

Quality or Quantity: Which is More Important for Adult Child-Parent Relationships?

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore, in a community sample, the association between quality and quantity of parent-adult child interactions and parents' ratings of parent-adult child relationship quality. Additionally, this study also evaluated the moderating influence of race on these associations. The sample of 434 participants was racially and economically diverse (43% minority; 67% made less than \$75,000) and included mothers (N = 227) and fathers (N = 207) with children at least 19 years of age. Measures of frequency of interactions, positivity of interactions, negativity of interactions, parental involvement, and parental consulting about romantic relationships were utilized, along with ratings of relationship quality, to evaluate the associations between aspects of parent-adult child interactions and parents' reports of relationship quality, and how race impacts these associations. Results from multiple regression analyses indicate positivity of interactions was the most potent predictor of relationship quality for both mothers and fathers. Negativity of interactions and frequency of interactions were also associated with mother and father-adult child relationship quality ratings. Moderation analyses indicate parental involvement, although not a unique predictor in the direct links model, is an important predictor for minority fathers' reports of relationship quality. Additionally, positivity of interactions is especially important for minority fathers' relationship quality with their adult children. These findings provide initial guidance for prevention and intervention programs, as it gives a focus on what to emphasize for parents and subgroups of parents in order to positively influence overall parent-adult child relationship quality.

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Introduction

While much is known about relationships between parents and their young or adolescent children, less is known about parent-adult child relationships and the behaviors (e.g., quality and quantity of interactions) that support relationship quality. As life expectancy is increasing, providing more opportunities to spend time together, the parent-adult child relationship is progressively becoming a meaningful relationship in adulthood for parents and their adult children, (Szydlik, 2016). Increases in divorce rates and later age at first marriage have also served to strengthen the parent-adult child relationship (Fingerman, Sechrist, & Birditt, 2013). Due to the increasing meaning of parent-adult child relationships, it is important to understand how these relationships function and how the quality of the relationship could be affected.

Research has found a variety of factors that are related to parent-adult child relationship quality, including adult child interactions, conflict, gender, and race (e.g., Lawton, Silverstein, & Bengtson, 1994b; van Gaalen & Dykstra, 2006; Birditt, Miller, Fingerman, & Lefkowitz, 2009; Lye, Klepinger, Hyde, & Nelson, 1995; Fingerman, 1996; Cichy, Lefkowitz, & Fingerman, 2012). More recent research has moved toward specific circumstances and contexts in families, such as divorce and caregiving, and tends to only consider the adult child's perspective of the relationship. Although this context-specific approach is important as it provides information on often times understudied populations, it has left out normative parent-adult child relationship experiences, as well as the parent's perspective of the relationship. Using intergenerational solidarity theory (Bengtson & Schrader, 1982), this study looked at types and frequency of

parent-adult child interactions and identified the strongest influences on parent-adult child relationship quality, for mothers and fathers, separately. Additionally, because little has been done to assess whether the behaviors involved in maintaining high quality relationships differs, this study investigated the influence of race on the parent-adult child relationship in order to better understand differences between families.

The History of Research on Parent-Adult Child Relationships

Work in the area of parent-adult child relationships began as scholars suggested societal influences could potentially have a negative impact on the parent-adult child relationship. Specifically, scholars Ogburn (1938) and Parsons (1943) suggested that the modernization of American society was encouraging children to move away for continuing education or for work, and this would impact the adult child's ability to connect with parents and to be present when elderly parents needed assistance and care. Responding research contradicted this, indicating that adult children frequently interacted with their parents, with modern communication technology and travel keeping geographic distance from negatively influencing the parent-adult child relationship (Litwak, 1960; Sussman & Burchinal, 1962; Troll, 1971; Bengtson & Black, 1973a). Thus, despite the independence that adult children were working toward, their relationship with their parents remained meaningful and influential in their lives.

Additionally, in the 1990s, research conducted by Spitze and Logan (1991b), in contradiction again to what was posited in the 1930s and 1940s, found that adult children's weekly work hours were not found to have a negative influence on relationship quality. The original theorists were correct, however, in considering the importance of filial responsibility, or one's sense of duty to care for elderly parents, for relationship quality. Specifically, research has

indicated that adult children who place high importance on filial responsibility, generally report higher quality relationships with their parents (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991).

Through the 90s and into the 2000s, research began to shift to national study efforts to further understand the importance of intergenerational relationships. Lawton and colleagues (1994b) found, in a nationally representative sample, that 80% of adult child respondents reported their relationship with their parents as “emotionally close,” reinforcing the contradiction to theorists’ concerns about the decline of intergenerational relationships. Ferring, Michels, Boll, and Filipp (2009) found that the largest group in their sample of adult children reported relationships with their mothers (42%) and fathers (43%) that were categorized as “amicable,” representing a positive relationship, with above average scores on attachment/closeness and low scores on dislike. While these are strong findings in support of the generally positive state of parent-adult child relationships, there is a noticeable difference in the amount of positive relationships from the 1994 study by Lawton and colleagues compared to more recent reports. Additionally, approximately one-third of the sample consisted of negative and ambivalent relationships, representing more diversity in the ratings of parent-adult child relationships than was observed historically. These findings are important considering the impact of parent-adult child relationship quality on well-being.

Poorer parent-adult child relationship quality has been linked to experiencing greater psychological distress for both parents and adult children (Umberson, 1992; Ryan & Willits, 2007). Parents with poor parent-child relationships have been found to report greater depressive symptoms than parents with at least one high-quality parent-child relationship (Koropecj-Cox, 2002). The relationship between relationship quality and well-being may be particularly relevant for parents, as Birditt, Hartnett, Fingerman, Zarit, and Antonucci (2015) found that the

association between relationship quality and well-being was stronger for parents than it was for adult children. For this reason, understanding the influence of negative or positive relationships on health, particularly from the parent's perspective, can meaningfully impact our understanding of physical and mental health in adulthood.

Important Behaviors in Parent-Adult Child Relationships

Overall, research in this area has covered a number of topics, including quantity of interactions, quality of interactions, and different contextual factors. Quantity of interactions between parents and adult children has been widely studied (e.g., Aldous, 1987; Aldous & Klein, 1991; Cicirelli, 1981; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Umberson, 1992; Lye, et al., 1995; Fingerman, Cheng, Tighe, Birditt, & Zarit, 2012), presumably because of the ease with which this information can be collected. The percent of adult children who have face-to-face contact with their parents at least a few times a week is about 51% (Fingerman et al., 2012), and evidence indicates percentages for any weekly contact, in addition to face-to-face interactions, that are a bit higher. Specifically, 89% of adult children reported contact with their mothers at least once a week and 72% reported contact with their fathers at least once a week (Fingerman et al., 2012), suggesting differences based on the gender of the parent, though these differences were not statistically tested. In one study, frequency of interactions was shown to be positively associated with relationship quality between mothers and their adult children, but this association did not exist for fathers (Lawton et al., 1994b).

In addition to quantity of interactions, quality of interactions between parents and their children has been explored in the literature to better understand how it impacts functioning of the child and how it impacts relationship quality overall. Studies have found that tensions in the parent-adult child relationship can be associated with less regard and more ambivalence toward

the parent-child relationship (Birditt et al., 2009). Contact frequency and personality differences were found to be more influential than individual tensions, such as lifestyle and job/education, when predicting indicators of relationship quality (e.g., solidarity, ambiguity). Conversely, research has found that regardless of difficult or positive parent-adult child relationships, parents laugh and have positive interactions with their adult children (Birditt, Fingerman, & Zarit, 2010; Fingerman, Kim, Birditt, and Zarit, 2016). This indicates the importance of understanding factors of and behaviors within the parent-adult child relationship compared to just individual characteristics related to relationship quality.

Considering Contextual Factors in Parent-Adult Child Relationships

As mentioned previously, a number of contextual influences have been found to have an impact on parent-adult child relationship quality. Research considered both racially diverse and more racially homogenous has shown differences in weekly communication, ranging from 69-89% of adult children having reported contact with their mothers at least once a week and 50-56% having reported contact with their fathers at least once a week (Lye et al., 1995; Fingerman, 1996; Fingerman et al., 2012). These findings are informed by research that has found mothers to be more active in maintaining relationships with their children compared to fathers (Hagestad, 1988; Spitze & Logan, 1990).

Beyond gender, the effect of divorce on parent-adult child relationships is one of the main contexts in which parent-adult child relationships are studied. Both parents' divorce and adult children's have been found to have a negative impact on relationship quality between parents and their adult children (Aquilino, 1994; Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1991; Cooney, 1994; Hagestad, 1988, Lye et al., 1995). Research has shown that relationship quality with divorced fathers experiences the strongest negative impact (Goldscheider, 1990; Spitze & Miner, 1992;

Kalmijn, 2007; Lin, 2008). This difference may be because, as research indicates, fathers, during family conflict, are the most likely member to be isolated or to withdraw (White, 1999).

