Norms of Filial Responsibility for Aging Parents Across Time and Generations

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Abstract

This investigation examined the normative expectation that adult children should be responsible for the care of their aging parents, and how this norm changes over the adult life-span, across several decades of historical time, in relation to generational position in families, and between successive generations. Analyses were performed using four waves of data from the USC Longitudinal Study of Generations between 1985 and 2000. A three-level hierarchical linear model was estimated using 4,527 observations from 1,627 individuals nested within 333 families. Results revealed that filial norms weakened after midlife, in response to parental death, and over historical time, yet strengthened in later-born generations. Findings are discussed in terms of the malleability of filial responsibility over the life course.

Key Words: Families in mid and later life, filial norms; growth curve analysis; intergenerational relations; life course.

Declines in mortality rates over the past century have increased the need of older adults for prolonged periods of care, thus making caregiving to older parents a normative activity in the lives of adult children (Brody, 1985). The role of adult children in providing long-term support and care to their aging parents has aroused much interest in social gerontology and family studies in the last quarter century (e.g., Brody & Brody, 1989; Logan & Spitze, 1995; Silverstein & Parrott, 2001), yet the norms of filial obligation that guide these supportive behaviors are less well understood. The purpose of this investigation was to examine developmental, historical, and generational dynamics in the endorsement of filial norms toward the elderly. Specifically, we examined the strength with which adult children are expected to be responsible for the care of their aging parents, and how this value changes across the life-span, over several decades of historical time, between successive generations, and in relation to one's generational position in one's family.

Filial responsibility for assisting elderly parents is an aspect of the broader concept of norms of familism--attitudes about the centrality or primacy of family life (Parrott & Bengtson, 1999). As a social norm, filial responsibility reflects the generalized expectation that children should support their older parents at times of need (Cicirelli, 1988, 1990). More than an expectation of one's own behavior, norms of filial responsibility refer to the recognized duties and obligations that define the social role of adult children with respect to their aging parents. Although expressed norms are predictive of personal intentions to provide support and the supportive behaviors themselves (Bromley & Blieszner, 1997; Silverstein & Litwak, 1993; Peek, Coward, Peek & Lee, 1998), they are conceptually distinct from both intentions and support (Stein et al., 1998). As generalized expectations reflecting underlying value orientations, filial norms are relevant to people at all stages of the adult life-span regardless of generational position, including children who have no surviving parents, and parents who have no children.

However, at a practical level, filial norms may change in response to personal circumstances that affect the ability to provide parental care (e.g., competing demands) or cause one to retroactively attribute supportive behavior to internalized normative values (e.g., providing parental care). Guided by the theory of cognitive dissonance, Finley, Roberts and Banahan (1988) suggest that generalized filial expectations may be adjusted in an attempt to reconcile the gap between the ideal and what is possible or actual. Thus, in our investigation, we acknowledge and hope to capture the subtle distinction between structured and situational aspects of filial norms as they evolve over the life course.

Intra-individual Change in Filial Norms

The literature on filial responsibility as a dynamic process falls along three main lines of thought: (1) life-span development, (2) cohort socialization, and (3) life-course. Life-span developmental theories concerning filial responsibility are typically focused on the psycho-social adjustments made by individuals to meet family demands at successive life-stages. With regard to parent-care responsibility, Blenkner (1965) invoked the concept of "filial maturity" to describe the transition of adult children from being relatively autonomous from their parents to being dependable sources of support to them. This transition involves a change in perspective that allows middle-aged children to view their parents as vulnerable individuals, thereby strengthening their commitment to provide care to them in the context of an adult relationship. Murray, Lowe and Horne (1995) pointed out the similarity of Blenkner's use of filial maturity to Jung's concept of the midlife crisis, and to Nydegger's (1991) discussion of filial maturity, in the Ericksonian tradition, as an aspect of personal growth that follows from successful resolution of a family crisis.

Cicirelli (1988, 1990) proposed an alternative developmental framework for conceptualizing filial responsibility based on caregiving anxiety. In his framework, filial responsibility is induced when children worry about how they might successfully manage care

duties well in advance of the time that care is actually needed by their parents. Anxiety over providing care to parents can also occur at a later point in the caregiving process, when adult children worry about the implications of further declines in their parents' health (Murray et al., 1995).

Filial anxiety and filial maturity may be mutually reinforcing characteristics, as suggested by Bromley and Blieszner's (1997) finding that adult children who worried about the future dependency needs of their parents also collaboratively discussed possible care options with them. Both perspectives predict a heightened sense of responsibility on the part of adult children in midlife when concerns for older parents are most likely to peak. However, studies have found little empirical evidence of midlife exceptionalism with regard to filial duty to older parents, and, to the contrary, found a linear *decline* in filial responsibility across successive age-groups (Guberman, 2003; Peek et al., 1998; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). As these studies rely on cross-sectional data, the nature of the developmental process remains unresolved; without the ability to also consider cohort and historical differences among different age strata, the attribution of such patterns to aging is only speculative.

Another perspective in the study of attitudes about family-life is the cohort-socialization model that focuses on stability and malleability of value orientations. The most commonly found model under this rubric suggests that central values are shaped by early socialization experiences in late adolescence or early adulthood, and are unlikely to change in middle-age and beyond (i.e., Krosnick & Alwin, 1989; Sears, 1981). Much of this literature emphasizes how historical conditions uniquely and, sometimes permanently, shape the values of birth cohorts at an early age--when they are "impressionable youth" (Alwin, 1990; Mannheim, 1928/1952; Riley, 1973; Ryder, 1965). Under the strict assumption of this model--that values are acquired early and then persist thereafter--any observed change in the values of a population would come about through cohort turnover--the emergence of a cohort with value orientations different than the

cohort it is replacing. Applied to the present example, attitudes of a cohort toward parent-care would be shaped by early exposure to culturally appropriate models of filial duty based on the historical contingencies it encounters. If today's older adults were brought up during a period when commitment to family was stressed (e.g., the Great Depression or World War II cohorts), then the inculcation of values of filial duty would be maintained throughout life. The values of society would only shift when cohorts who newly entered the adult population were less familistic than the values of an older generation who exited the adult population through death.

