Looking Within Families: Does Parent's Contact

with an Adult Child Depend on Characteristics

of Other Children in the Family?

Carol Lynn Roan

A National Survey of

FAMILIES

and

HOUSEHOLDS

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Carol Lynn Roan
Center for Demography and Ecology
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Madison, WI

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ABSTRACT

This study uses data from the National Survey of Families and Households to study the frequency of visits and phone calls or letters between parents and one of their children living outside their household. Ordered logistic regression is used to regress contact on selected characteristics of the parents' other children, of the child being considered, and of the parent. The results confirm that the number of parents' other children reduces contact with each individual child. However, the location of the parents' other children does not affect contact with the individual child. Additionally, distance, sex, marital status, religiosity, and education significantly predict the frequency of contact.

For many families, interactions between a parent and one adult child take place within the context of a larger family. A parent's decision to visit with one adult child may depend, in part, on the availability of his or her other children. Parents may substitute visits with a nearby child for visits with a child who lives farther away. Alternatively, a visit with one child may complement visits with another child. Parents who place a high value on visiting their children may want to visit all of their children as often as possible. Using the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), this research examines how the frequency of contact between parents and one of their adult children is affected by the parents having a different child either living nearby or living with the parent. In addition to answering this specific question, this paper provides a thorough analysis of the predictors of contact. Two measures of contact are examined: the frequency of face-to-face visits and the frequency of parents' receipt of telephone calls or letters.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Past research on the frequency of contact between parents and children stems from the debates over the declining functions of the family (Ogburn, 1933) and over the structural isolation of the nuclear family (Parsons, 1943). Motivation for current work on contact between parents and children stems, in part, from fertility and mortality patterns over the past century. Because of the large baby boom cohort of the 1950s and early 1960s and increases in longevity, the proportion of persons in the United States over age 65 will reach 22% in 2030 compared to only 13% in 1990 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1989). Concern about the ability of current government programs to survive the increased burdens of an aging population has renewed interest in alternative sources of support for elderly persons. Studies on co-residence, caregiving and contact between the generations give important information to policy makers on prospects for intergenerational support in the future.

Previous research has documented the levels and determinants of contact between parents and their adult children (Adams, 1968; Crimmins and Ingegneri, 1990; Cooney and Uhlenberg, 1990; Klatzky, 1972; National Center for Health Statistics, 1986; Rossi and Rossi, 1990; Shanas, 1982; Spitze and Logan, 1991). This paper adds to previous work by using recently collected, nationally representative data and examining how contact between a parent and one child is affected by the location of the parent's other children. The data have

information on face-to-face and telephone or mail contact between the parent respondent and <u>each</u> of the parent's adult children.

Most past work on contact has not used nationally representative data (Adams, 1968; Frankel and DeWit, 1989; Klatzky, 1972; Rossi and Rossi, 1990; Spitze and Logan, 1991). A study by Cooney and Uhlenberg (1990) also used the NSFH data but their study focused only on men's contact with their children. Although the data used by Shanas (The National Survey of the Aged) (NSA) does have a nationally representative sample of persons 65 or older, it collects information on contact by asking a general question about all children. It is not possible to measure the amount of contact with each child using the NSA data. Additionally, it can only address contact between elderly persons and their children. Literature on the age of parents when the first child leaves home is difficult to find. Data from 1980 shows that 50% of ever-married mothers have no children under age 18 by age 53 (Sweet and Bumpass, 1987, Table 4.10). Therefore, it is very likely that most parents have at least one child living elsewhere before the parent turns 65.

Like the NSA, most data sets do not have information on relationships between parents and <u>each</u> of their adult children. When the parent generation is the informant, they are usually asked to report on any adult child (Harris, Louis and Associates, 1975; Shanas et al., 1968; Shanas 1973; Watson and Kivett, 1976), or one specific child, often the child closest in proximity (Crimmins and Ingegneri, 1990). This may bias descriptions of parent and adult child relationships. If the frequency of contact between a parent and a child is the variable of interest and the parent was questioned about how often he or she saw <u>any</u> child, then the amount of contact <u>each</u> child has with his or her parents is overestimated. Parents who see <u>each</u> of four children once per month but not at the same time may report seeing <u>any</u> child weekly. If the child who is most geographically proximate is selected, then the level of contact is again overestimated because distance is negatively related to contact.

Even when a survey includes data on parents' contact with each adult child, analysts may not take advantage of the richness of the data. For instance, Spitze and Logan, (1991), analyze data from a personal interview survey conducted in the metropolitan area of Albany-Schenectady-Troy, New York, by treating each parent-child pair as a separate observation in their analysis. This over-represents parent-child relationships in

large families. It also ignores the possibility that contact between a parent and a child may depend on contact between the parent and that child's siblings. This dependence may come, in part, from factors that affect each child's contact with parents. A factor might be something that is easily measurable, such as parents' education, or something that is not easily measurable, such as parents' values.