Stepfamilies are another context in which parent-adult child relationships have been explored. Much of the research in this area appears to have focused on the development of stepfamily relationships and what influences could help or harm the development of positive relationships. Research has found that stepchildren can have warm relationships with all parents involved (Ganong, Coleman, & Jamison, 2011; King, 2006; White & Gilbreth, 2001); however, some stepparents may have difficulty bonding with their stepchild, due to influences of the biological parent or gender of the parent and child (Ganong et al., 2011; Ward, Spitze, & Deane, 2009). Research in relationships between adult stepchildren and their stepparents has also explored the sense of obligation felt by stepchildren to care for their stepparents in later life. Clawson and Ganong (2002) found that if the stepparent has biological children that are able to help care for the stepparent, then the adult stepchild is less likely to feel obligated to care for their stepparent.

Finally, research focused on parent-adult child relationships has found differences associated with race. Lawton and colleagues (1994b) found that adult children who identified as Black reported much higher emotional closeness with their mother than respondents who identified as a race other than Black. Race has also been found to be associated with how parents and adult children engage in conflict. In 2012, Cichy and colleagues found that African-American parents participated in more conflict engagement behaviors than their adult children did, and African-American children engaged in more conflict disengagement than their parents. This difference did not exist in European American families. Conflict engagement behaviors by parents was found to be associated with lower adult child reported relationship quality, and

disengagement behaviors by the child were found to be associated with lower mother reports of relationship quality.

Theory

The literature in this area has been explored through different hypotheses and models, but few theories. Intergenerational solidarity theory (Bengtson & Schrader, 1982) has been described as “one of the few long-term efforts of family sociology to develop and test a theory of family integration” (Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997), and thus, has served as the theoretical basis for much of the research in this area. Bengtson’s theory outlines six dimensions of intergenerational relationships: *associational*, *consensual*, *functional*, *normative*, *affective*, and *structural solidarity*.

Associational, consensual, functional, and structural solidarity represent the objective measures of solidarity. *Associational solidarity* represents the frequency of social contact and shared activities between family members. *Consensual solidarity* represents the actual or perceived agreement in opinions, values, and lifestyles between family members. For example, this can include sociopolitical attitudes or religious beliefs. *Functional solidarity* represents the exchanges of support and instrumental and financial assistance between family members. *Structural solidarity* represents the structural factors, such as number of family members and geographic distance, that can constrain or enhance interaction between family members.

Normative and affective solidarity represent the subjective measures of solidarity. *Normative solidarity* represents the strength of obligation felt toward other family members. Normative solidarity has been found to be a predictor of intergenerational association, exchange, and affection (Roberts & Bengtson, 1990; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). *Affective solidarity* represents the feelings of emotional closeness, affirmation, and intimacy between family members.

Bengtson & Schrader (1982) point out the importance of this dimension as giving a picture of the perceived quality of relations between generations. Ultimately, there is a strong foundation for this theory and its use in intergenerational relationships research.

The Current Study

Research suggests that quality and quantity of interactions have an influence on different aspects of the parent-child relationships through the lifespan, but research comparing quality and quantity of interactions and their influence on relationship quality, specifically with parents and adult children, is lacking. The goal of this study was to add to the literature on relationships between parents and their adult children by specifically exploring the strength of association of quality and quantity of interactions on reports of relationship quality, and how race can influence these associations. Results of the study can inform families and practitioners of ways to cultivate stronger, healthier parent-adult child relationships.

Literature Review

Trends in the Study of Parent-Adult Child Relationships

Work in the area of parent-adult child relationships began as scholars suggested societal influences could potentially have a negative impact on the parent-adult child relationship. Specifically, scholars Ogburn (1938) and Parsons (1943) suggested that the modernization of American society was encouraging children to move away for continuing education or for work, and this would impact the adult child's ability to connect with parents and to be present when elderly parents needed assistance and care. The early empirical evidence contradicted that hypothesis, as the responding research indicated that adult children frequently interacted with their parents, with modern communication technology and travel keeping geographic distance from negatively influencing the parent-adult child relationship (Litwak, 1960; Sussman & Burchinal, 1962; Troll, 1971; Bengtson & Black, 1973a). Thus, despite the independence that adult children were working toward, their relationship with their parents remained meaningful and influential in their lives.

From there, research continued about whether or not the state of parent-adult child relationships had been affected by societal changes. In the 1990s, research conducted by Spitze and Logan (1991b) found that adult children's weekly work hours were not found to have an influence on relationship quality, in contradiction to what was posited in the 1930s and 1940s. The original theorists were correct, however, in considering the importance of filial responsibility, or one's sense of duty to care for elderly parents, for relationship quality. Specifically, research has indicated that adult children who place high importance on filial

responsibility, generally report higher quality relationships with their parents (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991).

Through the 90s and into the 2000s, research began to shift to national study efforts to further understand the importance of intergenerational relationships. Lawton and colleagues (1994b) found that 80% of adult child respondents, in a nationally representative sample, reported their relationship with their parents as “emotionally close,” reinforcing the contradiction to theorists’ concerns about the decline of intergenerational relationships. In a later study exploring typologies of parent-adult child relationships, Ferring and colleagues (2009) found that the largest group in their sample of adult children reported relationships with their mothers (42%) and fathers (43%) that were categorized as “amicable,” representing above average scores on attachment/closeness and low scores on dislike. Race or ethnicity of the participants was not mentioned in the sample description; thus, it is difficult to know if these findings can be generalized across groups. While these are strong findings in support of the generally positive state of parent-adult child relationships, approximately one-third of the sample consisted of negative and ambivalent relationships. These findings are important considering the impact of parent-adult child relationship quality on well-being.

Negative or ambivalent social relationships have been found to be associated with a lower subjective well-being (Pinquart & Sörenson, 2000), and this relationship exists for parent-adult child relationship quality, as well. Poorer parent-adult child relationship quality has been linked to experiencing greater psychological distress for both parents and adult children, in both racially diverse and more homogenous samples (Umberson, 1992; Ryan & Willits, 2007). Parents with poor parent-child relationships have been found to report greater depressive symptoms than parents with at least one high-quality parent-child relationship (Koropecykj-Cox,

2002). The association between relationship quality and well-being may be particularly relevant for parents, as Birditt and colleagues (2015) found, in a racially and economically diverse sample, that the association between relationship quality and well-being was stronger for parents than it was for adult children.

The more recent research on parent-adult child relationships has focused on specific circumstances and contexts (e.g., child's job status, divorce, severe illness), leaving much to be learned about normative relationships. Furthermore, the work that has been done lacks in both theory and consistent findings (Lye, 1996; Fingerman et al., 2013), leaving little conclusive information to understand important aspects of positive parent-adult child relationships. Although considering contextual factors is necessary, it is also important to consider less static factors, such as quality and quantity of interactions, and their impact on relationship quality. These types of components are more likely to work as possible prevention or intervention points for practitioners working with parents and adult children.

For this reason, it is worthwhile to work to more clearly understand dimensions of these types of relationships and how they impact the relationship between adult children and their parents. Therefore, in a diverse sample of parents of adult children, this study investigated indicators of quality and quantity of interactions and their association with relationship quality, for mothers and fathers separately, and explored how race impacted these associations.

Quantity of Interactions

Quantity of interactions has been explored as a possible avenue to better understand parent-adult child interactions and how the interactions are changing over time. Quantity of interactions between parents and adult children has been widely studied (e.g., Aldous 1987; Aldous & Klein 1991; Cicirelli 1981; Rossi & Rossi 1990; Umberson 1992; Lye, et al., 1995;

Fingerman et al., 2012), presumably because of the ease with which this information can be collected. The percent of adult children who have face-to-face contact with their parents at least a few times a week has been found in a racially diverse sample to be about 51% (Fingerman et al., 2012), and evidence indicates percentages for any weekly contact, beyond face-to-face interactions, that are a bit higher. Specifically, 89% of adult children reported contact with their mothers at least once a week and 72% reported contact with their fathers at least once a week (Fingerman et al., 2012), suggesting differences based on the gender of the parent. Frequency of interactions has been shown to be a possible indicator of relationship quality. In one study, frequency of interactions was found to have a positive association with the quality of the relationship between mothers and their adult children, but this association did not exist for fathers (Lawton et al., 1994b). However, this sample was racially homogenous (93% nonblack), raising questions about the generalizability of its findings. Other research has shown that parent-adult child relationships with higher rates of interactions can experience more conflict, as it could provide more opportunity for negative interactions (van Gaalen & Dykstra, 2006). Even with this higher level of conflict, reports of relationship quality, in this study, were not affected, suggesting that quantity of interactions may have a stronger association with relationship quality than amount of conflict. This is observed in the parent-adolescent literature as well, as conflict has been found to not have a noticeable influence on ratings of relationship quality (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). Although research indicates quantity of interactions is important, more research in diverse samples is needed to fully understand its influence on parent-adult child relationship quality.

