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# Intergenerational relationships in Germany: Evidence from *pairfam*

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# The **Solidarity-Conflict-Model** (V. Bengtson)

- *Structural solidarity* (opportunities for contact)
- *Associational solidarity* (contact)
- *Functional solidarity* (financial/instrumental support)
- *Affective solidarity* (positive feelings for each other)
- *Consensual solidarity* (agreement on values)
- *Normative solidarity* (obligations to support each other)
- (*Conflict & ambivalence*)

# Some *basic facts* about the state of adult intergenerational relationships in Germany

- Germany takes an intermediate position in the Continental European continuum of intergenerational family solidarity: average levels of parent-child geographic proximity, frequency of contacts, or support exchanges (Hank 2009).
- 'Amicable' and 'detached' are the most common types of intergenerational relations, w/ smaller shares of 'ambivalent' & 'disharmonious' relations (e.g., Steinbach 2008).
- Quality of intergenerational relations has remained very stable across recent decades (see Steinbach et al. 2020).

# ***pairfam's* contribution to the study of intergenerational relationships**

- Providing data suitable for more in-depths analyses of intergenerational relationships has been one of *pairfam's* primary aims (see Huinink et al. 2011)!
- **But:** How shall we assess, whether *pairfam* has actually been successful in achieving this goal?
  - Some 30+ peer-reviewed studies (including five articles in the *Journal of Marriage and Family*) ...

➤ **Nauck & Steinbach (2009; RatSWD)** recommended that future data structures should obtain information on intergenerational relationships ...

(1) simultaneously and complete,

(2) in a life-span perspective,

(3) from a panel design,

(4) from a multi-actor design,

(5) accounting for cultural variability and

(6) for institutional settings in cross-national comparisons.

# (1) Longitudinal pairfam studies



Editorial

Intergenerational relations across the life course

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## ABSTRACT

Issues of intergenerational relationships within family and kinship increased in salience in the public's mind as well as in scientific research beginning in the late 20th century, when intense demographic change, including increased life expectancy and decreased fertility, began to impinge upon the functioning of the welfare state. One effect of this new interest was that several larger studies were launched to explore the situation of elderly individuals in modern western societies, including also questions of their relationships with family members. Furthermore, both previously and newly initiated longitudinal surveys now make more frequent use of instruments on parent-child relationships. In this volume, *Intergenerational Relations Across the Life Course*, papers were assembled reporting on important longitudinal studies in modern western societies that utilized measures on intergenerational relations, including for example the LSOG (USA), the NKPS (The Netherlands), the LOGG (Norway), pairfam (Germany), and SHARE (15 European countries). Bringing these papers together clarifies the important joint findings of these studies, which until now have not been compared systematically from the perspective of intergenerational relationships.

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In the late 20th century, major demographic changes began to alter the composition of advanced industrial countries. These changes, which include but are not limited to increased life expectancy, decreased fertility, higher rates of divorce and re-marriage, and greater mobility, are threatening the long-term sustainability of social welfare institutions (Bengtson & Putney, 2000; Saraceno, 2008). They have also turned the details of intergenerational relationships among family and kin into highly salient issues for public discourse and scientific research.

Most research on intergenerational relationships starts out by reflecting upon the hypothesis that modern demography destroys family solidarity. By way of specifying and testing this "family-in-crisis" hypothesis, various aspects of family relations have been scrutinized. The most important contributions in this vein of

discourse are the theory of intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991) and the work on ambivalence (Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998). These contributions discuss many different aspects of contact and supportive behavior within the family and between generations. Deeply rooted in social exchange theory, intergenerational relationships are understood as any form of exchange between generations, but six specific dimensions of exchange or "solidarity" are distinguished: structural, associative, affective, consensual, normative, and functional. The *structural dimension* refers to the opportunity structure that frames the specific way that family interactions are undertaken. Typical measurements are geographic distance and residential proximity; but the availability of kin, parents, children, and siblings and their respective ages, sex, marital status, health status, and working arrangements are also seen as important structural factors affecting these relations. The *associative dimension* refers to the amount and kind of intergenerational contact, including personal contact and electronically mediated communication. A distinction is