In addition to the stochastic *impressionable youth* model, other models in this genre have been advanced. These include *lifelong openness*, where values are potentially malleable at any stage of the adult life span, and *declining stability*, where change is more likely to occur at later stages of the life-span (Alwin & McCammon, 2003). However, as a general rule, this family of models, unlike the normative approaches of many developmental models, remains neutral about the direction and pattern of change that would be expected.

The life course perspective represents an ambitious attempt to synthesize developmental, cohort, and social-structural approaches to the understanding of change in attitudes over time (Elder, 1992). In the life course framework, human development lies in the space where personal biography intersects with historical events and social milieu. That is, trajectories of human development are conditioned by the historical period and social context within which development takes place. With regard to historical periodicity of attitudes toward filial responsibility, much has been written about the declining salience of family relations in American society. Social scientists, historians, and cultural critics have noted that values of collectivism—including those of familism—have been superseded by values of individualism in both civic and family life over the last half century (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Hareven, 1996; Putnam, 1995; Roberts & Bengtson, 1999). Some scholars posit that radical changes in family structure resulting from historically unprecedented divorce and

remarriage rates since the 1960s may have weakened the capacity and willingness of adult children to provide support to their aging parents (Crimmins & Ingegneri, 1990; Popenoe, 1988). Yet, other scholars consider the family to be a resilient social institution, and, even in its altered form, still capable of serving the needs of its vulnerable members (Bengtson, 2001).

The life-course perspective also considers social-ecological spheres that influence human development, including such contexts as family, community, region, and nation (Bengtson & Allen, 1993; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Elder, 1992). Within families--the most intimate and fundamental of social environments--human development is to a substantial degree bounded by the interdependence of its members (Elder, 1994). Family units themselves pass through stages of development along a temporal axis known as "family time" or "generational time" that may be asynchronous with chronological age (Bengtson & Allen, 1993; Hareven, 1996). For instance, adult children who experience the death of their parents rise to become the oldest generation in their family lineages--a succession that alters the allocation of roles and responsibilities within the family system.

Inter-individual Differences in Filial Responsibility

Research has identified social characteristics that differentiate individuals by the strength with which their filial norms are held, including gender, socio-economic position, marital status (both of the adult child and the aging parent), and the presence of young children in the household. A detailed literature review on each of these factors is beyond the scope of this paper, however, we present here a summary of the main points based on the current literature. We purposefully leave race and ethnicity out of this review because the homogeneity of the sample used in the current research precludes their consideration. However, we acknowledge a rich literature that distinguishes the cultural dimension of ethnic and racial background in shaping filial obligations (for a review: Lee, Peek & Coward, 1998).

Findings regarding gender differences in filial norms toward older parents are mixed (Stein et al., 1998). Although, in general, women and men do not seem to differ markedly in their expression of filial obligations (Connidis, 2001), there is some evidence for gender differences with regard to specific types of support. For example, Finch and Mason (1991), using a vignette technique in a British sample, found that adult sons were expected to provide financial support and adult daughters, personal care and housing. In the U.S., Ganong and Coleman (1999) provided similar evidence, with sons expected to provide instrumental help, and daughters to prepare meals and clean.

Socio-economic status also affects the level of commitment to filial norms. Financially and educationally advantaged families can more easily purchase care in the private market, thereby diminishing their sense of obligation to provide care themselves (Finley et al., 1988). Conversely, there is a fair amount of consensus that working and lower class families hold stronger filial obligations because of their need to be self-reliant (Connidis, 2001).

There is a vast body of literature on the impact of marital disruption (as well as remarriage) on parental support and filial obligation. Some findings suggest that divorced children feel less filial obligations than those who have not experienced a marital disruption (e.g., Cicirelli, 1983). The divorced have less money and time to help other family members (Ganong & Coleman, 1999) and face challenges that may make them less sensitive to the needs of their parents (Connidis, 2001). In addition, parental divorce may weaken the filial norms of children, especially toward divorced fathers who are less likely to reside with their children and more likely to remarry than divorced mothers (Ganong & Coleman, 1999). Divorce of either generation may lower familism in general.

Cognitive dissonance and attribution theories help explain why individuals who have provided support to their aging parents develop a stronger sense of filial obligation than those who have never provided such support.(e.g., Bromley & Blieszner, 1997; Peek et al., Rossi &

Rossi, 1990). Strengthening filial norms is means of bringing attitudes and beliefs about oneself into conformity with how one behaves (Finley et al., 1988). Conversely, when support to older parents cannot be delivered, for instance due to competing obligations, filial responsibility may be lowered (Bromley & Blieszner, 1997).

In summary, a variety of dynamic theories and approaches inform our empirical investigation of filial norms about care and support to aging parents over time. While the perspectives reviewed are not mutually exclusive, each emphasizes unique aspects of human development as applied to families. We thus use these perspectives as guideposts to develop a more inclusive framework for understanding if, and how filial responsibility for elderly parents changes over biographical, historical, and family time. Using data collected from a unique longitudinal study of multigenerational families, we explore how the strength of eldercare norms ebb and flow along these various temporal axes.