Quality of Interactions

In addition to quantity of interactions, quality of interactions between parents and their children has been studied in the literature to explore how it impacts functioning of the child and how it impacts relationship quality overall. It has been found, in a racially diverse sample, that tensions in the parent-adult child relationship can be associated with less regard and more ambivalence toward the parent-child relationship (Birditt et al., 2009). In this exploration of tensions in the parent-adult child relationship, contact frequency and personality differences were more influential than individual tensions, such as lifestyle and job/education, when predicting indicators of relationship quality. Conversely, research has found that regardless of difficult or positive parent-adult child relationships, parents laugh and have positive interactions with their adult children (Birditt et al., 2010; Fingerman, Kim, Birditt, and Zarit, 2016). This indicates the importance of understanding factors of the parent-adult child relationship over individual factors when considering predictors of relationship quality.

There are many ways to assess quality of interactions between parents and their adult children, but one dimension that has not been sufficiently assessed is parental consulting (i.e., how the parent and adult child interact if and when the adult child seeks advice from a parent). In a study on daily intergenerational support, it was found, in a racially diverse sample, that 87% of the parents in the sample had given advice to their adult children in the week studied, and 80% had provided emotional support (Fingerman, Kim, Tennant, Birditt, and Zarit, 2015). Parents in this study reported that providing support to their adult children was associated with a positive mood. Research about the interactions during parent-adult child consulting is lacking, but we can look to the parent-adolescent consulting research which has been explored more frequently. Research has indicated that although adolescence is a time of more conflict, adolescents feel

close to their parents and continue to value their opinion and show respect (Arnett, 1999; Holmbeck, Friedman, Abad, & Jandasek, 2006; Steinberg & Silk, 2002). Parent-adolescent consulting can become even more difficult during this time, as the topics of conversation may become more intimate (e.g., romantic relationships, sexual issues, substances); however, research shows that in the context of a trusting parent-adolescent child relationships, adolescents seek support from parents in these areas (Crouter & Head, 2002; Smetana & Metzger 2008; Steinberg & Silk, 2002). In adolescence, parental consulting interactions may be particularly relevant for mothers as adolescents are more likely to discuss sexual issues with their mothers (DiIorio, Kelly, & Hockenberry-Eaton, 1999). For fathers, however, research has found that a better indicator of closeness with their adult children may be reported “activities together” (Golish, 2000). As adult children navigate life experiences, including moving out, romantic relationships, and transitioning to parenthood, parental consulting may become more relevant, and this type of communication represents the quality of interactions through open and trusting communication. Findings in the adolescent literature point to the possibility that more intimate interactions may be an indicator of relationship quality for parents of adult children, and that there may be gender differences.

Another indicator of quality interactions is the affect of daily interactions. Research in the parent-adolescent literature has shown a progression in the affect of parent-child communication over time that can be tied to developmental stages (Steinberg & Silk, 2002; Larson, Richards, Moneta, Holmbeck, & Duckett, 1996). Generally, early adolescence can have high ratings of positive communication, a drop in middle adolescence, and a rebound back to a majority of positive communication in late adolescence. Through these developmental periods, research shows a stability in emotional cohesion, an indicator of relationship quality, despite this

fluctuation in ratings of communication (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). Moving into adulthood, the presence or lack of control and conflict in the relationship has been explored as a proxy for quality of interactions. In a prospective study on the transition from adolescence to adulthood, Aquilino (1997) found that the extent of parents' desire for control over the adult child's behavior, parental disapproval of the adult child's decisions, and the frequency of open disagreements, arguing, and fighting in the relationship, also known as control-conflict in intergenerational interactions, was negatively correlated with emotional closeness (e.g., relationship quality; Aquilino, 1997). These findings between adolescence and adulthood appear conflicting, which may indicate a shift in the parent-child relationship during the transition to adulthood; however, this has not been clearly assessed into adulthood.

Quality of interactions is an area that has been more widely studied in parent-adolescent relationships and has some conflicting findings as the child moves into adulthood. Research has also shown how quality of interactions can be measured in different ways; thus, it is important to study quality of interactions in a way that parses apart the numerous types of interactions that can influence relationship quality. Informed by this research, one can posit that relationship quality may be affected by the quality of interactions between mothers and fathers and their adult children. Additionally, there are influences on relationship quality that may be due to family context, rather than type and frequency of interaction, that should be acknowledged.

Demographic Influences

Gender.

As mentioned previously, research has shown that relationships between mothers and their adult children and fathers and their adult children may have different characteristics.

Research considered both racially diverse and more racially homogenous has shown differences

in weekly communication, ranging from 69-89% of adult children having reported contact with their mothers at least once a week and 50-56% having reported contact with their fathers at least once a week (Lye et al., 1995; Fingerman, 1996; Fingerman et al., 2012). These findings are informed by research that has found mothers to be more active in maintaining relationships with their children compared to fathers (Hagestad, 1988; Spitze & Logan, 1990). In another exploration of gender differences, Nakonezny, Rodgers, and Nussbaum (2003) found that mother-child relationships are characterized by greater solidarity and social support compared to father-child relationships, which could account for the difference in contact. Gender-based differences in parent-child relationships has also been explored in relationship typology research. Within families, Ferring and colleagues (2009) looked at the differences between the mother-adult child and the father-adult child relationship and categorized the relationships based on varying levels of attachment/closeness and dislike. It was found that a mixed typology (different categorizations for the mother and father relationships) within the family was the most common presentation of family relationships, with around 37% of the sample reporting this scenario.

Race.

Research in parent-adult child relationships has found differences associated with race. Lawton and colleagues (1994b) considered racial differences in emotional closeness of parent-adult child relationships, and found in a nationally representative sample that adult children who identified as Black reported much higher emotional closeness with their mother than respondents who identified as a race other than Black.

Race has also been found to be associated with how parents and adult children engage in conflict. In 2012, Cichy and colleagues found that African-American mothers participated in more conflict engagement behaviors than their adult children did, and African-American children

engaged in more conflict disengagement than their mothers. This difference did not exist in European American families. In general, African American families have been found to put a greater emphasis on parental authority (Dixon, Graber, & Brooks-Gunn., 2008), and this dynamic could still be present in adulthood, possibly explaining these findings. In the same study, adult children reported lower relationship quality when their mothers engaged in conflict engagement behaviors, and mothers reported poorer relationship quality when their children engaged in conflict disengagement behaviors.

Differences between African-American families and European American families were also found in a study by Hay, Fingerman, and Lefkowitz (2007). This study explored feelings of worry in parent-adult child relationships and found that parents and adult children rated their relationships more positively when the other party felt and communicated worry about them. African-American families in this study reported higher levels of worry about others in the family compared to European American families. These associations were run separately and were not explored through a moderation analysis; thus, it cannot be definitively said that African-American families' higher level of worry leads to higher relationship quality; however, these findings add to the literature that could support a further study into racial differences in parent-adult child relationships.

Contextual Influences

Divorce.

Beyond gender, the effect of divorce on parent-adult child relationships is one of the main contexts in which parent-adult child relationships are studied. Both parents' divorce and adult children's divorce arises as a strong influence on the quality of parent-adult child relationship functioning. Divorce of the parent, as well as divorce of the adult child, have been

found to have a negative impact on relationship quality between parents and their adult children (Aquilino, 1994; Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1991; Cooney, 1994; Hagestad, 1988, Lye et al., 1995). In the case of the adult child's divorce, it has been observed that the adult child receives less social support and experiences more strain with their mother, compared to married adult children (Umberson, 1992). Research has shown that relationship quality with divorced fathers experiences the strongest negative impact (Goldscheider, 1990; Spitze & Miner, 1992; Kalmijn, 2007; Lin, 2008). This difference between mothers and fathers could be due to the higher levels of solidarity and social support that have been found in the mother-child relationship, though this was in a predominantly Caucasian sample (Nakonezny et al., 2003). It has also been found that if the father remarries, contact and financial support with their adult children drop even lower than single divorced fathers (Noel-Miller, 2013). This may be because, as research indicates, fathers, during family conflict, are the most likely member to be isolated or to withdraw (White, 1999).

Lye et al. (1995) found in a large, nationally representative sample from the National Survey of Families and Households that parent-adult child relationships were affected by whom they lived with after a parental divorce during childhood. The negative influence of the divorce on relationship quality into adulthood was found to be multiplied for the noncustodial parent, and there was an additional negative effect on the relationship with the noncustodial parent if the custodial parent remarried. While the noncustodial parent appears to be affected the most, the custodial parent was also found to experience a negative change in relationship quality and frequency of contact after parental divorce.

Stepfamilies.

