

## Relationships Between Women and Their Parents: Implications for Midlife Well-Being

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The rapid changes in women's roles during the 1970s gave the graduates of the Radcliffe College class of 1964 opportunities for life experiences markedly different from those of either their mothers or their fathers. This longitudinal study of 89 Radcliffe graduates examined the ways in which women in midlife find continuity with their parents and the implications of experiences of continuity for women's relationships with parents and for women's self-esteem and well-being. Support was found for a model linking women's educational and occupational similarity to their parents to later perceptions of parental influence, perceived parental influence to parent-daughter relationship quality, and parent-daughter relationship quality to self-esteem and subsequent well-being. The quality of women's relationships with their fathers did not predict subsequent well-being, perhaps because of fathers' decreased involvement in their adult daughters' lives.

Middle-aged women, in comparison with their male counterparts and with women of other ages, have been assumed to be unusually preoccupied with their intergenerational relationships, negotiating changes in relationships with children as they become adults and with parents as they approach old age. According to Erikson (1982), this preoccupation is a normal focus of personality development during middle age and usually centers on questions of continuity and "legacy" across the generations. Although both women and men at midlife experience developmental pressure to leave a legacy to the next generation, women's traditional responsibility for "kin-keeping" (Hagestad, 1985, 1986) makes it especially likely that they will respond to that pressure in the context of intimate relationships with parents and children rather than through abstract connections with future generations. However, in the context of recent rapid social changes in women's roles, women who are currently middle aged may face some interesting dilemmas in finding continuity with their parents' generation. They may have constructed adult lives that not only differ from those of their parents but reflect different values as well. This suggests that the generativity crisis may be complicated for contemporary middle-aged women, particularly with respect to relations with their parents. In the study described in this article, we explored the implications of those complexities for women's psychological health and well-being in middle age.

The present study focused on women who, despite many differences, shared several characteristics that potentially influenced their experience of continuity with their parents. The

women in this sample shared a distinct social and historical context; they graduated from Radcliffe College in 1964, at the beginning of the era of the women's movement and near the end of the era of the "feminine mystique" (Friedan, 1983). The transition between these two periods was hardly complete in 1964; however, as highly educated women from predominantly (but not exclusively) White and privileged backgrounds, many of the women in this sample were in a position to benefit from the increased opportunities of the women's movement. The dramatic social change brought on by the women's movement thus had the potential for considerable impact on the occupational identities of these women (Stewart & Healy, 1989). In a broad analysis of the Radcliffe class of 1964 sample, Stewart and Vandewater (1993) reported that a large majority of the women had committed to some occupational identity by age 28.

This adoption of paid occupational roles by middle-class women reflected a general shift in society's views of appropriate feminine roles, but at a more concrete level it also reflected a shift by many of these women away from the role choices and experiences of their own mothers and toward the role choices of their fathers. Many of the mothers of the Radcliffe women had paid employment; 76% of them had been employed at some time. However, most who worked outside the home did so before marriage or after their daughters were in high school or college; fewer than 20% (as opposed to more than 50% of the daughters) were employed while their children were in preschool or elementary school. In addition, only 10% of the mothers were upper-level professionals, in comparison with more than 50% of the fathers and 41% of the daughters (Stewart & Vandewater, 1993). Although it is certainly not true, then, that the Radcliffe women all chose career to the exclusion of family (by 1986, more than 90% had been married at some time and almost 80% had at least one child) or that their mothers all chose family to the exclusion of career, it is safe to say that the occupational role tended to be less subordinate to the domestic role for the Radcliffe women than for their mothers.

These changes may have had ramifications for women's rela-

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tionships with mothers and with fathers. Widely dissimilar experiences may have presented an additional challenge to relationships between mothers and daughters, particularly if the dissimilarity reflected, or resulted in, an underlying difference in values. Similarity of values has been identified as an important aspect of relationships with friends (Johnson, 1989) and with family members (Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Block's (1972) study of student activists suggested that the experience of discontinuity with parental values has negative ramifications for women's images of themselves, as well as for their perceptions of their parents. Women activists who believed that their values were continuous with those of their parents considered themselves more assertive and confident and less doubting and self-denying than women who believed that their values were discontinuous with those of their parents.