Research Questions and Expectations

We begin with the general question of whether norms toward filial responsibility are fixed dimensions of one's personality or are pliable in response to aging, life events and changing historical trends. Drawing on the filial maturity/anxiety perspectives, we anticipate an increase in the strength of filial responsibility from young-adulthood until middle age, followed by a moderating tendency, or even a weakening in strength into old age. Several other dynamic forces likely to be correlated with the effects of aging are also considered in our analyses: experiencing the death of both parents, and historical trends in filial responsibility to the elderly.

We expect that generational succession, as a reflection of family time, will alter the point of view of respondents with regard to filial responsibility toward aging parents. Thus, we consider whether the occurrence of parental death is a dynamic life-event that signals a reappraisal of these norms. It is not possible to determine whether parental death weakens norms by releasing altruistic tendencies toward one's own children (as one shifts perspectives from

potential provider to potential recipient of filial support), or rendering irrelevant one's parent-care duties; both mechanisms point in the same direction of change.

As we have discussed, contemporary accounts of family life have generally pointed to a decline in the commitment to family over the last quarter of the 20th century. To address the issue of secular change in filial responsibility to older parents, we directly test for period effects by assessing the historical time of measurement as a dynamic factor in our models.

Several between-subject factors are considered as well, that are proposed to influence the level of filial norms and modify the pattern of age-related change. One of these factors relates to differences between generations who were socialized in different historical periods. We anticipate that the generation raised earlier in time (born in the1920s and 1930s) will more strongly endorse norms of filial support for elders than will the generation raised during a later period (born 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s). Other between-subject factors included variables that have been found to be related to filial commitment, including gender, education, marital status of the adult child and the parent, having young children under the age of 18, and whether one has provided help for his/her aging parents.

Finally, we expected that individuals related to each other by kinship (parent-child, sibling, cousin, aunt/uncle- niece/nephew relations) would tend to share similar beliefs. Family aggregations form the ecological context within which common environments and genes may similarly affect the development of individuals. Thus, we investigated the degree to which family members have similar levels and trajectories of filial norms toward care of elderly parents.

In this investigation, we thus ask the following research questions with regard to norms of filial responsibility toward care of the elderly: (1) What is the modal trajectory that underlies the expression of filial norms over the adult life-span? (2) What independent effect does the passage of historical time have on the expression of filial norms? (3) Does the experience of

generational succession influence the strength with which filial norms are expressed? (4) How do between-subject differences related to generation, gender, education, the experience of family disruption (of both the adult child and the parent), competing demands, and provision of parental support affect the expression of filial norms, and (5) How similar are filial norms and their life-span trajectories for individuals within the same family?

Method

Sample

Data from the University of Southern California Longitudinal Study of Generations (LSOG) are used for this analysis. The LSOG began in 1971 as a mailed survey with an original sample of 2,044 respondents ages 16 to 91 from 328 three-generation families who were selected via a multi-stage stratified random sampling procedure from a population of 840,000 individuals enrolled in southern California's first large HMO. All available grandparents (G1), parents (G2), and grandchildren 16 years of age or older (G3) in the selected families were eligible for the 1971 study. In 1985, 1,331 of the original sample members were surveyed again, and since then data have been collected at three-year intervals up to 2000. The longitudinal response rate between 1971 and 1985 was 73%, and has averaged 80% between waves since then, a rate that is comparable to most long-term longitudinal surveys. The sample is continually replenished by the addition of newly eligible spouses and previously non-responsive sample members (see Parrott & Bengtson, 1999 for details). The sample reflects a diversity of social class backgrounds ranging from working class to upper middle class, but under-represents minorities due to the source of the sample and the time in history when the families were originally recruited.

The outcome variable for this analysis—filial norms—was measured at four waves of data collection: 1985, 1994, 1997 and 2000. The universe of eligible respondents in G2 and G3 generations was 2,359 of which 1,643 (70%) responded to at least one survey. After omitting 16

respondents (1%) due to item non-response on all surveys, the sub-sample used for this analysis comprised 1,627 respondents from G2 and G3 generations who participated in at least one of the four waves. We excluded G1 generation because little longitudinal data were available due to their high rates of mortality over the period, and the G4 generation because, as adolescents entered into the study at later waves, they had not achieved the age necessary to make cohort-based comparisons or be at risk of family events of interest. These respondents yielded 4,527 observations over the four waves of data, representing a 70% longitudinal response rate. In terms of number of observations per respondent, 37.6% have data for all four measurement periods, 25.2% have three, 15.3% have two, and 22.0% have one observation. The average age across all person-observations was 52.5 years (see Table 1).

---- Insert Table 1 about here----

A critical question in evaluating sample selection is whether respondents who selectively drop out of the study (due to death, incapacity, refusal, or loss-to-follow-up) have characteristics that are associated with study outcomes--the problem of truncation in the dependent variable (Heckman, 1976). In this investigation, attrition bias would be problematic if respondents who exited the sample had stronger or weaker filial norms than those who remained in the sample. The attrition rate for this sample (defined as the proportion of respondents with no longitudinal data) was 16.3%, including those lost to mortality. As expected we found that older, lower educated, and male respondents were more likely to have only one measurement than to have two or more measurements. However, we found no significant difference between these two groups with regard to the strength of their filial norms, suggesting that attrition was random with respect to the dependent variable in this analysis.

