	-.05 <sup>*</sup> (.00)	-.04 <sup>*</sup> (.00)
Parents' religiosity → young adults' intergenerational obligations	-.07 <sup>*</sup> (.04)	-.06 <sup>*</sup> (.04)	-.05 <sup>*</sup> (.04)	-.06 <sup>*</sup> (.04)
Parents' religiosity → young adults' partnership attitudes	-.00 (.03)	.00 <sub>a</sub> (.03)	.00 <sub>a</sub> (.03)	.00 <sub>a</sub> (.03)
<i>Paths between parents' attitudes and young adult's education, religiosity</i>				
Parents' intergenerational obligations → young adults' education	-.10 <sup>**</sup> (.16)	-.10 <sup>a</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.12)	-.11 <sup>a</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.12)	-.09 <sup>a</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.12)
Parents' intergenerational obligations → young adults' religiosity	-.08 <sup>**</sup> (.02)	-.06 <sup>*</sup> (.02)	-.07 <sup>*</sup> (.02)	-.05 <sup>*</sup> (.02)
Parents' partnership attitudes → young adults' education	-.00 (.11)	.01 <sub>a</sub> (.10)	.00 <sub>a</sub> (.10)	.00 <sub>a</sub> (.10)
Parents' partnership attitudes → young adults' religiosity	.28 <sup>**</sup> (.02)	.26 <sup>a</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.02)	.27 <sup>a</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.02)	.25 <sup>a</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.02)
<i>Paths between parents' attitudes and young adults' attitudes</i>				
Parents' intergenerational obligations → young adults' intergenerational obligations	.39 <sup>***</sup> (.07)	.46 <sup>a</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.12)	.24 <sup>a</sup> <sup>**</sup> (.11)	.37 <sup>a</sup> <sup>**</sup> (.16)
Parents' intergenerational obligations → young adults' partnership attitudes	-.01 (.03)	-.05 <sub>a</sub> (.05)	-.02 <sub>ab</sub> (.03)	-.12 <sub>b</sub> (.07)
Parents' partnership attitudes → young adults' intergenerational obligations	-.04 (.04)	-.04 <sub>a</sub> (.07)	.03 <sub>a</sub> (.08)	-.07 <sub>a</sub> (.09)
Parents' partnership attitudes → young adults' partnership attitudes	.35 <sup>***</sup> (.04)	.42 <sup>a</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.05)	.22 <sup>b</sup> <sup>**</sup> (.06)	.47 <sup>a</sup> <sup>***</sup> (.07)

Note: Standardized coefficients (standard errors). Coefficients in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at  $p < .05$  (two-tailed).  
<sup>a</sup>Model fit statistics:  $\chi^2 = 603.451$ ,  $df = 46$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .925, RMSEA = .077. <sup>b</sup>Model fit statistics:  $\chi^2 = 725.972$ ,  $df = 256$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .930, RMSEA = .030.  
<sup>\*</sup> $p < .05$ . <sup>\*\*</sup> $p < .01$ . <sup>\*\*\*</sup> $p < .001$  (two-tailed).

**Table 5.3** Multiple group analyses: comparative goodness-of-fit of structural equation models ( $N = 2,041$ )

Model	Absolute goodness-of-fit					Step-down goodness-of-fit		
	$\chi^2$	$df$	$p(e)$	CFI	RMSEA	$\Delta\chi^2$	$\Delta df$	$p(d)$
Model 1: all paths are constrained to be equal	835.384	280	< .001	.917	.031			
Model 2: Model 1 + paths among parents' age, education, and religiosity are variant	826.571	274	< .001	.917	.031			
Model 1 versus Model 2						8.813	6	.184
Model 3: Model 1 + paths among young adults' age, education, and religiosity are variant	806.806	274	< .001	.920	.031			
Model 1 versus Model 3						28.578	6	.000
Model 4: Model 3 + paths between parents' age, education, religiosity, and parents' attitudes are variant	782.084	256	< .001	.921	.032			
Model 3 versus Model 4						24.721	18	.133
Model 5: Model 3 + paths between young adults' age, education, religiosity, and young adults' attitudes are variant	779.341	256	< .001	.921	.032			
Model 3 versus Model 5						27.465	18	.071
Model 6: Model 3 + paths between parents' education, religiosity and young adult's education, religiosity are variant	757.057	268	< .001	.927	.030			
Model 3 versus Model 6						49.749	6	.000
Model 7: Model 6 + paths between parents' education, religiosity and young adults' attitudes are variant	739.363	256	< .001	.928	.030			
Model 6 versus Model 7						17.693	12	.125
Model 8: Model 6 + paths between parents' attitudes and young adults' education, religiosity are variant	751.709	256	< .001	.926	.031			
Model 6 versus Model 8						5.348	12	.945
Model 9: Model 6 + paths between parents' attitudes and young adults' attitudes are variant	725.972	256	< .001	.930	.030			
Model 6 versus Model 9						31.085	12	.002

Note:  $\chi^2$  = chi-squared statistic;  $df$  = degrees of freedom;  $p(e)$  = probability of an exact fit to the data; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation;  $\Delta\chi^2$  = difference in likelihood ratio tests;  $\Delta df$  = difference in  $df$ ;  $p(d)$  = probability of the  $\chi^2$ -difference tests.

Regarding intergenerational attitude congruence, our analyses revealed that for partnership attitudes, associations between parents' and young adults' attitudes were significantly higher for young adults living with parents ( $\beta = .41$ ) and for young adults living with a partner and children ( $\beta = .45$ ), compared to young adults who lived alone ( $\beta = .19$ ) and young adults with a partner but without children ( $\beta = .23$ ). A similar pattern emerged for intergenerational obligations: Congruence in attitudes between parents and children was highest for young adults living with parents ( $\beta = .53$ ) and lowest for young adults living with a partner ( $\beta = .29$ ); however, the differences between the four life course stages in congruence regarding intergenerational obligations were not significant. Additional analyses (not shown here) indicated that indirect paths between parents' and young adults' attitudes – via parents' and young adults' education and religiosity – did not differ over the four life course stages.

Besides differences in attitude congruence, differences in mean scores on attitudes were investigated. In additional analyses (not shown in the tables) we examined differences between young adults in the four different life course stages in mean scores on intergenerational obligations and partnership attitudes as well as differences between their parents in their mean scores; these analyses estimated intercepts of these latent variables for each life course stage. We tested two models: (a) a model in which the intercepts of the four latent variables – intergenerational obligations and partnership attitudes of both young adults and their parents – were constrained to be equal across young adults' life course stage ( $\chi^2 = 919.967$ ,  $df = 282$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .904, RMSEA = .033) and (b) a model in which the intercepts were allowed to vary ( $\chi^2 = 895.901$ ,  $df = 270$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .906, RMSEA = .034). The chi-square difference test ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 24.066$ ,  $\Delta df = 12$ ,  $p = .020$ ) showed significant differences in fit between these two models. Estimates indicated that cohabiting young adults had less traditional views on partnership than young adults living with parents ( $\beta = -.13$ ,  $p = .027$ ); parents of cohabiting children had less traditional partnership attitudes ( $\beta = -.11$ ,  $p = .005$ ) and less strong feelings regarding intergenerational obligations ( $\beta = -.11$ ,  $p = .015$ ) than parents of children living at home.

In our models, we did not distinguish between different gender combinations within parent-child dyads. In additional analyses, we tested whether this decision was justified, by examining whether intergenerational congruence differed across the four possible gender combinations (father-son, father-daughter, mother-son, mother-daughter). Two models were tested: (a) a model in which associations between parents' and young adults' attitudes were constrained to be equal across parent-child dyads with different gender compositions ( $\chi^2 = 908.948$ ,  $df = 280$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .920, RMSEA = .033) and (b) a model in which these paths were allowed to vary ( $\chi^2 = 892.372$ ,  $df = 268$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .920, RMSEA = .033). The chi-square difference test ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 16.575$ ,  $\Delta df = 12$ ,  $p = .167$ ) showed no significant differences in fit between these models, suggesting that intergenerational congruence was not dependent on the specific gender constellation of the parent-child dyad.

## 5.5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Since the 1960s, the Western industrialized world has experienced broad ideational and cultural changes, characterized by an increased emphasis on personal freedom and individual autonomy, which have resulted in increased tolerance toward nonconformist orientations in marriage and the family and more egalitarian gender roles in marriage and cohabitation (Frank & McEneaney, 1999; Surkyn & Lesthaege, 2004; Thornton, 1989; Van de Kaa, 1987). In line with these developments, the young adults and parents in our study expressed relatively favorable attitudes toward divorce, nontraditional relationships, and egalitarian gender roles in marriage and cohabitation. In general, the young adults exhibited more tolerant attitudes than did their parents. Furthermore, our study indicated that kinship norms are still relevant: Both young adults and their parents reported moderate to moderately strong feelings concerning intergenerational obligations. This conclusion is consistent with findings from earlier studies on kinship norms (Lye, 1996; Rossi & Rossi, 1990), as well as research emphasizing the continuing importance of intergenerational bonds for both parents and children (Bengtson, 2001; Bucx et al., 2008; Lye, 1996); in general, people from Southern and Eastern European countries tend to have stronger feelings of intergenerational obligations than people from Northern and Central European countries (Fokkema et al., 2008). In accordance with earlier findings (Lye, 1996; Rossi & Rossi, 1990), parental obligations were perceived to be stronger than filial obligations.

Our research was guided by two main goals. First, we examined to what extent direct and indirect types of intergenerational congruence can be distinguished in the domain of family-related attitudes. Second, we investigated whether intergenerational attitude congruence was related to the life course stage of young adult children.

### 5.5.1 Direct and indirect types of attitude congruence

In line with previous research (De Vries et al., 2009; Glass et al., 1986; Mangen & Westbrook, 1988), the parents and their young adult children in our study showed moderate levels of congruence in their beliefs about intergenerational obligations and intimate partnership. In the literature, attitude congruence between parents and children has been explained in terms of direct as well as indirect types of intergenerational transmission. An important general finding of this study is that both types of intergenerational transmission of attitudes appear to be valid and complementary. On the one hand, we found that relationships between parents' and young adults' attitudes were relatively strong, after controlling for parents' and young adults' age, education, and religiosity. This suggests that attitude congruence concerning intergenerational relations and intimate partnership is a result of direct transmission processes between parents and children. On the other hand, we found that attitude congruence between parents and children may also be attributed to indirect transmission via educational and religious background: Parents' educational level, as well as their religiosity, were indirectly related to young adults' attitudes. Our findings contribute to the existing literature by

showing that direct and indirect types of intergenerational congruence and transmission apply not only to political and religious attitudes (Glass et al., 1986; Vollebergh et al., 2001), but also to family-related attitudes. In line with earlier research (Acock & Bengtson, 1978; Glass et al., 1986), intergenerational attitude congruence was unrelated to the gender composition of the parent-child dyad.

### 5.5.2 Intergenerational attitude congruence and young adults' life course stage

Our results did not provide evidence that congruence of attitudes concerning intergenerational obligations is dependent on young adults' life course stage. However, support was found for our expectation that intergenerational congruence concerning partnership attitudes depends on life course stage: Attitude congruence was higher for young adults who lived with their parents and for those with children, as compared with young adults who lived alone and those who lived with a partner without children. The level of intergenerational congruence produced by congruence of educational and religious background was not found to be dependent on young adults' life course stage.

The finding that intergenerational congruence concerning partnership attitudes was higher for young adults living with parents is in accordance with socialization theory (Bandura, 1977; Miller & Glass, 1989): Young people who live with parents generally have more frequent interactions with their parents, which increases opportunities for mutual influence. The finding that intergenerational attitude congruence was higher for young adults with children than for young adults who lived on their own without children (cohabiting or noncohabiting) suggests that the birth of a child leads young adults to rely more on their parents' attitudes. This finding can be explained in terms of two underlying processes. First, it is consistent with the intergenerational similarity hypothesis (Aquilino, 1997, 1999; Bengtson & Black, 1973): By moving into the parental role, young adults' experiences become similar to their parents', which increases identification with parents. Second, it is in line with socialization theories, as earlier research has found that entrance into parenthood changes individuals' networks (Bucx et al., 2008; Munch et al., 1997): In general, the grandparent role becomes prominent, especially when grandchildren are young, which increases opportunities for parents and young adult children to influence each other's attitudes. When controlling for age, educational and religious background, and parents' attitudes, we did not find that young adults with children differed from other young adults in the mean level of their attitudes; this suggests that having children does not lead to more traditional views *per se*. Readers should note that, because of the cross-sectional nature of our study we were not able to identify the direction of causality of the relationships found. It is possible that increased intergenerational attitude congruence is a result of young adults becoming parents themselves, yet equally possible that having a child in this life course period is the result of having attitudes similar to those of parents.

In line with cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) and with role theoretical approaches (Stryker, 1968), previous research indicated that experiences with cohabita-

tion produce more tolerant attitudes toward unmarried cohabitation among young adults (Axinn & Thornton, 1993; Cunningham & Thornton, 2005). Consistent with these findings, we observed that the group of young adults living together with a romantic partner (without children), of whom the majority (more than 80%) lived in unmarried cohabitation, had in general more progressive views on partnership than young adults living at the parental home. Our results suggest that young adults' transition into nonmarital cohabitation might not only produce more tolerant views among young adults but also among their parents: Probably, parents might adapt their attitudes to their children's behavior in order to reduce cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), because they observe their children having positive experiences with this relationship form, or because they wish to remain in close contact (Axinn & Thornton, 1993; Poortman & Van Tilburg, 2005). Furthermore, we found that parents of children who lived together with a partner (without offspring) had less strong feelings of intergenerational obligations compared to parents of children living at home: This finding suggests that, although obligations are conceptually different from personal intentions to provide support, at a more practical level, parents' feelings of obligation to provide support may change in response to changes in their children's circumstances (Gans & Silverstein, 2006). The cross-sectional design of our study limits the causal inferences that can be made: It is possible that differences in young adults' and parents' attitudes are a result of young adults' moving into union formation, yet equally possible that the choices young adults make in relationships and family life are influenced by their own attitudes as well as those of their parents. In fact, empirical evidence is consistent with the view that both causal directions coexist (Axinn & Thornton, 1993; Jansen, 2002; Thornton et al., 1983; Thornton, Axinn, & Hill, 1992).

### 5.5.3 Limitations and future research

Previous research revealed that intergenerational congruence is lower when it pertains to family-related attitudes as compared with religious and political orientations (Glass et al., 1986). It has been suggested that there are more competing socialization agents for attitudes concerning family issues, and that the latter attitudes are more elastic because they are more related to activities of daily living (Glass et al., 1986). Following this line of reasoning, intergenerational attitude congruence in domains other than family issues might be less dependent on young adults' life course, but this remains a direction for future research.

The multi-actor nature of the data used in this study provided important advantages for the examination of our research questions, as information from both the parent and the child could be included. Because it can be expected that respondents are more likely to grant permission to contact family members with whom they maintain positive relationships, selective alter response is a serious limitation of multi-actor designs: Parent-child dyads who get along well and – as a consequence – experience high levels of attitude congruence, may be overrepresented. Nevertheless, levels of intergenerational attitude congruence were generally in line with previous research (De Vries et al., 2009; Glass et al., 1986; Mangen &

Westbrook, 1988; Vollebergh et al., 2001). Moreover, previous analyses of the same dataset indicated that parental correlates of children's attitudes were not biased by selective alter response (Kalmijn & Liefbroer, 2008).

Because of the cross-sectional nature of our study, we were not able to determine to what extent intergenerational attitude congruence is produced by parents influencing their children and to what extent such congruence is attributable to children influencing their parents. Instead, in our empirical models it was assumed that the direction of attitude transmission runs from parent to child rather than from child to parent. This assumption is plausible given the empirical evidence that transmission from children to parents is negligible in this phase of the family life course (Vollebergh et al., 2001). Nevertheless, it would be desirable to replicate our findings in the future with longitudinal data, and to disentangle transmission processes from parents to children and vice versa. Another limitation of cross-sectional data is that we were not able to disentangle whether attitude congruence between parents and offspring is attributable to transmission processes or to effects of the contemporaneous societal context (e.g., 'Zeitgeist'; Boehnke, Hadjar, & Baier, 2007) on both parents and children.



## CHAPTER 6

# The impact of family relations on leaving home and intergenerational geographic proximity in young adulthood

This chapter is co-authored by Inge Seiffge-Krenke (University of Mainz, Germany) and is currently under review at an international journal. An earlier version of this chapter has been presented at the 4<sup>th</sup> European Society on Family Relations Conference, September 2008, Jyväskylä (Finland).



# 6 The impact of family relations on leaving home and intergenerational geographic proximity in young adulthood

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Late adolescence and young adulthood is the life course phase in which children typically leave the parental home in order to establish an independent household. In general, departure from the parental home and becoming responsible for one's own residence is considered a key marker of adulthood, together with related developmental tasks such as attending college, starting a career, living with a partner, and getting married (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006; Shanahan, 2000). Since the 1980s, the age at which individuals leave the parental residence has been increasing (Arnett, 2000), together with the variability in timing of this transition (Shanahan, 2000).

Leaving home and related developmental tasks of young adulthood are inseparably bound to the changing roles and functions of the family. Both parents and their adolescent or young adult child must redefine their relationships in response to the challenges of their respective developmental paths (Seiffge-Krenke, 1999). Investigating predictors of the timing of residential independence is important, as difficulties with this transition have been found to be related to problematic adjustment in young adulthood (O'Connor, Allen, Bell, & Hauser, 1996).

Establishing residential independence typically (but not always) leads to an increase in geographic separation from parents (Rogerson et al., 1997); subsequent residential moves may increase or decrease intergenerational proximity. Intergenerational geographic proximity is conceptualized as an important dimension of intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991), because it represents the opportunity structure of contact and exchanges of support (Lawton et al., 1994). Although classical functionalist family theories (Parsons, 1942, 1943) suggested that after children have left the parental household, children and parents separate and go on to lead their independent lives, research generally reveals that most children remain in frequent contact with parents (Lye, 1996) and that, in general, children elect to live relatively close to their parents (Mulder & Kalmijn, 2006; Rogerson et al., 1993; Warnes, 1986).

Leaving the parental home is a family decision in which both the child and the parents are involved (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1998). Previous research has consistently shown that the timing of residential independence as well as intergenerational geographic proximity are affected by family structure: In large families and in nonintact families, children leave earlier and migrate farther away from parents (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1998; Shelton

& Grundy, 2000; White, 1994). Research on how the quality of earlier family relationships affects the timing of leaving home and geographic proximity is, however, relatively scarce, with some notable exceptions (Aquilino, 1991; De Jong-Gierveld et al., 1991; Seiffge-Krenke, 2006). Guided by the family life course perspective (Elder, 1994; MacMillan & Copher, 2005), the present research examines how the quality of family relationships during adolescence predicts the timing of leaving home and intergenerational geographic proximity in young adulthood. Hypotheses are tested in a large probability sample of young adults living in The Netherlands. Like the United States and other Northern and Western European countries, The Netherlands has been characterized in the past few decades by increases in the average age at which young persons leave the parental home (Cherlin, Scabini, & Rossi, 1997). Compared to other countries, The Netherlands is small; the largest possible distance between family members is about 300 kilometers (= 187.5 miles). The Netherlands is also one of the most densely populated countries in the world, with 484 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> (= 1,008 per mile<sup>2</sup>) (Central Bureau of Statistics Netherlands, 2007). Therefore, family members live relatively close to one another.

## 6.2 THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

The family life course perspective (Elder, 1994) has inspired a considerable amount of research on family relations. One of its main tenets is that individuals acquire or lose social roles and role positions in the domains of work and family as they develop across the life span (MacMillan & Copher, 2005). Changes in roles and positions are indicated by specific life course transitions. The family life course perspective includes the concept of 'linked lives' (Elder, 1994), which posits that individual development takes place in the context of the family: Family relationships affect the individual developmental paths of family members, and changes in individual family members' lives affect family interactions. The family life course perspective also postulates that family relations experienced at earlier times, and in particular the quality of these relations, will influence the relationship between family members in later stages of the life span (Caspi & Elder, 1988). Indeed, empirical studies have found that parent-child relationships in childhood and adolescence influence later bonds between adult children and their parents (Aquilino, 1997, 2006; Rossi & Rossi, 1990).

### 6.2.1 Family relations and leaving the parental home

In accordance with the premise of the family life course perspective that family relations influence family members' development, it can be expected that the quality of earlier parent-child relationships influences the timing of departure from the parental home. Young individuals who get along well with their parents have less reason to leave the parental household and to give up their relatively comfortable way of life (inexpensive living, material security) than young individuals with troubled relationships with parents. From a psychological perspec-

tive, residential independence contributes to an important developmental task of adolescence and young adulthood, that of becoming autonomous and establishing a more egalitarian relationship with parents (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006). Mature, adaptive parent-child relationships are characterized by an optimal balance between closeness and intimacy on one hand, and autonomy and independence on the other hand (Holmbeck, Paikoff, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995). Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that resolution of the developmental task of establishing autonomy and more egalitarian parent-child relationships during adolescence may have consequences for patterns of home-leaving in young adulthood: Individuals who have weak or troubled relationships with parents may move out at an early age, whereas individuals who maintain overly close relationships with their parents experience greater difficulty in establishing physical separation from them (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006). Taken together, an optimal balance between autonomy and support is necessary to foster residential independence.

Empirical evidence on parent-child relations and leaving home is fairly limited, although there are some notable insights. It has for example been found that young adults who had warm and caring relationships with their parents in adolescence left home at a later age than young adults with less favorable relationships with parents (Aquilino, 1991; De Jong-Gierveld et al., 1991). Other studies found that an authoritative parenting style, coupled with low and decreasing levels of parental support, facilitated the process of leaving home (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006). In contrast, too much parental support for too long resulted in delayed home-leaving and slow progression in the developmental tasks of young adulthood (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006).