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- A special issue of *ALCR* (Steinbach 2012) – based on papers presented at the 1<sup>st</sup> (!) International *pairfam* Conference in Chemnitz – included only one study using *pairfam* data.
- Today, *pairfam*'s "panel design" allows to investigate intergenerational relations "in a life-span perspective" – and to observe within-person changes over time (i.e. causal effects; Huinink & Brüderl 2021). ➔

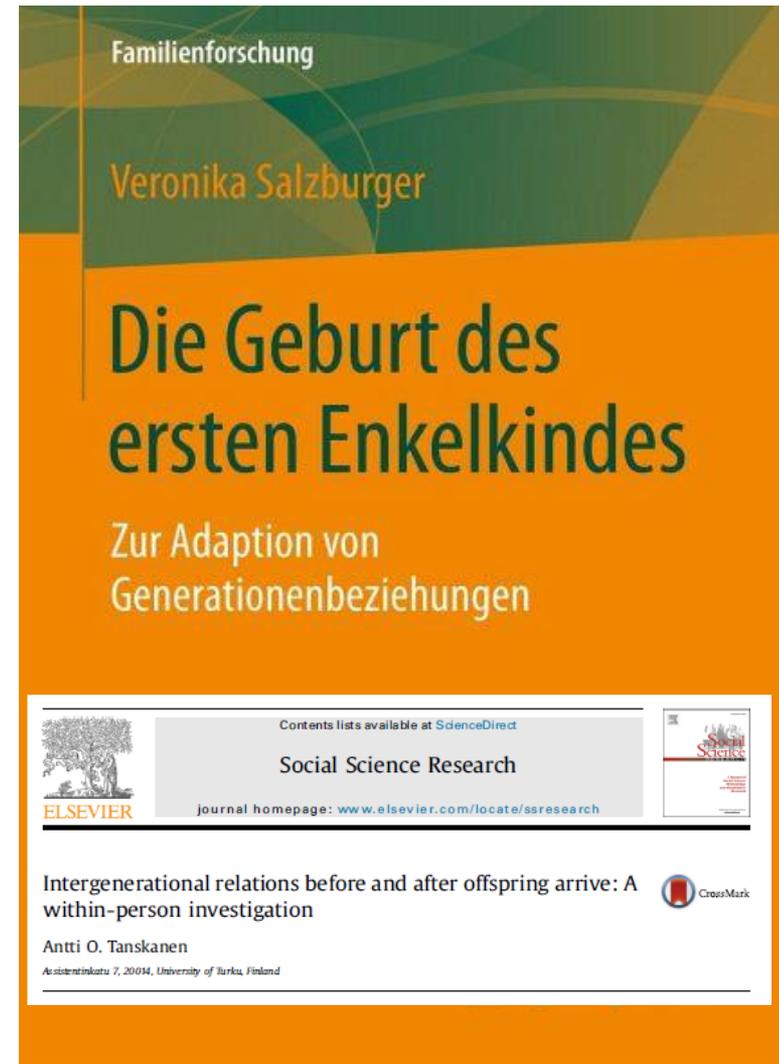
# (1) Longitudinal pairfam studies

E.g. the transition to (grand-) parenthood:

Min et al. (2022) used *FE models* to examine support exchanges between adult children and their parents across life transitions (i.e. marriage & parenthood).

Becoming a mother was associated with *receiving more* instrumental support from parents, but *receiving less* material/financial support.

When adult children became a parent, the *provision* of emotional and instrumental support to mothers decreased.



## **(1) Longitudinal pairfam studies (cont'd.)**

Fang et al. (2021) examined whether youth and parent perceptions of intergenerational contact, closeness, and conflict change during the **transition to adulthood**, and how these relationship characteristics vary as a function of life course experiences.

*Latent growth models* revealed that parent–child contact and conflict decreased, whereas parent–child closeness remained relatively stable from ages 17 to 22.

Youth *co-residence* with parents was associated with higher levels of youth- and parent-reported contact and conflict.