Measures

Dependent Variable. Normative filial responsibility for aging parents was measured with

the following question: “Regardless of the sacrifices involved, how much responsibility should adult children with families of their own have: (1) To provide companionship or spend time with elderly parents who are in need? (2) To help with household chores and repairs and/or to provide transportation for elderly parents who are in need? (3) To listen to the problems and concerns of elderly parents and to provide advice and guidance? (4) To provide for personal and health care needs of the elderly parent? (5) To provide financial support and /or assist in financial and legal affairs of elderly parents who are in need? (6) To provide housing for the elderly parents who are in need? For each item the respondent assigned responsibility on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “none” to “total”. Since reliability coefficients for the items were acceptably high in each year (.88 in 1985, .91 in 1994, .92 in 1997, and .91 in 2000), responses were summed to create additive scales with a potential range from zero (no filial responsibility) to 24 (total filial responsibility).

Independent Variables. Predictor variables are grouped based on the three levels of analysis: within-subject, between subjects, and family context.

Within-subject. Age (in years) at each wave of measurement was used to predict developmental trajectories in norms at the level of the subject. Age values are mean-centered at 52.5, and then divided by 10 to improve the scaling of coefficients. A quadratic term of age-squared was included as well to capture non-linearity in temporal trajectories. Historical period was treated as a dummy variable signifying whether responses were obtained from the 1985 wave of measurement vs. the 1994, 1997, and 2000 waves. Parental mortality was considered at each wave of measurement with a dummy variable indicating whether both parents were deceased vs. at least one parent was still living. In addition, the presence of dependent children in the household was represented as a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent had at least one child under the age of 18 at the corresponding wave of measurement. Distributions of these variables are shown in Table 2.

----Insert Table 2 about here----

Between-subjects. All variables in this category were coded as dummy variables. Generation membership was operationalized by comparing the later born generation (G3s) to the earlier born generation (G2s). In 1985, G2s and G3s averaged 57.6 and 33.1 years, respectively. Since these two groups were identified by their lineage position not their birth year, they are arguably too heterogeneous with respect to age to be considered cohorts. Consequently, we will refer to them as generations.

Socio-demographic predictors known to be associated with family outcomes included gender (females vs. males), education (college educated vs. less education), marital disruption of the adult child (experience of divorce vs. other marital histories), and marital disruption of the family of origin—the parents—during childhood. In the case of parental marital disruption, we did not have information about many respondents because retrospective questions about family structure during childhood were not asked in all surveys. In order to account for the missing values, we created two dummy variables: one coded for those who experienced parental divorce, and the other for those parental marriages are of unknown status (reference = parents' marriage was intact). We also constructed a behavioral support variable signifying that respondents provided their parents assistance with household chores, transportation or shopping at any measurement point. The frequency distributions of independent variables are presented in Table 2.

Family context. Our interest in understanding the degree to which common family membership jointly shapes norms leads to the consideration of family context as the third level of analysis. We also note that because respondents were recruited from the same nuclear and extended families, the use of statistical techniques appropriate to such a nested data structure was required. Thus, we estimated the extent of family-level homogeneity within the 333 families

represented in the study. Families averaged almost five individuals per family cluster, the largest family consisting of 19 individuals.

Statistical Approach

The nature of the data used to address our research questions required a modeling procedure that could estimate time-varying, fixed, and group effects in multi-wave clustered data. Therefore, we used hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to test for age trends, historical change, and family-level variation in filial norms toward aging parents (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Our application of HLM specified three-levels of analysis: within persons (level-1), across persons (level-2), and within family (level-3). Our analysis included 4,527 time-varying observations nested within 1,627 individuals, who were further nested within 333 families. In order to account for incomplete data due to non-response we use full information maximum-likelihood estimation to estimate parameters under the assumption that data are "missing at random" (MAR) (e.g., McArdle et al., 2004). This type of estimation offers a practical way to minimize attrition bias and increase the statistical power of estimated parameters by using all available data.

At the first-level of analysis, time-varying filial norm scores were regressed on linear and quadratic age terms for each respondent across as many as four measurements. These regressions generated random intercept and slope estimates that described person-specific growth curves. Because we have only four data points, some restrictions were necessary at level-1 to identify the model. We chose to estimate age-related coefficients as random effects, as developmental change is our main focus. Other time-varying coefficients are estimated as fixed effects, that is, as constant across individuals and families. The equation at level-1 is represented as:

$$y_{ijk} = a_{jk} + b_{1jk}\, t_{ijk} + b_{2jk}\, t^2_{ijk} + b_{3jk}\, p_{ijk} + b_{4jk}\, h_{ijk} + b_{5jk}\, c_{ijk} + e_{ijk},$$

where, y_{ijk} is the measure of filial responsibility, t_{ijk} is age (mean centered), t^2_{ijk} is the square of age (mean centered), p_{ijk} signifies whether or not both parents are deceased, h_{ijk} represents whether or not year of measurement was later than 1985, and c_{ijk} represents whether or not a child under 18 resided in the same household, for the *j*th respondent in *the k*th family at the *i*th time of measurement. The estimate a_{jk} is the random intercept that represents the predicted level of filial responsibility evaluated at the mean sample age of 52.5, b_{1jk} is the random linear slope for age, b_{2jk} is the random quadratic slope for age-squared, b_{3jk} , b_{4jk} , and b_{5jk} are fixed dynamic effects for parental death, year of measurement, and young child in the household, respectively, and e_{ijk} is the error term.

At level-2, we estimated the effects of fixed explanatory variables on the three random effects (level, and linear and quadratic rates of change) in filial responsibility across persons within each family cluster. Random effects are predicted by the following equations:

$$a_{jk} = g_{00k} + g_{01k}x_{jk} + r_{0jk}$$

$$b_{1jk} = g_{10k} + g_{11k}x_{jk} + r_{1jk}$$

$$b_{2jk} = g_{20k} + g_{21k}x_{jk} + r_{2jk},$$

where x_{jk} describes a fixed, person-specific variable (with implied extension to the multivariate case) for the *j*th person in the *k*th family, $g_{01k,}$ g_{11k}, and g_{21k} are the within-family estimates of the relationship between x_{jk} and the three random effects, g_{00k}, g_{10k}, and g_{20k} represent the level-2 intercepts in each equation, and r_{0jk}, r_{1jk} r_{2jk}, are error terms.