Other types of family structure have been found to influence parent-child relationships. Stepfamilies experience unique difficulties in the building and maintenance of stepparent-

stepchild relationships (Visher & Visher, 2013). Stepfamilies can also be particularly difficult to study, as they are found to be diverse and nonhomogeneous (Ganong et al., 2011). When looking at families who have experienced divorce and remarriage, it is important to consider relationships with biological parents in addition to stepparents, as they all have been found to be affected as the family structure shifts (e.g., Ganong & Coleman, 2017). Research has found that stepchildren can have warm relationships with all parents involved (Ganong et al., 2011; King, 2006; White & Gilbreth, 2001); however, some stepparents may have difficulty bonding with their stepchild, which can have effects on their relationship development into adulthood. Some research has found that stepparents can experience interference from the biological parent of their stepchild when working to develop a bond with their stepchild (Ganong et al., 2011). The biological parent's presence or lack thereof in the child's life has been found to have an effect on stepfathers' relationship quality with their stepchild when the stepfather demands conformity (e.g., follow family rules, always do what is asked) from the stepchild. Particularly, when the biological father was present in the child's life, the stepfather's demand for conformity had a negative impact on relationship quality, and if the biological father was less or not present, the effect on relationship quality was positive (MacDonald & DeMaris, 2002). A study completed in Nigeria found that other possible predictors of stepparent-stepchild relationships could be communication, relationship with non-residential kin, loyalty conflict, and the spousal marital relationship (Adeyemo & Onongha, 2008).

Gendered expectations could also affect the development of relationships with stepchildren as stepfathers and stepmothers work to navigate difficulties with fulfilling family roles appropriately and lacking opportunity to bond with their stepchild if they do not reside in the stepparent's home (Ganong et al., 2011). Gendered expectations can also impact stepsons and

stepdaughters differently. Stepdaughters have been found to be cautious in building a relationship at first, which could be due to their socialization to be protectors and kinkeepers in the family (Ganong et al., 2011). Research has shown that the relationship can then move toward more positive interactions when the stepdaughter sees positive interactions between their parent and stepparent (Ganong et al., 2011). Differences in gender also can impact stepmothers, as research has found stepmothers to have more negative relations with their stepchildren (Ward, Spitze, & Deane, 2009).

Clawson and Ganong (2002) explored adult stepchildren's obligation to older stepparents and what this meant for intergenerational care in later life. A sense of filial obligation on the part of the stepchild was found to be associated with the length of the stepparent-stepchild relationship and whether there are genetic or adopted children of the stepparent. Relationship quality was positively associated with filial obligation; however, the actions the child perceived they were responsible for in assisting their stepparent had to do with if there were genetic or adopted children involved. Based on this research, it appears stepfamilies can have strong enough bonds that adult children do feel a sense of obligation to care for older stepparents, but it can depend on the structure of the family overall and other relationships that may have existed before the stepparent and stepchild's relationship.

Other familial relationships.

Family structure also influences parent-adult child relationship functioning. For example, the birth of grandchildren has been found to positively influence support in the relationship; however, not the quality of the relationship (e.g., Umberson, 1992). While the number of siblings has been found to have a negative influence on how much support and assistance parents are able to provide to each adult child such that more siblings predict less support from parents (Aldous

& Klein, 1991; Rossi & Rossi, 1990), number of siblings does not appear to impact ratings of relationship quality (Spitze & Logan, 1991a).

Theory

The literature in this area has been explored through different hypotheses and models, but few theories. Some examples of hypotheses and models are the intergenerational stake hypothesis (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971) and separation thesis (Mancini & Blieszner, 1989). More recently, developmental schism theory (Fingerman 1996; 2001) has been explored, but many of the hypotheses in this area remain untested assumptions. Intergenerational solidarity theory (Bengtson & Schrader, 1982) has served as the theoretical basis for much of the research in this area. Intergenerational solidarity theory has been described as “one of the few long-term efforts of family sociology to develop and test a theory of family integration” (Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997). Bengtson’s theory outlines six dimensions of intergenerational relationships: *associational, consensual, functional, normative, affective, and structural solidarity*.

Associational, consensual, functional, and structural solidarity represent the objective measures of solidarity. *Associational solidarity* represents the frequency of social contact and shared activities between family members. In sociology, this type of contact has been discussed as particularly human in developing solidarity between people. Moreover, Bengtson, Olander, and Haddad (1976) found that this type of contact is particularly important in parent-child solidarity. *Consensual solidarity* represents the actual or perceived agreement in opinions, values, and lifestyles between family members. For example, this can include sociopolitical attitudes or religious beliefs. While consensual solidarity assessments may contain subjective information, it is ultimately viewed as objective, because it is most often assessed by asking the same questions of parent and child, and then scoring based on matched answers (Bengtson and

Schrader, 1982). *Functional solidarity* represents the exchanges of support and instrumental and financial assistance between family members. While an objective measure, this can be difficult to measure due to underreported and overreported assistance by the younger and older generation, respectively (Bengtson and Black, 1973b). *Structural solidarity* represents the structural factors, such as number of family members and geographic distance, that constrain or enhance interaction between family members.

Normative and affective solidarity represent the subjective measures of solidarity. *Normative solidarity* represents the strength of obligation felt toward other family members. Research has found this to vary depending on individual characteristics, such as ethnicity, characteristics of parents, and early family experiences of children (Bengtson, Manuel, & Burton, 1981; Adams, 1968; Lopata, 1973, 1979; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Normative solidarity has been found to be a predictor of intergenerational association, exchange, and affection (Roberts & Bengtson, 1990; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). *Affective solidarity* represents the feelings of emotional closeness, affirmation, and intimacy between family members. Bengtson & Schrader (1982) point out the importance of this dimension as giving a picture of the perceived quality of relations between generations.

This theory has been used to frame research on parent-child relations, often focusing on support and assistance exchange between adult children and elderly parents (Mancini & Blieszner, 1989; Dewit, Wister, & Burch, 1988; Ingersoll-Dayton, Neal, & Hammer, 2001). This theory has also been used as a framework in which to study individual differences and compare characteristics between groups, such as immigrant versus non-immigrant status, families who have experienced parental divorce versus those who have not, and families involving mental illness or intellectual disability versus families who have not experienced such strains (Kwak,

2003; Booth & Amato, 1994; Lounds, Seltzer, Greenberg, & Shattuck, 2007; Greenberg, Knudsen, & Aschbrenner, 2006). Ultimately, there is a strong foundation for this theory and its use in intergenerational relationships research.

The Current Study

Research suggests that quality and quantity of interactions have an influence on different aspects of the parent-child relationships through the lifespan, but research comparing quality and quantity of interactions and their influence on relationship quality, specifically with parents and adult children, is lacking. The goal of this study was to add to the literature on parents and their adult children by specifically exploring the strength of association of quality and quantity of interactions on reports of relationship quality, and how race affected these associations. Results of the study can inform families and practitioners of ways to cultivate stronger, healthier relationships.

Guided by Bengtson & Schrader's (1997) intergenerational solidarity theory, we specifically addressed four of the six dimensions of parent-child solidarity. Specifically, we assessed *functional solidarity* by addressing the quality of interactions – affect of daily interactions and the presence of parental consulting interactions. *Associational solidarity* was measured by the frequency of interactions - how often the parents talk to their adult children and how often those interactions consist of parental involvement in the adult child's life. The outcome of interest in the current study, parent's report of their parent-adult child relationship quality, represented *affective solidarity*, addressing the solidarity established by the emotional bond between the parent and adult child. This study also controlled for the parent's reported proximity to their adult child, number of children, gender of the child, and the parent's

relationship to the child, addressing *structural solidarity* and its possibility of influence on the opportunities available to parents to interact with their adult child.

The existing research and theoretical foundation led to the development of two research questions. Previous research indicates there may be differences in reports of relationship quality between mothers and fathers (Lye, 1996; Lawton, Silverstein, & Bengtson, 1994a; Lawton et al., 1994b; Hagestad, 1988; Spitze & Logan, 1990; Golish, 2000). Therefore, the current study will assess the associations between quality and quantity of interactions and reports of relationship quality separately for mothers and fathers, using the following research questions:

1. Taken together, which indicator of quality or quantity of interactions is the most potent predictor of relationship quality, for mothers and for fathers?
2. How does race moderate the associations between indicators of quality or quantity of interactions and relationship quality?