An additional factor that might impact the timing of leaving home is the quality of parents' relationship with each other. Several studies have reported a spill-over effect from spousal conflict into the quality of relationships between other family members, for example siblings (Stocker & Youngblade, 1999). When feelings of connectedness within the family are weak, the attractiveness of remaining in the parental home is likely to be low. Indeed, family conflict has been found to lead to decreased levels of psychological well-being among children (Amato & Afifi, 2006). Therefore, it can be expected that the experience of interparental conflict acts as a stimulatory factor in the process of leaving home.

### 6.2.2 Family relations and intergenerational geographic proximity

Previous research has found that intergenerational contact and support remain important after young adults have left the parental home (Aquilino, 1997; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Because contact and support exchanges are facilitated by intergenerational geographic proximity, it is likely that young adults take the residential location of their parents into account when deciding where to establish their own residence.

In line with the premise of the family life course perspective that parent-child relations in childhood and adolescence affect intergenerational relationships at later points in the life course (Caspi & Elder, 1988), it can be assumed that the degree to which young adults attach importance to intergenerational geographic proximity depends on the quality of earlier expe-

periences with parents. Among individuals who experienced warm and supportive relationships with parents in adolescence, it is likely that these relations remain important after departure from the parental home, and that parents and children have a need or desire to maintain frequent contact (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991). As larger geographic distances are accompanied by increasing costs of contact, in terms of time and money, it can be expected that these young adults choose to live relatively close to their parents. In contrast, individuals who experienced weak or even troubled relationships with parents in adolescence may, as young adults, feel less inclined to live close to their parents, or might even prefer to live far away. Because high levels of interparental conflict in adolescence are associated with low cohesion within families (Seiffge-Krenke, 1999; Stocker & Youngblade, 1999), it might be expected that interparental conflict is negatively related to intergenerational geographic proximity. To our knowledge, no research thusfar has examined how the quality of family relations in childhood and adolescence predicts geographic proximity among family members later in life.

### 6.2.3 Aims and hypotheses

The first objective of this study is to investigate how the timing of departure from the parental home can be predicted by the quality of family relations during adolescence. Based on our theoretical arguments and review of the literature, we hypothesize that young adults who had warm and supportive relationships with their mother and father in adolescence tend to leave home at a later age than young adults whose relationships with their parents were less supportive (Hypothesis 1.1). Furthermore, we expect that young adults who experienced high levels of interparental conflict in adolescence tend to leave home at an earlier age (Hypothesis 1.2).

The second aim of our research is to examine to what extent the quality of family relations in adolescence predicts whether young adults decide to live close to or farther away from their parents. Based on our theoretical arguments, we hypothesize that the quality of parent-child relationships in adolescence is positively related to intergenerational geographic proximity in young adulthood (Hypothesis 2.1). Furthermore, we expect that interparental conflict is negatively related to intergenerational geographic proximity (Hypothesis 2.2).

### 6.2.4 Control variables

In our models predicting the timing of leaving home, we control for parents' marital status, as divorce of parents increases the likelihood of leaving at an early age (Aquilino, 1991; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1998; Holdsworth, 2000). We also include controls for number of siblings because individuals with more siblings tend to leave home earlier than those in smaller families (Holdsworth, 2000; White, 1994). Furthermore, we control for gender: In general, daughters have been found to move out earlier than sons (Garasky, 2002; White, 1994), which has been explained with reference to the tendency for women to marry at an

earlier age than men. Also, we include year of birth to account for the fact that different cohorts of young people face different macro-level economic and institutional conditions which may contribute to the timing of leaving home (Juang et al., 1999). Furthermore, we control for children's level of education, as it can be expected that highly educated children leave home earlier to attend college or university (Mulder & Hooimeijer, 2002; White, 1994). Finally, we include parental level of education and occupational status, because children's residential independence is facilitated by access to parental resources (White, 1994).

Prior research has shown that family structure influences how far children and their parents decide to live from each other. When examining intergenerational geographic proximity, we control for parents' marital status, because children from nonintact families tend to live farther away from parents than those whose parents are still together (Lawton et al., 1994). We also include controls for number of living siblings: Research showed that the number of living siblings is negatively related to geographic proximity (Shelton & Grundy, 2000), possibly because individuals from large families may feel less need to live near their parents than those from smaller families. Furthermore, we control for young adults' marital status and parenthood (Lawton et al., 1994). Gender is included as a control variable, in view of the social expectation that daughters, more so than sons, should live near their parents (Hank, 2007). The level of education of both young adults and their parents is also included: More highly educated persons tend to live farther away from their family, because of structural factors as well as normative considerations (Hank, 2007; Lawton et al., 1994). Furthermore, we control for the age of both young adults and parents (Lawton et al., 1994), as well as health status: Health problems could plausibly increase the value attached to intergenerational proximity (Mulder & Kalmijn, 2006; Silverstein, 1995).

## 6.3 METHOD

### 6.3.1 Data

The data in this study were drawn from the second wave of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS; Dykstra et al., 2007), a large-scale study of family relations in a random address sample of 6,026 adults residing in private households in The Netherlands. The data were collected in 2006 and 2007, by means of computer-assisted face-to-face interviews and additional self-report questionnaires. The response rate of this wave was 73.8%, which is slightly lower than that of earlier studies (Dykstra et al., 2007). Respondents gave information about their own and their parents' place of residence. Furthermore, they reported retrospectively on the quality of their relationship with their mother and father in adolescence, and on marital conflict between their parents.

From this total sample, we selected all individuals between 18 and 34 years of age (15.1% of the total sample). Respondents who did not return the self-report questionnaire (6.5% of the young adult sample) were excluded from the sample, because this questionnaire contained

essential information about the quality of earlier parent-child relationships. The resulting sample included 851 young adults (305 men, 546 women) for the analysis of timing of leaving home. The regression analyses of intergenerational proximity included only those young adults who were living independently at the time of the interview, and who had at least one (biological) parent living in The Netherlands (85.7% of the young adult sample,  $N = 729$ ).

We used data from the second wave of the NKPS because this wave contained (retrospective) information on the quality of parent-child relationships in adolescence, which was essential in view of our research aims. In our sample, young adult men, young adults in single households, and young adults living with parents were underrepresented; in the descriptive analyses, weights were used to adjust our sample of young adults to the composition of the Dutch population of young adults.

### 6.3.2 Measures

Two *dependent variables* were evaluated. *Age at (first) home-leaving* was measured in years; this variable was used in the event history analyses (for more information, see section 6.3.3). *Geographic proximity between young adults and their parents* was measured separately in relation to mothers and fathers as the geographic distance (in kilometers) between the child's residence and the residence of the mother and the father, respectively.

*Independent variables.* *Quality of the relationship with mother (at 15 years of age)* was retrospectively assessed with four items (e.g., "I always could discuss problems with my mother when I was 15 years old" and "I always felt supported by my mother when I was 15 years old"). The same questions were asked for the *quality of the relationship with father (at 15 years of age)*. If the respondent's mother or father was no longer alive when he or she was 15 years old, these items referred to the situation immediately preceding mother's or father's death. Items were evaluated on a five-point Likert scale, varying from 0 = *completely disagree* to 4 = *completely agree*. In our analyses, the mean score over the four items was used; Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .93 for both measures.

*Marital conflict between mother and father (at the age of 15 of the respondent)* was measured with five items, for instance: "How often did your parents have heated discussions when you were 15 years old?" and "How often did arguments get out of hand when you were 15 years old?". Answer categories were 0 = *never*, 1 = *once or twice*, 2 = *frequently*. If one or both parents were no longer alive or if the parents divorced before the respondent was 15 years old, these items referred to the situation immediately preceding death of the parent(s) or divorce. In our analyses, the mean score of these items was used; Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .77.

*Control variables.* In the analysis of home-leaving, we included respondent's *age* (in years) and *age-squared* ( $age^2$ ) to account for the (nonlinear) relationship between age and leaving home. Furthermore, we controlled for respondent's *year of birth* as well as their *gender* (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*). Also, respondents reported on their own and their parents' level of *education*. To construct an appropriate interval scale, we applied a standard recoding procedure (De Graaf et al., 2000) whereby each of 10 discrete educational categories were coded with a

numerical value representing the approximate number of years of education needed to complete that level of education. In our sample, many young adults were in the process of completing a degree or diploma; in those cases, intervening values were assigned to represent the approximate number of years of education completed. The resulting variable ranged from 6 = *completion of elementary school but not secondary or vocational education* to 21 = *completion of postgraduate education*. Furthermore, *parents' occupational status* when the respondent was 15 years old (or younger if neither parent had an occupation at that time) was measured by the International Socioeconomic Index of Occupational Status developed by Ganzeboom and colleagues (1992). Higher values represented higher socioeconomic status of the occupation; if both parents worked the higher status occupation was used. Also, the questionnaire assessed two other family characteristics when the respondent was 15 years old: *number of living siblings* and *parents' marital status* defined as (a) living together, (b) widowed, (c) separated and/or divorced.

In the regression analyses of current geographic proximity, *respondent's age*, *gender*, and *number of living siblings* were used as control variables. To represent respondent's *residential status*, three categories were defined: (a) living alone, (b) cohabiting, and (c) married. (Young adults living with parents were excluded from the analyses of proximity.) Furthermore, we controlled for the *number of children in the respondent's own household* and *prior divorce*. The latter variable indicated whether respondents had ever been divorced (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*), regardless of current marital status. Respondents reported on their own and their parents' *health status*, with scores ranging from 0 = *very bad* to 4 = *excellent*. *Parents' marital status* was defined as: (a) living together, (b) divorced at age 15 of respondent, (c) divorced after age 15 of respondent, (d) widowed at age 15 of respondent, (e) widowed after age 15 of respondent. Our analyses did not control for *age of the parent*, in view of high correlations between this variable and child's age. For the independent and control variables, means and standard deviations are presented in Table 6.1. Frequencies of missing data were low (ranging from 0 to 2%).

### 6.3.3 Method of analysis

To study the impact of earlier family relations on the timing of leaving home, event history techniques were used; because age at home-leaving was measured in years, we estimated the likelihood of home-leaving with a discrete-time hazard rate model, using a logistic regression analysis of person-years (Yamaguchi, 1991). In this analysis, the dependent variable was the likelihood that an individual would leave the parental home at a particular age, given that he or she still lived with parents at that time. Individuals were 'at risk' of leaving home from age 15 until they left the parental home; those who had not lived independently before the interview were censored at their age at the time of the interview. Positive coefficients reflect a higher likelihood (hazard rate) of leaving home for each unit of change in the predictor variables. Because the observations were nested in persons, robust parameters were estimated, using the cluster option in Stata (StataCorp, 2005). Testing of the assumption of proportionality verified that the data followed the proportional hazard assumption.

**Table 6.1** Descriptive information on child and parent characteristics

Variables	M	SD
<i>Child's characteristics (N = 851<sup>a</sup>)</i>		
Age <sup>b</sup> (years)	28.02	4.32
Gender		
Male	.50	
Female	.50	
N of living siblings	2.06	1.62
N of living siblings (at age 15 child)	2.00	1.54
Education (years)	14.28	2.82
Residential status		
Living with parents	.31	
Living alone	.15	
Cohabiting	.24	
Married	.30	
N of children in the household	.57	.93
Prior divorce (1 = yes)	.03	
Parents living		
Both	.90	
Only mother	.07	
Only father	.02	
None	.01	
Health status	3.19	.61
<i>Mother's characteristics (N = 817<sup>a</sup>)</i>		
Age (years)	55.77	5.91
Education (years)	10.96	2.88
Occupational status (at age 15 child)		
Occupational status	42.59	16.46
No occupation	.47	
Marital status		
Living with child's father	.77	
Divorced (by age 15 child)	.09	
Divorced (after age 15 child)	.07	
Widowed (by age 15 child)	.01	
Widowed (after age 15 child)	.06	
Health status	2.82	.72
<i>Father's characteristics (N = 770<sup>a</sup>)</i>		
Age (years)	58.00	6.25
Education (years)	11.75	3.52
Occupational status (at age 15 child)	51.13	16.06
Marital status		
Living with child's mother	.81	
Divorced (by age 15 child)	.09	
Divorced (after age 15 child)	.07	
Widowed (by age 15 child)	.01	
Widowed (after age 15 child)	.02	
Health status	2.82	.74
<i>Quality of family relations (at age 15 child)</i>		
Child's relationship with mother	2.81	.89
Child's relationship with father	2.45	.94
Marital conflict between mother and father	.41	.39

Note: SDs are given for continuous variables only. Data are weighted. Health status of parent and child is scored from 0 = very bad to 4 = excellent.

<sup>a</sup>Unweighted. <sup>b</sup>Age at time of the interview.

To investigate the impact of earlier family relations on intergenerational geographic proximity, ordinary (least square) regression analyses were performed. The distribution of geographic proximity was positively skewed; logarithm transformation was used to make this dependent variable more normally distributed (Shapiro, 2003). In our interpretations, we assume that the current distance between parents and children is mainly the result of the residential mobility histories of the younger generation; this assumption is supported by empirical evidence (Warnes, 1986).

Our information on age at leaving home and on family relations in adolescence was of retrospective nature. A potential problem with retrospective self-reports is that information may have become distorted over time, making it difficult to draw causal inferences. Nevertheless, we decided to use these retrospective measures, for the following reasons. First, research shows that retrospective reports on major life events – such as leaving the parental home – are reasonably accurate (Dex, 1995; Scott & Alwin, 1998), and that childhood memories remain generally stable over time (Brewin, Andrews, & Gotlib, 1993; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Second, because it is possible that individuals' reports on family experiences and events during youth are colored by their perception of the present relationship with their parents, supplemental analyses were conducted in which we controlled for the present quality of the relationship between respondents and their parent(s) (if alive). In general, results regarding the relationship between the retrospective accounts of family relationships and age at leaving home and intergenerational proximity did not change (results not shown).

## 6.4 RESULTS

### 6.4.1 Descriptive results

Analyses revealed that 76.4% of the young adults had left the parental home at least once. 4.0% reported having left the parental home relatively early (before age 18), while 12.9% had left the parental home relatively late (at 25 years or older). Average age of leaving the parental home was almost 21 years ( $M = 20.81$ ,  $SD = 2.74$ ). T-tests ( $t = 4.64$ ,  $p < .001$ ) revealed that daughters left the parental home at an earlier age ( $M = 20.37$ ,  $SD = 2.34$ ) than sons ( $M = 21.29$ ,  $SD = 3.04$ ). Of the young adults who left the parental home, 19.4% had returned for at least six months; of these 'returners', 61.5% were sons and 38.5% were daughters. Most of the returners (93.8%) had left the parental home again and were currently living independently; for the returners, average age of the most recent home-leaving was 23 years ( $M = 23.11$ ,  $SD = 3.03$ ). At the moment of the interview, 24.7% of the young adults were living in the parental home, of whom 63.6% were sons and 36.4% were daughters; their mean age was almost 24 years ( $M = 23.94$ ,  $SD = 3.16$ ). Of those 'in the nest', more than 60% reported that they expected to live independently within the next two years.

Young adults who had left the parental home lived on average 30.69 kilometers (= 19.07 miles;  $SD = 44.73$ ) from their mother, and 31.26 kilometers (= 19.42 miles;  $SD = 44.84$ ) from

their father. In general, about 50% of young adults had one or both parents in close proximity (< 10 kilometers, i.e. 6.25 miles); about 25% of young adults lived at a distance of more than 50 kilometers (= 31.25 miles) from their parent(s). T-tests revealed that daughters lived closer to their mother [ $M_{\text{daughters}} = 29.03$  km (= 18.04 miles),  $M_{\text{sons}} = 36.37$  km (= 22.60 miles),  $t = 2.20$ ,  $p < .05$ ] and their father [ $M_{\text{daughters}} = 28.63$  km (= 17.79 miles),  $M_{\text{sons}} = 37.78$  km (= 23.48 miles),  $t = 2.88$ ,  $p < .01$ ] than did sons.

**Table 6.2** Summary of discrete-time hazard rate model of home-leaving ( $N = 813$ )

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$e^B$
<i>Child's characteristics</i>			
Age	.77***	.05	2.16
Age <sup>2</sup>	-.03***	.00	.97
Year of birth	.03*	.01	1.03
Gender (1 = female)	.55***	.09	1.74
Education (years)	.04*	.02	1.04
<i>N</i> of living siblings (at age 15 child)	.04	.03	1.04
<i>Parents' characteristics</i>			
Education (years)	.08***	.02	1.08
Occupational status (at age 15 child)	.01**	.00	1.01
Marital status (at age 15 child)			
Living together <sup>a</sup>			
Divorced	.50**	.17	1.65
Widowed	.44	.63	1.55
<i>Quality of family relations (at age 15 child)</i>			
Child's relationship with mother	-.12*	.05	.88
Child's relationship with father	-.09	.06	.92
Marital conflict between mother and father	.25*	.12	1.28
Wald $\chi^2$		612.49	
-2 Log likelihood		1,713.39	
% Left the parental home		76	

Note: Robust standard errors.  $e^B$  = exponentiated *B*. *N* person years = 4,358.

<sup>a</sup>Reference category.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed).

#### 6.4.2 Family relations and leaving the parental home

Results from the discrete-time hazard analyses are presented in Table 6.2. The results reported in the tables do not differentiate between sons and daughters. In additional analyses, gender interaction terms were included in order to examine differential effects. Interaction terms, however, were not significant, which suggests that effects of relationships between family members on age at leaving home and on intergenerational proximity were generally similar for sons and daughters.

Before turning to our hypotheses, we first discuss the estimates of control variables. Age had a positive effect on home-leaving: There was a steady increase by age in the number of individuals that had left the parental home. The significant effect of age squared shows that the relationship between age and home-leaving was nonlinear. Young adults born in a later cohort were more likely to leave the parental home. In general, daughters left the parental home at an earlier age than sons. Highly educated young adults were more likely to leave the parental home than less highly educated young adults. Parental level of education and occupational status were positively related to home-leaving. When parents had divorced, young adults were more likely to leave than when parents were still together.

Partial support was found for our hypotheses. When respondents had a warm and supportive relationship with their mother in adolescence, they were less likely to leave the parental home. No such effects, however, were found for the relationship with father. In accordance with our expectations, we found that young adults were more likely to live independently when they had experienced high levels of marital conflict between mother and father during adolescence.

#### 6.4.3 Family relations and intergenerational geographic proximity

Table 6.3 shows the results for regression analyses predicting geographic proximity between young adults and their mother (Column 1) as well as their father (Column 2). First, estimates of control variables are discussed. Older respondents lived farther away from their mother and father than younger respondents. More highly educated young adults lived farther away from their parents than less highly educated young adults. The greater the number of children in their own household, the closer respondents lived to their parents. Young adults with more highly educated parents lived farther away than those with less highly educated parents. Young adults whose parents had divorced before they were 15 years old lived farther away from their father than young adults from intact families; for divorced mothers, no such relationship was found.

In line with our hypothesis, young adults who had warm and supportive relationships with their mother and father in adolescence lived in closer proximity to them than did young adults who reported less supportive relationships with parents in adolescence. Contrary to our expectations, no relationships were found between the quality of the marital relationship between mother and father when respondents were 15 years old and current intergenerational geographic proximity.

**Table 6.3** Summary of regression analyses for variables predicting geographic proximity between young adults and their parents

Predictor	Proximity to mother			Proximity to father		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$
<i>Child's characteristics</i>						
Age (years)	.04*	.02	.08	.04*	.02	.10
Gender (1 = female)	-.08	.12	-.02	-.17	.12	-.05
<i>N</i> of living siblings	.07	.04	.07	.02	.04	.02
Education (years)	.18***	.02	.30	.15***	.03	.25
Residential status						
Living alone <sup>a</sup>						
Cohabiting	-.19	.16	-.06	-.15	.17	-.05
Married	-.16	.18	-.05	-.07	.19	-.02
<i>N</i> of children in the household	-.22***	.06	-.15	-.23***	.07	-.15
Prior divorce (1 = yes)	.32	.29	.04	.18	.31	.02
Health status	.08	.09	.03	.06	.08	.03
<i>Parent's characteristics</i>						
Education (years)	.10***	.02	.18	.10***	.02	.22
Marital status						
Living with other parent <sup>a</sup>						
Divorced (by age 15 child)	.30	.20	.06	.52*	.23	.09
Divorced (after age 15 child)	.03	.22	.00	.19	.23	.03
Widowed (by age 15 child)	-.26	.52	-.02	-1.13	.85	-.05
Widowed (after age 15 child)	.09	.22	.01	.28	.35	.03
Health status	-.01	.08	-.00	.06	.08	.03
<i>Quality of family relations (at age 15 child)</i>						
Child's relationship with parent	-.12*	.06	-.08	-.23***	.07	-.14
Marital conflict between mother and father	-.05	.14	-.02	-.16	.15	-.04
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> (adjusted)		.20			.20	
<i>N</i>		682			635	

Note: Proximity is defined as the logarithm of intergenerational distance in kilometers. Health status of parent and child is scored from 0 = *very bad* to 4 = *excellent*. Young adults living with parents are excluded.

<sup>a</sup>Reference category.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed).

## 6.5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In our sample, more than 75% of young adults between 18 and 34 years old had left the parental home. Mean age of leaving home was about 21 years; daughters left the parental home slightly earlier than sons. Similar patterns have been found in other Western European countries such as Germany (Juang et al., 1999; Seiffge-Krenke, 2006) and Great Britain (Holdsworth, 2000). In the United States, young people generally leave home at an earlier age (Arnett, 2000). In our sample, the majority of young people continued to live independently; about 19% returned for at least six months after their initial departure from home. Similar patterns have been observed in other Western European countries (Kerckhoff & Macrae, 1992; Seiffge-Krenke, 2006). In the United States, returning to the parental home is more common (White, 1994).

We also examined how far the young adults lived from their parents, after leaving the parental home. We found that about half lived at a distance of less than 10 kilometers from their parents (= 6.25 miles), and one quarter lived farther away than 50 kilometers (= 31.25 miles). Because The Netherlands is a country with a relatively high-density population, inter-generational geographic proximity is generally higher than in other Western European countries (Hank, 2007; Warnes, 1986), and much higher than in the United States (Rogerson et al., 1993). As in other Western countries (Hank, 2007; Lawton et al., 1994), the level of proximity was related to both the child's and the parents' level of education, with more highly educated families living at greater distances from each other.