The level-1 fixed effects for parental death, year of measurement, and child in the household have no predictors as they were estimated without variance under the assumption that their effects do not vary within the same family:

$$b_{3jk} = g_{30k}$$

$$b_{4jk} = g_{40k}$$

$$b_{5jk} = g_{50k}$$

Finally, at the third level of aggregation, the family-level effects are averaged across the *k* families. In order to identify the model, only the three age-related effects were estimated with variance across families:

$$g_{00k} = z_{000} + u_{00k}$$

$$g_{10k} = z_{100} + u_{10k}$$

$$g_{20k} = z_{200} + u_{20k},$$

with the *z* estimates representing averages of the level-2 random effects, and *u* representing error terms or family variation in the random effects. Estimates reported in our tables are the *z* coefficients shown above. In order not to over-saturate the three-level model, we made the simplifying assumption that the effects of level-2 estimates outside of the three age-related intercepts shown above are considered to be constant across families. Error variances associated with age estimates (level, linear, and quadratic) at level-3, together with corresponding level-2 error variances, allow us to compute intra-class correlations that identify the degree of intra-family resemblance in levels and rates of change in filial responsibility.

Applying the life-course approach presents empirical challenges when the goal is disaggregating the mutually confounded effects of age, period, and generation. Solutions to this problem generally involve making simplifying assumptions about one or more of the effects in the estimated model. We used several simplifying strategies based on theory and previous literature to ensure identification of our model. These included the decision to treat the period effect as a constant across individuals, the use of adjacent generations that have some degree of age-overlap to represent generations, and the creation of a synthetic lifespan model using individuals from different stages of life (for other applications of these strategies see, Horn & McArdle, 1980; McArdle, et al., 2004; Roberts & Bengtson, 1999).

Results

Summary statistics for age and filial norms over time are shown in Table 1. We note that norms appear to be weakening with increasing age of the sample. However, because these statistics are based on aggregations, it is not possible to attribute this trend to intra-subject development, or aging. We next present the estimates from the hierarchical linear model in Table 3. The model is shown in three progressive steps. First, the unconditional model is shown, that is, a model with only random age effects at level-1 and no effects at level-2. Second, the unconditional model is shown with two fixed effects added to the random age effects at level-1. Third, the conditional model is shown, adding level-2 variables to predict variation in the random age effects. We note that all estimates account for family clustering (level-3) as noted by the family-level variance reported in the table.

----Insert Table 3 about here----

The first equation shows estimates for the unconditional model. The predicted level of filial responsibility for the average-aged respondent was about 15 points on the 0-24 scale. Slope estimates associated with age and age-squared were negative, implying an accelerating downward trend in the strength of filial responsibility with increasing age. Using these coefficients, we calulated the inflection point of this curve--the age at which the slope starts to move in a negative direction—to be 37.5 years. Thus, we see no evidence of a midlife peak in filial norms, and, indeed, find that these norms begin *weakening* at the start of middle-age with the decline accelerating through old age.

The second equation shows the unconditional model with level-1 fixed effects for parental death (both parents deceased) and period of measurement (1985 vs 1994, 1997, 2000). Both slope estimates associated with age were negative, again implying an accelerating downward trend in the strength of filial responsibility with increasing age. The inflection point shows that norms peak at 42.3 years, after which the slope reverses to a negative direction. The

fixed effect related to parental death enabled us to compare within-subject change from the time that at least one parent was alive to the time that both parents were deceased. The estimate shows that following generational succession, the strength of filial norms significantly weakened by an average of 1.6 points, a finding consistent with the notion that filial norms are reevaluated when the possibility of being a care recipient becomes more real. The fixed effect for period of measurement suggests that filial norms weakened over historical time, significantly declining between 1985 and the decade of the 1990s. We did not find that the ebb and flow of role conflict, in the form of children under the age of 18 entering and exiting the household, produced a significant change in filial norms.

The third equation presents the conditional model with the addition of level-2 predictors. In this model, the age coefficients once again revealed an accelerating rate of decline in the strength of filial norms over the lifespan, with the decline beginning at 51 years. Our findings showed that gender, generation, a history of providing care to parents, and education level had significant effects on growth parameters. At the intercept age of 52.5, women averaged about half a point higher than men on the filial norms scale (remaining higher than men at every age), and had a signifincatly more negative instantaneous slope than men. Taken together, these findings revealed that filial norms of women--though consistently higher than men and similarly non-linear--peaked in strength earlier in life before declining more rapidly.

The two generations differed significantly in their levels of filial norms at the intercept, when each reached the comparable age of 52.5 years. Those from the later-born generation (G3) scored about one and a half points higher on filial norms than did those from the earlier born generation (G2). We note from preliminary analyses that the generational difference emerged only when historical period was included in the model suggesting that historical period suppressed the ability to detect the familistic tendancies of the G3 generation (who reached their early fifties in the less familistic 1990s).

We found that individuals with no college experience had significantly higher levels of filial norms than those with at least some college education. Individuals with college education scored about half a point lower on their levels of filial norms at midlife when compared to those with less education. We further found that those who had the experience of providing household, transportation, or shopping support to a parent had significantly stronger filial norms at midlife when compared to those who never provided such support. Somewhat surprisingly, marital disruption of the adult child and the parent had little effect on the level and growth rate of filial norms.