Method

Procedures

Participants were recruited across 10 sites in a southeastern state to enroll in a study of the efficacy of two evidence-informed couple relationship education programs. Participants were recruited from the community in several ways, including web pages, emails listservs, social media, flyers, and word of mouth. Before random assignment was conducted, all study respondents completed baseline surveys used in the current study. Surveys were completed online, and participants were paid fifty dollars for survey completion. Because the current study only utilizes baseline data, all study respondents were included as no one was introduced to either of the couple relationship education programs evaluated in the larger study. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Participants

The original sample is composed of 1,798 individuals enrolled in the randomized control trial testing the efficacy of relationship education programs. Inclusion criteria for the current study was set to include only those who had reported having a child who is 19 years old or older. The analytic sample, therefore, is comprised of the 190 participants who were parents with at least one child that is 19 years old or older and answered all required questions for this analysis. Mothers comprise 53.7% of the sample. Participants' mean age is 56.94 ($SD = 9.00$). The majority (80.9%) were married at the time of data collection, while the remainder of the sample reported being in a committed relationship (17.8%). The sample was racially and economically diverse. A slight majority of participants reported being European-American/White (63.2%);

over a third reported being African-American (35.8%); and the remaining 1% reported other races (e.g., Asian-American, Biracial, Hispanic, etc.). Of the participants, 17.3% reported a household income of less than \$24,999; 49.2% reported a household income ranging from \$25,000 to 74,999; and 33.5% reported a household income of more than \$75,000. Participants' educational attainment varied, with 2.6% having no degree or diploma, 18.5% having either a high school diploma or GED, 6.8% having vocational or technical certification, 15.8% having attended some college without degree completion, 12.6% having an associate's degree, 21.6% having a bachelor's degree, or 22.1% having a master's or advanced degree.

Measures (see Appendix B for detailed description of measures)

Quality of interactions.

Negativity of interactions. Daily interactions were assessed by using the Daily Interactions Scale (Birditt, Kim, Zarit, Fingerman, & Loving, 2016). Two questions from the Daily Interactions Scale were used to assess negativity of interactions. The negative affect questions included, "Did you have any interactions with your child that made you feel irritated, hurt or annoyed," and, "Did you have any interactions with your child in which you could have felt irritated, hurt or annoyed but decided not to be?" Responses ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very frequently*). Internal consistency was excellent for fathers and mothers (*Cronbach's* $\alpha = .95$ and $.95$). Although the responses are phrased more closely to the frequency of interactions, the questions more closely assess overall negativity in the parent-adult child interactions.

Positivity of interactions. Daily interactions were assessed by using the Daily Interactions Scale (Birditt et al., 2016). Two questions from the Daily Interactions Scale were used to assess positivity of interactions. The positive affect questions included, "Did you have any interactions with your child that brought you pleasure or enjoyment or made you feel good," and, "Did you

have any interactions with your child where you shared a good laugh?” Responses ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very frequently*). Internal consistency was excellent for fathers and mothers (*Cronbach's* $\alpha = .95$ and $.96$). Again, although the responses are phrased more closely to frequency of interactions, the questions more closely assess overall positivity in the parent-adult child interactions.

Parental consulting about romantic relationships. The consulting subscale from Mounts' (2007) Parental Management of Peers Inventory (PMPI) was used to assess the level of parental consulting about romantic relationships in the parent-adult child relationship. Four questions were used, including, “When your child is having a problem with his/her partner, he/she often asks me for advice,” and, “I give my child good advice about solving problems with her/his partner.” Responses ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) so that higher scores indicate a higher level of advice and support given to the adult child by the parent. Internal consistency was excellent for fathers and mothers (*Cronbach's* $\alpha = .94$ and $.93$).

Quantity of interactions.

Frequency of contact. One global item from the Daily Interactions Scale (Birditt et al., 2016) was used to assess frequency of contact. The question respondents answered was, “How often do you talk on the phone, video chat, receive a text, or receive an email from your child?” Responses ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*more than once a week*) with higher scores indicating a higher frequency of contact.

Frequency of topical conversations. A reduced and revised version of the parental involvement measure in Yu, Pettit, Lansford, Bates, & Dodge (2010) was used to assess how often parents spoke to their adult children about current events in their lives. Four questions were used, including, “How often do you and your child talk about ordinary daily event in her/his

life,” and, “How often do you hear about your child's activities at work/school?” Responses to four items ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very frequently*) with higher scores indicating a higher level of parental involvement. Internal consistency was excellent for fathers and mothers (*Cronbach's* $\alpha = .94$ and $.97$).

Relationship quality.

One global item was used to assess parent-adult child relationship quality. The question respondents answered was, “Taking all things together, how would you describe your relationship with your child?” Responses ranged from 0 (*really bad*) to 10 (*absolutely perfect*) with higher scores indicating a higher level of relationship quality.

Race.

Race was recoded and dichotomized; specifically, non-European Americans (African-American, Asian-American, Hispanic, etc.) were coded as “0” and European Americans were coded as “1.”

Control variables.

Proximity ($M = 2.78$) will be included in each model as a covariate to address the *structural solidarity* dimension of the intergenerational solidarity theory as it suggests it may have an effect on relationship quality. Proximity was assessed using one question: “What is your physical proximity to your child?” Responses ranged from 1 (my child lives with me) to 6 (more than 720 miles (12+ hours travel time)). Number of children ($M = 2.70$) will also be included as a covariate, as a result of the *structural solidarity* dimension of the intergenerational solidarity theory (Bengtson & Schrader, 1982). Number of children was assessed using one question: “How many children do you have?” Participants were able to type in the number of children. Gender of the child was also included as a covariate to address possible gender differences

between the different parent-child dyads. The adult child's relationship to the respondent was also included as a covariate to address possible differences based on the context of the parent-adult child relationship. Participants were able to choose from the following options: biological, stepchild, my partner's child, adopted, grandchild, foster child, or other.

Analytic Strategy

IBM SPSS Version 22 was used to conduct all preliminary analyses and main analyses. Preliminary analyses included descriptive statistics, correlations among variables of interest, and tests of normality. To test each of the research questions a series of multiple regression analyses were conducted. Because the majority (78.8%) of the sample had a romantic partner included in the data set there are issues of dependence. Therefore, each of the following models was run for mothers and fathers separately.

The first multiple regression model tested the relative association between each of the quality and quantity of interactions predictors and reports of relationship quality, for mothers and for fathers, separately (RQ1). The next multiple regression model tested how race, as a moderator, impacts the associations between the quality and quantity of interactions predictors and the relationship quality outcome, for mothers and for fathers, separately (RQ2).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics are presented for men and women in Table 1. On average, in this sample, parents rate their relationship quality with their adult children highly ($M = 7.98$). Parents in this sample also reported, on average, high rates of contact ($M = 5.09$), more positive ($M = 3.93$) than negative ($M = 2.41$) interactions, occasional to frequent parental involvement ($M = 3.60$), and agree that they engage in parental consulting about romantic relationships with their adult children ($M = 2.62$). Variables were analyzed for normal distribution of data and appeared to be normally distributed (George & Mallery, 2010).

Correlations were run between all variables tested. The predictors were moderately correlated with each other, suggesting that they are related, but still distinct measures of interactions. For fathers, all predictors were statistically significantly correlated with the outcome of the study, relationship quality; for mothers, all but negativity of interactions were statistically significantly correlated with relationship quality. See Tables 2 and 3 for all correlations.

RQ1: Taken together, which indicator of quality or quantity of interactions is the most potent predictor of relationship quality, for mothers and for fathers?

Two multiple regression models, one for fathers and one for mothers, (fathers: $R^2 = .60$; mothers: $R^2 = .66$) were conducted to investigate the direct association between the predictors (negativity of interactions, positive of interactions, parental consulting about romantic relationships, frequency of contact, and frequency of topical conversations) and parent-adult child relationship quality. In the analysis of RQ1, controlling for all else in the model, positivity

of interactions was most strongly associated with relationship quality for fathers ($\beta = .359, p = .008$) and mothers ($\beta = .458, p = .000$), such that more positive interactions are associated with higher ratings of relationship quality. Frequency of interactions (fathers: $\beta = .283, p = .022$; mothers: $\beta = .335, p = .008$) and negativity of interactions (fathers: $\beta = -.212, p = .014$; mothers: $\beta = -.161, p = .024$) were also statistically significantly associated with relationship quality. Specifically, more frequent interactions and less negative interactions were associated with higher ratings of relationship quality. Parental involvement (fathers: $\beta = .354, p = .269$; mothers: $\beta = -.115, p = .703$) and parental consulting about romantic relationships (fathers: $\beta = -.007, p = .976$; mothers: $\beta = .449, p = .071$) were not uniquely related with parent-adult child relationship quality between parents and adult children in this sample. The model for fathers predicts 60% of the variance in parent-adult child relationship quality and the model for mothers predicts 66% of the variance in parent-adult child relationship quality. See Table 4 for results.

RQ2: How does race moderate the associations between indicators of quality or quantity of interactions and relationship quality?

Multiple regression models were conducted to investigate race as a moderator of the relationship between each predictor and the outcome. Models were run separately for each interaction term and separately for fathers and mothers. Models contained the outcome regressed onto all predictors, controls, race, and the interaction term of one of the predictors with race. Results from the five models (one per predictor by race interaction) for fathers and mothers are presented in Tables 5-9.