Our research was guided by two main goals. First, we examined how the timing of leaving home is affected by the quality of family relations during adolescence. Second, we investigated to what extent the quality of family relations in adolescence predicts the geographic proximity between young adult children and their parents.

### 6.5.1 Family relations and leaving the parental home

Our results showed that children with warm and supportive relationships with their mother in adolescence left the parental home at a relatively late age, compared to those who experienced a less supportive relationship; no independent effect of quality of the relationship with father was found. This finding is in accordance with earlier studies in which close parent-child relations were found to be related to prolonged co-residence among adolescents and young adults (Aquilino, 1991; Bucx & Van Wel, 2008; De Jong-Gierveld et al., 1991; Seiffge-Krenke, 2006). Apparently, adults who get along well with their parents and who feel supported by them have less reason to start living on their own. Our results suggest that it is mainly the relationship with mother which is important in this respect; this finding may be attributable to the fact that mothers are generally more involved with their children than are fathers (Seiffge-Krenke, 1999). Readers should note, however, that the association between having a close and supportive relationship with mother and delayed home-leaving might also be a spurious artefact. Children who are less skilled in handling developmental tasks in

earlier phases of the life course might evoke higher levels of support from the mother and, for the same reason, can be expected to have greater difficulty establishing residential independence in young adulthood.

As expected, we found that children who had experienced high levels of conflict between their mother and father in adolescence left home at an earlier age than those who had experienced lower levels of conflict. Previous research has found that the children of parents in conflicted marriages are more likely to feel caught between parents and to have lower levels of subjective well-being (Amato & Afifi, 2006). Our finding suggests that an important reason for children to leave the parental home is to escape from these interparental conflicts and to escape from the accompanying negative climate. In general, our results are consistent with the basic tenet of the family life course perspective, namely that the timing of individual life course transitions is dependent on relations between family members.

Although our focus was on the relationship between the quality of family relations and leaving home, other findings deserve attention as well. In line with earlier research (Garasky, 2002; White, 1994), we found that parental divorce before children reach adulthood was associated with earlier home-leaving. In the past, authors have suggested that earlier home-leaving among young people with divorced parents could be explained by lower levels of closeness between parents and children (Stattin & Magnusson, 1996) and higher levels of interparental conflict (Kiernan, 1992). Because in our models these variables were already included, we can conclude that, in addition to the affective climate in the parental home, other aspects need to be taken into account to explain the relationship between parental divorce and leaving home, for example the economic circumstances of dissolved families: In general, disrupted families have fewer economic resources and, as a consequence, less comfortable housing conditions, which might lead young people to leave home at an earlier age (Kiernan, 1992).

In line with previous research (Holdsworth, 2000; Mulder & Hooimeijer, 2002; White, 1994), we found that the level of education of young adults and their parents, as well as parents' occupational status, was associated with leaving home at an earlier age. Furthermore, our research revealed that individuals born in later cohorts left the parental home at an earlier age. This is in line with recent research in The Netherlands (De Graaf & Loozen, 2006) which indicated that, after increases in age at home-leaving during the 1980s and 1990s, the average age has decreased slightly since the year 2000, probably because of advantageous macro-economic conditions and low levels of unemployment among youth.

### **6.5.2 Family relations and intergenerational geographic proximity**

In line with our hypothesis, we found that the quality of the relationship between parents and adolescents was related to intergenerational geographic proximity in young adulthood: Children who had experienced warm and supportive relationships with parents in adolescence lived closer to their parents in young adulthood. Our results suggest that, despite increasing mobility nowadays, young adults prefer to live relatively close to their parents if

relationships with them are perceived as favorable. Our finding is consistent with the family life course perspective, which posits that early child-parent relationships have long-term consequences for intergenerational relationships. It is also in line with previous findings that the quality of parent-child relationships is strongly related to other dimensions of intergenerational solidarity, such as the level of parent-child contact (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Lawton et al., 1994; Lye et al., 1995; Roberts & Bengtson, 1990). In our research, no relationship was found between interparental conflict in adolescence and intergenerational geographic proximity in young adulthood.

Furthermore, when parents had been divorced before a child had reached adulthood, the adult child tended to live farther away from the father; no such effects were found for divorced mothers. Similar differential effects of divorce for fathers and mothers were found in earlier studies (Lawton et al., 1994; Shapiro, 2003). The negative effect of early divorce on father-adult child proximity might be attributable to the tendency for men to be noncustodial fathers: Previous research suggests that early parental divorce leads to greater geographical distance between adult children and their noncustodial parent, whether the mother or the father (Aquilino, 1994).

Our findings suggest that it is not only the family structure of the parental home that has an impact on intergenerational geographic proximity; the young adults' own family structure also plays a role. The number of children in a young adult's household was positively related to intergenerational geographic proximity, which is in line with earlier results (Lawton et al., 1994). Because our study was based on cross-sectional information, we have to be careful in identifying the direction of causality of this relationship. It is possible that young adults with children move closer to their parents' residence in order to facilitate grandparents' provision of child care, yet equally possible that young adults who live close to their parents decide to have (more) children because of the proximity of grandparents to provide child care.

### 6.5.3 Limitations and future research

The reader should take into account that our study was conducted in The Netherlands, a country with a relatively high-density population. Parents and children live in relatively close geographic proximity, and differences in residential distance are relatively small. Future research should investigate to what extent our results can be generalized to countries with different structural characteristics. It is plausible that the relationships that we found between family relations and leaving home and intergenerational geographic proximity are stronger in countries with larger intergenerational distances (such as the United States): In these countries, the decision to leave the parental home and where to live can be expected to have a greater impact on opportunities for intergenerational exchanges within the family.

A limitation of our research was that we relied on retrospective information: Respondents retrospectively provided information on their age at home-leaving and on the quality of family relationships in adolescence. Although retrospective reports on major life events – such as leaving the parental home – are generally quite accurate (Dex, 1995), and memories of

early family experiences and events are found to be relatively stable over time (Brewin et al., 1993; Rossi & Rossi, 1990), a potential problem with retrospective self-reports is that information may become distorted over time. In general, the optimal design for investigating our research questions would include retrospective and prospective data collection processes, combining the advantages of both approaches (Scott & Alwin, 1998). Therefore, it is important to replicate our findings with prospective data that allow for the measurement of family relations prior to and after leaving home. Furthermore, there are different reasons why young adults leave the parental home: They leave home for reasons of education and employment, in order to gain greater freedom and independence, or because they want to live together with a partner (marriage or unmarried cohabitation) (De Jong-Gierveld et al., 1991). Because the effect family relations have on the process of leaving home might vary depending on the reasons for leaving, future research should take into account the reasons young adults have for living on their own.





## CHAPTER 7

# Conclusion and discussion



# 7 Conclusion and discussion

## 7.1 INTRODUCTION

In the past, theory formation and empirical research on parent-child relations have concentrated mainly on either the early end of the age continuum – the ‘parenting years’ – or the later end of the age continuum – the ‘aging years’; in contrast, the period between these two phases – the ‘middle years’ – has been largely neglected (Hagestad, 1987; Treas & Lawton, 1999). Although ties with adult children were perceived as important for the social integration of older individuals and (gerontologic) research on intergenerational relations in the ‘aging years’ intensified during the second half of the twentieth century (De Jong-Gierveld & Hagestad, 2006; Putney & Bengtson, 2003), only few attempts were undertaken to investigate family relations beyond childhood and adolescence, or to examine the development of intergenerational relations across the life span.

We have argued that parent-child relations in the ‘middle years’ of life have increased in importance in light of recent changes affecting the individual life courses of both children and their parents. First, changes in the patterning and timing of life course transitions early in adult life have led researchers to identify young adulthood as a separate phase of the life span in which young individuals experiment with alternative roles and life options and increasingly assume adult life roles and responsibilities. Secondly, sociodemographic changes and increases in life expectancy have created a new phase of the life span described as early old age in which older individuals are freed from work and family responsibilities while maintaining adequate health and financial resources. We theorized that these changes have extended the length of the middle portion of family life and have contributed to its distinctive character: As these ‘middle years’ occur when children are in young adulthood and their parents are in early old age, specific patterns of intergenerational interdependence might emerge which reflect the life course phase of both generations.

The current dissertation investigated the relationship between parents and children in the ‘middle years’; the central goal was to investigate links between young adults’ life course and their relations with parents. Our study was guided by two theoretical frameworks: the family life course perspective (Elder, 1994; Elder & Johnson, 2002; MacMillan & Copher, 2005) and the paradigm of intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991). The family life course perspective guided us to direct attention to the individual’s life course and important life course transitions, to the impact of past experiences and conditions on present and future life course decisions, and to the importance of ‘linked lives’ for understanding the

interplay between the life course and relationships between young adult children and their parents (Elder, 1994; Elder & Johnson, 2002; MacMillan & Copher, 2005). In line with the explicit assumption of the intergenerational solidarity paradigm that all six dimensions represent relevant aspects of intergenerational relations (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991), we studied the relationship between young adults' life course and their relationship with parents separately in relation to all six solidarity dimensions.

In Chapter 1 (section 1.7), the main research questions of this dissertation were presented, classified in terms of the dimensions of intergenerational solidarity. In Chapters 2 to 6, these research questions were empirically addressed. Each of these five empirical chapters addressed a different dimension of solidarity – with the exception of Chapter 5, in which two dimensions were investigated. Analyses were performed using data from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS; Dykstra et al., 2005, 2007) and the Utrecht Study of Adolescent Development (USAD; Meeus & 't Hart, 1993; Van Wel et al., 2000).

In this concluding chapter, the main findings of this thesis are discussed and placed in perspective. In section 7.2, an overview of the main findings is presented in relation to the research questions formulated in Chapter 1. Section 7.3 discusses the main conclusions of this thesis and its contribution to the literature on intergenerational relationships in the 'middle years'. In section 7.4, we discuss our findings in light of recent macro-level societal and historical developments, micro-level parent-child relationship histories, and micro-level changes in the lives of young people. Section 7.5 summarizes the major strengths and limitations of the present study, and offers directions and suggestions for future research. This chapter closes with our final conclusion.

## 7.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### 7.2.1 Associational solidarity: intergenerational contact

Although it was formerly believed (Parsons, 1942, 1943) that parents and children become isolated from each other after the latter have left the parental home and formed their own (nuclear) families, empirical research has generally shown that most parents and children remain in close contact with each other (Lin & Rogerson, 1995; Lye, 1996; Mancini & Blieszner, 1989; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Guided by the family life course principle of 'linked lives' (Aquilino, 1997; Elder, 1994; MacMillan & Copher, 2005), we have suggested that it is nevertheless plausible that contact between parents and children may be affected by the specific life course status of young adults, albeit in a much less radical way. Two research questions were central in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. First, we investigated to what extent the frequency of intergenerational contact is related to young adults' partnership status – whether they are involved in a romantic relationship – and to their parenthood status – whether they have children. Secondly, we studied mechanisms underlying the relationship between partnership or parenthood status and intergenerational contact.

In general, we observed that the young adults in our sample had frequent contact with their parents, even after they had established an independent household. Slightly more than half of the nonresident young adults had face-to-face contact with their mother and father at least once a week. More than 70% of the young adults had at least weekly contact with their mother via phone or (e-)mail; more than 50% spoke or (e-)mailed with their father at least once a week. Studies in other Western European countries such as Germany (Szydlik, 2000) and Great Britain (Grundy & Shelton, 2001) have revealed similar patterns of contact. Face-to-face contact in Western Europe is relatively high compared to the United States, where about 40% of adults see their parents at least weekly (Lye, 1996; Lye et al., 1995).

Regarding partnership status, we expected to find that young adults with a partner have less contact with their parents than do single young adults; our arguments for this hypothesis were that, by entering romantic partnerships, young adults' social networks expand to include their partner's family (most notably, the parents-in-law), and that the partner's sentiments might mediate contact with parents. In line with our hypothesis, our results suggest that entrance into cohabitation and marriage is associated with less face-to-face contact with parents. Regarding underlying mechanisms, young adults who have satisfactory relationships with their parents-in-law speak less often with their own mother via phone or (e-)mail. Frequency of face-to-face contact with both parents is related to the quality of the relationship not only between respondents and their parents, but also between the respondent's partner and the respondent's parents (i.e., the partner's parents-in-law). Finally, young adults see their parents less often when their partner has a satisfactory relationship with his or her own parents.

Regarding parenthood status, we theorized that young adults' entrance into parenthood leads to more frequent interactions with (grand)parents, as both young adults and their parents were assumed to benefit from the provision of childcare by (grand)parents: Grandparents can be expected to enjoy seeing their grandchildren, whereas for young adults grandparents' provision of support may be a financially attractive alternative to professional childcare. In line with our hypothesis, we observed that young adults with offspring of their own see their parents more often than young adults without offspring, and that young adult daughters with children of their own have more telephone/(e-)mail contact with their mother than young adult daughters without offspring. Our finding that contact is more frequent only when the youngest grandchild is below the age of six can be interpreted as evidence that grandparents play a more active and caring role in families with young children than in households with older children (Silverstein & Marengo, 2001). Concerning underlying mechanisms, intergenerational contact with young adult children is more frequent when parents offer support with childcare; when young adults make use of paid childcare arrangements, contact with their mothers typically decreases. In general, our results are in line with previous findings on intergenerational support (Hogan et al., 1993).

### 7.2.2 Affectual solidarity: the emotional bond between parents and children

The family life course perspective suggests that the relationship between parents and children remains important throughout the life course, but that life course transitions have the potential to influence the emotional quality of the relationship between young people and their parents (Elder, 1994; MacMillan & Copher, 2005). In Chapter 3, we investigated how adolescents' and young adults' life course stage affects their affective bond with parents. Concerning adolescents' and young adults' living situation, four life course stages were distinguished: living with parents, living independently without a partner, married (or cohabiting) without children, and married (or cohabiting) with children. Regarding their financial circumstances, we compared young people who have a main source of income independent of their parents with young people who are financially dependent on their parents.

Three theoretical perspectives with psychological and sociological origins suggest different ways in which life course transitions may affect parent-child relations. First, individuation theory suggests that life course transitions require some degree of transformation and loosening of ties with parents, because these transitions increase young people's independence from their parents (Buhl, 2000; Smollar & Youniss, 1989; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Second, role identity theory implies more positive effects because life course transitions lead to greater similarity in the roles and experiences of parents and children (Bengtson & Black, 1973; Stryker, 1968). Third, if life course transitions are conceptualized as potential stressors, temporary pressure or conflicts can be expected to arise in the relationship between parents and children, which are typically resolved in due course (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998; Knoester, 2003).

In line with previous research (Aquilino, 1997; Thornton et al., 1995; Van Wel et al., 2002), we observed that adolescents and young adults have relatively close relationships with their parents, and that these relationships remain largely stable from adolescence through young adulthood. Results of earlier analyses of the same dataset showed a moderate increase in emotional closeness between parents and children during this phase of the life course (Van Wel et al., 2002), which is in line with other empirical research (Rice & Mulkeen, 1995).

Nevertheless, our longitudinal results indicate that these positive changes in closeness with increasing age are tempered by life course transitions: After leaving the parental home and after becoming parents themselves, young adults report feeling less close to their parents. No effects of financial independence were observed. These results are in line with findings from previous studies (Aquilino, 1997, 1999; Berger & Fend, 2005). Consistent with previous research (Umberson, 1992), our findings indicate that the parent-child relationship remains important for the psychological well-being of children throughout adolescence and into adulthood. In line with prior research (Roberts & Bengtson, 1993), the relationship between the parental bond and well-being decreased over time; this trend was not statistically significant, however.

Overall, our results are consistent with individuation theory (Buhl, 2000; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), which posits that life course transitions enhance autonomy and independence, and that the latter in turn necessitate a transition to a less close parent-child relationship. Nevertheless, it is important to note that despite a loosening of the parent-child relationship, there is no evidence of a radical detachment as suggested by classic psychoanalytical perspectives (Blos, 1962; Erikson, 1950; A. Freud, 1958).

### **7.2.3 Functional solidarity: intergenerational exchanges of support**

In Chapter 4, we investigated the flows of aid up and down between the generations. Four kinds of intergenerational support were examined: emotional support, advice, financial support, and instrumental support (help with practical matters). In line with previous research (Aquilino, 2005; Eggebeen, 2005; Kohli, 1999; Rossi & Rossi, 1990), we observed that the intergenerational relationship provides a major source of assistance and support to both young adults and their parents. More support flows from parents to their children than in the reverse direction; this applies in particular for exchanges of financial support and advice.

Our main purpose was to investigate how the support that young adults receive from their parents, as well as the support that young adults provide to their parents, depends on the young adults' life course status – whether the young adult lives independently or with parents, is involved in a romantic relationship, has children, and has attained financial independence. Adopting a life course framework, we theorized that young adults who occupy different positions in the life course differ in their resources and, therefore, in their potential need for receiving help and in their opportunities to provide help.

Overall, evidence was observed for our notion that the amount of time and resources the older generation provides to their young adult children is related to the latter's life course status. After leaving the parental home, young adults are less frequently the recipients of emotional help from their fathers, and of advice from both their parents. Young adults living together with a romantic partner (whether cohabiting or married) get less advice from their parents than do single young adults. These findings might be attributable to changes in young adults' network structures as a consequence of leaving the parental home, cohabiting, and marriage (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992): Other people in the young adult's network, most notably the partner, may take over many functions previously performed by parents, such as providing support. Moreover, when young adults leave the parental home, intergenerational geographical distance typically increases, which makes it more difficult and more costly – in terms of both time and money – for family members to exchange support (Eggebeen, 2005; Kalmijn, 2007).

Our study contributes to earlier research by showing that the financial support that parents give to their children is dependent not only on parents' income level (Kohli, 1999), but also on the financial situation of their children. In accordance with previous studies (Aquilino, 2005), we found that young adults receiving (college) education are generally subsidized by their parents. Financial support to young adults not enrolled in an educational

program depends on their financial status: Young adults with fewer economic resources tend to get more economic assistance from their parents than young adults with greater resources.

Our findings suggest that parenthood is associated with more instrumental support from grandparents, most notably in the provision of childcare. At the same time, however, this transition leads young adults to get less emotional support from their mother. These results indicate that, whereas functional contact with parents typically increases as young adults transition into parenthood, there is a concomitant decrease in the amount of quality time that young adults and their parents can spend together. The latter result is consistent with our results discussed in section 7.2.2, and with previous findings indicating that when children become parents, emotional closeness between parents and children typically decreases, and conflicts are likely to increase (Aquilino, 1997, 1999; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Decreased closeness between parents and children may arise from the difficulties experienced by young adults in adapting to the stresses and demands of parenthood; the latter generally have a negative effect on the couple's relationship quality as well (Demo & Cox, 2000). Also, the birth of a child might lead young adults to ignore, at least temporarily, their own intimacy needs and to tolerate reduced levels of intimate contact with family members in order to meet the needs of their children (Ambert, 1992). Furthermore, grandparents' attempts to provide support may sometimes be interpreted as interference by the adult child, or may lead to differences of opinion, creating frustrations and tensions on both sides of the intergenerational relationship and leading to decreases in emotional closeness.

Our study yielded mixed evidence concerning the relationship between young adults' life course status and the support they provide to their parents. Young adults who have left the parental home less frequently offer emotional support and advice to their father, probably because of increased geographic constraints. Dating and married young adults more often provide emotional support to their mother than do single young adults. This suggests that entry into a romantic partnership makes young adults' roles and experiences more similar to those of their parents, which in turn may make young adults' emotional support more relevant to their parents. Furthermore, our results indicate that entry into parenthood typically reduces opportunities for young adults to provide emotional and financial support to their mother.

Cohabiting young adults tend to provide less financial help to their mothers, whereas cohabiting and married young adults less frequently give instrumental support to their fathers. These findings might be explained by the fact that these transitions typically expand the young adult's family network; in this context, parents with financial needs might need to compete with a larger network of family members. Furthermore, these forms of support may decline because decisions on the allocation of money and leisure time become partly dependent on the new partner's preferences and sentiments; children-in-law may, in line with common stereotypes, experience adjustment problems and conflicts with their parents-in-law.

#### 7.2.4 Normative solidarity: family norms and obligations

In Chapter 5, we investigated perceptions of intergenerational norms or obligations. Intergenerational obligations include filial obligations, which refer to the expectations of adult children concerning their provision of support to (aging) parents, as well as parental obligations, which refer to parents' perception of their responsibility to support their offspring in childhood and adulthood (Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Although family scholars have suggested that both types of intergenerational obligations have weakened considerably in recent decades (Lasch, 1977), our study suggests that kinship norms are still relevant: Both young adults and their parents reported moderate to moderately strong feelings concerning intergenerational obligations. This finding is consistent with results from previous studies in other Western countries (Fokkema et al., 2008; Lye, 1996; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Parental obligations were found to be stronger than filial obligations, which is in line with earlier research (Lye, 1996; Rossi & Rossi, 1990).

We examined whether the strength of intergenerational obligations is dependent on young adults' life course stage. Four life course stages were compared: living with parents, living independently without a partner, cohabiting or married without children, and cohabiting or married with children. We reasoned that life course transitions have the potential to affect feelings of obligation in young adults as well as their parents: For young adults, life course transitions lead to the adoption of new family roles, such as spouse and parent, which might decrease the salience of other role identities, such as son or daughter. Moreover, young adults' feelings of obligation may depend on their life course stage, as these transitions may change the young adult's capacity to provide care to parents. Parents' feelings of intergenerational obligations might also depend on the life course stage of their children, as young adults' life course transitions lead to changes in their needs and resources, bringing about corresponding changes in their parents' lives and roles.