Finally, we addressed the question of how common family membership influenced filial norms. We addressed this issue first by decomposing the variance of the raw data, and then the variance of the random parameter estimates in the growth model. When partitioning the total variance in filial norms across the three levels of analysis, we found that 48% of the variation occurred within individuals (over time), 47% occurred between individuals (within families), and only 5% occurred between family aggregates. These results suggested that family members are quite heterogeneous in their expression of filial norms, and that family units are not very discernable in this regard. Families are more internally diverse than they are different from each other.

The variance decompositions for the growth parameters are shown in Table 4. For each random parameter, we calculated the intra-class correlation, a statistic that expresses the percentage of variance in the parameter estimates that can be attributed to between-group variation (level-1 error variance is not considered in this calculation because the focus is on the random parameter and not the data). Higher intra-class correlations demonstrate greater within-family resemblance. Across the three models, we found that 13%-15% of the variance in the random intercepts, 7%-10% of the variance in the linear estimates, and 30%-38% of the variance in the quadratic estimates are due to between-family differences. These correlations generally

increase with the complexity of the model as other sources of variation are controlled. In the final model, almost a tenth of the variance in the linear estimates and one-third of the variance in the quadratic estimates (model 3) occurred between family units, providing evidence that lifespan patterns of change in filial norms are to some degree shaped by common membership in distinctive family contexts. Nevertheless, the overall results suggest that family groups are internally diverse with respect to norms, as most of the variation is found between members in the same families.

----Insert Table 4 about here----

Discussion

We began this investigation by asking the following general question: how do filial norms for supporting older parents change over the life-course? Guided by the principles of the life-course perspective, we focused on dynamics related to the process of aging, the passage of historical time, generational succession both in families and in society. Several of the only theoretical guideposts in this area of inquiry specify that normative obligations toward the elderly peak in midlife, either as a manifestation of filial maturity or as a reaction to parent-care anxiety. However, empirical examinations (e.g., Guberman, 2003; Rossi & Rossi, 1990), almost all using cross-sectional data, have generally not supported such a prediction, and in fact, showed the very opposite. Taking advantage of a multi-wave, multi-generation data set, we were able to gain some leverage over the challenges posed by traditional data limitations to examine competing social forces that shape norms of familism over the life course. To elucidate our findings with respect to the effects of aging, we present in Figure 1 a summary of the predicted age-trajectories from our three estimated models. The unconditional model shows little to support the thesis of midlife exceptionalism, mainly showing an accelerating decline in filial norms with age. However, the shapes of the next two curves reveal a progressive moderating tendency that is mirrored in the age at which the curves peak. The inflection point of the curve

rises with the complexity of the models, going from 38 in the unconditional model, to 42 with the addition of fixed effects, and then to 51 in the conditional model. Once social forces associated with age are controlled, the average age at which norms peak is squarely in middle-age, approximating the lifespan metabolism that developmental theories predict.

----Insert Figure 1 about here----

The norms of young adults are relatively strong, especially when contrasted with sharp declines between midlife and old age. Guberman (2003) explains similar findings by noting that the young are typically far removed from any need to care for elderly relatives, and thus present a more idealistic view of caregiving without considering the practical implications of what such responsibility may entail. Older people may already need help or see themselves as needing help in the near future and better appreciate the sacrifices involved. It is quite reasonable that the shift in self-perception from potential provider to potential receiver of care promotes the altruistic goal of saving children from the burden of care. Buttressing this interpretation is our finding that generational succession weakens norms of filial responsibility. In results not shown, we found that the death of one parent does not induce a change in filial norms, affirming that it is only *full* succession into the oldest generation and the accompanying change in perspective that diminishes the norm of filial duty to older parents. As suggested by Rossi and Rossi (1990), normative obligations to older parents may also tend to weaken among those who have no relevant kin.

Findings with regard to historical change in filial norms revealed that filial norms weakened from the 1980s to the 1990s, giving credence to the claim made by some scholars (e.g., Bellah et al., 1985; Putnam, 1995) that the family as a social institution is in decline. This decline is mirrored in reductions over the same historical period in the valuation of other family relations such as marriage (e.g., Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001), in global values of

collectivism (Roberts & Bengtson 1999), and, more specifically to old age, in the proportion of elderly persons living with their families (Casper & Bianchi, 2002).

Contrary to expectations, the later born generation was more familistic than the earlier born generation. In other words, the generation born in the 1950s and 1960s had stronger filial norms in midlife than their parents a generation earlier. The pro-familistic trend across successive genrations exists simultaneously with an opposite historical trend of weakening norms; this implies that when the baby-boom generation reached midlife in the 1990s, they were more familistic than the period they aged into. A similar cross-cohort trend was found by Alwin (1998) with regard to attitudes toward coresidence with aged parents. It is conceivable that the surge in institutional forms of long-term care for the elderly (peaking in the 1970s and 1980s) represented a legitimation of formal service use in the middle-aged G2 generation that to some degree dissipated in the G3 generation by the time *they* reached middle-age in the 1990s.

As expected, we found that women consistently express stronger filial norms than men from young adulthood to old age. However, the strength of norms begins to weaken earlier in life for women than for men. If women are socialized to find greater value in caring roles, then their greater enactment of this role with respect to parents and other relatives may induce in them a more realistic appreciation of the sacrifices required of such efforts, and the demands it places on adult children.

Despite findings in the literature that family disruption and remarriage have significant effects on generalized filial norms, personal expectations regarding parental care as well as actual support behaviors (e.g., Ganong & Coleman, 1999), we found no evidence that divorce in either generation had any bearing on normative prescriptions about parent care. A more nuanced approach that takes into account timing of divorce and remarriage—unavailable in our data—may provide a better model for detecting such effects in the future.