In the analysis of RQ2, it was found that the association between positivity of interactions and relationship quality was moderated by race for fathers ($R^2 = .65, \beta = -1.223, p = .003$), but not for mothers ($R^2 = .67, \beta = .446, p = .143$). More specifically, fathers who identified as

minority and reported high levels of positivity of interactions reported the highest quality parent-adult child relationships, suggesting this aspect of relationship behaviors is particularly important for minority fathers. Additionally, the association between parental involvement and relationship quality was found to be statistically significantly moderated by race. Specifically, fathers who identified as minority and reported more parental involvement reported the highest quality parent-adult child relationships ($R^2 = .64$, $\beta = -.927$, $p = .012$), but, again, not for mothers ($R^2 = .66$, $\beta = .250$, $p = .299$). These findings suggest high levels of positivity of interactions and parental involvement are particularly important for minority fathers. Race did not moderate the association between negativity of interactions (fathers: $R^2 = .61$, $\beta = -.217$, $p = .330$; mothers: $R^2 = .66$, $\beta = .120$, $p = .512$), frequency of contact (fathers: $R^2 = .62$, $\beta = -.823$, $p = .053$; mothers: $R^2 = .66$, $\beta = .297$, $p = .292$), parental consulting about romantic relationships (fathers: $R^2 = .62$, $\beta = -.588$, $p = .085$; mothers: $R^2 = .67$, $\beta = .415$, $p = .078$) and parent-adult child relationship quality, for fathers or for mothers. The models for fathers predict 61-64% of the variance in parent-adult child relationship quality and the model for mothers predicts 66-67% of the variance in parent-adult child relationship quality.

Discussion

Researchers working in the area of relationships carry the important responsibility of trying to understand how relationships function and how we can improve them, in order to make a positive impact in people's lives through informing effective prevention and intervention efforts. Research in parent-adult child relationships has shown how destructive relationships can negatively impact overall well-being (Koropecj-Cox, 2002), and how this is particularly true for parents of adult children (Birditt et al., 2015). For this reason, it is important to investigate the factors that influence relationship quality for these dyads, in the hopes of being able to improve people's well-being effectively. The current study serves to contribute to this mission by helping to identify the factors with the strongest association with relationship quality, addressing mothers' and fathers' experiences separately, and assessing if race alters these associations. Results from this study indicate that positivity of interactions, frequency of interactions, and negativity of interactions are important for ratings of relationship quality for mothers and for fathers; however parental involvement and parental consulting about romantic relationships were not directly uniquely related to parents' reports of relationship quality. Although not specifically tested in this study, it appears that the important behaviors for high quality parent-adult child relationships are the same for both mother and fathers. Race also appeared to influence these associations for fathers, such that positivity of interactions and parental involvement were particularly important for minority fathers' ratings of relationship quality.

Quality and Quantity Matter for Parent-Adult Child Relationships

Tenets of Bengtson & Schrader's intergenerational solidarity theory (1982) posit that different facets of intergenerational interactions comprise the overall intergenerational relationship. More specifically, *functional solidarity* (quality of interactions) and *associational solidarity* (quantity of interactions) and *affective solidarity*, or relationship quality, are important pieces of parent-child relationships. While intergenerational solidarity theory is presented more similarly to a framework, with each dimension being its own piece, the current study explored and found associations between the dimensions, connecting them and establishing affective solidarity as a possible outcome. The current study expanded upon previous findings by assessing the overall influence of the parent-adult child interactions rather than focusing on specific topics of tension (e.g., finances) or stressful interactions. Results of the current study appear to support the relative importance of functional solidarity, as well as associational solidarity. When we assessed the direct links between quality and quantity of interactions and relationship quality, positivity of interactions stood out as the strongest association, as well as negativity of interactions, whereby less negativity and more positivity were linked with higher relationship quality ratings. These findings appear to be in agreement with previous research that indicates positivity of interactions and negativity of interactions are influential in ratings of relationship quality (Birditt et al., 2009; Birditt et al., 2010; Fingerman et al., 2016), as well as confirms the significance of *functional solidarity's* inclusion in overall intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson & Schrader, 1982).

Additionally, frequency of interactions was found to be positively associated with relationship quality ratings, which suggests the importance of *associational solidarity* although it may be to a lesser degree. These findings also partially confirmed in previous research that found

that frequency of interactions was positively associated with relationship quality for mothers, but not for fathers (Lawton et al., 1994b). The current study found this association for both mothers and fathers. Previous research has found that relationship quality with fathers is more closely associated with “activities together” (Golish, 2000), which inherently involves more frequent interaction. It is possible that including multiple predictors in the same model and considering how they come together to affect relationship quality provided a clearer picture of the different ways that both mothers and fathers could interact with their adult children, rather than simply exploring one type of interaction and its association with relationship quality.

Parental involvement and parental consulting about romantic relationships, indicators of both associational and functional solidarity, were not uniquely associated with relationship quality in the current study. Little research on these topics has been conducted in the parent-adult child relationship literature; however, research into parent-adolescent relationships find them to be positively associated with reports of relationship quality. Some of the existing parent-adolescent research did indicate that a better relationship would then yield more parental consulting interactions, suggesting that the relationship could function in the opposite direction of what was tested in the current study (Crouter & Head, 2002; Smetana & Metzger 2008; Steinberg & Silk, 2002). It is also possible, because the predictors included in the model were significantly and moderately correlated to one another, that parental involvement and parental consulting about romantic relationships share predictive variance in the model. This seems likely considering positivity, negativity, and frequency of interactions are contingent upon some level of involvement and related to some topic. For example, an interaction consisting of parental consulting could be seen as parental involvement, this interaction could be the parent and adult child’s weekly interaction, and it could be a positive or negative interaction. Thus, in future

research, it may be important to consider the behaviors in combination together are related to reports of relationship quality for parents and adult children.

Previous research has explored specific family experiences and how those influence relationship quality. For example, in the case of divorce, divorce of the parent and adult child has been found to have a negative impact on relationship quality between parents and their adult children (Aquilino, 1994; Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1991; Cooney, 1994; Hagestad, 1988, Lye et al., 1995), with fathers seeing the strongest negative impact (Goldscheider 1990; Spitze & Miner, 1992; Kalmijn, 2007; Lin, 2008). In the case of remarriage, overall, stepfamilies have warm relationships across members (Ganong et al., 2011; King, 2006; White & Gilbreth, 2001); however, research indicates the presence of the biological parent could impede relationship development as members of stepfamilies navigate their new roles (Ganong et al., 2011). While it is important not to overlook these specific subgroup experiences, the current study utilized a community sample, which can provide a more generalizable view of parent-adult child interactions and relationship quality, and focused on malleable behaviors rather than experiences that are static. Because we included parent-adult child interaction and controlled for more static individual characteristics, the direct links model accounted for 60% of the variance for fathers and 66% of the variance for mothers, verifying that *functional* and *associational solidarity* are strong facets of intergenerational solidarity. This highlights the importance of looking at behaviors and not just individual characteristics (e.g., divorce experience, transition to a stepfamily) that typically only account for between 7-30% of the variance in indicators of relationship quality (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1991; Cooney, 1994).

Consideration of Racial Differences

After considering the direct links between quality and quantity of interactions and parent-

adult child relationship quality, we investigated the moderating role of race in the associations because previous research suggests there may be differences. Previous research on differences across families based on race (e.g., Lawton et al., 1994b; Cichy et al., 2012; Hay et al., 2007) were partially supported by the findings of the current study. Previous work has found higher ratings of relationship quality for African-American adult children (Lawton et al., 1994) and higher levels of worry for family members in African-American parents and adult children compared to European-American respondents (Cichy et al., 2012). Additionally, researchers have found discrepancies in how African-American mothers and adult children engage in conflict (Hay et al., 2007). Likely due to African-Americans' high value for parental authority (Dixon et al., 2008) African-American children choose to disengage in conflict, while their mothers engage. This, however, was not the case for European-American dyads that engaged in conflict in a more similar manner. Although these studies indicate racial differences, these studies did not look at these aspects together and explore how the associations between behaviors and relationship quality differed based on race. The current study found that the association between both positivity of interactions and parental involvement and relationship quality differed for minority fathers; no significant associations existed for mothers. First, we found an enhanced influence of positivity of interactions for minority fathers and ratings of relationship quality. Positivity of interactions appears to be important for all groups; however, this association is more profoundly important for minority fathers. Notably, there was a masked association between parental involvement and parent-adult child relationship quality. In the direct links model, there was no association apparent; however, when we considered race as a moderator of the association, we discovered parental involvement is positively associated with relationship quality for minority fathers.

In American culture, there is a myth that exists that Black fathers are absent and, at times, even viewed as nonessential to family functioning (Coles, Coles, & Green, 2010). It is possible that this highly reported and socially emphasized myth has permeated Black communities and has placed greater pressure on father involvement in families. As a result, minority father involvement may be seen as particularly boosting for relationship quality in the face of a narrative that suggests they were expected to be “absent.” Both findings related to the moderating influence of race suggest the possible influence of perception and social influence and speak strongly to the need to assess and compare subgroups’ experiences in parent-adult child relationships. These results and future studies considering group differences can help inform practitioners when considering intervention and prevention work.