This paper takes advantage of a rich data set by examining how characteristics of the sibship affect contact between a randomly selected member of that sibship and his or her parents. The first hypothesis is that contact between a parent and a child will be affected by whether the parent has another child living within 10 miles. The second hypothesis is that contact between a parent and a child will be affected by the parent having a coresidential child. In addition to examining the characteristics of the parents' other children, this paper also examines how contact is affected by the sex, marital status and age of both the parent and child, the geographic distance separating the parent and child, and the religion and religiosity of the parent.

SIBSHIP CHARACTERISTICS AND CONTACT

Parents who have many children available for contact have less contact with each individual child (Logan and Spitze, 1991). Because parents may or may not include stepchildren as being available for contact, the effect of number of children on contact may differ by whether or not the children are stepchildren or biological children of the parents.

In addition to the number of parents' other adult children, the location of the parents' other children may also affect contact. However, the direction of such an effect is unclear. Parents with a coresiding or nearby child may have less contact with a more distant child because they can substitute a visit with another child more easily. Alternatively, these parents may have more visits from a distant child because the child can visit with a sibling as well as the parent.

The distance to each adult child within a sibship may be interdependent. The geographic dispersion of an adult sibship is likely to depend on both measurable and unmeasurable characteristics of the family. Highly educated parents are likely to have highly educated adult children. Because the labor market is geographically

larger for highly educated persons, these children are likely to be more geographically dispersed than children from families where the parents have less education. Family members may also share a similar value system regarding the importance of family ties relative to other ties. Families that place great importance on visits may be less geographically dispersed than families in which visits are less important.

If children are clustered together in the same geographic area then parents are not able to substitute contact with a nearby child for contact with a faraway child. However, if children are more widely dispersed geographically then parents may substitute contact with a close child for contact with a faraway child. This suggests that the effect of having another child living within 10 miles varies by whether or not the other child lives far away. To date, little is known about the amount of variation in distance to children within a sibship.

VARIATION IN PARENT-CHILD CONTACT

The most important factor associated with parent-child contact is the geographic distance separating the parent and the child. In addition to distance, other characteristics of both the parents and the children have been shown to significantly affect their frequency of contact. Previous studies have investigated marital status, race, age, sex, health, education, and the child's parental status (Cooney and Uhlenberg, 1990; Bumpass and Sweet, 1991, Rossi and Rossi, 1990). This study looks at these factors as well as the religion and religiosity of the parent, and one measure of the parent's sense of obligation toward the child.

Although distance is the strongest predictor of frequency of contact -- especially of face-to-face visits (DeWit et al., 1988; Klatzky, 1972; Reiss, 1962; Rossi and Rossi, 1990) -- the causal association between distance and contact is ambiguous. Very frequent face-to-face contact depends on parents and children living close to one another. But, decisions about where to live may also depend on how much contact parents and children desire. Children and parents may decide to live near each other or even with each other, in part because they want to see each other often.

Whether or not the distance between parents and children is determined by either's desire for contact is a very difficult question to answer. Sometimes people are not sure themselves why they moved and sometimes they are reluctant to give accurate information (Long, 1988). There is evidence that location of children may

be important in some elderly persons' decisions to move. Three recent studies examined how migration and the distance between elderly parents and their children are related. The first study used data from the Longitudinal Study on Aging on elderly parents' distance to their nearest child in 1984 and again in 1988. Among elderly parents who moved between 1984 and 1988 (13.3%), 36.2% had no significant change in proximity to children. Of those elderly parents who did change in proximity to children, 70% ended up living closer to a child (Speare and McNally, 1992). In this analysis proximity was coded as (1) in the same household, (2) less than 10 minutes away, (3) 10 to 29 minutes away, and (4) 30 or more minutes away. A change in proximity meant a switch among these 4 categories. The second study used the NSFH data to examine the correlates of proximate living between elderly parents and their geographically closest adult child. A parent (60 years or older) and a child were considered proximate if they lived within 10 miles of each other. The study showed that the effect of age on proximity is curvilinear. The "young-old" and the "oldest-old" are more likely to live near one of their children than those persons in between. However, the effect of age on proximity differed by whether the parents moved 25 or more miles in the past 5 years. Migrants who are "young-old" are less likely to live near a child than are non-migrants. Older migrants are more likely to live within 10 miles of a child than older non-migrants (Clark and Wolf, 1992).

Third, data from Annual Housing Surveys show that the most common reason for moving is job related (47.2%). However, 8.6% of household reference persons cite "to be closer to relatives" as their main reason for moving (Long, 1988). To fully investigate the relationship between distance and contact, longitudinal data with information on residence decisions and contact are needed. Because of the lack of such data, most research on contact assumes that distance from kin is based on an earlier decision about matters external to parent-child interaction such as employment and marital opportunities.