The concept of filial responsibility as the normative aspect of filial support says little about the expectations that adult children have with respect to their own parents. Such personal expectations are likely to be the mediating link between norms and caregiving behaviors. In the current study we did not find that role conflict, in the form of caring for young children in the household, had an effect on the temporal rhythm of filial norms toward the elderly. However, it is quite possible that responsibility to children alters *personal* expectations with regard to care for parents, and even more so, inhibit the amount of actual help given. We found that providing support to a parent was positively associated with filial norms. Although we cannot authoritatively establish the causal relationship between norms and the provision of care, it is reasonable to assume that support is a manifestation of held norms as well as their progenitor.

Relatively low within-family consistency in the level of normative beliefs about intergenerational support may seem somewhat puzzling given that the norms we consider are directly related to family outcomes and that families are typically the main agents of child socialization with regard to value orientations. Contemporary perspectives on modern family forms tend toward the notion that family context is just one of several social environments that shape normative values. Thus, it should not be surprising that siblings, spouses, and parents/children in the same families remain, to a large degree, independent of each other in their eldercare norms. Put another way, the family aggregates are more similar to each other than the individuals within them, possibly reflecting the ethnic homogeneity of the sample.

Despite our reliance on normative theories of human development, we consider the concept of filial maturity to be an overly prescriptive and ethnocentric concept. In societies characterized by chronic poverty, adult children may choose to devote scarce resources to their children rather than to elderly parents (Aboderin, 2004). We would be loath to label such behavior as immature. It is perhaps in the United States, where policies toward older people are fairly restrictive but where the society at-large is fairly wealthy, that norms for eldercare are most

apt to peak in midlife. Approaches that compare family ideals and practices across diverse nations and cultures will be needed to ultimately test the universality of the "midlife maturity" model.

Although the sample used in this investigation provides several advantages for the research questions posed—in terms of its longitudinal design and inclusion of multiple family members—it is notably absent of minority families—clearly a limitation in the study of filial norms. Still, one may speculate that Black, Hispanic, and Asian families would more strongly subscribe to filial norms, given cultural values that tend to stress kinship obligation. We can only imagine if minority groups would have had a more gradual decline in norms over time or introduce greater intra-family resemblance (due to cultural similarity) than we observed in the largely white families in our sample, though these seem to be reasonable expectations. We also note that the sample is not nationally representative, and lacks the coverage needed for making conclusive inferences about the American population. However, these limitations must be weighed against the unique multiple-time, multiple-generation design of the study that makes it possible to disaggregate social change into its various temporal and contextual components.

In conclusion, our results show that filial norms toward care of the elderly demonstrate considerable malleability across the adult life span, a pattern that is most consistent with the "lifelong openness" model. Indeed, the change is occurring in late life when reappraisals are likely the result of altruism (growing relevance as a potential receiver) or role loss (growing irrelevance as a provider). Eldercare norms appear to be sensitive to exigencies of personal circumstances, emphasizing the notion that norms toward the care of older people are linked to situational factors, and are to some degree reciprocally related to them. Would more abstract, universalistic norms about the salience of family life be more trait-like and, thus, less sensitive to objective conditions than norms that are tagged to a particular target person? We hope that our

research opens the door to addressing such a question by providing an inclusive framework for understanding the multidimensional and dynamic nature of filial norms.

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Table 1

Age and Filial Norms at Four Times of Measurement (Observations=4527)

Year of Measurement	N	%	Age		Filial Norms	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1985	1,084	23.9	45.29	12.95	15.16	3.89
1994	1,177	26.0	52.44	12.74	14.08	4.46
1997	1,098	24.3	54.90	12.41	14.23	4.75
2000	1,168	25.8	57.02	12.24	13.94	4.67
Total	4,527	100.0	52.51	13.32	14.34	4.48

Table 2.

Distribution of Explanatory Variables (N=1,627)

Variables	Number	Percent
Level-1: Time Varying		
Measurement by decade		
1985 survey only	186	11.4
1994-2000 survey(s) only	543	33.4
Both 1985 and 1994-2000 surveys	898	55.2
Parent death/survival		
Both parents deceased before 1985	381	23.4
Second parent died 1985 – 1993	128	7.9
Second parent died 1994 – 1996	48	3.0
Second parent died 1997 – 1999	61	3.7
Both parents alive in 2000	1,009	62.0
Child 18 years or younger in household		
1985 survey	347	21.3
1994 survey	296	18.2
1997 survey	193	11.9
2000 survey	137	8.4
Level-2: Time Invariant		
Gender		
Female	906	55.7
Male	721	44.3

Education		
College educated	607	37.3
Not college educated	1020	62.7
Marital disruption		
Ever divorced	207	12.7
Never divorced	1420	87.3
Generation		
G3 generation	955	58.7
G2 generation	672	41.3
Support provided to parents		
Ever provided support	371	22.8
Never provided support	1256	77.2
Marital experience of parents		
Parents divorced	295	18.1
Parents' marriage intact	1014	62.4
Parents' marital history unknown	318	19.5

Table 3.