Our results revealed no differences in the strength of young adults' obligations across the four life course stages. The parents of children who lived together with a partner (without offspring) expressed less strong feelings of intergenerational obligation than parents of children living at home. As parents' actual provision of support can be a manifestation of perceived obligations as well as a determinant of obligations (Festinger, 1957), this finding is consistent with our earlier observations that parental contact and support typically decrease after young adults have left the parental home and entered into cohabitation or marriage (see sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.3). Although norms or obligations that people perceive must be conceptually distinguished from personal intentions to provide support (Stein et al., 1998), this finding suggests that, at a more practical level, parents' feelings of obligation to give help may change in response to changes in their children's circumstances and corresponding need for (parental) support (Gans & Silverstein, 2006).

### 7.2.5 Consensual solidarity: intergenerational congruence in attitudes

In Chapter 5, we investigated attitude congruence or agreement between young adults and parents in two important family domains: intergenerational relations and intimate partner relationships. Although sociologists and psychologists have suggested that the attitudes of adolescents and young adults diverge from those of their parents, leading to the emergence of a ‘generation gap’, research has revealed a substantial degree of attitude congruence between parents and their adolescent and young adult children (Acock & Bengtson, 1978; Glass et al., 1986; Miller & Glass, 1989; Styskal & Sullivan, 1975; Vollebergh et al., 2001). Recent research suggests that the generation gap in attitudes narrowed considerably during the latter part of the twentieth century (Smith, 2006). In line with previous research (De Vries et al., 2009; Glass et al., 1986; Mangen & Westbrook, 1988), our study revealed moderate levels of intergenerational attitude congruence regarding intergenerational obligations and intimate partner relationships. Our findings indicate that parents remain successful at transmitting attitudes to their children, both in a direct way – through the process of socialization – and in an indirect way – via status inheritance (Bandura, 1977; Glass et al., 1986; Vollebergh et al., 2001), and that these sources of influence extend well into adulthood. Previous research suggests that children also have the potential to influence their parents’ attitudes, although parental influences on children are generally much stronger (Glass et al., 1986; Vollebergh et al., 2001).

Our main research goal was to investigate how intergenerational attitude congruence in these domains depends on the young adult’s life course stage (living with parents, living independently without a partner, cohabiting or married without children, cohabiting or married with children). Our results revealed no evidence of a relationship between young adults’ life course stage and congruence of attitudes concerning intergenerational obligations. However, our findings do suggest that intergenerational congruence in the domain of partnership attitudes is dependent on the young adult’s life course stage, as congruence is lower for young adults who live independently and have no children of their own, as compared with young adults who live with their parents and young adults who have offspring. Our finding that intergenerational congruence in partnership attitudes is higher for young adults living with parents is consistent with socialization theory (Bandura, 1977; Miller & Glass, 1989), as this life course stage provides frequent opportunities for parents and children to influence each other’s attitudes. When young adults leave the parental home and enter romantic relationships, they typically become socialized into other social groups, such as their partner’s family and friends, whose attitudes may differ from those of their parents.

The finding that intergenerational attitude congruence is higher for young adults with children than for young adults living independently without offspring (cohabiting or non-cohabiting) suggests that the entry into parenthood leads young adults to rely more on their parents’ attitudes. Different underlying processes may account for this finding. First, it is consistent with the intergenerational similarity hypothesis (Aquilino, 1997, 1999; Bengtson & Black, 1973): By moving into the parental role, young adults’ experiences become similar to

those of their parents, which leads young adults to identify more with their parents. Second, our finding is in line with socialization theories: The birth of a child changes individuals' networks (Munch et al., 1997) and typically leads to more contact between the generations (see section 7.2.1), which increases opportunities for mutual influence. Third, because our study was cross-sectional and we could not determine the direction of causation, it is also possible that young adults with attitudes similar to those of their parents are more likely to have a child in this life course period.

### **7.2.6 Structural solidarity: intergenerational geographic proximity**

In Chapter 6, we investigated the timing of departure from the parental home and geographic proximity between young adults and their parents. Guided by the family life course perspective, we addressed two research questions. First, we examined to what extent family relations in adolescence predict the age at which young individuals leave the parental home. Secondly, it was investigated to what extent family relations in adolescence predict whether young adults who have left the parental home live close to or farther away from their parents.

Our descriptive results revealed that more than 75% of the young adults aged between 18 and 34 years lived independently at the time of the interview. The mean age at departure from the parental home was about 21 years, with daughters leaving slightly earlier than sons. Studies in other Western European countries such as Germany (Juang et al., 1999; Seiffge-Krenke, 2006) and Great Britain (Holdsworth, 2000) showed similar patterns; in the United States, people generally leave home at younger ages (Arnett, 2000). Young adults who had left the parental home lived relatively close to their parents: About 50% of young adults lived at a distance of less than 10 kilometers from their parents (= 6.25 miles), while 25% lived farther away than 50 kilometers (= 31.25 miles). Compared to other countries, The Netherlands is relatively small and densely populated; therefore, family members tend to live closer to one another than in other Western countries (Hank, 2007; Rogerson et al., 1993; Warnes, 1986).

Regarding the timing of leaving home, we hypothesized that young individuals who had warm and caring family relationships with parents and who felt supported by their parents during adolescence have less reason to start living on their own, and consequently leave the parental home at a later age; individuals who get along less well with their parents can be expected to make this transition at a younger age. In accordance with this hypothesis and in line with previous research (Aquilino, 1991; De Jong-Gierveld et al., 1991; Seiffge-Krenke, 2006) and our earlier findings (see section 7.2.2), our analyses revealed that close and supportive relationships with parents have the potential to slow down the process of leaving home. Our results indicate that it is mainly the relationship with mother which is important in this respect; this finding may reflect the fact that, although gender roles have become more egalitarian, on average, mothers have the primary responsibility for their children and are more highly involved with their children than are fathers (Seiffge-Krenke, 1999).

Furthermore, an important reason for children to leave the parental home is to escape from conflicts between mother and father and to escape from the accompanying negative family atmosphere.

Regarding intergenerational geographic proximity, we argued that, as contact and support exchanges are facilitated by intergenerational geographic proximity, it is plausible that young adults take the residential location of their parents into account when deciding where to live. Assuming that the degree to which young adults attach importance to intergenerational proximity depends on the quality of earlier experiences with parents, we hypothesized that children who had warm and supportive relationships with parents in adolescence would live closer to their parents in young adulthood. Our findings are consistent with this expectation and in accordance with earlier evidence that the quality of parent-child relationships is related to other dimensions of intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Lawton et al., 1994; Roberts & Bengtson, 1990).

In addition, we examined to what extent intergenerational geographic proximity is related to young adults' partnership status and parenthood status. We found no differences between single, dating, cohabiting, and married young adults. Consistent with previous research (Lawton et al., 1994), our study revealed that the number of children in a young adult's household is positively related to intergenerational geographic proximity. Because of the cross-sectional nature of the data collection, we were not able to make inferences about the direction of causality: Young adults with children might move closer to their parents' residence in order to facilitate grandparents' provision of childcare; alternatively, it is possible that young adults who live close to their parents decide to have (more) children because of the proximity of grandparents to provide childcare.

### 7.3 THE 'MIDDLE YEARS' OF THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

With their focus on young children and adolescents living with parents or on middle-aged children providing care to their elderly, frail parents, family researchers have largely neglected intergenerational relationships in the 'middle years', the period beyond childhood and adolescence (Hagestad, 1987; Treas & Lawton, 1999). A possible explanation for the relative scarcity of family research on the middle portion of family life is the dominance of classic functionalist family theories (Parsons, 1942, 1943) and psychoanalytical theories (Blos, 1962, 1979; Erikson, 1950) in sociological and psychological research. These theories emphasize that youth need to establish autonomy from parents during adolescence and young adulthood and that, as a consequence, intergenerational relations lose their relevance beyond adolescence (Marks et al., 2007). First and foremost, our findings suggest that intergenerational ties remain important throughout people's lives; their relevance is not limited to the beginning and end of the life course. In the 'middle years', the intergenerational network consists of two generations that reside in separate nuclear households and exchange resources representing different types of solidarity (geographic proximity; interaction; emotional, instrumental and

material support). In general, young adults and their parents maintain reasonably good relationships with each other, they see and speak with each other on a frequent basis, and they help each other regularly. This conclusion is in line with recent research from other Western countries (Allen et al., 2000; Bengtson, 2001; Mitchell, 2006; Treas & Lawton, 1999).

In the introduction to our empirical studies, we pointed out that the ‘middle years’ of the parent-child relationship are conceptually different from the ‘parenting years’ and the ‘aging years’. One of the major functions of the parent-child relationship is the provision of care and assistance to dependent generations. Whereas both the ‘parenting years’ and the ‘aging years’ entail a clear distinction between a dependent generation and a generation that provides care, this applies much less to the ‘middle years’: In the pathway to adulthood, young adults become independent of their parents, while their parents are usually in good health and have sufficient financial and material resources to remain active and independent in most aspects of their lives. As a result, the ‘middle years’ can be characterized as a phase in which the generations are relatively free from clearly circumscribed responsibilities to provide care to each other (Van den Brink & De Vries, 2002). Our empirical results nevertheless show that there are frequent exchanges of contact and support between the two generations in the ‘middle years’, and that both young adults and their parents have moderate to moderately strong feelings regarding intergenerational obligations. After young adults have made the transition from the parental home to independent living and have taken on adult roles and responsibilities in the domains of work and family, parents remain central in the lives of their young adult children.

Our findings concerning support exchanges reveal that parents are usually willing and able to provide help to their children to assure the latter’s well-being, to subsidize professional development and training, to help them cope with difficult situations, and to encourage their emancipation and successful transition into adult roles. Our findings reveal that parents provide more support to their young adult children than vice versa; this holds especially for financial support and, to a lesser extent, for advice. This ‘intergenerational asymmetry’ in exchanges of support is also reflected in our finding that both young adults and their parents perceive stronger parental obligations than filial obligations. Apparently, after the ‘parenting years’ the relationship between parents and children continues to be fairly asymmetrical in nature throughout the ‘middle years’. It is only when parents are near the end of life – during the ‘aging years’ – that this pattern is reversed; with the possible exception of financial support, more support and care flow from children to their dependent elders than in the other direction (Klein Ikkink et al., 1999).

An important feature of the ‘middle years’ is that several critical life course transitions occur in the lives of children and parents, which change the roles and behaviors of both generations. When progressing from economic dependence on parents to economic autonomy, and from membership in the family of origin to establishment of an independent household, young adults assume adult roles and responsibilities in the domains of work and family. For parents, explicit work and parental responsibilities typically decrease, as they become economically less active and their children leave the parental household. As these changes

affect both generations' needs, resources, roles and responsibilities, we proposed that they might lead to transformations in the parent-child relationship and to new patterns of intergenerational interdependence.

Our research clearly shows that intergenerational contact and support exchanges are dependent on the life course status and life situation of young adults. After leaving the parental home, young adults less often exchange emotional help and advice with their fathers, and they receive less advice from their mothers; these decreases may reflect increased geographic distance as well as changes in need for parental support. Besides these behavioral exchanges, young adults' feelings of belonging to the other generation also seem to be affected by leaving the parental home, as this transition is associated with a less close relationship with parents and with decreased levels of attitude congruence between the generations. Entering cohabitation and marriage unions is accompanied by less frequent intergenerational contact and less advice from parents; young adults with a partner give more emotional support to their mothers than do single young adults.

The transition into parenthood is associated with more intergenerational contact and more instrumental support from parents, and with higher levels of intergenerational attitude congruence; additionally, young adults with children live closer to their parents' residence, which further enhances intergenerational contact. At the same time, however, the entry into parenthood leads young adults to exchange less emotional support with their mother, and this transition has the potential to decrease affective closeness with parents. Parents tend to give more economic assistance to young adult children who are financially less well off and to children who are attending college (or another educational institution). Our results indicate that besides the actual support given by parents, their feelings of obligation to provide support are also dependent on their children's life circumstances. Although daughters generally have closer relationships with their parents, especially their mothers, we found only minor differences between daughters and sons in the way relationships with parents were dependent on the child's life course status.

The parent-child relationship appears to depend not only on the life course status of young adult children, but also on the life course status of their parents. In line with earlier research (Aquilino, 1994, 1997; Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1992; Eggebeen, 1992, 2005; Kalmijn, 2007), we found that parental divorce and remarriage generally decrease contact and support exchanges with children, with stronger effects for fathers than for mothers. A parent's widowhood results in more intergenerational contact and advice from children, probably reflecting the widowed parent's increased need for these kinds of support.

In conclusion, in the 'middle years' relationships between children and parents continue to play an important role in the lives of both generations. In some periods of the young adult's life (such as departure from the parental home and entry into romantic relationships), relationships with parents may be displaced by relationships with other individuals (peers, and most notably the partner), whereas in other phases (such as entry into parenthood) the young adult's parents become more important. Regarding the parents' life course, relationships with children become particularly relevant after one parent's death; and intergenerational

relations tend to become less close after parents have divorced. Intergenerational transfers of exchanges, services, and other kinds of support occur in particular life course periods and in response to particular life course needs. Our findings indicate that in the 'middle years' of the family life course intergenerational relations represent a 'latent kin network' (Bengtson, 2001; Riley & Riley, 1993): a family network that exists beyond the nuclear family system, that may be inactive or less intensively used in some periods of life but that can be called upon in other life phases and in times of need. In this way, intergenerational relations provide an important safety net, helping both generations to cope with difficult situations in life and to negotiate life course transitions.

Two theoretical perspectives guided our investigation of the 'middle years': the family life course perspective and the intergenerational solidarity paradigm. In general, our conclusions are consistent with the family life course perspective (Elder, 1994; MacMillan & Copher, 2005), which contends that the parent-child relationship is characterized by both continuity and discontinuity: Although the relationship between parents and children continues to be important throughout the life course, major transitions in the lives of children and parents have the potential to forge new relationship patterns. Clearly, longitudinal research is the best way to assess continuity and discontinuity in the development of the parent-child relationship over time; as not all our studies were longitudinal, we have to be careful in our interpretations. Nevertheless, our results indicate that parent-child relations in the 'middle years' are characterized by both continuity and discontinuity. Continuity is evident in the high stability observed in our longitudinal research on parent-child closeness, and in the fact that the parental bond continues to have positive effects on children from adolescence through young adulthood. Furthermore, after the 'parenting years', the intergenerational relationship continues to be asymmetrical in nature, with parents providing more help to their children than vice versa. Continuity is also observed in our finding that young adults who had close relationships with their parents in adolescence live at a smaller distance from their parents than do young adults with less close parental relations. Discontinuities can be deduced from our finding that the intergenerational relationship, though important throughout the 'middle years', is dependent on the life course of both young adults and their parents: Our findings suggest that the intergenerational relationship and intergenerational exchanges vary across the life course, and that major events in the lives of individual family members have the potential to change old patterns of interaction. Apparently, parent-child relations are flexible enough to adjust to changes in life situation and in the respective needs of both parents and children.

Consistent with the intergenerational solidarity paradigm (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991), the relationship between young adults' life course and their relations with parents was investigated for six aspects of intergenerational solidarity. These six aspects or dimensions of solidarity were examined separately, which enabled us to take a more detailed look at parent-child relations in this phase of the family life course compared to previous research. Moreover, we considered it plausible to assume that the mechanisms that underlie the relationship between young adults' life course and intergenerational relations would differ depending

on the specific dimension under study. Our empirical results provided support for such an approach: Although some general patterns can be distinguished – leaving home and, to a lesser extent, having a partner are predominantly negatively associated with the strength of parent-child relationships – there were clear variations in the association between young adults' life course and intergenerational solidarity depending on the specific dimension under study, in particular regarding the relationship between young adults' parenthood status and intergenerational solidarity.

#### **7.4 YOUNG ADULTS' INCREASING INDEPENDENCE AND RELATIONS WITH PARENTS**

As young adults' life course transitions represent their entry into adulthood characterized by increasing autonomy and independence from parents, our research addressed a theme that is prominent in both (family) sociology (Bengtson, 2001; Litwak, 1960; Parsons, 1942, 1943; Shanas et al., 1968) and (developmental) psychology (Blos, 1962, 1979; Buhl, 2000; Erikson, 1950; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Smollar & Youniss, 1989; Steinberg, 1996; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Scholars within both traditions have long debated the question of how increasing autonomy and independence during adolescence and young adulthood is reflected in parent-child relationships. Do young adults achieve a radical separation from parents in this phase of the parent-child relationship? Whereas family sociologists have focused on the influence of macro-level structural and cultural developments on patterns of intergenerational solidarity, (developmental) psychologists have concentrated on transformations in the parent-child relationship precipitated by micro-level developments in young people's lives. Below, we discuss our findings in light of these theoretical issues.

##### **7.4.1 Young adults' relations with parents in the context of macro-level societal and historical conditions**

Questions about the extent to which macro-level processes of industrialization and urbanization have changed not only the structure but also the nature of intergenerational family relations have formed a recurrent theme in family sociology (Bengtson, 2001; Litwak, 1960; Parsons, 1942, 1943; Shanas et al., 1968). This debate can be traced back to the classic sociological controversy over the effects of urbanization, rationalization, and the expanding division of labor on traditional social bonds (Aboderin, 2004; Bengtson, 2001), including the writings of Durkheim (1888/1975, 1892/1975, 1893/1972), Weber (1924/1947), and Tönnies (1887/1974). In general, these authors hypothesized that, under the influence of modernization and industrialization processes, functional types of solidarity ('organic solidarity', 'Gesellschaft') would replace normative types of solidarity ('mechanic solidarity', 'Gemeinschaft') as models for social organization.

According to Durkheim (1888/1975; see also Lamanna, 2001; Popenoe, 1988), three institutions are involved in family life and maintain a dynamic equilibrium between change and continuity: (1) the corporate extended family, including mother and father, and all generations descended from them, (2) the conjugal (nuclear) family, consisting of husband, wife and their unmarried children, and (3) the state. In his evolutionary theory of the family, Durkheim (1892/1975) predicted the decline of corporate extended family ties in favor of the conjugal nuclear family and the state. According to his theorizing, the increased division of labor in society associated with industrialization and the growing intervention of the state in the lives of individuals were mainly responsible for these changes in family life. As a consequence of industrialization, the economic functions of the extended family were increasingly performed by professional and occupational groups. At the same time, state interventions in family life were intensified (including the legal regulation of marriage and the introduction of compulsory education in schools), in order to emancipate the nuclear family from the extended family and counteract unlimited paternal power, to provide stability, and to facilitate social equality (Lamanna, 2001). As a result, the educational, economic, and protective functions of older extended family members were transferred to public institutions, such as schools and later social welfare arrangements. Consequently, with the modernization of society, relationships between adult children and their parents shift from instrumental and economic bases to a basis of personal sentiments of love, loyalty, and companionship. According to Durkheim, as the family focus changed to the nuclear family, more 'independent spheres of action' (Popenoe, 1988) were developed, liberating individuals from kin control and providing opportunities for the development of modern forms of individualism (Lamanna, 2001).

Heavily influenced by Durkheim's functionalist approach to the family, structural-functionalists such as Talcott Parsons (1942, 1943) occupied the most radical position in the debate on the role of extended kin relations in modern societies: He proposed that the extended family had not only lost most of its functions, but had additionally become isolated from other institutions (Popenoe, 1988). Parsons suggested that industrialization and labor force mobility stimulated young adults to distance themselves from their parents when they left home and entered into marriage. According to Parsons, 'isolated nuclear families' were better able than traditional extended families to adapt to the requirements of the industrial society. Parsons (1942) posited that, within the nuclear family, a strict gender division of 'instrumental' and 'expressive' roles was most functional for providing social stability, with the instrumental role – earning an income, maintaining (economic) relations with the world outside of the family – carried out by the husband/father, and the expressive role – providing nurturing and warmth, taking care of the psychological needs of the husband and children – by the wife/mother. As we have already mentioned, Parsons' ideas dominated the debate in family sociology for several decades, especially in the United States (Marks et al., 2007).

In the 1960s, the concept of the 'modified extended family' (Litwak, 1960; Shanas, 1979; Shanas et al., 1968) was introduced as a reaction against Parsons' theory. According to these theorists, related nuclear families maintain regular contact with each other while maintain-

ing considerable autonomy in their functioning and living in separate residences. In line with the functionalist approach of both Durkheim and Parsons, notions of 'modified extended family' were based on the potential utility of relations between adult children and parents in modern societies (Shanas, 1979): Because the traditional functions of the extended family, namely providing instrumental and economic stability, had been increasingly taken over by the state, the 'modified extended family' was supposed to concentrate on emotional functions. This way, the concept of the 'modified extended family' reflected more recent societal developments in Western countries, such as the creation and expansion of the welfare state. By introducing social security systems that provide income guarantees for unemployment, old age, widowhood and the like, the state further decreased responsibilities traditionally left to families. From the 1970s onwards, the introduction and subsequent modernization of the welfare state in Western societies has given rise to a lively debate over whether welfare state arrangements discourage or complement exchanges of family support (the 'crowding out' hypothesis; Attias-Donfut & Wolff, 2000; Knijn, 2004; Kohli, 1999; Kohli & Künemund, 2003; Künemund & Vogel, 2006).

Our findings that parents remain a critical source of support for their children as the latter move into young adulthood, and that there are relatively frequent exchanges between the generations in this phase of the life course clearly challenge Parsons' notion of 'isolated nuclear families'. In line with the concept of 'modified extended family' (Litwak, 1960; Shanas et al., 1968), living in different residences or in different geographic areas does not prevent young adults and parents from having frequent contact with each other. Furthermore, parents and children frequently exchange emotional support and advice, and the parental bond remains important for young adults' well-being in this phase of the family life course. In contrast to the idea that the instrumental function of 'modified extended families' has been replaced with an emotional function (Shanas, 1979), however, parents often play large instrumental and economic roles in the lives of young adults as well. Consistent with previous research (Aquilino, 1997, 2005; Lin & Rogerson, 1995; Lye, 1996; Mancini & Blieszner, 1989; Rossi & Rossi, 1990), our results suggest that, while the specific ways in which family members are supported have probably changed during the last century, intergenerational family relations remain an important institution for the distribution of material and instrumental resources in the Western world. Apparently, relations between adult children and their parents are still (or again) relevant in highly industrialized Western societies. Instead of a traditional extended family where adult children and parents live in the same residence, a 'multi-local extended family' has emerged: an intergenerational system or network which exists alongside nuclear family patterns, which offers a basis for allocating resources among its members and providing support in times of need.