Many studies have demonstrated how women have more frequent contact with kin than men (Rossi and Rossi, 1990; Spitze and Logan, 1991). Women have been described as "kinkeepers" or "ministers of the interior" (Hagestad, 1986). Rossi and Rossi (1990) found that mothers and daughters exhibited the greatest frequency of contact (46% visited weekly or more), and fathers and sons the least (40% visited weekly or more).

However, they found no significant effect of child's sex on face-to-face visits once distance was taken into account. But, being female significantly increased the frequency of phone contact (Rossi and Rossi, 1990, Table 8.7). The marital status of both generations may affect contact between parents and children for three reasons. First, separated, divorced, widowed or never-married persons may have more contact with their adult children or parents because they are more dependent on such kin for help and companionship. Second, separated or divorced persons may have less contact with parents or children because the breakup of the marital relationship may also have a long-lasting negative effect on relationships with other kin (Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 1989). For example, mothers have less contact with divorced and separated children than currently married children (Bumpass and Sweet, 1991). Parents may be critical of children who divorce, or children may be uncomfortable with parents after they divorce. Furthermore, married fathers report more frequent contact with children than unmarried fathers (Rossi and Rossi, 1990). This is likely a long-term effect of non-coresidential fathers' lack of involvement with their children during childhood (Cooney and Uhlenberg, 1990). Third, never-married children may have less contact with their parents because they have less in common with their parents than married children do.

Adult children with children of their own have less frequent contact with their parents than childless adult children (Rossi and Rossi, 1990; Spitze and Logan, 1991). Perhaps adult children who are parents are so involved with their children that they have few opportunities to contact their parents. On the other hand, parents of young children may ask for help from parents in babysitting, thus increasing the amount of contact. The effect of having children for an unmarried adult child may differ from that for a married adult child. Single parents may increase contact with their parents because of the increased needs of the single-parent family; or single parents may reduce contact because of the stigma attached to a divorce or a non-marital birth.

Parents with more education may have more interests outside their family compared to parents with less education. Therefore they see their children less often than less educated parents (Crimmins and Ingegneri, 1990). Education may also act as an indicator of social-economic status and income. Persons with more income may find it easier to travel and pay for phone calls than those with less income.

Strong ties to a particular church may be associated with strong family ties. Persons who are active in a church community are also likely to be active with their families. Because most religions regard the family as very important, persons who are religious (attend services and declare a religion) may have more frequent contact with their children than those who are not religious. Additionally, frequent attendance at religious services may leave less time for parents to interact with their children or may increase interaction if children and parents worship together. Because some families may be more kin oriented than others, attitudinal measures of parents' views on obligations toward children may capture differences in values between families. For example, parents who agree that parents "should pay for their adult child's college education if they can afford to" may be more family oriented than parents who do not agree.

DATA AND MEASUREMENT

This research uses The National Survey of Families and Households. The NSFH is a cross-sectional, national, multi-stage area probability sample of adults aged 19 and older living in households in the coterminous United States. These data are well suited for this analysis because of the information available on each adult child. The data were collected in face-to-face interviews in 1987 and 1988. The response rate for primary respondents is 74%. The NSFH includes an oversample of minorities and selected family types. The sampling weights take this into account (Sweet, Bumpass and Call, 1988). This research draws upon information from respondents who have at least one biological, adult child (aged 19 or older) living outside the respondent's home. The analyses use 3,741 cases. Overall, 4,310 respondents have an adult child living outside their household. Of these, 276 had only stepchildren living outside the household, and therefore they are removed from the analysis. Because respondents are asked the current distance from their adult children and the amount of contact in the past 12 months, respondents who moved in the past 12 months are deleted from the analysis (N=134). An additional 93 cases were excluded because of missing data on the amount of contact with the randomly selected child. Because there are so few cases, respondents who were never married are also deleted from the analysis (N=50). Missing data on the independent variables was handled as follows: For variables that had

more than 10 cases with missing data, mean substitution with a dummy variable indicator is used in the multivariate analysis; for variables with less than 10 missing cases, the entire record was deleted (N=16).

Respondents were asked questions about each of their adult children living outside the household. The analysis presented in this research randomly selects one of the respondent's adult children from the pool of non-resident, biological adult children. Respondents with only one biological adult child living outside the household are also included. Therefore each of the families is represented by only one parent-child dyad. This maintains the independence of the observations. The characteristics of the siblings are attached to the randomly selected child's record.

Contact Between Parents and Adult Children

The NSFH interviewer asked respondents two questions about contact with adult children - During the past 12 months how often did you see this child? - and a similar question for receiving a letter or a telephone call from the child. Respondents were asked to select from one of six responses. These responses and the weighted percentage of respondents selecting them are shown in Table 1. In this table, the sample is separated by the sex of the parent.