In the current study, race did not moderate the associations between each predictor and mothers’ reports of relationship quality. Previous research across racial groups find mothers to be more active in maintaining family relationships (Hagestad, 1988; Spitze & Logan, 1990) suggesting behaviors and interactions in mother-adult child relationships are similarly important and not influenced by racial differences. Previous research has found differences across groups in how mothers and their adult children engage in conflict and the association this has with relationship quality (Cichy et al., 2012), with African-American mothers participated in more conflict engagement behaviors than their adult children did, and African-American children engaged in more conflict disengagement than their mothers. In this study, adult children reported lower relationship quality when their mothers engaged in conflict engagement behaviors, and mothers reported poorer relationship quality when their children engaged in conflict disengagement behaviors. The current study did not evaluate conflict behaviors specifically, thus

these previous findings suggest that it may be more enlightening to study specific behaviors and the difference in effect on relationship quality across groups.

Practical Implications and Future Directions

The findings of the current study can help to inform interventions, particularly when working with families to build strong parent-adult child relationships. Using this initial evidence, interventions could consider building skills aimed at facilitating more frequent positive interactions and less negative interactions between the parent and their adult child in order to support more positive parent-adult child relationship quality. These findings also inform the need to consider race and culture when tailoring interventions. When working with minority fathers specifically, it may be of particular importance to encourage both positive interactions and parental involvement as well to better support positive parent-adult child relationships. There has been a strong emphasis at the national level on encouraging father involvement through fatherhood programs that function at a local and national level (Dion, Zaveri, & Holcomb, 2015). Groups such as the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse and the Office of Family Assistance, are working to fund local programs, as well as provide general information through their websites, that encourage the involvement of fathers in order to positively impact overall family functioning, including the father-child relationship. The findings of this study and future studies that investigate the experience of other subgroups can inform best practices for these organizations.

Moving forward, research in parent-adult child relationships would benefit from considering both the parent and adult child's perspectives in exploring what influences or is associated with relationship quality. Our study explored the perspective of the parent, which serves as a contribution to the current literature; however, it is possible that the adult child's

perception of the parent-adult child relationship is different or that the value they associate with different interactions is different from their parent. As research has found that parent-child relationship quality can impact the well-being of both parents and their adult children (Umberson, 1992; Ryan & Willits, 2007), it is important not to overlook either perspective, as they are both impacted by parent-adult child relationship quality and would benefit greatly from further exploration of these influences. Thus, future research can use multi-informant data to capture a more realistic picture of the parent-adult child relationship. Nonetheless, parents have been found to have the strongest association between parent-adult child relationship quality and their well-being (Birditt et al., 2015), further highlighting the importance of the current study for its contribution to the understanding of the parent's experience in parent-adult child relationships.

The current study examined the basic associations between mother and father-adult child interactions and relationship quality, while also considering the experience of racial subgroups. Other possible moderators of the association include socioeconomic factors, parent-adult child cohabitation, and the child's marital status (Grundy, 2005; Aquilino & Supple, 1991; Shapiro, 2004). Understanding the experiences of subgroups and the comparative importance of specific associations is a meaningful endeavor so that we can understand enhanced or masked effects that may not be apparent by looking at the average experience.

Future studies should also take into account gender of both the parent and the adult child. Research has explored very generally what gender-based differences may exist between the different parent-child dyads (e.g., Russel & Saebel, 1997; Ferring et al., 2009), such as closeness and solidarity between the parent and child. The current study controlled for gender of the child, based on previous findings, and although gender of the child was not significantly associated

with relationship quality in the current study, it does not preclude the possibility that the association between behaviors and relationship quality would differ based on the gender match of the parent and adult child. The current study also controlled for the parent's relationship to the child, but future studies would benefit from an intentional exploration on the impact of divorce and remarriage on biological parent's and stepparent's relationship with their adult children. Research has found that relationships between biological parents and their adult children change with the addition of stepparents (e.g. Ganong & Coleman, 2017); thus, working to understand these changes may provide information useful for intervention as a family experiences divorce and remarriage.

Limitations

Although the current study adds to the literature on parent-adult child relationships, it did have some limitations that should be considered. Primarily, the data was cross-sectional, preventing any predictive conclusions about the influences on relationship quality. Future studies would benefit from the use of longitudinal data, considering how relationship quality develops through parent-adult child interactions, over time. The data was also obtained through self-report measures, which could pose issues if the participants responded in a more subjective rather than objective manner. Observational data or participant interviews could provide a clearer, and possibly more accurate, idea of parent-adult child interactions and relationship quality. Because relationship quality is a dyadic outcome, it is important to highlight again that these findings only speak to the parent's perspective in their relationship with their oldest adult child, which could be considered a limitation. Future studies can consider the adult child's perspective of their interactions with their parent and ratings of parent-adult child relationship quality to more concretely discuss the overall influences on parent-adult child relationship quality. As the

predictors in this study were significantly and moderately correlated with one another, there may have been issues of multicollinearity in the model. This is expected as the predictors make up different facets of the same parent-adult child interactions, (i.e., an interaction characterizing parental involvement could also be rated as an interaction with overall positive affect). Using structural equation modeling in the future would allow for a more accurate picture of how the predictors are associated with one another and with relationship quality.

Conclusion

Research shows that parent-adult child relationships matter for the well-being and quality of life of both the adult child and the parent. This study serves to expand our understanding of how parent-adult child relationships function through exploring which parent-adult child interactions have an association with parent-adult child relationship quality. Much of the research has focused on the experiences of adult children in their relationships with their parents; however, this study contributed to the exploration of parents' experience in their relationship with their adult child. This has particular importance as relationship quality is more strongly associated with overall well-being for parents than for adult children (Birditt et al., 2015). In light of this stronger association, future studies would benefit from exploring a mediation model to better understand how parent-adult child interactions can affect parents' well-being through their parent-adult child relationship quality. It is important that these explorations continue, particularly including dyadic data, in order to produce a clearer picture of parent-adult child relationship experiences.

In this sample, positivity of interactions, negativity of interactions, and frequency of interactions were all associated with ratings of relationship quality for mothers and fathers. Future work may consider these important behaviors in combination with one another and other

behaviors because they are likely related to one another, as the current study suggests an additive model. This study also adds to the literature on parent-adult child relationships because we considered the moderating role of race. When considering how race impacts these associations, it was found that minority fathers who report higher positivity of interactions report higher ratings of relationship quality compared to White fathers with similar reports of positivity of interactions, and that the influence of parental involvement is only important for minority fathers. There was no moderating role of race for mothers in the current study. These findings provide some suggestions for prevention and intervention programs, as the current study provides some initial evidence on areas of focus for parents, and subgroups of parents, in the context of parent-adult child relationships. As the current study explored these associations within the same model, these interactions should be considered for their relative importance in the outcome of parent-adult child relationship quality. As positivity of interactions was found to have the strongest association, this cannot be removed from the findings of the rest of the model that imply that positivity of interactions is associated with parent-adult child relationship quality, in addition to lower rates of negativity in interactions and more frequent interactions. This is a novel interpretation compared to other studies that have explored these associations individually rather than additively. The current study also highlights the importance of considering race when evaluating and choosing interventions for parent-adult child relationships, as these findings indicate it cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. Integrating these findings into prevention and intervention programs and encouraging these behaviors in parent-adult child interactions may serve to enhance relationship quality, which could benefit parents' overall well-being.

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Appendix A

Tables

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i> (SD)	Min	Max	Skewness (SE)	Kurtosis (SE)
Frequency of Interactions	102 87	5.16 (1.33) 5.00 (1.29)	1.00 1.00	6.00 6.00	-1.64 (.24) -1.55 (.26)	2.04 (.48) 2.26 (.51)
Positivity of Interactions	101 87	3.99 (1.08) 3.86 (.98)	1.00 1.00	5.00 5.00	-1.09 (.24) -1.24 (.26)	.63 (.48) 1.77 (.51)
Negativity of Interactions	99 87	2.54 (1.12) 2.26 (1.02)	1.00 1.00	5.00 5.00	.40 (.24) .60 (.26)	-.37 (.48) .06 (.51)
Parental Involvement	100 86	3.73 (1.15) 3.45 (1.02)	1.00 1.00	5.00 5.00	-.73 (.24) -.73 (.26)	-.32 (.48) .20 (.51)
Parental Consulting	95 84	2.74 (.84) 2.49 (.87)	1.00 1.00	4.00 4.00	-.44 (.25) -.28 (.26)	-.35 (.49) -.65 (.52)
Relationship Quality	100 84	7.88 (2.23) 8.10 (1.89)	.00 1.00	10.00 10.00	-1.94 (.24) -2.14 (.26)	4.10 (.48) 5.48 (.52)

Men's results in bold.