Maximum Likelihood Estimates for Three-Level Growth Curve Model Predicting Filial Norms Across 15 Years within Family Context (N =1,627)

	Filial Norms					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Fixed Effects	*Unstandardized Coefficient*	SE	*Unstandardized Coefficient*	SE	*Unstandardized Coefficient*	SE
Intra-Individual Level						
Status at average age	14.96***	.12	14.87***	.12	14.86***	.16
Linear rate of change	-1.11***	.06	-.64***	.08	-.11	.23
Quadratic rate of change	-.37***	.04	-.32***	.04	-.36**	.10
Death of parents+			-1.63***	.18	-1.45***	.22
Decade of measurement+			-.43**	.13	-1.01***	.26
Child in household+			.10	.16	.11	.15
Inter-Individual Level						
Status at average age						
Female					.48*	.19
College educated					-.48*	.22
G3 cohort					1.56**	.46
Support to parents					.90***	.21
Divorced					.07	.30
Parents divorced					-.33	.26
Parents marital unknown					-.21	.32

Linear Rate of Change		
Female	-.33**	.12
College educated	-.02	.12
G3 cohort	-.24	.48
Support to parents	.11	.14
Divorced	.28	.18
Parents divorced	.27	.16
Parents' marital unknown	-.26	.12
Acceleration of Change		
Female	-.02	.06
College educated	-.05	.07
G3 cohort	.10	20
Support to parents	.01	.07
Divorced	.04	.09
Parents divorced	.06	.08
Parents' marital unknown	-.07	.10

+Denotes fixed effect estimate with inter-individual variance restricted to zero.
*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001
Note: Predictor variables are mean-centered. Effects are estimated with robust standard errors.

Table 4

Variance Decomposition from the Three-Level HLM Analysis of Filial Norms (N=1,627)

	Variance of Estimates		
Variance Components	Model: Unconditional Model	Model 2: Unconditional Model with Fixed Effects	Model 3: Conditional Model with Fixed Effects
Level-3			
Intercept	1.09***	1.24***	1.22***
Linear Slope	.14**	.10**	.10*
Quadratic Slope	.04**	.04**	.05**
Level-2			
Intercept	7.58***	7.34***	6.89***
Linear Slope	1.26***	1.22***	1.04***
Quadratic Slope	.09***	.09***	.08***
Level-1 (no tests of significance)	8.07	7.93	7.92

Table 4

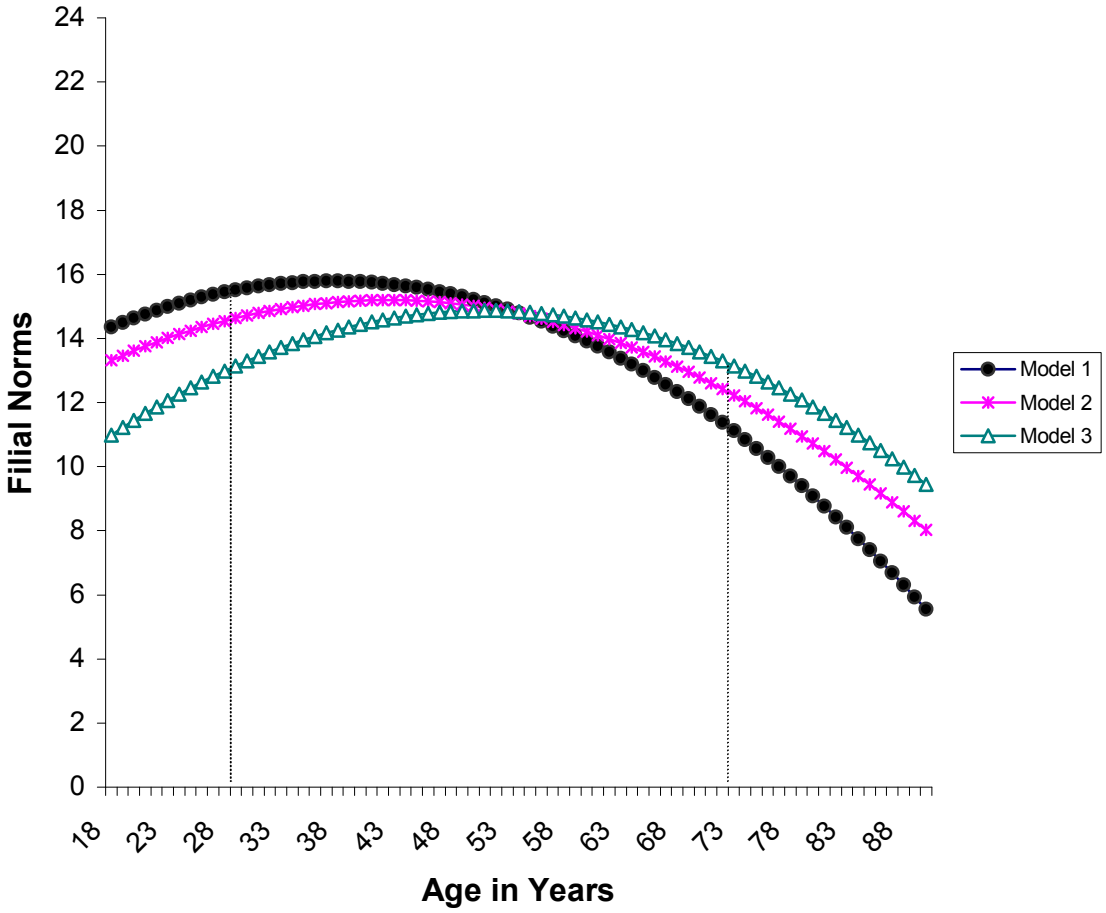
Continued

Intra-class correlations (no tests of significance)			
Intercept	.13	.14	.15
Linear Slope	.10	.07	.09
Quadratic Slope	.30	.30	.38

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Figure 1

Growth curves for filial norms by age predicted by three models (N=1,627)



Note: Model 1 is completely unconditional; model 2 is unconditional with fixed level-1 effects; model 3 is conditional on level-2 covariates with fixed level-1 effects (see Table 3). Vertical bars trim the outlying 2% of the age range in the sample