Frequency of contact between parents and children is high, as shown in other studies (Rossi and Rossi, 1990). Most parents report seeing the randomly selected child at least monthly (64%). Phone calls and letters are more frequent than visits. There are no statistically significant differences between fathers and mothers on reports of frequency of visits. However, mothers report receiving phone calls and letters from the randomly selected child more frequently than fathers. The difference in weekly or greater phone or mail contact is significantly higher for mothers than fathers (.67 versus .56; $F=26.7$, $p \leq .001$).

Means of Independent Variables

Table 2 presents the weighted means and standard deviations of the independent variables. The third column in Table 2 shows the unweighted number of cases with non-missing data.

Five variables measuring the characteristics of the parent's other children are presented in Table 2. The first two measure the number of other non-coresident adult children (besides the randomly selected child). One

measures the number of other biological children, the other measures the number of stepchildren. Nearly two-thirds of parents (73%) have at least one additional biological child living elsewhere, and 11% have at least one adult stepchild living elsewhere (not shown). The next two variables measure the number of children (regardless of age) living in the same household as the parent. Once again the measure is separate for the parent's biological and stepchildren. Thirty-four percent of the parents are living with at least one biological child, and just under 2% live with one or more stepchildren (not shown). The mean number of biological children living with the parents is .54 while the mean number of stepchildren is .02. The fifth variable indicates whether or not any of the parent's other biological children are living within 10 miles of the parents. It is coded 1 if at least one biological child lives within 10 miles (including 10 miles) of the parents, and 0 otherwise. Forty percent of the respondents have at least one other biological child living within 10 miles. The cutoff of ten miles was chosen because it is close enough that frequent travel between the households would be easy. The results shown below were not sensitive to the 10 mile definition of close.

In the multivariate analysis the geographic distance separating the parent and the child is measured by the natural logarithm of the number of miles. This allows for the nonlinearity of the relationship between distance and contact (Dewit et al., 1988; Klatzky, 1972). Table 2 presents both the mean distance and the mean of the natural logarithm of distance between the parents and the randomly selected adult child. The mean distance separating the parent and the randomly selected child is 411 miles. The median distance is 50 miles (not shown).

The adult child's marital status is measured by two dichotomous variables distinguishing among currently separated, divorced or widowed, never married, and currently married. The majority of adult children in the sample (67%) are currently married. Because more detailed information is not available, remarried and once-married children are combined in the currently married category. The "child has child" variable indicates whether or not the randomly selected adult child has at least one child.

The parent's marital status is measured by three dichotomous variables distinguishing among currently separated or divorced, currently widowed, remarried since the random child's birth, and currently married to the

same spouse as when the random child was born. The difference in the specification of parents' and children's

marital status reflects differences in their life cycle stages. Remarried parents include those who were previously

widowed and divorced. Because recent research has shown that cohabitation is an important family status

(Manning, 1992; Bumpass and Raley, 1993), the group of remarried parents includes a small number of parents

who are currently living with a partner other than the child's other parent (N=72 or 4% of the parents in the

remarried category). As in the population, the distribution of respondent's marital status varies by sex. Mothers

are more likely to be separated or divorced, or widowed, than men. Similarly, fathers are slightly more likely

to be remarried than women (24% versus 17%, not shown). The analysis below includes interactions of marital

status by sex to take into account the different meaning of marital status for women's and men's economic

welfare and current living arrangements.

Parent's education is presented as a continuous variable of number of years of completed education. The

measure of parent's health is based on the self-report question: Compared with other people your age, how

would you describe your health? Respondents could choose from five categories ranging from very poor to

excellent. Only 8% of parents said their health was poor or very poor. Parent's religion is divided into five

categories. The omitted category includes parents who specify a mainline Protestant religion where this includes

Baptists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians and United Church of Christ (Congregational).

The parent's frequency of attending worship services is measured by one dichotomous variable distinguishing

between parents who attend a worship service weekly or more and those who do not. The last characteristic of

the parent included in the analysis measures whether or not the parent agrees that parents ought to help children

with college expenses. Three-quarters of parents of adult children agreed or strongly agreed with this.

METHODS

The analysis has two parts. The first simply describes the variation in distance to children within a

sibship. The second regresses the frequency of contact on the independent variables described above using

ordered logistic regression models to take into account the ordinal metric of the two contact variables. This type

of model is an extension of a logit model for a dichotomous variable. In an ordered model the distances between

the categories for the dependent variable are unknown. The model assumes that the observed distribution on the ordinal dependent variable represents a continuous underlying distribution whose values are mapped onto an ordered scale. For this analysis, the ordered metric ranging from no contact in the last 12 months to contact several times per week represents an underlying continuous distribution of the amount of contact in the past 12 months. For continuous independent variables the ordered logit coefficients give the effect of a one standard deviation change in the independent variable on the dependent variable in standard deviation units. For dichotomous variables the ordered logit coefficient gives the difference between the categories on the underlying latent dependent variable. Ordered logit models also estimate threshold parameters. These parameters indicate whether or not the categories are evenly spaced in the logit scale. (For more information see Winship and Mare, 1984; McKelvey and Zavona, 1975).