Table 2

Correlations among Key Variables (Mothers)

	Frequency of Interactions	Positivity of Interactions	Negativity of Interactions	Parental Involvement	Parental Consulting	Relationship Quality
Frequency of Interactions	1					
Positivity of Interactions	.69**	1				
Negativity of Interactions	.24*	.034	1			
Parental Involvement	.84**	.79**	.14	1		
Parental Consulting	.56**	.61**	-.002	.70**	1	
Relationship Quality	.58**	.69**	-.11	.63**	.59**	1

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 3

Correlations among Key Variables (Fathers)

	Frequency of Interactions	Positivity of Interactions	Negativity of Interactions	Parental Involvement	Parental Consulting	Relationship Quality
Frequency of Interactions	1					
Positivity of Interactions	.77**	1				
Negativity of Interactions	-.05	-.16	1			
Parental Involvement	.77**	.82**	-.11	1		
Parental Consulting	.41**	.48**	-.01	.61**	1	
Relationship Quality	.57**	.68**	-.28*	.61**	.34**	1

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 4

RQ1: Multiple Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Mothers' Relationship Quality and Fathers' Relationship Quality

Variable	Mothers				Fathers			
	β	p	B(SE)	t	β	p	B(SE)	t
Frequency of Interactions	.34	.01	1.04 (1.16)	2.73	.29	.02	.52 (.22)	2.34
Positivity of Interactions	.46	<.001	.98 (.23)	4.20	.36	.01	.81 (.30)	2.72
Negativity of Interactions	-.16	.02	-.33 (.14)	-2.30	-.21	.01	-.41 (.17)	-2.51
Parental Involvement	-.06	.70	-.12(.30)	-.38	.16	.27	.35 (.32)	1.12
Parental Consulting	.17	.07	.45 (.25)	1.83	-.003	.98	-.01 (.23)	-.03
Race	-.10	.15	-.44 (.31)	-1.45	.13	.14	.53 (.35)	1.51
R^2			.66				.60	

Significant results in bold.

Table 5

RQ2: Moderation Analysis of How Race Impacts Association between Frequency of Interactions and Mothers' Relationship Quality and Fathers' Relationship Quality

Variable	Mothers				Fathers			
	β	p	B(SE)	t	β	p	B(SE)	t
Frequency of Interactions (Freq)	.25	.09	.44 (.25)	1.73	.51	.003	.94 (.31)	3.08
Positivity of Interactions	.46	<.001	.97 (.23)	4.18	.32	.02	.73 (.30)	2.46
Negativity of Interactions	-.16	.03	-.31 (.15)	-2.16	-.18	.03	-.36 (.16)	-2.20
Parental Involvement	-.05	.73	-.11(.30)	-.35	.20	.18	.43 (.31)	1.37
Parental Consulting	.17	.08	.44 (.25)	1.81	.00	.99	.00 (.23)	.02
Race	-.37	.17	-1.73 (1.25)	-1.39	.93	.03	3.74 (.1.67)	2.24
Race x Freq	.30	.29	.25 (.23)	1.06	-.82	.05	-.61 (.31)	-1.97
R^2			.66				.62	

Significant results in bold.

Table 6

RQ2: Moderation Analysis of How Race Impacts Association between Positivity of Interactions and Mothers' Relationship Quality and Fathers' Relationship Quality

Variable	Mothers				Fathers			
	β	p	B(SE)	t	β	p	B(SE)	t
Frequency of Interactions	.33	.01	.57 (.21)	2.67	.25	.03	.46 (.21)	2.20
Positivity of Interactions (Pos)	.29	.07	.61 (.34)	1.80	.68	< .001	1.54 (.37)	4.20
Negativity of Interactions	-.15	.03	-.31 (.14)	-2.17	-.17	.04	-.33 (.16)	-2.12
Parental Involvement	-.02	.90	-.04(.30)	-.13	.20	.16	.42 (.30)	1.41
Parental Consulting	.18	.06	.48 (.25)	1.95	.03	.73	.08 (.22)	.34
Race	-.50	.08	-2.30 (1.30)	-1.78	1.27	.001	5.09 (1.51)	3.38
Race x Pos	.45	.14	.47 (.32)	1.48	-1.22	.003	-1.14 (.37)	-.310
R^2			.67				.65	

Significant results in bold.

Table 7

RQ2: Moderation Analysis of How Race Impacts Association between Negativity of Interactions and Mothers' Relationship Quality and Fathers' Relationship Quality

Variable	Mothers				Fathers			
	β	p	B(SE)	t	β	p	B(SE)	t
Frequency of Interactions	.33	.01	.57 (.21)	2.66	.30	.02	.56 (.23)	2.48
Positivity of Interactions	.46	<.001	.98 (.23)	4.20	.38	.01	.86 (.30)	2.85
Negativity of Interactions (Neg)	-.21	.04	-.43 (.21)	-2.07	-.11	.41	-.22 (.26)	-.82
Parental Involvement	-.05	.76	-.09(.30)	-.31	.12	.45	.25 (.33)	.75
Parental Consulting	.17	.07	.45 (.25)	1.82	.01	.90	.03 (.24)	.12
Race	-.19	.24	-.90 (.76)	-1.19	.34	.14	1.37 (.93)	1.48
Race x Neg	.12	.51	.18 (.28)	.66	-.22	.33	-.35 (.36)	-.98
R^2			.66				.61	

Significant results in bold.

Table 8

RQ2: Moderation Analysis of How Race Impacts Association between Parental Involvement and Mothers' Relationship Quality and Fathers' Relationship Quality

Variable	Mothers				Fathers			
	β	p	B(SE)	t	β	p	B(SE)	t
Frequency of Interactions	.33	.01	.57 (.21)	2.67	.29	.02	.53 (.21)	2.48
Positivity of Interactions	.46	<.001	.98 (.23)	4.21	.31	.02	.71 (.29)	2.45
Negativity of Interactions	-.15	.04	-.31 (.15)	-2.08	-.21	.01	-.41 (.16)	-2.57
Parental Involvement (Inv)	-.14	.41	-.28(.34)	-.83	.52	.01	1.11 (.42)	2.63
Parental Consulting	.18	.06	.47 (.25)	1.92	.03	.75	.07 (.23)	.324
Race	-.32	.16	-1.50 (1.06)	-1.42	1.02	.01	4.08 (1.41)	2.89
Race x Inv	.25	.30	.28 (.27)	1.05	-.93	.01	-.97 (.37)	-2.59
R^2			.66				.64	

Significant results in bold.

Table 9

RQ2: Moderation Analysis of How Race Impacts Association between Parental Consulting and Mothers' Relationship Quality and Fathers' Relationship Quality

Variable	Mothers				Fathers			
	β	p	B(SE)	t	β	p	B(SE)	t
Frequency of Interactions	.29	.02	.51 (.21)	2.37	.28	.02	.51 (.22)	2.35
Positivity of Interactions	.44	<.001	.95 (.23)	4.11	.35	.01	.79 (.29)	2.68
Negativity of Interactions	-.15	.04	-.31 (.14)	-2.14	-.18	.04	-.35 (.17)	2.08
Parental Involvement	-.03	.86	-.05(.30)	-.17	.20	.19	.42 (.32)	1.33
Parental Consulting (Cons)	.06	.62	.15 (.30)	.50	.29	.15	.65 (.44)	1.48
Race	-.48	.04	-2.24 (1.05)	-2.13	.71	.04	2.82 (1.36)	2.08
Race x Cons	.42	.08	.65 (.36)	1.78	-.59	.09	-.82 (.47)	-1.75
R^2			.67				.62	

Significant results in bold.

Appendix B

Measures

Frequency of Communication:

1. How often do you talk on the phone, video chat, receive a text, or receive an email from your child?

Daily Interactions Scale:

1. Did you have any interactions with your child that brought you pleasure or enjoyment or made you feel good?
2. Did you have any interactions with your child where you shared a good laugh?
3. Did you have any interactions with your child that made you feel irritated, hurt or annoyed?
4. Did you have any interactions with your child in which you could have felt irritated, hurt or annoyed but decided not to be?

Relationship Quality:

1. Taking all things together, how would you describe your relationship with your child?

Parental Involvement:

1. How often do you and your child talk about ordinary daily event in her/his life?
2. How often do you talk with your child about thing he/she is happy or satisfied with?
3. How often do you hear about your child's activities at work/school?
4. How often do you and your child talk about problems you may be concerned with?

Parental Consulting about Romantic Relationships:

1. When your child is having a problem with his/her partner, he/she often asks me for advice.

2. I encourage my child to think of several ways to solve a problem with her/his partner.
3. I give my child good advice about solving problems with her/his partner.
4. When my child asks me for advice for his/her romantic relationship, I feel capable to provide several solutions.