Only during the past decade have empirical findings from several Western societies convinced family sociologists that intergenerational relations provide more than just emotional and social cohesion and stability; they are also an important source of instrumental and financial support (Bengtson, 2001; Kohli, 1999; Kohli & Künemund, 2003). Because research has only relatively recently begun to pay attention to relations and transfers between adult

children and their parents, little systematic empirical research has documented parent-child relations in earlier historical periods (Bengtson, 2001). It is therefore not possible to give an empirical answer to the question of whether relations between adult children and their parents have to some degree maintained their functional relevance throughout the twentieth century, or alternatively whether the 'multi-local extended family' is a relatively new phenomenon brought about by societal changes in recent decades. The scarce available data that do permit comparisons across sociohistorical contexts suggest that, although the specific structure and form of families has changed dramatically over time, intergenerational relations have remained relevant throughout the twentieth century (Bengtson, 2001). There are however important theoretical reasons to favor the view that the high level of material and instrumental help exchanged between the generations reflects recent sociodemographic and societal developments affecting the interplay between intergenerational kin, nuclear families, and the state.

First, several scholars have argued that changing family structures, resulting from divorce and single-parent families, have led to a 'decline of the nuclear family' (Popenoe, 1993); where the ability of nuclear families to provide socialization, protection, nurturance, and support to family members is weakened, relations with extended kin may become more important for fulfilling these family functions (Bengtson, 2001). Second, until the 1970s, most women discontinued paid employment and became full-time homemakers when they married and their children were born; the rapid increase in recent decades in the number of mothers in the labor force has challenged the strong gender role division of paid work and unpaid care activities that characterized the traditional nuclear family, namely the husband-as-breadwinner and wife-as-homemaker model. The rise in dual income households, especially among the younger generations, has given rise to a redistribution of responsibilities for unpaid care activities within couples as well as between couples and other institutions, including non-profit organizations, public agencies, and older extended family members; by providing childcare, (grand)parents enable young adults to hold paid jobs (De Ruijter, 2005; Van der Lippe, Tjijdens, & De Ruijter, 2004). Feminist and postmodernist scholars (e.g., Stacey, 1996) went one step further by contending that, as a consequence of women's increasing economic and social participation, together with the introduction of new reproductive technologies and the shift towards a postindustrial and globalised economy, the traditional nuclear family has been increasingly replaced by highly diverse, complex and 'fluid' household patterns.

During the past few decades, state support for professional development, (college) education, and training has decreased; as a consequence, young people have to rely much more on their parents for financing educational expenses. Furthermore, the prolongation of education and changes in labor market conditions (youth unemployment, temporary contracts) have served to delay young people's economic and residential independence (Coleman, 2000; Holdsworth, 2000). In addition, today's young adults enter the Dutch housing market at a time when there is an insufficient supply of officially subsidized housing, when buying houses has become normative, and when housing prices have escalated considerably. On the oth-

er side of the intergenerational dyad, today's aging cohorts have greater economic resources, partly because of the introduction of public old-age security systems, which enable them to provide support to their descendants (Kohli, 1999; Kohli & Künemund, 2003). Furthermore, improvements in longevity and health conditions have enhanced parents' opportunities to provide support and cohesion. Also, today's parents generally have fewer children than earlier generations did; as a consequence, their attention, time, and financial resources are divided among fewer children, leading to the provision of more resources per child.

In conclusion, the contemporary relevance of the relationship between adult children and their parents, manifested by high levels of instrumental and material support provided to the younger generation, might be accentuated by these recent sociodemographic and societal developments. From a functionalist point of view, it can be hypothesized that contemporary intergenerational family ties have regained some of the functions of the traditional, corporate extended family. To some degree, today's intergenerational relationships are clearly reminiscent of the type of relationships that underlay the traditional extended family. The important economic and instrumental role of today's parents in the lives of their young adult children is similar to the familial, social and economic authority and corresponding roles of elders within the traditional extended family structure. In the traditional extended family, older and younger family members were heavily dependent on each other for their security and survival: Older people provided useful services such as domestic help, child-rearing, and education, which in turn provided an incentive for the younger generation to care for the older generation (Aboderin, 2004).

An important distinction between contemporary intergenerational relations and the corporate extended families of more than a century ago is that today's parents and their adult children generally live in separate households, especially when the latter have offspring of their own. However, there are signs that the intensified interdependencies between parents and their adult children may lead to a renewed importance of multiple generation households in the near future. First, as we described previously, since the 1980s there has been a growing tendency for young people to remain in the parental home, increasing the number of households with two adult generations living together. Second, census data from the United States show that although households with three or more generations represent a small percentage of all households, the number of multigenerational households has increased substantially in recent decades (Primus, 2006). These increases have probably been intensified by economic conditions (such as higher housing costs) and by increased incidence of single parenthood. Recently, Dutch politicians proposed that three-generation houses ('generatiewoningen') should be built to facilitate mutual exchanges of support between extended family members; it was argued that such multi-generation households would have a positive effect on the labor participation of married women of working age (Remarque, 2009).

#### 7.4.2 Young adults' relations with parents in the context of their development towards autonomy

Whereas family sociologists have focused on macro-level sociohistorical and cultural developments to explain relationships between children and parents beyond childhood, (developmental) psychologists have sought to understand how the parent-child relationship develops throughout the life span, and in particular how this relationship is affected by micro-level changes in young people's lives. Inspired by psychoanalytical thinking, theorists have proposed on one hand that adolescents and young adults are stimulated by an internal drive towards emotional and behavioral independence from the family of origin; on the other hand, environmental conditions are highly important in facilitating or inhibiting successful development into adulthood. From the 1960s onwards, psychologists have debated whether or not young individuals should separate from their parents to attain autonomy and to successfully negotiate transitions into major social roles. Classic psychoanalytical theorists (Blos, 1962; Erikson, 1950; A. Freud, 1958) argued that young people must radically disconnect themselves from their parents in order to establish autonomy. Our findings are generally not in line with these classic psychoanalytical theories.

Instead, our findings are consistent with insights from attachment (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969/1982; Cicirelli, 1991) and individuation theories (Blos, 1979; Buhl, 2000; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Both of these theoretical traditions emerged from psychoanalytic roots and contend that parent-child relations continue to be important throughout adolescence and into adulthood. Attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969/1982) is an evolutionary, ethological theory positing that infants are instinctively inclined to form strong, enduring bonds of affection with their primary caregivers, usually their parents. Through these 'attachment relations', children receive the necessary care and protection that allows them to explore and interact with the physical and social world and to develop reciprocal relationships with others; in this way, attachment behaviors contribute to human survival. Individuation theories (Blos, 1979; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Youniss & Smollar, 1985) were developed in reaction to classic psychoanalytical ideas about 'disengagement' from parents in adolescence and contend that young individuals' striving for independence requires some degree of transformation and loosening of ties with parents, but does not necessarily lead to major confrontations and conflicts. More recent individuation theories (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Youniss & Smollar, 1985) have integrated insights from attachment theory by positing that a young individual's development toward autonomy occurs optimally in the context of warm, supportive relationships with parents.

Both attachment theorists (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969/1982) and individuation theorists (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Youniss & Smollar, 1985) contend that parent-child relations characterized by an optimal balance between feelings of connectedness and encouragement of independence are best equipped to promote the child's development towards autonomous functioning. Like infants, who need proximity to the caregiver as a secure base for exploration of the external world (Bowlby, 1969/1982), adolescents' independent behavior is optimally supported by parents who encourage autonomous actions of their child but who are

at the same time available to the child and responsive to the child's needs, so that the child can rely on parental support in times of need or failure (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Our findings are consistent with these ideas and indicate that parents continue to play such a role in the lives of young adults. Parental support is crucial in assisting young adults to successfully negotiate key life course transitions: Parents may encourage their child's emancipation by subsidizing independent living (buying a house, financing education) and by providing instrumental assistance (helping with childcare), or they might hinder their child's progress towards independence by withholding financial and instrumental help.

At the same time, our finding that exchanges of help are dependent on the child's life course needs indicate that parents continue to be responsive to their child's needs, and that relations with parents form an important safety net for young adults, which the latter can call upon in times of need. Our finding that a warm and caring family climate in adolescence has the potential to slow down the process of independent living – a key transition in young adults' development towards independence (see section 7.2.6) – suggests the importance for both parents and children of negotiating a balance between feelings of connectedness with each other and respect for one another's individual autonomy.

In conclusion, both attachment and individuation theories provide an explanation for continued parental involvement in young adults' lives, by pointing to the important role that parents play in the promotion of their children's development towards independent functioning, arising from early parent-child interaction patterns; by successfully fulfilling this role, parents enhance their offspring's life chances and outcomes, thereby contributing to evolutionary survival.

### **7.4.3 Young adults' increasing independence and relations with parents: a family life course perspective**

The family life course perspective contends that family relationships are dynamic and highly contextualized. In order to understand parent-child relations in the 'middle years', researchers must consider how these relations are embedded in and affected by numerous factors: broader socioeconomic and historical contexts, the specific position of the generations in the life course, the shared history of the two generations, and the individual's biological and psychological development. Through their effects on opportunities and constraints, social and historical conditions set the stage for how people's life courses unfold, for how parent-child relationships evolve over the life course, and for how the relationship between parents and children is shaped during the 'middle years'. In the previous sections, we interpreted our findings in the context of macro-level societal and historical developments as well as micro-level changes in young people's life course. From a sociohistorical point of view, we concluded that the continued asymmetrical relationship between parents and children in this phase of the parent-child relationship can be explained in the context of recent societal and demographic changes affecting the life course of both young adults and their parents. If

one focuses on the shared history of parents and their children, it becomes clear that parent-child relations in the 'middle years' differ in form from those in the 'parenting years', yet bear important similarities with earlier patterns of interaction. For instance, parents' continued provision of support can be understood as an attempt to encourage the emancipation of their young adult children, and to help them cope with difficult situations.

Integrating these two views, the role of parents in fostering their children's well-being, maturity and independent functioning, which begins with the child's birth and continues through adolescence, is not finished in young adulthood: As the younger generation's transition to economic and residential independence has been generally delayed in recent decades, their transition to adult responsibilities in family and work has been postponed, affinal ties have weakened, and formal types of state support have declined or become insufficient, parents seem to have extended their role in the lives of their children accordingly. Parents tend to provide care to their children for much longer than in the past, by giving support that promotes the latter's development into adult roles as well as providing a safety net in times of need and stress. Because of increases in life expectancy, health and economic resources, parents of young adults are generally at a point in their lives (early old age) in which they have discretionary time and money to provide financial and instrumental support to their young adult children; at the same time, their need for these kinds of support from their children remains relatively limited.

We have proposed that parents' continued provision of support to their children in young adulthood reflects recent macro-level historical, demographic, and societal developments, yet is at the same time rooted in early relationship patterns activated by parents' innate need to provide care and children's need to receive protection. This might suggest that evolutionary mechanisms and motivations play a significant role in contemporary intergenerational exchanges. Evolutionary theories of the family suggest that parents tend to maximize investments in and support of their children; especially in contexts where the postponement of life course transitions negatively affects the likelihood that young adults will produce offspring, it seems reasonable to assume that parents try to maximize their children's life chances and reproductive success by helping them to complete important life course transitions. Our finding that young adults' entry into parenthood is associated with higher levels of overall contact with their parents, as well as greater instrumental support from parents, is in line with such an evolutionary perspective. As parents continue to provide more support to their children than they receive, altruistic motives probably also play an important role: In this view, parents and children exchange resources and services because they care about each other's well-being and because utility is derived from providing and receiving support (Becker, 1974).

At this point, it is unclear to what extent contemporary parental support of children represents such evolutionary principles and altruistic motives, or whether other reasons have to be taken into account. Clearly, exchanges of instrumental and material support between family members can be assumed to be driven by a vast range of different motives. Like market transactions, exchanges between family members can be perceived in terms of costs

and rewards; for example, grandparents can be expected to provide childcare because they enjoy seeing their grandchildren or because they want to remain involved in their adult children's lives. However, unlike market transactions, exchanges between family members have important social functions as well. According to anthropological and social psychological accounts of gift giving (Homans, 1961/1974; Komter & Vollebergh, 2002; Lévi-Strauss, 1949/1996; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), goods and services are transferred to create mutual solidarity between individuals by means of feelings of obligation: As in the traditional extended family, parental exchanges might be motivated by reciprocity considerations, in order to ensure that children meet their obligation to provide support. Furthermore, material and instrumental transactions between parents and children may be used as ritual offerings, as a means to communicate love, friendship, or respect to one another (Cheal, 1987/1996). The provision of support may also reflect a desire for control or power over others: By giving financial support, parents may exercise influence over their children's lives and decisions. Additionally, parents might support their children simply because they have become used to doing so.

In general, a striking discrepancy can be observed between the fact that young adults increasingly live their own independent lives both socially and sexual-emotionally, but at the same time remain to a large extent dependent on the economic and time resources of their parents (Brinkgreve, 2004; Mills & Blossfeld, 2005). At best, young adults can be regarded as 'semi-dependent' (Du Bois-Reymond, 2006) on their parents. Thus far, it is unclear to what extent such a prolonged status of semi-dependency is associated with tensions in young adults and their parents, and in their relationships with each other. On one hand, in line with individuation (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Youniss & Smollar, 1985) and attachment theories (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969/1982) and consistent with previous research on parent-child relations in adolescence (Baumrind, 1991; Beyers et al., 2003; Grotevant & Cooper, 1986), it can be expected that family relations characterized by high levels of connectedness and parental support as well as high levels of autonomy and individuality are beneficial for young adults' psychosocial adjustment. On the other hand, several researchers have pointed to the potential risks of such a prolonged period of dependency for young adults' psychosocial development and maturation; it might, for example, become more complicated and difficult for young adults to achieve an adult identity while remaining dependent on their parents (Arnett, 2001; Setterston, 2007). Furthermore, some parents may become overburdened, as they not only continue to support their children far beyond the age of 18, but in light of increased longevity may also be faced with elderly relatives in need of long-term care (De Jong-Gierveld & Dykstra, 2008).

## 7.5 STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The studies in this dissertation offer increased insight into intergenerational relations in the 'middle years'. Adopting the paradigm of intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson & Rob-

erts, 1991; Roberts & Bengtson, 1990; Silverstein et al., 1997), we examined the relationship between young adults' life course and their relations with parents by distinguishing several different aspects of parent-child relations. In this way, we were able to construct a more complete and nuanced picture of relations between young adults and their parents, reflecting the complex nature of intergenerational relationships beyond childhood. The family life course perspective (Elder, 1994; MacMillan & Copher, 2005) directed our attention to the interplay between sociohistorical and socioeconomic conditions, individual life courses and family relations. Both the family life course perspective and the intergenerational solidarity model are orienting theoretical perspectives: They provide important guidelines for investigating family relations and family members' life courses, but they are not specific enough to identify the theoretical mechanisms by which family relations and life courses are linked. Theoretical progress was made by complementing these general principles with additional explanatory theoretical concepts related to the specific solidarity dimension under study. In this way, we were able to specify mechanisms that could plausibly connect young adults' life course to their relations with parents, and to formulate testable hypotheses.

Our study has raised a number of important issues and questions to be addressed in future research. First, there are issues arising from data limitations and methodological decisions. Inspired by the family life course perspective, our research questions and hypotheses concerning the relationship between young adults' life course and intergenerational relations clearly have dynamic implications that can only be fully tested in a longitudinal panel design. In Chapter 3, the USAD dataset allowed us to investigate the relationship between young people's life course and the parental bond longitudinally, and therefore, to infer causal effects. In Chapters 2, 4, and 5, the relationship between the life course and parent-child relations was studied cross-sectionally, as these chapters were written at a time when only data from the first wave of the NKPS study were available. In Chapter 6, we used cross-sectional and retrospective information from the second wave of the NKPS study. In the latter study of patterns of departure from the parental home, we decided not to use the longitudinal qualities of the NKPS dataset because many young adults had already left the parental home at the first wave; for longitudinal analyses, it would have been necessary to exclude the latter respondents, which would have seriously distorted sample representativeness. In these chapters, specific causal directions were assumed based on theoretical grounds; future longitudinal panel studies should test these causal relations empirically in order to develop a clearer sense of the temporal relationships between the life course of young adults and their relations with parents.

In a related vein, the family life course approach implies that the relationship between young adults and their parents evolves from a long history of interactions between parents and children. Consistent with this approach and in line with previous research, our longitudinal study in Chapter 3 indicated that the quality of the parental bond remains relatively stable over time. As the studies in Chapters 2, 4, and 5 were cross-sectional in nature, we were not able to take into account both generations' relationship history; in Chapter 6, we used retrospective information on family life during adolescence in order to situate young

adults' life-course experiences in the context of the history of the parent-child relationship. Although retrospective data on life events and family life clearly have their value (Brewin et al., 1993; Dex, 1995; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Scott & Alwin, 1998), prospective panel data tracking respondents' life course and their relations with parents from infancy through adulthood would provide the optimal research strategy to study effects of life course events on parent-child relations in the context of their relationship history.

The NKPS has the advantage of providing a rich source of information on family solidarity in The Netherlands. A limitation of our study is the moderate response rate of the NKPS. In view of this, readers should note that young adults with a poor relationship with their parents and – as a consequence – less frequent intergenerational contact and support exchanges, lower levels of intergenerational obligations and attitudinal congruence, and higher geographical distances, may be underrepresented.

Except for geographic proximity, the distribution of the family solidarity dimensions in our study is generally in line with patterns of intergenerational solidarity observed in other Western European countries such as Germany (Hank, 2007; Szydlik, 2000) and Great-Britain (Grundy & Shelton, 2001). Nevertheless, the reader should take into account that our study was conducted in The Netherlands, a country with a relatively high-density population: Parents and children live in relatively close geographic proximity. As differences in residential distance in The Netherlands are relatively small, it can be hypothesized that our findings provide an underestimation of relationships between young adults' life course and intergenerational contact, support, and proximity in other Western countries. More research, however, is needed to clarify to what extent our results can be generalized to countries with different structural characteristics.

In Chapters 2, 4, and 6, we decided to use information about parent-child relations stemming from young adults, although the NKPS dataset provided the opportunity to investigate the perspective of both young adults and their parents. In our view, the potential advantages of using information from both young adults and their parents are outweighed by their disadvantages. First, empirical research generally shows high levels of parent-child agreement (Aquilino, 1999; Mandemakers & Dykstra, 2008). Secondly, we focused on behavioral aspects of the intergenerational relationship (frequency of contact, exchange of support, intergenerational proximity), which are probably less biased by personal feelings than attitudes or evaluations of the quality of the intergenerational relationship. Thirdly, using information from both young adults and their parents would increase selection bias (see also section 1.8.1). As the main focus of this dissertation was on young adults and their lives, and we had the most detailed information about the anchor respondents in the NKPS dataset, we selected parent-child dyads in which young adults (and not their parents) were anchor respondents. Nevertheless, we recommend future research to replicate our findings by using information from both young adults and their parents.

The main focus in our theoretical framework and analyses was on children's individual life courses, in particular the life course transitions that are typical of young adulthood. Additionally, we paid attention to parents' life course by investigating how parents' age, edu-

cation, widowhood, and divorce are linked to intergenerational relations. It is likely that other life course events in parents' lives, including retirement and the empty nest, could affect intergenerational relations: As these transitions are associated with the loss of several role identities, they might increase the importance of other (family) roles and enhance opportunities to invest in relationships with kin. A more in-depth analysis of parents' life course was outside the scope, and/or was not possible within the context of the current dissertation, and this remains a direction for future research.

Previous research has suggested differences between ethnic groups in family relationships (Schans, 2007) and in patterns of life course transitions among youth (De Valk, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2004). Research in The Netherlands (Schans, 2007) indicates that immigrants generally have stronger preferences for filial obligations than the native Dutch; also, exchanges of instrumental support are more common among immigrant women. Research conducted in the United States (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004) suggests that black people exchange more instrumental support, whereas Caucasian individuals are more involved in providing emotional and financial support. Regarding life course transitions in young adulthood, evidence from research in The Netherlands (De Valk, 2006) suggests that Turkish and Moroccan youth are more strongly in favor of marriage without prior cohabitation than native Dutch adolescents; compared to Dutch youngsters, migrant youth prefer to see women leave the parental home at a later age, and to enter into marriage and parenthood at an earlier age. Research from Canada (Mitchell et al., 2004) revealed that young adults of Asian and South European backgrounds leave the parental home at a later age than young adults with origins in Great Britain. In our sample, the majority of the young adults were Caucasian, and only a few had a different ethnic background; therefore, we were not able to take ethnic factors into account. Future research should extend our findings to include other ethnic groups to enable meaningful comparisons between young adults with different ethnic backgrounds.

Besides issues stemming from data limitations, our study generated some new theoretical issues that merit further research. In line with the family life course perspective that family relations are embedded in and shaped by multiple contexts, we interpreted our findings in light of macro-level societal and historical developments, the history of past interactions between parents and children, as well the individual life courses of parents and children. We recognize that – in the context of this dissertation – it was not possible to empirically disentangle effects of macro-level historical conditions, micro-level parent-child relationship histories, and the specific features of the 'middle years' of the parent-child relationship. We recommend that future research efforts should be directed towards distinguishing between these different kinds of influences.