RESULTS

Figures 1 and 2 describe how distance to the randomly selected child is related to the distance to the other children within the sibship. It shows the proportion with any other biological child less than 10 miles away (Figure 1) and the proportion of parents with any other biological child more than 100 miles away (Figure 2) by whether or not the randomly selected child lives within 10 miles of the parents and by the number of other biological children. By definition, the figures only include parents with at least two adult children living elsewhere. When the randomly selected child lives within 10 miles of the parents, the parent is much less likely to have another child living more than 100 miles away and much more likely to have another child also living within 10 miles, compared to parents where the randomly selected child lives more than 10 miles away. This relationship holds when the age, sex, marital status of the parent and the parent's attitudes are taken into account. However, taking account of the parent's level of education attenuates (but does not eliminate) the relationship (not shown).

Distance to children within a sibship may be related because some families may value kin more or be more kin-oriented than other families. These values, in combination with the job expectations of the children, may lead to a geographic clustering of the adult children as well as frequent contact between the parents and

each child for some families. The multivariate analysis below examines the effects of sibling characteristics, including distance, controlling for the parent's education and other characteristics that may affect location of the random child and the child's siblings.

Table 3 presents the parameters from the multivariate ordered logistic regression on contact.

Four models are presented in Table 3; two for visits and two for phone or mail contact. The second model for each dependent variable differs from the first by the addition of several interactions of sex (of parent and child) by other characteristics of the family.

Results for Sibship Characteristics

The first two rows of Table 3 show the effects of the number of biological children and stepchildren also living outside the household on contact with the randomly selected adult child. The results for the reduced model (Model 1) show that the number of other biological children significantly decreases the frequency of visits and the frequency of receipt of phone or mail contact with the randomly selected child. The number of stepchildren living elsewhere has no effect on either type of contact. The number of parents' coresident children (either biological or step) does not affect the frequency of visits between parents and the randomly selected child. However, the number of biological children who live with the parent reduces the frequency of receipt of phone calls and letters from the randomly selected child to the parent. Having another child living within 10 miles does not affect contact between the parent and the randomly selected child. Furthermore, the effect of having another child living within 10 miles does not vary by distance to the randomly selected child (not shown). Also, the sex of the other children living elsewhere was not important in predicting contact with the randomly selected child.

The full model, or the interaction model (Model 2) shows how the effects of the parents' other children differs by the sex of the randomly selected child. For visits, the negative effect of the number of other biological children holds only when the randomly selected child is a daughter. For phone or mail contact, the effect of the number of other biological children is the same for both sons and daughters. Model 2 also shows that the number of children living with the parent does affect the frequency of visits with the randomly selected child.

The effect of number of biological children at home on visits for sons is negative (-.13) and positive (-.13+.16=.03) for daughters. Additionally, daughters increase the frequency of visits with parents for each stepchild at home, whereas sons' visits do not change.

Results for Child Characteristics

The natural logarithm of the number of miles separating the parent and the randomly selected adult child is a very strong predictor of face-to-face visits. Although the relationship between distance and phone or mail contact is not as strong as the relationship between distance and visits, it is still a very important predictor of phone or mail contact. The difference in strength is likely due to the high economic and time costs for visiting over great distances compared to the lower costs of telephoning or writing.

Compared to sons, daughters have significantly more contact of both types with parents. The reduced models show how separated, divorced or widowed children do not differ significantly in their frequency of contact with parents from currently married children. But parents report less frequent phone and mail contact with their never-married children, compared to children who are currently married. The interaction models show how the effect of child's marital status differs by the sex of the child. Never-married daughters have less frequent contact with their parents than do never-married sons.

Whether or not the randomly selected adult child is a parent has no effect on the frequency of contact with parents. Furthermore, adult children who are single parents are no different from adult children who are married parents in their frequency of contact (not shown).

Results for Parent Characteristics

According to the reduced models, mothers have more frequent contact with the randomly selected child than do fathers. Also, compared to parents who are currently married, separated or divorced parents, widowed parents, and parents who have remarried since the birth of the randomly selected child have less frequent contact with the child. But the effect of parent's marital status differs for mothers and fathers. The negative effect on contact of being separated or divorced is larger for fathers than mothers (-1.48 versus -1.48+.99 = -.49 for visits; -1.5 versus -1.5 + 1.14 = -.36 for phone or mail). The effect of being widowed does not differ by sex of parent.

Also, the negative effect of the parent being remarried is larger for fathers than mothers (-1.62 versus -1.62+.95 = -.67 for visits; -1.39 versus -1.39 + .69 =-.7 for phone or mail).

Even after controlling for distance, more educated parents have more frequent contact with the randomly selected child than less educated parents. Parents who self-report being in poor health have less frequent contact than those who say they are in good health. The only significant finding for religious denomination is that Jewish parents receive more frequent phone calls or letters from the randomly selected child than mainline Protestant parents. Parents who attend church services weekly or more have more frequent phone or mail contact with the randomly selected child than parents who attend church less frequently. This effect differs for fathers and mothers. The positive effect of attending church at least weekly is greater for fathers than mothers. Parents who believe parents ought to pay for their children's college education have more frequent contact with the randomly selected child than those who do not agree.