## (2) pairfam's *multi-actor design* allows to ...

- ... avoid potential distortions resulting from (*a*) single-reporter bias and/or (*b*) different evaluations of parent-child relationship qualities by generation ('intergenerational stake' hypothesis; see Steinbach et al. 2019)
- ... examine the *interplay between inter- and intragenerational relationships*:
  - Johnson et al.'s (2017) investigation of bidirectional associations between **anchors'** interactions with their **parents** and **intimate partners** revealed a robust pattern of *coordinated development* between parent-adult child and couple interactions: Increases in conflict and intimacy in one relationship were intertwined with changes in the other relationship.
  - Plus analyses of relationships to **siblings** and parents (Hank & Steinbach 2018) or intimate partners (Johnson et al. 2021) ...

## (2) pairfam multi-actor design (cont'd.) ...



Intergenerational transmission of parent-child relationship quality: Evidence from a multi-actor survey



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Intergenerational transmission is a long-standing interest of social science research. However, little attention has been devoted to the study of transmission of relationship quality between several generations of family members. Exploiting multigenerational multi-actor data from the German Family Panel (*pairfam*), we estimate multilevel models to investigate whether, in three-generation families, relationship quality between the middle generation and the oldest (that is, grandparent) generation predicts relationship quality between the youngest generation of adolescent children and the middle generation. Our results reveal evidence of intergenerational transmission of emotional closeness, conflict, and ambivalence. Transmission was more consistently observed when emanating from ties to grandfathers than from ties to grandmothers. A hypothesis concerning differences in the strength of transmission between East Germany and West Germany found no support. The paper concludes with a discussion of limitations and perspectives for future research.

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### 1. Introduction

Family sociologists and demographers have collected ample evidence indicating that family behaviors and attitudes are transmitted from one generation to another (e.g., Fasang and Raab, 2014; Liefbroer and Elzinga, 2012), including fertility and divorce (e.g., Murphy, 2013; Wolfinger, 2011), parenting styles and attachment (e.g., Chen and Kaplan, 2001; Sette et al., 2015), or kinship norms (e.g., De Vries, Kalmijn and Liefbroer, 2009). The present study is concerned with the intergenerational transmission of relationship quality, which so far has mainly been considered from two perspectives: (a) How does intra-generational relationship quality in the older generation affect intragenerational relationship quality in the younger generation? The most prominent example here is the intergenerational transmission of separation and divorce (e.g., Amato and Patterson, 2017; Wolfinger, 2011). (b) How does intragenerational relationship quality (e.g. in couples) affect intergenerational relationship quality (e.g., King et al., 2014; Yu et al., 2010; also see Arránz Becker, 2015)?

Whereas most of this research considers two generations (that is, parents and children) only, some studies observed such transmission processes across three generations (see, for example, Amato and Cheadle, 2005, on the 'long reach of divorce' or Hautamäki et al., 2010, on the transmission of attachment). Except for two studies (Birditt et al., 2012; Savelieva et al., 2017),

... allows taking a *three-generation perspective* to investigate intergenerational transmission processes:

Greater emotional closeness, more frequent contacts, and a higher level of ambivalence in G1-G2 parent-child dyads is paralleled by the same pattern of relationship quality in G2-G3 parent-child dyads.

⇒ *Understanding families as multigenerational systems ...*

### (3) Using pairfam to investigate ...

- ... *complex family structures* encompassing biological and non-biological parent-child relationships, e.g.:
- Arránz Becker et al. (2013) examined differences in parental closeness across relations with multiple coresidential and non-coresidential adolescent and adult children.

A multilevel analysis revealed a strong positive effect of *biological descent* on closeness in comparison to adoptive and *step-relations*.

Moreover, within-parent FE analyses suggested that the relative disadvantage of stepchildren was offset by longer duration of the stepparent–stepchild relationship.

- '**Step-gaps**' have also been observed in *sibling* relations (Steinbach & Hank 2018).

# (3) Using pairfam to investigate ...

- ... *diversity* in intergenerational relationships, e.g.:

Hank & Salzburger (2015) found indication of modestly lower levels of emotional closeness to both parents and evidence for less frequent contacts of homosexual children to their fathers.

Overall, however, adult gay and lesbian children's relations to parents were *not* found to differ substantially from those observed among their heterosexual counterparts.