We have argued that the interdependencies between today's young adults and their parents can be understood in light of relatively recent societal and historical developments and changes in the life course structure of both generations. As such, our findings invite speculation as to whether these intergenerational patterns will also apply to future generations. We think it is plausible to assume that many of the sociodemographic conditions we have connected with contemporary intergenerational relations – namely, greater diversity in

nuclear family structures, increased participation of women in education and employment, decreasing fertility resulting in smaller families, and improvements in longevity and health conditions – will remain prevalent in the near future; therefore, it can be hypothesized that observed patterns of interaction between young adults and their parents will hold for future generational dyads. At the same time, however, it should be mentioned that future generations of (grand)parents will probably have fewer opportunities to provide childcare for their young adult children than today's early old aged parents, for two reasons. First, because of the aging of the population, future (grand)parents may be forced or given the opportunity to defer retirement. Second, in future cohorts reaching early old age, an increasing number of women will be engaging in paid employment.

In section 7.4.3, we presented a theoretical analysis of mechanisms and motives that could account for parents' continued involvement in the lives of their young adult children. In the empirical literature on transfers between the generations, there is generally a lack of clarity about the kind of motives that underlie decisions about contact and support exchanges (Kohli & Künemund, 2003). In the past, research has been dominated by a long-standing debate over whether altruistic motives underlie the provision of support between the generations (Becker, 1974), or whether intergenerational transfers are a form of exchange, made with the expectation of some form of reciprocity (Cox, 1987; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Thus far, there is no consensus regarding the importance of these alternative explanations for intergenerational exchanges of support and contact. A possible reason for this is that both models are problematic in that they assume universal rather than complex and heterogeneous motivations, and they do not consider the more symbolic aspects of exchanging goods. Another reason might be that the motivations themselves and the relations among them have not received adequate attention. The limited number of empirical studies that do offer insight into the motivations underlying family exchanges indeed suggest that giving is based on heterogeneous motives (Berry, 2008; Kohli & Künemund, 2003). In line with Kohli and Künemund (2003), we consider it important that future research focuses more on the motivations that underlie exchanges of support between the generations. More information about underlying motivations will help us to interpret the high level of support exchanges between parents and children in the 'middle years' of the parent-child relationship.

In this dissertation, we decided to study the different dimensions of solidarity separately. A suggestion for future research would be to look more closely into how different (sub)dimensions of solidarity are interrelated in the context of both generations' life courses. Such research could be directed toward a range of interesting and challenging issues. Inspired by social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), it could for example be investigated to what extent parents' continued provision of support and financial help to their young adult children constitute payments for the attention and services that children give to parents. Furthermore, an investigation of relations among the different solidarity dimensions would provide an opportunity to capture and explain possible contradictions in relations between parents and adult offspring. Relatively recently, family scholars have recognized that relationships between parents and adult children are often characterized

by ‘intergenerational ambivalence’ (Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998; Van Gaalen, 2007), that is, the simultaneous existence of positive and negative sentiments. In a related vein, in view of our findings that (grand)parents often provide childcare support to their adult children, whereas affective closeness with parents decreases when children enter parenthood, future research could investigate in what situations such attempts by (grand)parents are interpreted as interference by the adult child, leading to intergenerational conflict. Finally, examining the connections between different aspects of intergenerational solidarity would contribute to the development of an adequate theory of family solidarity. Previous research has suggested that geographical distance is negatively related to face-to-face contact (Kalmijn, 2006; Lawton et al., 1994), that contact and affection are reciprocally related (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Lawton et al., 1994), and that strong commitments to familial obligations result in emotionally close relationships. Most of these studies, however, were cross-sectional; clearly, long-term data from the same individuals over time are needed to disentangle causal relationships between the various solidarity dimensions in light of children’s and their parents’ life course changes.

On a macro-level, it is unclear to what extent continued (instrumental and financial) support from parents in young adulthood enhances social inequality in the children’s generation. On one hand, as parental support is important in helping young adults get started in adult life, young adults of parents with fewer available resources may be disadvantaged in terms of their life course trajectories. On the other hand, social inequality may not be affected or might even decrease, as parental support is generally directed towards the more needy children. Clearly, more information is needed concerning this issue, as such information would be of practical and social significance to a wider audience, including policy-makers and health professionals.

A final direction for future research concerns the possible psychosocial consequences and tensions arising from young people’s delayed entry into adult life and prolonged reliance on their families. For some young adults, a long delay in the attainment of independence and responsibility might be advantageous as it promotes exploration and the development of more sophisticated and flexible identities, and provides greater freedom to construct one’s own life course. On the other hand, because of the ambiguous nature of young adulthood, other individuals might have difficulty finding their way in life, as there are no clear life scripts and life course choices are accompanied by uncertainties and risks (Arnett, 2000; Beck, 1994; Mills & Blossfeld, 2005; Setterston, 2007). Researchers have hypothesized that psychosocial capacities such as planfulness, social skills, and reflective capacities have become crucial to negotiate the challenges associated with the delayed entry into adulthood (De Jong-Gierveld et al., 2001; Setterston, 2007). Clearly, more empirical research is needed to identify which skills and capacities are important in this respect. As mentioned above, parents’ ability to help their children manage this complex life course phase depends on the resources they possess. For parents, young adults’ continued dependence creates the risk of overinvolvement, in particular if parents have to care for elderly relatives as well (De Jong-Gierveld & Dykstra, 2008).

## 7.6 FINAL CONCLUSION

This dissertation has extended previous research by investigating intergenerational relations in the ‘middle years’: when children are in young adulthood and parents find themselves in early old age. Our findings revealed that, after young adults have left the parental home, their lives and those of their parents remain intimately linked. In this phase of the family life course, intergenerational relations represent a network for the distribution of material, instrumental and social support, which is more intensely used in some periods of life than in other life periods, depending on an individual’s life course status. As in earlier periods of the parent-child relationship, parents remain an important source of support on which young adult children can call in times of need. In addition, parents can encourage their young adult children to move towards independence, for example by providing childcare and financial help. The contemporary relevance of relationships between young adults and parents might be accentuated by recent sociodemographic, economic, and societal developments which have changed the life course of both young people and their parents, including the increasing economic and social participation of women, prolonged youth education, changes in labor market conditions and social security, and improvements in longevity and health conditions of parents. While affinal family ties (ties through marriage or cohabitation) have weakened in recent decades because of decreases in marriage rates and increases in divorce rates, consanguinal kin ties (ties of blood) seem to have retained their relevance.

Despite historical changes and processes of industrialization, secularization, and individualization, intergenerational family relations constitute an important aspect of the dynamics within nuclear families. As other traditional sources of social cohesion such as religion and neighborhood have become less relevant in recent decades, the present findings reveal additional support for the proposition that family ties provide one of the few institutions that offer social cohesion. With a few exceptions, sociologists have long considered ties between adult children and their parents as a phenomenon of less developed countries (Kuper, 1996). The current dissertation provides further evidence that intergenerational relations in highly industrialized societies fulfill not only social and emotional functions, but also important economic and instrumental functions.





Samenvatting in het Nederlands/

Summary in Dutch



# Samenvatting in het Nederlands/ Summary in Dutch

In dit proefschrift is de relatie tussen jongvolwassen kinderen en hun ouders onderzocht en met name hoe deze afhangt van de levenslooppositie of levensloopstatus van het jongvolwassen kind. Aanleiding voor dit onderzoek is de constatering dat recente demografische en maatschappelijke krachten de individuele levenslopen van zowel jongvolwassenen als hun ouders ingrijpend veranderd hebben (Arnett, 2000; De Jong-Gierveld et al, 2001; Hareven, 1994; Shanahan, 2000), en daarmee hun beider relatie. Naast het feit dat de gemiddelde levensverwachting is gestegen, zijn levenslopen van mensen steeds meer gaan verschillen. Was er in het midden van de twintigste eeuw nog meer sprake van een ‘standaardbiografie’ (Hareven, 1994) – met duidelijke verwachtingen over wat men in welke levensfase te doen stond; vanaf de jaren tachtig vindt er – onder invloed van culturele, socio-economische en technologische veranderingen – een ‘destandaardisering’ van de levensloop plaats (Bengtson, 2001; Elzinga & Liefbroer, 2007; Fokkema & Liefbroer, 2004). De traditionele standaardbiografie wordt steeds minder vanzelfsprekend gevonden en vervangen door een individuele ‘keuze-biografie’, waarin individuen zelf de verantwoordelijkheid dragen om hun levensloop in te vullen en vorm te geven (Du Bois-Reymond & De Jong-Gierveld, 1993; Liefbroer & Dykstra, 2000). Kon de vroegere standaardbiografie grofweg in drie fasen ingedeeld worden – jeugdfase, midden-fase en ouderdom – in de moderne levensloop zijn er twee nieuwe fasen bij gekomen: de fase van de ‘jongvolwassenheid’ en de fase van de ‘vroeg ouderdom’.

De fase van de jongvolwassenheid markeert de overgang van de jeugd- en adolescentiefase naar de periode van de volwassenheid (Buchmann, 1989; Furstenberg et al., 2005; Fussell et al., 2007; Mitchell, 2006). In deze fase gaan jongeren belangrijke verplichtingen aan op het gebied van werk, relaties en gezinsleven: Jongeren verlaten het ouderlijk huis, betreden de arbeidsmarkt, gaan samenwonen of trouwen, en krijgen kinderen (Setterston, 2007). Deze levenslooptransities zorgen ervoor dat jongeren op maatschappelijk, emotioneel en economisch gebied een grotere verantwoordelijkheid op zich nemen en een meer zelfstandige positie gaan innemen ten opzichte van hun ouders. Was er vroeger sprake van een betrekkelijk korte overgang tussen de jeugd- en adolescentiefase en de volwassenheid, inmiddels neemt deze fase meer tijd in beslag doordat verplichtingen uitgesteld worden en/of op een later tijdstip aangegaan worden (Arnett, 2000; De Jong-Gierveld et al., 1991; Shanahan, 2000). De fase van de jongvolwassenheid wordt namelijk ook gekenmerkt door het feit dat jongeren, voordat zij definitieve keuzes ten aanzien van hun leven maken en verplichtingen aangaan, de ruimte krijgen om het leven te verkennen (Arnett, 2000; Vollebergh, 2008). Een ander verschil met vroeger is dat zowel het moment waarop als de volgorde waarin

levenslooptransities van jongvolwassenen plaatsvinden minder vastligt (Fussell et al., 2007; Hareven, 1994; MacMillan & Copher, 2005).

Aan het andere uiteinde van de levensloop is er de fase van de vroege ouderdom bijgekomen (Knipscheer, 2006; Laslett, 1989; Van Tilburg, 2005), die grofweg gesitueerd wordt tussen de 50 en 75 jaar. Als gevolg van vooruitgang in de gezondheidszorg en veranderingen in voedings- en leefgewoonten is de gemiddelde levensverwachting gestegen alsmede de periode waarin ouderen in relatief goede gezondheid leven. Socio-economische ontwikkelingen hebben ertoe geleid dat ouderen tegenwoordig over voldoende financiële middelen beschikken die hen in staat stellen lange tijd een onafhankelijk en zelfstandig leven te leiden (Van Solinge, 2006). Daarnaast zijn gezinnen kleiner geworden en is het, door de invoering van prepensioen-regelingen, aantrekkelijker geworden eerder te stoppen met werken, wat ervoor zorgt dat de levensfase die gedomineerd wordt door gezins- en werkverplichtingen over het algemeen kleiner is geworden. De vroege ouderdom wordt dan ook gekenmerkt door een afnemende oriëntatie op betaalde arbeid en zorg voor (thuiswonende) kinderen en een toename in vrije tijd, die over het algemeen in goede gezondheid en met voldoende financiële middelen besteed kan worden. Op de fase van de vroege ouderdom volgt tenslotte de 'late ouderdom', die gepaard gaat met lichamelijke achteruitgang en die de levensloop besluit.

Individuele levens worden niet in afzondering geleefd maar in verbondenheid met andere levens. Net zoals individuele levenslopen beschreven en bestudeerd kunnen worden, geldt dat ook voor levenslopen van relaties tussen mensen. Eén van de potentieel langstdurende en belangrijkste relaties in iemands leven is die tussen ouder en kind. De ouder-kind relatie begint met de geboorte van het kind en eindigt met de dood van één van beide, meestal de ouder. Als gevolg van de toegenomen levensverwachting is de levenstijd die ouders en kinderen in elkaars aanwezigheid doorbrengen tegenwoordig langer dan ooit tevoren (De Jong-Gierveld & Dykstra, 2008). Net zoals in individuele levenslopen kunnen ook in de levensloop van de ouder-kind relatie verschillende fasen onderscheiden worden; deze zijn verbonden met de fasen van de individuele levenslopen van zowel ouder als kind en worden schematisch weergegeven in Figuur 1.1 (zie pagina 26 van dit proefschrift).

We onderscheiden drie fasen in de levensloop van de ouder-kind relatie. In de eerste fase heeft de ouder een opvoedende, verzorgende en socialiserende rol ten opzichte van het thuiswonende kind. Deze fase begint met de geboorte van het kind en eindigt wanneer het kind het ouderlijk huis verlaat. In de derde en laatste fase van de ouder-kind relatie bevindt de ouder zich in de fase van de late ouderdom en is door fysieke en mentale achteruitgang in toenemende mate afhankelijk van ondersteuning vanuit zijn of haar omgeving, onder andere van zijn of haar kind. Deze laatste fase eindigt met de dood van de ouder. Tussen de eerste en derde fase in bevindt zich de 'midden-fase'. Wat in Figuur 1.1 naar voren komt is dat de midden-fase van de ouder-kind relatie zich over het algemeen afspeelt gedurende een periode waarin kinderen zich in de fase van de jongvolwassenheid bevinden en de meeste ouders zich in de vroege ouderdom bevinden. Zoals hiervoor aangegeven, zijn beide fasen recente maatschappelijke verschijnselen. Tegelijkertijd vormen deze fasen elkaars spiegelbeeld: Terwijl jongvolwassen kinderen op het gebied van gezin en arbeid in toenemende

mate een grotere verantwoordelijkheid op zich nemen, bevinden hun ouders zich vaak in een levensfase waarin zij steeds meer ontslagen zijn van formele verplichtingen en verantwoordelijkheden ten aanzien van arbeid en kinderen. Net zoals er ten aanzien van de individuele levensfasen van jongvolwassenheid en vroege ouderdom nog weinig collectieve beelden en opvattingen zijn over hoe deze fasen vormgegeven moeten worden, geldt dat ook voor de midden-fase van de ouder-kind relatie. Dit is des te meer het geval doordat – in tegenstelling tot de andere twee fasen – geen van beide generaties duidelijk behoeftig en afhankelijk is van de ondersteuning door de andere generatie.

Onderzoek naar ouder-kind relaties heeft zich tot nu toe met name gericht op de fase waarin kinderen jong zijn (tot ongeveer 21 jaar) en bij hun ouders wonen en op de fase waarin ouders oud en afhankelijk zijn geworden (het zogenaamde ‘alpha-omega fenomeen’; Hagestad, 1987). Onderzoek naar de midden-fase is relatief schaars. Het huidige onderzoek was erop gericht relaties tussen kinderen en ouders in deze midden-fase in kaart te brengen. Hoofdvraag van het proefschrift heeft betrekking op de vraag in hoeverre de relatie tussen jongvolwassenen en hun ouders afhangt van de levenslooppositie van het jongvolwassen kind – dat wil zeggen, of de jongvolwassene bij zijn ouders woont of zelfstandig woont, of de jongvolwassene een partner heeft met wie hij of zij eventueel samenwoont of getrouwd is, of de jongvolwassene zelf kinderen heeft, en in welke mate de jongvolwassene in financieel/werk opzicht zelfstandigheid heeft bereikt. Hiermee sluit dit onderzoek aan bij een wetenschappelijk thema dat van oudsher zowel binnen familiesociologische als psychologische en pedagogische disciplines veel aandacht heeft gekregen: Hoe verandert de relatie tussen ouders en kinderen wanneer de laatsten het ouderlijk huis verlaten en een zelfstandige positie gaan innemen ten opzichte van hun ouders? Werd er door structureel-functionalistische (Parsons, 1942, 1943) en psycho-analytische (Blos, 1962) theoretici van uitgegaan dat, indien jongvolwassenen op eigen benen willen gaan staan en een eigen leven willen leiden, het functioneel en noodzakelijk is dat zij op een vrij radicale manier afstand nemen van hun ouders en zich van hun ouders isoleren om zich helemaal te kunnen richten op hun eigen leven, voor zo’n radicaal losmakingsproces is vooralsnog weinig empirisch bewijs gevonden. Ook nadat kinderen op eigen benen zijn gaan staan en een eigen gezin hebben gevormd is er veelvuldig contact tussen ouders en kinderen en is hun wederzijdse band sterk (Allen et al., 2000; Bengtson, 2001; Mitchell, 2006; Treas & Lawton, 1999). Hoe dienen relaties tussen jongvolwassenen en hun ouders in het licht van hun toenemende zelfstandigheid dan beschreven en begrepen te worden?

Een veelbelovend theoretisch alternatief dat vrij recent zijn intrede heeft gedaan in onderzoek naar intergenerationele relaties is het zogenaamde ‘levensloopperspectief’ (Elder, 1994; MacMillan & Copher, 2005). Volgens dit levensloopperspectief bestaat de levensloop van individuen uit een opeenvolging van posities of statussen die een persoon in de loop van de tijd inneemt. Elke positie is verbonden met specifieke rolverwachtingen en regels over hoe men zich dient te gedragen. Levensloope gebeurtenissen of -transities markeren de overgang van de ene naar de andere positie. Een voorbeeld van een positie of status is ‘getrouwd’; de transitie ‘trouwen’ geeft de overgang aan van de positie ‘ongetrouwd’ naar ‘getrouwd’.

Een levensloopstadium wordt gevormd door een specifieke combinatie van verschillende posities of statussen op een bepaald moment in iemands leven. Een belangrijk theoretisch concept binnen het levensloopperspectief op intergenerationele relaties wordt gevormd door het principe van de ‘verbonden levens’ (‘linked lives’) (Elder, 1994). Volgens dit principe is er een hoge mate van stabiliteit in de ouder-kind relatie gedurende de gehele levensloop van ouder en kind, maar kan deze relatie veranderen onder invloed van transitities en gebeurtenissen die optreden in het leven van het kind of de ouder. Dit principe vormde de theoretische leidraad bij het huidige onderzoek. Het geeft op een algemene manier aan hoe de ouder-kind relatie zich kan verhouden tot de levensloop van kind en ouder. Het levensloopperspectief geeft richting aan dit onderzoek maar leent zich niet voor de afleiding van toetsbare hypothesen. Teneinde specifieke verwachtingen te formuleren is daarom gebruikgemaakt van aanvullende theoretische concepten en assumpties.

Overeenkomstig het paradigma van ‘intergenerationele solidariteit’ (Bengtson & Black, 1973; Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Putney & Bengtson, 2003; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997) werd in dit onderzoek verondersteld dat de relatie tussen ouders en kind verschillende aspecten kent, die men, wil men de ouder-kind relatie volledig beschrijven en begrijpen, liefst alle dient te bestuderen. Daartoe zijn in het huidige onderzoek de volgende zes aspecten van de relatie tussen jongvolwassenen en hun ouders bestudeerd: de mate van contact, de emotionele band, uitwisseling van steun, wederzijdse familie-verplichtingen, wederzijdse consensus daarover, en geografische nabijheid. Deze zes aspecten of dimensies zijn in vijf empirische hoofdstukken onderzocht: in elke hoofdstuk één, met uitzondering van hoofdstuk 5 waarin twee aspecten zijn onderzocht.

Hypothesen zijn empirisch getoetst met behulp van data afkomstig van de Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS; Dykstra et al., 2005, 2007) en van de Utrecht Study of Adolescent Development (USAD; Meeus & 't Hart, 1993). De NKPS is een grootschalig onderzoek naar solidariteit in familierelaties waarbij meer dan 8000 Nederlanders tussen de 18 en 79 jaar oud zijn geïnterviewd. De NKPS heeft een multi-actor structuur: Naast de hoofdrespondenten zijn aanvullend ook aan familieleden vragenlijsten voorgelegd. De NKPS kent twee dataverzamelingsrondes (de eerste ronde vond plaats tussen 2002 en 2004; de tweede ronde in 2006 en 2007); van het panel-karakter van deze dataset kon in dit proefschrift om verschillende redenen geen gebruik worden gemaakt. Voor de onderhavige studie zijn gegevens gebruikt van repondenten die zich in de jongvolwassenheid bevonden – jongvolwassenheid werd hierbij afgebakend tot de leeftijdsperiode tussen 18 en 34 jaar – en van wie tenminste één ouder in leven was. De USAD is een panelstudie waarin meer dan 1000 jongeren, in leeftijd variërend tussen de 12 en 24 jaar oud, op drie meetmomenten (in 1991, 1994, en 1997) zijn ondervraagd, onder andere over hun relatie met hun ouders.

## ASSOCIATIONELE SOLIDARITEIT: INTERGENERATIONEEL CONTACT

Associationele solidariteit heeft betrekking op de mate waarin ouders en kinderen contact met elkaar hebben: hoe vaak zij elkaar zien (face-to-face contact) en hoe vaak zij elkaar spreken (via telefoon, post, email). Zoals hiervoor aangegeven is er weinig empirisch bewijs gevonden voor de theorie van Parsons (1942, 1943) dat kinderen die het huis uit zijn en een eigen gezin vormen zich op een radicale manier isoleren van hun ouders. Toch kan op basis van het levenslopperspectief verondersteld worden dat contact met ouders voor een deel afhangt van de levensloppositie van jongvolwassenen, ook al zijn zulke effecten waarschijnlijk minder drastisch dan Parsons destijds veronderstelde. In hoofdstuk 2 van dit proefschrift stonden de volgende twee onderzoeksvragen centraal. Ten eerste werd onderzocht hoe de mate van intergenerationeel contact afhangt van de partnerstatus en de ouderschapsstatus van jongvolwassenen. De partnerstatus geeft aan of een jongvolwassene een romantische partner heeft, en of hij of zij met deze samenwoont of getrouwd is; ouderschapsstatus wordt gedefinieerd als het wel of niet hebben van (eigen) kinderen. Ten tweede werden de onderliggende mechanismen onderzocht die de relatie kunnen verklaren tussen partnerstatus en ouderschapsstatus aan de ene kant en intergenerationeel contact aan de andere kant.