DISCUSSION

Given that many of the effects of the characteristics of the parents' other children on the frequency of contact vary by the sex of the randomly selected child, the meaning of the coefficients is difficult to interpret. As found in other studies, the more children a parent has, the less contact there is with each individual child. However, there are two exceptions to this finding. First, the number of stepchildren has no significant effect on contact with the randomly selected child. This suggests that adult stepchildren are not competing with biological adult children for contact with parents. Second, the number of children living elsewhere negatively affects daughters' frequency of visits with parents but has no effect on sons' visits. Logan and Spitze argue that, compared to sons, daughters are more cognizant of family activities and adjust their visits accordingly (1991).

Unlike the number of other biological children living outside the parent's home, the number of biological children living with the parents increases daughters' visits and decreases sons' visits. Furthermore, the number of stepchildren living at home significantly increases daughters' visits but has no significant effect on sons' visits. The increase in daughters' visits with parents, when the parent has coresident children, may be due, in part, to

women's greater involvement with kin compared to men. For parents with coresident children, an adult child's visit home most likely means a visit with a sibling (either biological or step) as well. Because women are more interested in visiting kin than men, daughters may be more motivated than sons to visit parents with coresident children. This argument assumes that the visit takes place in the parent's household. More information is needed in order to test this assumption. The decrease in sons' visits may come from their lessened feeling of obligation to visit their parents if the parents have another child or children living with them. This suggests that sons' visits are motivated by obligation, whereas daughters visits are motivated by a desire for contact.

The finding that the number of children at home increases daughters' visits with parents suggests that daughters may be more involved with their siblings than sons. Research on contact among elderly siblings shows that males are less likely to have frequent contact with siblings than females (Lu and Bumpass, 1993). Perhaps this explains why the number of other children living outside the parent's household decreases daughters' visits but not sons'. Daughters may reduce their visits with parents when the parents have other children outside the household because the parents compete with their other children for their daughters' visits. In other words, women are busy visiting with both siblings and parents whereas sons are only active in visiting with parents.

The frequency of phone calls and letters received from sons or daughters is reduced if the parent has coresident children. Children may feel less obliged to call or write if the parent is living with another child or children. Alternatively, parents with coresident children may hear from the randomly selected child indirectly. Information gathered in conversations between the siblings (i.e., the randomly selected child and a coresident child) may be passed on to the parents.

Although the hypothesis that location of parent's other children affects contact with a randomly selected child was not supported, the descriptive analysis suggested that distance to one child within a sibship is not independent of distance to another child. Future research can further investigate the variation in parents' geographic distance to children within a sibship and how characteristics of each of the parents' children influence contact with each member of the sibship. This research joins with previous research in showing how women

are more involved with kin than men. Even after controlling for distance, daughters had more frequent visits and phone calls or letters with parents than sons. The difference between this result and Rossi and Rossi's finding that the child's sex was not important once distance was taken into account may be due to the geographic location of the Rossi's sample (1990). Perhaps living in the Boston metropolitan area attracts sons more than living in other parts of the United States. Mothers received phone calls and letters from the random child more frequently than fathers do. However, the effect of parent's sex on visits disappears once it is interacted with parent's marital status. Currently married mothers had no more visits with children than currently married fathers. Among separated or divorced and remarried parents, fathers had less frequent visits with children than mothers. These differences are likely due to the earlier living arrangements of fathers and their children. Fathers and children who seldom saw each other because of custody and visiting arrangements when the child was a minor are not likely to see each other often when the child reaches adulthood (Conney and Uhlenberg, 1990). The finding that widowed parents have less contact with their children than currently married parents is somewhat surprising. Assuming that widowed parents have more emotional and economic needs than currently married parents, this finding suggests that the needs of the parents is not one of the reasons why parents and children keep in touch.

The different effects of child's marital status on contact by sex of the child has a less straightforward explanation. Never-married daughters have less frequent contact with their parents than currently married daughters. Never-married sons have the same amount of contact with their parents compared to currently married sons. Perhaps this reflects differences in single sons' and daughters' lifestyles. Single daughters may have less trouble living on their own than single sons. They may find it easier to develop close friendships and to maintain a household than sons.

The finding that more educated parents have more frequent contact with children is surprising. The effect of education may be picking up some of the effect of income in the model. However, Crimmins and Ingegneri found a negative effect of education on contact also without controlling for income (1990).

Because parents in poor health are more likely to be dependent upon others it is surprising that they actually have less frequent contact with their children than parents in better health. Perhaps any difficulty they have with writing, talking on the phone, receiving visitors, or travelling is a large enough barrier to contact despite their increased dependence.