## Gay and Lesbian Adults' Relationship With Parents in Germany

*Despite a rapid expansion of research on gay and lesbian family issues, a comprehensive account of intergenerational family relationships for a population-based sample of adult homosexual children is still lacking. Using more than 7,500 baseline interviews from the German Family Panel (pairfam), this study aimed to fill this gap. The authors analyzed nationally representative data for 2 cohorts (born in 1971–1973 and 1981–1983, respectively) with regard to 5 outcome variables: (a) emotional closeness, (b) contacts, (c) geographic proximity, (d) conflicts, and (e) ambivalence. They found indications of modestly lower levels of emotional closeness to both parents as well as evidence for less frequent contacts of homosexual children with their fathers. Overall, however, the results suggest that adult gay and lesbian children's relations to parents do not differ substantially from those observed among their heterosexual counterparts. The article concludes with a discussion of limitations and potentials for future research.*

Next to significant expansions of legal rights and recognitions of homosexuals, the beginning of the 21st century brought a rapid expansion of social science research on gay and lesbian family issues (see Biblarz, Carroll, & Burke, 2014,

and Biblarz & Savci, 2010, for recent reviews). In addition to general demographic accounts of same-sex partnerships in the United States and elsewhere (e.g., Andersson, Noack, Seierstad, & Weedon-Fekjær, 2006; Carpenter & Gates, 2008; Chamie & Mirkin, 2011), a number of more specific topics, such as parenthood, the division of household labor, or relationship stability in same-sex couples, have been investigated empirically (e.g., Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2007; Kurdek, 2007; Rosenfeld, 2014). Although this research has benefited from a growing availability of nationally representative data on the gay and lesbian population, most studies are still based on nonrepresentative samples and have qualitative research designs.

This is also the case in the literature investigating intergenerational relations of adult gay and lesbian children with their parents. Although homosexual children's experience of rejection and weak ties in families of origin is a long-investigated topic (e.g., Weston, 1991), many of the more recent studies have focused on the question of how parents' sexual orientation matters for their children (see Manning, Fetto, & Lamidi, 2014, and Stacey & Biblarz, 2001, for reviews), whereas a comprehensive account of intergenerational family relationships for a population-based sample of adult gay and lesbian children is—to the best of our knowledge—still lacking (but see Reczek, 2014, for a recent qualitative study).

Using information derived from the German Family Panel (pairfam; see <http://www.pairfam.de/en/study.html>), our study aimed to

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**Key Words:** Germany, homosexual children, intergenerational relations, solidarity–conflict model, pairfam.

### (3) Using pairfam to investigate ...

- ... *cultural variability* in intergenerational relationships, e.g.:
  - Baykara-Krumme et al. (2011) compared emotional closeness and contact frequency in native intergenerational relationships and Turkish as well as repatriate (*Aussiedler*) families.

Whereas natives and repatriates barely differed from each other, respondents of Turkish origin expressed a substantially greater emotional closeness to parents.

Moreover, migrants were less likely to report conflicts with parents. This initial gap diminished (for repatriates) or even disappeared (for Turks), once confounders – e.g. proximity, number of siblings, and value orientations – were controlled.

## (4) Linking pairfam w/ other data sources

- International: Nauck & Ren (2018; 2021) linked *pairfam* with *U.S. and East Asian surveys* to study co-residence patterns with kin and young adults' subjective well-being from a cross-cultural perspective.
- National (1): Barschkett et al. (2021) investigated inter-generational effects of grandparental care using *pairfam's* information on child health, children's socio-emotional skills, and parental satisfaction measures as well as *SOEP's* information on children's school outcomes.
- National (2): Erlinghagen & Hank (2021) used *pairfam* as a reference study to compare recent German emigrants' transnational intergenerational relationships – observed in the *German Emigration and Remigration Panel Study* – with those in the population of non-emigrant 'stayers'.

# Conclusions

- *pairfam* obtained data on intergenerational relations ...
- (✓) simultaneously and complete,
- (✓) in a life-span perspective,
- (✓) from a panel design,
- (✓) from a multi-actor design,
- (✓) accounting for cultural variability and
- (✓) for institutional settings in cross-national comparisons!

➤ **Mission accomplished!**

# Perspectives

- *pairfam's* data collection has been completed after 14 waves – but *pairfam's* data on intergenerational relations have (by far!) not yet been fully analyzed ...
- **And:** Further data on intergenerational relationships in Germany (and beyond) will be available soon ...



**Thank you, “Team Chemnitz”, for your  
groundbreaking work ...**



**... and thank you for your attention!**

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