In lijn met eerder empirisch onderzoek afkomstig uit andere Westerse landen (Grundy & Shelton, 2001; Lye, 1996; Szydlik, 2000) laten de NKPS-gegevens zien dat jongvolwassenen, ook nadat zij het ouderlijk huis hebben verlaten, regelmatig contact met hun ouders hebben: Meer dan de helft ziet zijn of haar vader en moeder tenminste wekelijks. Meer dan 70% heeft tenminste één keer in de week contact met moeder via telefoon, post of email, en meer dan 50% met vader. Wat betreft de partnerstatus van jongvolwassenen, verwachtten we dat jongvolwassenen met een partner minder contact hebben met hun ouders dan alleenstaande jongvolwassenen. Deze verwachtingen waren gebaseerd op de volgende veronderstellingen. Ten eerste wordt, wanneer jongvolwassenen romantische relaties aangaan, het sociale en familiale netwerk vergroot: Familie en vrienden van de partner gaan deel uit maken van het netwerk, waardoor de tijd en energie die jongvolwassenen kunnen besteden aan elk lid van dat netwerk, waaronder de eigen ouders, kleiner wordt. Hierbij kunnen de ouders van de partner (schoonouders) de belangrijkste 'concurrent' voor de eigen ouders worden, aangezien beide ongeveer dezelfde rol en functie vervullen. Ten tweede is het plausibel te veronderstellen dat contacten met familie en vrienden een activiteit is die paren deels gezamenlijk ondernemen en dat bij beslissingen om veel of weinig contact met ouders te hebben voorkeuren en sentimenten van beide partners een rol spelen. Aangezien relaties met schoonouders soms gepaard gaan met aanpassingsproblemen en conflicten, kan verwacht worden dat, door de bank genomen, contact met ouders minder wordt wanneer jongvolwassenen een partner krijgen. In overeenstemming met deze verwachtingen werd gevonden dat jongvolwassenen die met een partner samenleven ouders minder vaak zien dan jongvolwassenen zonder partner. Aanvullende analyses laten zien dat de kwaliteit van relaties met schoonouders hierbij een rol speelt: Jongvolwassenen die een bevredigende relatie met hun schoonouders hebben, hebben minder vaak contact met hun eigen ouders. Daarnaast speelt ook de partner een

rol: De mate van contact met eigen ouders wordt niet alleen bepaald door de kwaliteit van de band tussen ouders en het jongvolwassen kind, maar ook door de kwaliteit van de band tussen ouders en de partner van het jongvolwassen kind. Jongvolwassenen hebben minder vaak contact met hun ouders wanneer de kwaliteit van de relatie tussen deze laatste en de partner van de jongvolwassene als niet prettig ervaren wordt.

Wat betreft de ouderschapsstatus van jongvolwassenen werd verwacht dat de geboorte van een kind contact tussen jongvolwassenen en hun ouders kan intensiveren: Verondersteld kan namelijk worden dat grootouders graag hun kleinkinderen zien en voor jongvolwassen ouders het oppassen door grootouders een vertrouwd en financieel aantrekkelijk alternatief kan vormen voor professionele kinderopvang. In lijn met onze verwachtingen werd gevonden dat jongvolwassenen met kinderen hun ouders vaker zien dan jongvolwassenen zonder kinderen, dat intergenerationeel contact toeneemt naarmate ouders meer ondersteuning bieden bij het zorgen voor hun kleinkinderen en naarmate jongvolwassenen minder vaak een beroep doen op professionele kinderopvang.

### **AFFECTIONELE SOLIDARITEIT: DE EMOTIONELE BAND TUSSEN OUDERS EN KINDEREN**

Het levensloopperspectief op intergenerationele relaties suggereert dat de relatie tussen ouders en kinderen gedurende de gehele levensloop belangrijk blijft voor zowel ouder als kind, maar ook dat levenslooptransities de emotionele kwaliteit van de relatie kunnen beïnvloeden. Daarom werd in hoofdstuk 3 onderzocht welk effect het levensloopstadium heeft op de emotionele band tussen ouders en kinderen. Wat betreft de woon- en partner-situatie van jongvolwassenen werd onderscheid gemaakt tussen vier stadia: thuiswonend, uit huis zonder partner, samenwonend/getrouwd zonder kinderen, samenwonend/getrouwd met kinderen. Wat betreft de financiële situatie van jongvolwassenen werd onderscheid gemaakt tussen jongvolwassenen die financieel afhankelijk zijn van hun ouders en jongvolwassenen die een eigen bron van inkomsten hebben.

Toetsbare hypothesen over de richting en aard van de invloed van levenslooptransities werden afgeleid uit drie verschillende theoretische tradities, met wortels in psychologie en sociologie. Op grond van de individuatie-theorie (Blos, 1962, 1979; Buhl, 2000; Smollar & Youniss, 1989; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), die haar wortels in de psycho-analyse heeft, kan verwacht worden dat relaties met ouders minder hecht worden wanneer jongvolwassenen bepaalde levenslooptransities hebben ondergaan, omdat onder invloed van deze laatste gebeurtenissen jongvolwassenen een meer autonome positie ten opzichte van hun ouders in gaan nemen die het noodzakelijk maakt dat de relatie met ouders een ander en minder hecht karakter krijgt. De rol-identiteits theorie (Bengtson & Black, 1973; Stryker, 1968) suggereert dat relaties tussen jongvolwassenen en hun ouders juist hechter worden, omdat levenslooptransities ertoe leiden dat rollen en ervaringen van ouders en kinderen meer op elkaar gaan lijken, en ouders en kinderen elkaar daardoor beter gaan begrijpen. Wanneer

levenslooptransities tenslotte gezien worden als potentiële stressoren, als gebeurtenissen die een beroep doen op de draagkracht en het aanpassingsvermogen van zowel kinderen als ouders (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998; Knoester, 2003), kan verwacht worden dat de ouder-kind relatie tijdelijk meer onder druk komt te staan en er meer conflicten kunnen optreden, die op de langere termijn echter in de meeste gevallen zullen oplossen zodra er een nieuwe balans gevonden is; op basis van deze theorie kan dus verwacht worden dat de ouderlijke band tijdelijk minder hecht is.

Onderzoek op basis van de USAD-data laat zien dat relaties tussen ouders en kinderen relatief hecht zijn, en dat deze relaties gedurende de adolescentie en jongvolwassenheid een grote mate van stabiliteit vertonen. Eerder onderzoek op basis van dezelfde data concludeerde dat de ouderlijke band gedurende deze fase van de levensloop zelfs hechter wordt (Van Wel et al., 2002). Onderhavige studie suggereert echter dat deze positieve effecten van leeftijd op de emotionele band tussen ouders en kinderen afgezwakt worden door de levenslooptransities die in deze periode plaatsvinden: Wanneer jongvolwassenen het ouderlijk huis hebben verlaten en zelf kinderen hebben gekregen, geven zij aan zich minder verbonden te voelen met hun ouders; deze afname is niet tijdelijk van aard maar blijft stabiel op de langere termijn. Geen effect werd gevonden van de mate waarin jongvolwassenen een financieel zelfstandige positie hebben verworven. Verder werd gevonden dat ook na de adolescentie de ouderlijke band een belangrijke rol blijft spelen in het psychologische welzijn van kinderen.

Concluderend kunnen we stellen dat onze resultaten het meest overeenkomen met de verwachtingen afgeleid uit de individuatie-theorie, die stelt dat levenslooptransities leiden tot meer autonomie en zelfstandigheid, wat het noodzakelijk maakt dat de emotionele band tussen ouders en kinderen minder hecht wordt. Van een radicaal losmakingsproces, zoals verondersteld door enkele vroege psycho-analytische en individuatie-theoretici (Blos, 1962; Erikson, 1950; A. Freud, 1958) is echter geen sprake.

## **FUNCTIONELE SOLIDARITEIT: UITWISSELING VAN STEUN TUSSEN KINDEREN EN OUDERS**

In hoofdstuk 4 onderzochten we met behulp van NKPS-data de uitwisseling van steun tussen jongvolwassen en hun ouders. Vier soorten van steun werden onder de loep genomen: emotionele steun, het geven van advies, financiële steun, en praktische steun. Ook in de midden-fase blijken ouders en kinderen een belangrijke bron van steun voor elkaar te zijn. Net als in de jeugd- en adolescentiefase ontvangen jongvolwassen kinderen meer steun van ouders dan andersom. Dat laatste geldt met name voor de uitwisseling van advies en financiële steun. De centrale onderzoeksvraag was hoe de steun die jongvolwassenen van hun ouders krijgen alsook de steun die zij aan hun ouders geven afhangt van de levenslooppositie van de jongvolwassene – dat wil zeggen of hij of zij bij ouders woont of op zichzelf, een partner heeft, kinderen heeft, en de mate waarin hij of zij financieel zelfstandig is. Op basis van een levensloopperspectief veronderstelden we dat jongvolwassenen die verschillen in hun

levenslooppoositie verschillen in de mate waarin zij over specifieke hulpbronnen beschikken, en daarmee verschillen in de mate waarin zij steun nodig hebben en in de mogelijkheden die zij hebben om steun aan anderen te verlenen.

Onze verwachting dat de steun die ouders aan hun jongvolwassen kinderen verlenen afhangt van de levenslooppoositie van deze laatsten werd voor een groot deel bevestigd. Nadat jongvolwassenen hun ouderlijk huis hebben verlaten, ontvangen zij minder advies van hun vader en minder emotionele steun van beide ouders. Samenwonende en getrouwde jongvolwassenen ontvangen minder advies van ouders dan alleenstaande jongvolwassenen. Deze resultaten suggereren dat wanneer jongvolwassenen op zichzelf gaan wonen, gaan samenwonen en trouwen, functies die daarvóór door ouders uitgevoerd werden door andere personen in het netwerk (in het bijzonder de partner) overgenomen worden (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Daarnaast neemt door het verlaten van het ouderlijk huis de reisafstand tussen ouders en kinderen toe, wat het minder gemakkelijk maakt om steun uit te wisselen. Eerder onderzoek heeft aangetoond dat de mate waarin ouders financiële steun aan hun kinderen geven afhangt van het inkomen van de ouders (Kohli, 1999). Onze resultaten wijzen uit dat daarnaast de financiële status van het jongvolwassen kind een rol speelt: Jongvolwassenen die over minder eigen financiële middelen beschikken ontvangen meer financiële steun van hun ouders dan jongvolwassenen met meer financiële middelen. Dit geldt voor studenten alsook voor niet-studenten.

Onze resultaten suggereren dat de geboorte van een kind aan de ene kant tot meer praktische steun van (groot)ouders leidt – met name bij het zorgen voor de kleinkinderen; aan de andere kant ontvangen jongvolwassenen met kinderen minder emotionele steun van hun moeder dan jongvolwassenen zonder kinderen. Samenhangend met deze laatste bevinding beschreven we in de vorige paragraaf dat het krijgen van een kind tot een meer algemene afname in emotionele verbondenheid tussen jongvolwassenen en hun ouders kan leiden. Een mogelijke verklaring vanuit de individuatie-theorie (Blos, 1962, 1979; Buhl, 2000; Smollar & Youniss, 1989; Youniss & Smollar, 1985) voor deze bevindingen is dat het krijgen van een kind leidt tot een meer onafhankelijke positie ten opzichte van ouders, wat het voor jongvolwassenen en hun ouders noodzakelijk maakt emotioneel meer afstand van elkaar te nemen. Andere mogelijke verklaringen leggen de nadruk op de nieuwe uitdagingen en verantwoordelijkheden die de geboorte van een kind met zich meebrengt: Deze doen een beroep op het adaptatievermogen van jongvolwassenen, kunnen tot spanningen bij hen leiden en kunnen daarmee relaties tussen hen en anderen – de partner, maar ook de ouders – onder druk zetten (Demo & Cox, 2000). Ook kunnen de inspanningen van grootouders om steun te bieden door jongvolwassenen als bemoeienis ervaren worden, wat kan leiden tot frustraties en conflicten over en weer.

Onze verwachting dat de steun die jongvolwassenen aan hun ouders geven ook afhangt van de levenslooppoositie van jongvolwassenen werd slechts deels empirisch ondersteund. We vonden dat nadat jongvolwassenen het ouderlijk huis hebben verlaten, zij minder emotionele steun en advies aan hun vader geven, wat verklaard kan worden door de toegenomen reisafstand. Jongvolwassenen met een partner verlenen meer emotionele steun aan hun moeder

dan alleenstaanden, wat erop kan wijzen dat het aangaan en beleven van romantische relaties ertoe leidt dat jongvolwassenen meer levenservaring krijgen en hun rollen en ervaringen gaan lijken op die van hun ouders, waardoor zij meer van waarde kunnen zijn voor ouders voor het geven van emotionele steun. Samenwonende en getrouwde jongvolwassenen geven minder vaak financiële en praktische steun aan ouders dan alleenstaanden. Deze bevinding kan op twee manieren verklaard worden. Ten eerste is het familiale netwerk van jongvolwassenen met een partner groter, waardoor ouders met financiële en praktische behoeften moeten concurreren met meer familieleden. Ten tweede kan de partner hierin een remmende rol hebben, aangezien verondersteld kan worden dat beslissingen over het verlenen van tijd en geld genomen worden op basis van de voorkeuren en gevoelens van beide partners. De geboorte van een kind, tenslotte, gaat samen met minder emotionele en financiële steun van jongvolwassenen aan hun moeder.

Concluderend werd onze verwachting dat de steun van ouders aan hun jongvolwassen kinderen afhangt van de levenslooppositie van de jongvolwassene grotendeels empirisch ondersteund. De verwachting dat de steun die jongvolwassenen aan hun ouders geven ook afhangt van de levenslooppositie van de jongvolwassene vond slechts ten dele empirische ondersteuning. Dit laatste kan waarschijnlijk teruggevoerd worden op de specifieke levensfase van de ouders van de jongvolwassenen: Deze bevinden zich in de vroege ouderdom, beschikken in de meeste gevallen over voldoende financiële middelen en een prima gezondheid en hebben daardoor relatief weinig behoefte aan steun van hun kinderen – ook wanneer deze laatsten in een positie verkeren waarin zij over meer middelen beschikken. In het algemeen suggereren onze resultaten dat de intergenerationele uitwisseling van steun niet alleen begrepen kan worden door te kijken naar de hulpbronnen die ouders en kinderen hebben, maar dat het minstens zo belangrijk is om de behoeften van iedere generatie te identificeren.

### **NORMATIEVE SOLIDARITEIT: OPVATTINGEN OMTRENT VERPLICHTINGEN JEGENS OUDERS EN KINDEREN**

In hoofdstuk 5 werden de opvattingen of attitudes van jongvolwassenen en hun ouders onderzocht ten aanzien van normen en verplichtingen tegenover de familie. Twee soorten intergenerationele verplichtingen werden onderscheiden: verplichtingen van volwassen kinderen om steun te bieden aan hun (ouder wordende) ouders en verplichtingen van ouders om hun (volwassen) kinderen te steunen. Hoewel sommige theoretici (bijv. Lasch, 1977) beweerd hebben dat gedurende de afgelopen decennia als gevolg van processen van individualisering normen ten aanzien van beide soorten verplichtingen beduidend zwakker zijn geworden, is hier weinig empirisch bewijs voor gevonden (Fokkema et al., 2008; Lye, 1996; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Ook in het onderhavige onderzoek rapporteerden zowel jongvolwassenen als hun ouders relatief sterke normen ten aanzien van intergenerationele verplichtin-

gen. Normen met betrekking tot verplichtingen jegens kinderen worden over het algemeen sterker ervaren dan normen omtrent verplichtingen ten aanzien van ouders.

In het algemeen kan gesteld worden dat levenslooptransities opvattingen van mensen kunnen beïnvloeden. Ten eerste leiden levenslooptransities tot nieuwe ervaringen; deze nieuwe ervaringen kunnen ertoe leiden dat individuen hun opvattingen ter discussie stellen en eventueel veranderen. Ten tweede gaan levenslooptransities gepaard met nieuwe rollen en rolverwachtingen, die door het individu geïnternaliseerd kunnen worden (Stryker, 1968). Ten derde leiden levenslooptransities tot gedragsveranderingen; als gevolg hiervan zal het individu – teneinde cognitieve dissonantie te voorkomen (Festinger, 1957) – zijn of haar opvattingen bijstellen en in overeenstemming brengen met zijn of haar gedrag. Ten vierde heeft eerder empirisch onderzoek aangetoond dat opvattingen van individuen kunnen veranderen wanneer zij transitie in hun leven meemaken.

Kunnen levenslooptransities ook opvattingen omtrent intergenerationele verplichtingen beïnvloeden? Er zijn een aantal argumenten die een dergelijke theorie ondersteunen. Wat betreft de intergenerationele verplichtingen van jongvolwassenen kan verondersteld worden dat levenslooptransities nieuwe sociale rollen en bijbehorende rolverwachtingen met zich meebrengen – zoals de rol van echtgenoot en ouder – wat ertoe kan leiden dat andere rollen – zoals die van zoon of dochter – een minder belangrijk deel uit gaan maken van iemands identiteit. Een andere reden waarom levenslooptransities effect kunnen hebben op gevoelde intergenerationele verplichtingen van jongvolwassenen is dat levenslooptransities de hulpbronnen die jongvolwassen tot hun beschikking hebben kunnen beïnvloeden, en daarmee de mogelijkheden die jongvolwassenen hebben om steun te geven. Ook de opvattingen van ouders ten aanzien van intergenerationele verplichtingen kunnen beïnvloed worden door de levenslooptransities van hun jongvolwassen kinderen: Deze transitie kunnen namelijk veranderingen in behoeften en hulpbronnen van jongvolwassenen teweeg brengen, en daarmee kunnen de verwachtingen van ouders over welke rol zij moeten spelen in het leven van (hun) kinderen veranderen.

In hoofdstuk 5 werd op basis van NKPS-data onderzocht hoe de intergenerationele verplichtingen die jongvolwassenen en hun ouders ervaren samenhangt met het levensloopstadium van het jongvolwassen kind. Vier levensloopstadia werden onderscheiden, te weten: thuiswonend, uit huis zonder partner, samenwonend/getrouwd zonder kinderen, samenwonend/getrouwd met kinderen. Onze resultaten laten geen verschil tussen de vier levensloopstadia zien in de opvattingen omtrent intergenerationele verplichtingen van jongvolwassenen. Ouders van kinderen die met een partner (zonder kinderen) samenwonen rapporteerden echter minder sterke gevoelens van verplichtingen dan ouders van thuiswonende kinderen. Aangezien de daadwerkelijke steun die ouders aan kinderen geven een uitkomst van opvattingen omtrent verplichtingen kan zijn alsook deze opvattingen kan beïnvloeden (Festinger, 1957), komt deze observatie overeen met de eerdere bevinding dat contact met en steun aan kinderen afneemt nadat de laatsten het ouderlijk huis hebben verlaten en gaan samenwonen of trouwen. Hoewel opvattingen omtrent verplichtingen conceptueel onderscheiden dienen te worden van persoonlijke intenties om steun te verlenen (Stein et al.,

1998), suggereert deze bevinding dat, op een meer praktisch niveau, opvattingen van ouders ten aanzien van de verplichting om kinderen te ondersteunen kunnen veranderen wanneer de levensomstandigheden van hun eigen kinderen veranderen en hiermee ook hun behoefte aan ouderlijke steun.

### CONSENSUELE SOLIDARITEIT: INTERGENERATIONELE CONGRUENTIE IN ATTITUDES

In hoofdstuk 5 onderzochten we ook de mate waarin opvattingen van ouders en hun jongvolwassen kinderen congrueren of samenhangen. Opvattingen ten aanzien van twee soorten van familie- en gezinsrelaties werden onderzocht: ten aanzien van intergenerationale relaties en ten aanzien van relaties met een partner. Wat betreft intergenerationale relaties werden opvattingen onderzocht omtrent intergenerationale verplichtingen: verplichtingen van volwassen kinderen om steun te bieden aan hun (ouder wordende) ouders en verplichtingen van ouders om hun (volwassen) kinderen te steunen. Ten aanzien van relaties met een partner werd onderzocht in hoeverre ouders en kinderen traditionele opvattingen hebben over huwelijk en echtscheiding en over seksestereotype rolverdeling binnen het gezin.

In het verleden hebben diverse sociologen (Inglehart, 1977, 1990) en psychologen (Blos, 1962, 1979) gesuggereerd dat opvattingen van adolescenten en jongvolwassenen in de loop der tijd meer zijn gaan afwijken van de attitudes van hun ouders, wat uiteindelijk zou hebben geleid tot een 'generatiekloof'. Voor een dergelijke generatiekloof is weinig empirisch bewijs gevonden; over het algemeen is er sprake van een grote samenhang tussen de attitudes van ouders en die van hun adolescente en jongvolwassen kinderen (Acock & Bengtson, 1978; Glass et al., 1986; Miller & Glass, 1989; Styskal & Sullivan, 1975; Vollebergh et al., 2001). Recentelijk werd vastgesteld dat gedurende de laatste decennia attitudes van ouders en kinderen zelfs meer naar elkaar toe zijn gegroeid (Smith, 2006). Eerder onderzoek laat zien dat intergenerationale congruentie lager is wanneer het gaat om opvattingen ten aanzien van familierelaties dan wanneer het gaat om politieke en religieuze opvattingen (Glass et al., 1986). In lijn hiermee werd in ons onderzoek op basis van NKPS-data een redelijke samenhang gevonden tussen de familie-gerelateerde opvattingen van jongvolwassenen en hun ouders.