Parents who participate in weekly worship services receive letters and phone calls from the randomly selected child more frequently than those who attend services less often. This effect is stronger for fathers than mothers. Either the behavior of participating in something on a weekly basis, or a value associated with participation in worship may be producing the relationship with contact. If it is the behavior of attending a service that is causing this result, then this may indicate that parents who are active in other activities are also likely to have active family lives. This could be further tested by seeing if any other types of activities also increase contact with children. If it is a value that is causing this result, than we might expect this relationship to disappear if we could accurately measure how parents value contact with children and participation in worship.

The one attitudinal measure included in the multivariate analysis has a strong significant effect on frequency of contact. Parents who agreed that parents ought to help their children with college expenses had more frequent contact with their children than those who did not agree. This measure could be reflecting different attitudes in the importance of a college education, differences in income, or a difference in parents' feelings of obligation towards their children. If the educational level of the parents (which is included in the model) is capturing some of the effects of income and the importance of a college education, this attitude measure may be capturing differences in parents' feelings of obligation towards their children.

Literature on differences in family values by race or ethnicity proposes that non-Hispanic black families are more kin-oriented than non-hispanic white families. Given this, one would expect to see a positive effect of being black on the frequency of contact between parents and children. However, preliminary analyses found no effects of race or ethnicity on contact.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the hypothesis that location of parents' other children affects contact with a randomly selected child was not supported, there is evidence that using data on an entire family can enhance research on intergenerational relations. The descriptive analysis suggested that distance to one child within a sibship is not independent of distance to another child. As stated earlier, a possible reason for this is between family differences in the value of family. The one measure of value of family (albeit not a very good measure) included in the model does support the argument that differences in values between families may play an important role in contact between parents and children.

Some of the findings in this work suggest that parents' or children's needs are not driving the frequency of contact between the generations. For example, children who were single parents did not differ in contact with their parents from children who were married parents or children who were single and childless. Furthermore, parents who were widowed and those who were in poor health had less contact with their children than parents who were currently married and those who were in better health (respectively). This can be interpreted as showing that contact between the generations is less motivated by dependencies and more motivated by other factors such as concern, love, or a sense of obligation to stay in touch.

Future research on contact between parents and children can further investigate variation in parents' geographic distance to children within a sibship, how characteristics of each of the children influence contact with each member of the sibship, and how this may be related to between-family differences in family values. Some of these questions can be addressed by using statistical models that take into account each member of the sibship. Additionally, because of the longitudinal data, the second wave of the NSFH will allow a more thorough analysis of the relationships among migration, distance to children, and contact to children. Finally, future work should also look at such factors as where visits take place, and whether or not it is the parent or child who initiates contact.

Table 1 Weighted Frequency of Contact with
Randomly Selected Child in the Past 12 Months[1]

Visits	Both	Fathers	Mothers
Not at all	6	8	5
About once a year	9	9	9
Several times per year	22	22	21
1-3 times per month	18	18	17
About once a week	17	16	17
Several times per week	29	26	31
	100%	100%	100%
Phone or Mail			
Not at all	7	8	6
About once a year	2	2	1
Several times per year	9	11	8
1-3 times per month	21	23	19
About once a week	24	23	26
Several times per week	37	33	41
	100%	100%	100%
Unweighted N	3741	1345	2396

[1] Sample weighted to reflect population. Columns may not add to 100% due to rounding error.

Table 2 Weighted Means and Standard Deviations
of Independent Variables

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Valid N[1]
Characteristics of Other Children			
Num Other Biological Children	1.58	1.53	3699
Num Other Stepchildren	.25	.85	3724
Num Bio Children at Home	.54	.95	3741
Num Stepchildren at Home	.02	.23	3741
Any Other Bio Child Within 10 Miles	.40	.49	3597
Characteristics of Random Child			
Miles to Parent	411.06	1022.75	3629
Ln (Miles)	3.51	2.50	3629
Daughter	.45	.50	3741
Age of Child (Years)	33.76	10.00	3674
Child Sep/Div/Wid	.11	.31	3714
Child Never Married	.22	.42	3714
Child Has Child	.64	.48	3576
Characteristics of Parent			
Respondent is Mother	.57	.50	3741
Age of Parent (Years)	60.40	11.50	3741
Parent Sep/Div	.10	.31	3741
Parent Widowed	.16	.36	3741
Parent Remarried	.16	.37	3741
Parent's Education (Years Completed)	11.42	3.19	3741
Parent in Poor Health	.08	.27	3534
Parent Declares No Religion	.04	.19	3708
Parent is Catholic	.24	.43	3708
Parent is Jewish	.02	.15	3708
Parent Declares Other Religion	.20	.40	3708
Parent Worships Weekly or More	.45	.50	3677
Parent Should Pay Child's College	.75	.43	3491

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[1]   Valid N is the unweighted number of cases for which there is non-missing data.

Table 3 Ordered Logit Models Frequency of Contact [1]

	Visits		Phone/Mail	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Characteristics of Other Children				
Num Other Biological Children	-.08 **	-.03	-.15 ***	-.13 ***
	(.02)	(.03)	(.02)	(.03)
Num Other Stepchildren	.00	.01	.00	.05
	(.04)	(.05)	(.04)	(.05)
Num Bio Children at Home	-.03	-.13 **	-.10 **	-.18 ***
	(.04)	(.05)	(.04)	(.05)
Num Stepchildren at Home	-.04	-.24	.01	.00
	(.13)	(.18)	(.15)	(.19)
Any Other Bio Child in 10 Miles	.01	.02	.10	.09
	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)
Daughter * Num Bio Elsewhere		-.11 **		-.03
		(.04)		(.03)
Daughter * Num Stp Elsewhere		-.02		-.11
		(.07)		(.07)
Daughter * Num Bio Home		.16 *		.11
		(.08)		(.07)
Daughter * Number Stp Home		.66 **		.16
		(.24)		(.28)
Characteristics of Random Child				
Ln (Miles)	-.95 ***	-.95 ***	-.34 ***	-.34 ***
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)
Daughter	.41 ***	.62 ***	.56 ***	.70 ***
	(.07)	(.12)	(.07)	(.12)
Child Sep/Div/Wid	-.07	-.07	-.02	-.01
	(.10)	(.15)	(.10)	(.14)
Child Never Married	-.09	.13	-.24 *	-.05
	(.10)	(.12)	(.09)	(.12)
Daughter * Child Sep/Div/Wid		-.02		-.02
		(.21)		(.20)
Daughter * Child Never Married		-.45 **		-.43 **
		(.16)		(.16)
Child Has Children	.04 ***	.04	.06 ***	.06 **
	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)

[1]   *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05   Standard errors in parenthesis.

The analysis also controls for parent's and child's age, parent's metropolitan status, and parent's region of residence. Missing variable indicators for child has child, child's age, religion, parent's marital status, frequency of worship, and distance are included in the model.

Table 3 Ordered Logit Models Frequency of Contact (cont.)

	Visits		Phone/Mail	
Characteristics of Parent	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Respondent is Mother	.48 ***	.17	.59 ***	.33 **
	(.07)	(.13)	(.07)	(.12)
Parent Sep/Div	-.83 ***	-1.48 ***	-.76 ***	-1.50 ***
	(.10)	(.16)	(.09)	(.16)
Parent Widowed	-.31 **	-.41 *	-.27 **	-.46 *
	(.09)	(.19)	(.09)	(.18)
Parent Remarried	-1.06 ***	-1.62 ***	-1.00 ***	-1.39 ***
	(.11)	(.15)	(.10)	(.14)
Mother * Parent Sep/Div		.99 ***		1.14 ***
		(.19)		(.19)
Mother * Parent Widowed		.25		.39
		(.21)		(.21)
Mother * Parent Remarried		.95 ***		.69 ***
		(.19)		(.19)
Parent's Education (Years Completed)	.04 ***	.04 ***	.04 ***	.04 ***
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Parent in Poor Health	-.22 *	-.24 *	-.25 *	-.26 *
	(.11)	(.11)	(.11)	(.11)
Parent Declares No Religion	.02	.04	-.27	-.26
	(.18)	(.18)	(.16)	(.16)
Parent is Catholic	.05	.04	.02	.02
	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)
Parent is Jewish	.18	.17	.55 *	.56 *
	(.29)	(.28)	(.26)	(.26)
Parent Declares Other Religion	-.03	-.06	-.09	-.10
	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)
Parent Worships Weekly or More	.12	.20	.19 **	.36 **
	(.07)	(.12)	(.07)	(.12)
Mother * Worships		-.14		-.28 *
		(.14)		(.14)
Par Should Pay Child's College	.25 ***	.25 **	.22 ***	.22 **
	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)
Thresholds				
One	1.51 ***	1.54 ***	.22 ***	.22 ***
	(.07)	(.07)	(.03)	(.03)
Two	3.85 ***	3.90 ***	1.20 ***	1.22 ***
	(.09)	(.10)	(.06)	(.06)
Three	5.41 ***	5.48 ***	2.47 ***	2.52 ***
	(.10)	(.11)	(.07)	(.07)
Four	6.75 ***	6.83 ***	3.71 ***	3.76 ***
	(.11)	(.11)	(.07)	(.07)
Five	8.19 ***	8.39 ***	3.48 ***	3.66 ***
	(.34)	(.35)	(.31)	(.32)
-2 Log-Likelihood	9012.2	8942.6	10098.4	10035.2
Degrees of Freedom	39	49	39	49
Sample Size	3741	3741	3741	3741

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Mailing Address:

Center for Demography & Ecology
University of Wisconsin
1180 Observatory Drive, Rm. 4412
Madison WI 53706
U.S.A.