Verklaringen voor het bestaan van een samenhang tussen opvattingen van ouders en kinderen hebben zich gericht op twee verschillende manieren van intergenerationale overdracht. Ten eerste kunnen opvattingen via socialisatie op een directe manier van ouders op kinderen overgedragen worden; imitatie- en internalisatie-processen spelen hierbij een belangrijke rol (Bandura, 1977; Moen et al., 1997). Eerder onderzoek laat zien dat niet alleen ouders hun kinderen op deze manier kunnen beïnvloeden maar ook kinderen hun ouders, al is de invloed van ouders op kinderen vaak groter dan andersom (Glass et al., 1986; Vollebergh et al., 2001). Ten tweede worden opvattingen van ouders op een indirecte manier aan kinderen overgedragen, namelijk via de sociaal-economische (opleidingsniveau) en culturele positie (religieuze achtergrond) die ouders in de maatschappij innemen. De sociaal-economische

en culturele positie van een individu bepaalt voor een belangrijk deel diens leefstijl en diens waarden en opvattingen. Doordat deze positie voor een groot deel door ouders op kinderen wordt overgedragen, worden op een indirecte manier ook de bijbehorende opvattingen overgedragen. Voor beide typen verklaringen is empirische steun gevonden (Glass et al., 1986; Vollebergh et al., 2001); daarom werden beide verklaringen opgenomen in de theoretische modellen die in hoofdstuk 5 werden getoetst.

In hoofdstuk 5 werd de vraag beantwoord hoe de mate van intergenerationele samenhang in opvattingen afhangt van het levensloopstadium van het jongvolwassen kind. Vier levensloopstadia werden onderscheiden, te weten: thuiswonend, uit huis zonder partner, samenwonend/getrouwd zonder kinderen, samenwonend/getrouwd met kinderen. Onze resultaten laten geen verschil zien tussen de vier levensloopstadia in de mate van samenhang tussen opvattingen van ouders en kinderen omtrent intergenerationele verplichtingen. Wel werd ondersteuning gevonden voor onze verwachting dat intergenerationele samenhang in opvattingen op het gebied van partnerrelaties afhangt van het levensloopstadium van de jongvolwassene: Deze samenhang is kleiner voor jongvolwassenen die op zichzelf wonen, met of zonder een partner maar zonder kinderen, vergeleken met thuiswonende jongvolwassenen en jongvolwassenen met een partner en kinderen. De bevinding dat samenhang in attitudes groter is voor thuiswonende jongvolwassenen is in lijn met theorieën over socialisatie (Bandura, 1977; Miller & Glass, 1989), want dit levensloopstadium biedt jongvolwassenen en hun ouders veel gelegenheid elkaars opvattingen te beïnvloeden. Wanneer jongvolwassenen het ouderlijk huis hebben verlaten en romantische relaties aangaan, worden zij gesocialiseerd binnen andere groepen en door andere mensen – zoals de partner en de familie en vrienden van de partner – wiens opvattingen kunnen verschillen van die van de ouders.

De bevinding dat samenhang in attitudes ten aanzien van partnerrelaties groter is voor jongvolwassenen met kinderen dan voor (zelfstandig wonende) jongvolwassenen zonder kinderen suggereert dat wanneer jongvolwassenen zelf kinderen krijgen zij meer gaan terugvalen op de opvattingen van hun ouders. Dit kan op verschillende manieren verklaard worden. Ten eerste is deze bevinding in overeenstemming met de ‘intergenerationele gelijkheids-hypothese’ (Aquilino, 1997, 1999; Bengtson & Black, 1973): Doordat de jongvolwassene zelf de rol van ouder op zich neemt, gaan zijn of haar ervaringen meer lijken op die van zijn of haar ouders, waardoor de identificatie met ouders groter wordt. Ten tweede kan deze bevinding verklaard worden vanuit de theorieën over socialisatie. De geboorte van een kind leidt tot veranderingen in iemands netwerk: Contact met ouders neemt toe, waardoor ook de gelegenheid voor wederzijdse beïnvloeding toeneemt. Ten derde was het onderhavige onderzoek cross-sectioneel van aard en kan daarom geen uitsluitsel geven over wat oorzaak en wat gevolg is; het is daarom ook mogelijk dat jongvolwassenen wiens opvattingen lijken op die van hun ouders eerder geneigd zijn kinderen te krijgen in deze fase van hun leven.

## STRUCTURELE SOLIDARITEIT: INTERGENERATIONELE GEOGRAFISCHE NABIJHEID

Het verlaten van het ouderlijk huis is één van de meest belangrijke veranderingen die jongvolwassenen meemaken. In hoofdstuk 6 werd gekeken naar de leeftijd waarop jongvolwassenen de ouderlijke woning verlaten en welke rol ouders hierin spelen. Verder werd nagegaan hoe ver jongvolwassenen van hun ouders af (gaan) wonen, en hoe deze intergenerationale geografische afstand afhangt van de relatie met ouders en de levenslooppositie van de jongvolwassenen.

In het onderzoek op basis van de NKPS-gegevens blijkt dat kinderen gemiddeld op 21-jarige leeftijd het ouderlijke huis verlaten en zelfstandig gaan wonen, alleen of met een partner; dochters doen dat over het algemeen iets eerder dan zonen. Deze resultaten komen overeen met patronen die in andere West-Europese landen gevonden zijn zoals Duitsland (Juagn et al., 1999; Seiffge-Krenke, 2006) en Groot-Brittannië (Holdsworth, 2000). In de Verenigde Staten verlaten jongeren het ouderlijk huis op jongere leeftijd (Arnett, 2000). In overeenstemming met onze verwachtingen werd gevonden dat jongeren die tijdens de adolescentie hun relatie met hun moeder als positief en ondersteunend ervaren het ouderlijk huis op latere leeftijd verlaten; de relatie met vader speelt wat dat betreft een minder belangrijke rol. Deze bevinding suggereert dat, wanneer jongeren een goede verstandhouding met hun moeder hebben, moeder mogelijk bereid blijft een groot deel van van het huishoudelijk werk te verzorgen en jongeren tegelijkertijd de ruimte krijgen om een onafhankelijk leven thuis te leiden, jongeren een minder grote noodzaak zien om het ouderlijk huis te verlaten. Verder komt uit de analyses naar voren dat jongeren die in de adolescentie vaak conflicten tussen hun vader en moeder meemaken, het ouderlijk huis op jongere leeftijd verlaten, mogelijk met het doel te ontsnappen aan de negatieve sfeer thuis.

Hoe ver wonen jongvolwassenen van het ouderlijke huis af? Om dit te onderzoeken werd de geografische afstand in kilometers berekend tussen de adressen waarop jongvolwassenen en hun ouders wonen. Hierbij zijn jongvolwassenen onderzocht die kort geleden het ouderlijk huis hebben verlaten, maar ook jongvolwassenen die al een tijd geleden zelfstandig zijn gaan wonen. Uit de resultaten komt naar voren dat Nederlandse jongeren die het ouderlijk huis hebben verlaten over het algemeen dichtbij hun ouders wonen: Ongeveer 50% van de jongvolwassenen woont binnen een straal van tien kilometer van tenminste één van hun ouders, 25% woont op een afstand van 10 tot 50 kilometer en eveneens 25% woont verder dan 50 kilometer. Overeenkomstig eerder onderzoek blijkt het opleidingsniveau van ouders en kinderen van grote invloed: Ouders en kinderen die hoger zijn opgeleid wonen over het algemeen verder van elkaar dan ouders en kinderen die minder hoog zijn opgeleid.

Intergenerationele geografische nabijheid is een belangrijke determinant van contact en steunuitwisseling tussen ouders en kinderen: Hoe dichterbij men woont, hoe gemakkelijker het is om elkaar te zien en steun te verlenen. Het is daarom plausibel te veronderstellen dat wanneer jongvolwassenen kiezen waar te gaan wonen in hun overwegingen rekening houden met waar hun ouders woonachtig zijn. Aangenomen kan worden dat de mate waarin jongvolwassenen er belang aan hechten niet te ver van hun ouders af te wonen afhangt van

de kwaliteit van de ouder-kind band. Daarom werd de verwachting opgesteld dat jongvolwassenen dichter bij hun ouders wonen naarmate zij gedurende de adolescentie een hechtere relatie met hen hadden. Deze hypothese werd door onze resultaten ondersteund. Daarmee weerspiegelt de geografische nabijheid tussen jongvolwassenen en hun ouders de kwaliteit van de relatie tussen beiden.

Geen verschillen in afstand tot het ouderlijk huis werden gevonden tussen jongvolwassenen die single zijn, jongvolwassenen die samenwonen met een partner of jongvolwassenen die getrouwd zijn. Wel maakt het uit of jongvolwassenen zelf kinderen hebben: Naarmate jongvolwassenen zelf meer kinderen hebben wonen zij dichter bij hun ouders. Mogelijk besluiten jongvolwassenen dichter bij hun ouders te gaan wonen wanneer zij zelf kinderen krijgen, omdat dit de uitwisseling van instrumentele steun door (groot)ouders – zoals hulp bij de zorg voor (klein)kinderen – vergemakkelijkt. Omdat de gebruikte informatie cross-sectioneel van aard was, was niet vast te stellen of jongvolwassenen dichter bij hun ouders gaan wonen, of dat ouders meer richting de kinderen gaan wonen in geval van kleinkinderen. Ook is het mogelijk dat kinderen die dicht bij hun ouders wonen over het algemeen eerder en meer kinderen krijgen.

## CONCLUSIE EN DISCUSSIE

In dit proefschrift stond de midden-fase van de ouder-kind relatie centraal. Een belangrijke bevinding die in ons onderzoek naar voren komt is dat de solidariteit tussen ouders en jongvolwassen kinderen in deze fase van de levensloop over het algemeen groot is. Jongvolwassenen hebben over het algemeen een bevredigende band met ouders, onderhouden regelmatig contact, en wisselen regelmatig emotionele en praktische steun uit. Opvattingen van jongvolwassenen op het gebied van familie- en gezinsrelaties hangen voor een groot deel samen met die van hun ouders. Nadat jongvolwassenen het ouderlijk huis hebben verlaten, wonen zij relatief dicht bij hun ouders in de buurt, vooral indien relaties tussen ouders en kinderen in eerdere levensfasen als bevredigend en hecht ervaren werden.

Tegelijkertijd toont ons onderzoek aan dat de manier waarop ouder-kind relaties ingevuld en vormgegeven worden ook afhangt van de specifieke fase van de levensloop waarin het jongvolwassen kind zich bevindt. In het algemeen vindt er tot op zekere hoogte een verwijdering tussen ouders en hun jongvolwassen kinderen plaats wanneer deze laatsten het ouderlijk huis verlaten hebben en samen zijn gaan wonen met een partner: Intergenerationeel contact is minder frequent, de emotionele band wordt door kinderen als minder hecht ervaren, er vindt minder uitwisseling van steun plaats, en opvattingen op het gebied van gezin en familie gaan meer uit elkaar lopen. Ouders verlenen minder financiële steun wanneer jongeren over meer financiële middelen gaan beschikken. De geboorte van een kind lijkt de band tussen ouders en kinderen nieuw leven in te blazen: Contact wordt geïntensiveerd, onder andere doordat (groot)ouders helpen met kinderopvang; bovendien wonen jongvolwassenen met kinderen dichterbij hun ouders dan jongvolwassenen zonder kinderen. Daarnaast

suggereren onze bevindingen dat wanneer jongvolwassenen zelf kinderen krijgen, zij meer gaan terugvallen op de opvattingen van hun ouders. Het karakter van de ouderlijke band lijkt daarbij wel te veranderen; op emotioneel gebied is er sprake van meer afstand. Overigens blijkt uit ons onderzoek dat naast de levensloop van het jongvolwassen kind ook de levenslooppositie van zijn of haar ouders ertoe doet: Contact met ouders vindt bijvoorbeeld minder vaak plaats wanneer ouders gescheiden zijn. Wanneer één van beide ouders overleden is, is het contact met de andere ouder juist intensiever.

Het principe van de 'verbonden levens' (Elder, 1994), onderdeel van het levensloop-perspectief, vormde de theoretische leidraad bij het onderzoek. Op basis van dit principe werd verondersteld dat de ouder-kind relatie ook gedurende de midden-fase een belangrijke plaats blijft innemen in het leven van ouder en kind, maar dat de manier waarop deze relatie ingevuld en vormgegeven wordt, wordt beïnvloed door transities die optreden in het leven van het jongvolwassen kind. Het principe heeft een dynamisch karakter: Het veronderstelt dat ouder-kind relaties zich door de tijd heen ontwikkelen en dat deze ontwikkeling gekenmerkt wordt door zowel continuïteit als discontinuïteit. De beste manier om dergelijke ontwikkeling in relaties over tijd vast te kunnen stellen is panel-onderzoek, waarbij dezelfde mensen over tijd gevolgd worden. Omdat de meeste van de onderzoeken in dit proefschrift cross-sectioneel van aard waren, dienen we voorzichtig te zijn met een antwoord op de vraag in hoeverre het principe van de 'verbonden levens' ondersteund wordt door onze resultaten. Het is dan ook met dit voorbehoud in ons achterhoofd dat we concluderen dat onze bevindingen het principe ondersteunen. Een hoge mate van continuïteit kan afgeleid worden uit de resultaten uit ons panel-onderzoek en, meer algemeen, in het feit dat ook in de midden-fase de ouder-kind relatie belangrijk is voor beide generaties. Onze bevinding dat de ouder-kind relatie ook afhangt van de specifieke fase van de levensloop van het jongvolwassen kind én zijn ouders suggereert ook een belangrijke mate van discontinuïteit.

Ons onderzoek laat zien dat ook nadat jongvolwassenen het ouderlijk huis hebben verlaten en zij verplichtingen aangegaan zijn op het gebied van werk, relaties en gezinsleven, ouders een belangrijke rol blijven vervullen in het leven van hun kinderen, door het verlenen van financiële en praktische steun (hulp bij kinderopvang). Hulpbronnen van ouders kunnen jongvolwassenen helpen om een zelfstandige maatschappelijke positie in te nemen en maatschappelijke verplichtingen aan te gaan (bijvoorbeeld door hen te helpen bij het vinden van een zelfstandige woonruimte) en hen helpen om eenmaal aangegane verplichtingen te kunnen blijven vervullen (door hulp te bieden bij kinderopvang). Er is geen sprake van een radicaal losmakingsproces, zoals eerder gesuggereerd werd door theoretici met een klassiek-psychoanalytische achtergrond (Blos, 1962; Erikson, 1950, A. Freud, 1958). Eerder lijkt het erop dat gehechtheidspatronen van de kindertijd en adolescentie, waarin ouders de zelfstandigheid van hun kinderen bevorderen door hen ondersteuning te bieden (Bowlby, 1969/1982), gecontinueerd worden in de jongvolwassenheid.

Vanuit een macro-sociologisch perspectief kunnen deze bevindingen erop duiden dat familieverbanden nog steeds, ondanks processen van emancipatie, secularisering, en individualisering, een belangrijke rol spelen, in tegenstelling tot wat eerdere auteurs met een

structureel-functionalistische achtergrond (bijv. Parsons, 1942, 1943) beweerden. Terwijl als gevolg van het dalend aantal huwelijken en het stijgend aantal echtscheidingen aange trouwde familiebanden minder belangrijk zijn geworden, lijken bloedbanden (weer) een prominente plaats in te nemen. Aan de andere kant kan de hoge mate van intergenerationele solidariteit voor een deel ook ingegeven zijn door een aantal recente sociaal-economische, demografische en maatschappelijke ontwikkelingen die de levensloop van ouders en kinderen hebben beïnvloed. Het is voor jongvolwassenen moeilijker geworden om op eigen benen te staan zonder de steun van ouders. Zo is het onderwijstraject in de afgelopen decennia verlengd, waardoor het langer duurt voordat jongeren economisch zelfstandig worden. Starters komen slechts moeilijk aan de bak op de dure huizenmarkt. Steun van ouders lijkt in veel gevallen noodzakelijk te zijn geworden voor jongvolwassenen om in economisch en maatschappelijk opzicht een zelfstandig bestaan op te bouwen. Het feit dat levenslooptransities (zoals zelfstandig gaan wonen, trouwen, kinderen krijgen) over het algemeen worden uitgesteld, reflecteert niet alleen (veranderingen in) attitudes en voorkeuren van individuen maar ook sociaal-economische en structurele belemmeringen. Aan de andere kant beschikken ouders, door de toegenomen welvaart, in het algemeen over voldoende financiële bronnen en verkeren zij, door verbeteringen in de gezondheidszorg en veranderingen in leefpatronen, over het algemeen in goede gezondheid, waardoor zij meer dan ooit in staat zijn hun kinderen te ondersteunen.

Dit proefschrift heeft op verschillende manieren bijgedragen aan onderzoek op het terrein van ouder-kind relaties. Ten eerste zijn ouder-kind relaties in een fase van de levensloop onderzocht die tot nu toe in de onderzoeksliteratuur relatief weinig aandacht heeft gekregen: de midden-fase, waarin kinderen zich in jongvolwassenheid bevinden en hun ouders in de vroege ouderdom. We hebben beargumenteerd dat deze fase zijn huidige bijzondere karakter heeft gekregen doordat recente maatschappelijke en culturele veranderingen de individuele levensloop van zowel kinderen als ouders hebben veranderd. Ten tweede heeft ons onderzoek laten zien dat het, teneinde relaties tussen ouders en hun jongvolwassen kinderen te begrijpen en te verklaren, belangrijk is om – naast structurele kenmerken (zoals sociaal-economische status, geslacht) en culturele kenmerken (opvattingen, attitudes) van zowel ouder als kind – ook te kijken naar meer dynamische levensloopkenmerken. Met het levensloopperspectief (Elder, 1994) als oriënterend theoretisch framework en met in ons achterhoofd de vaststelling dat de jongvolwassenheid gekenmerkt wordt door een groot aantal belangrijke levenslooptransities, ging de aandacht van dit proefschrift in het bijzonder uit naar de levenslooppositie van jongvolwassenen. Aangezien deze levenslooptransities de overgang naar een volwassen levensfase markeren waarin individuen op maatschappelijk, emotioneel en economisch gebied een grotere verantwoordelijkheid op zich nemen en waarin een verschuiving plaatsvindt van betrokkenheid op het gezin van herkomst naar het vormgeven van een eigen leven en (eventueel) een eigen gezin, leverde ons onderzoek een bijdrage aan een wetenschappelijk debat dat van oudsher zowel binnen familiesociologische als psychologische en pedagogische disciplines veel aandacht heeft gekregen. Het levensloopperspectief, aangevuld met andere theoretische concepten en veronderstellingen, stelde

ons in staat een aantal nieuwe hypothesen te formuleren. Grote datasets op het gebied van familie- en gezinsrelaties stelden ons in de gelegenheid om deze hypothesen empirisch te toetsen. Tenslotte werd – overeenkomstig het paradigma van intergenerationale solidariteit (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991) – beargumenteerd dat, indien relaties tussen (jong)volwassenen en ouders in hun volle complexiteit begrepen dienen te worden, verschillende aspecten van deze relatie onderscheiden moeten worden. In lijn hiermee werden zes dimensies van ouder-kind relaties onderzocht, te weten contact, emotionele band, uitwisseling van steun, opvattingen over intergenerationale verplichtingen, intergenerationale samenhang in attitudes, en geografische nabijheid.

Naar aanleiding van dit proefschrift kunnen een aantal aanbevelingen voor toekomstig onderzoek worden geformuleerd. Ten eerste stond in dit onderzoek de levensloop van het jongvolwassen kind centraal; veel minder aandacht kon besteed worden aan de levensloop van hun ouders. Aangezien veel ouders zich in de vroege ouderdom bevinden, vinden ook in het leven van deze ouders cruciale transitieën plaats – zoals (pre)pensioenering en de overgang naar de ‘lege nest’ fase – die hun weerslag kunnen hebben op de relatie die zij met hun kinderen onderhouden. Deze levenslooptransities zouden in toekomstig onderzoek meer aandacht kunnen krijgen. Ten tweede was het grootste deel van dit proefschrift gebaseerd op cross-sectionele gegevens. Met behulp van deze gegevens kan slechts een samenhang aangetoond worden tussen de levensloop van jongvolwassenen en de relatie met ouders; wat oorzaak is en wat gevolg is op basis van deze gegevens niet te onderscheiden. Toekomstig panel-onderzoek is noodzakelijk om antwoord te kunnen geven op de vraag in hoeverre de manier waarop de ouder-kind relatie vormgegeven wordt het gevolg is van bepaalde levenslooptransities of juist invloed heeft op de kans om bepaalde levenslooptransities mee te maken. Middels panel-onderzoek kan ook meer inzicht verkregen worden in hoe de verschillende aspecten van de ouder-kind relatie – die in het huidige onderzoek meestal in afzondering onderzocht werden – zich tot elkaar verhouden. In het verlengde hiervan verdient het aanbeveling om in onderzoek naar ouder-kind relaties in de midden-fase ook meer aandacht te besteden aan hoe deze relatie zich in de vorige fase ontwikkeld heeft, bij voorkeur door vanaf jonge leeftijd ouders en kinderen middels een panel-onderzoek te volgen. In de midden-fase kennen kinderen en hun ouders elkaar al meer dan vijftien jaar, en het ligt voor de hand dat de manier waarop de relatie vorm krijgt in de midden-fase deels een uitkomst is van eerder ontstane patronen.



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# Curriculum Vitae

Alfred Jacobus Elisabeth Hubertus (Freek) Bucx was born November 16, 1971 in Maastricht, The Netherlands. He studied developmental psychology at the University of Nijmegen, where he received his Master of Science degree (cum laude/with distinction) in 2001. From 2002 to 2004 he was as an academic teacher at the Department of Developmental Psychology of Utrecht University. In 2004 he started his dissertation research on parent-child relations in young adulthood at the Department of Interdisciplinary Social Science of Utrecht University, and joined the PhD program of the Interuniversity Center for Social Science Theory and Methodology (ICS). In 2007 he spent several months at the Department of Psychology of the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz (Germany). Currently, he is employed as a researcher at The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP). His research interests include life-course research; intergenerational relations; attitudinal research; and young people's health and lifestyle.



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