Social changes in women's roles, though, do not necessitate daughters' experience of discontinuity with their mothers' values. The image of the 1950s stay-at-home mother and the 1970s career-track daughter ignores considerable variation in both groups. Perhaps more important, a discontinuity in roles does not always imply a discontinuity in values. In a study of women in their late 20s and 30s, Sholomskas and Axelrod (1986) found that young women's role decisions were related to their mothers' messages to them but were not related to their mothers' actual role decisions. Similarly, Stewart and Healy (1989) suggested that women who were adolescents in the 1930s and young adults during the years of World War II may have given their daughters mixed messages about work and family choices, emphasizing the importance of both roles without any expectation that they could be successfully combined. Gerson found this to be the case in her 1985 study of women's role choices. It seems likely that differences between the role choices of mothers and daughters present less of a challenge to the relationship if daughters believe that their choices are continuous with their mothers' values and influence.

In addition, shifts in women's roles may have positive ramifications for their sense of continuity with their fathers. Nydegger and Mitteness (1991) found that relationships between daughters who were not career oriented and their fathers tended to be marked by warmth but little real communication or understanding. Conversely, when the adult daughters were oriented toward careers, their relationships with their fathers were more similar to relationships between fathers and sons, with increased criticism and tension but also greatly increased understanding and mutual respect. It is important to note, however, that although the occupational attainments of women in this sample resembled their fathers', important role differences remained. In the norm for White middle-class families in the 1950s to which many of these women's families conformed, the father's occupational role was supported by a wife who took responsibility for all household and child-care concerns. Married women with children in this sample may have chosen occupational roles similar to those of their fathers, but they did not relinquish the family responsibilities characteristic of their mothers' roles.

Most of the participants in this sample of Radcliffe College graduates, then, had taken on combinations of roles unlike either of their parents, although they may still have felt continuity with their parents' values in terms of those roles. Women may

have received particularly mixed messages about work and family roles from their fathers, because fathers' values in terms of women's employment were not necessarily reflected in behavior as clearly as the values of mothers. Fathers whose views reflected traditional gender role stereotypes may therefore have communicated different values to their daughters through the value they placed on their own occupational achievements and, perhaps, on their daughters' school achievements. Daughters may have been able to perceive that they were being faithful to their fathers' values even as they broke away from these gender role stereotypes.

Bengtson (1975) emphasized the statistical distinction between agreement or similarity and covariation, but the conceptual distinction is perhaps more relevant here. There were clear differences between the life patterns of the women in the present study and their parents that are readily attributable to the social contexts of their lives, and these differences most likely correspond to some differences in values. There may also have been, however, considerable covariation between parents' lives and daughters' lives and, perhaps more important, between parents' values and daughters' values. In other words, daughters' choices and values most likely reflect the influence of their parents as well as the influence of their generation. One would expect this parental influence, despite dissimilarities in experiences, to contribute to women's relationships and sense of continuity with their parents.

There is reason to believe that a sense of continuity with parents has psychological benefits for women in midlife. Erikson (1963) emphasized the importance of intergenerational continuity, and the midlife task of making connections with the next generation seems particularly relevant to finding connections with previous generations (Erikson, 1982). Women at midlife may be particularly open to a recognition of connections with previous generations as they experience the growing maturity of their own children and gain new perspective on their parents' experience of this transition (La Sorsa & Fodor, 1990). Hagestad (1985), in her analysis of the role of grandparents in modern families, emphasized the importance of intergenerational relationships as "bridges" between disparate social-historical periods and referred to intergenerational continuity as "a core of 'sameness,' transcending time and change" (p. 36).

Several studies have found that most women in mature adulthood rate their relationships with their mothers positively (Baruch & Barnett, 1983) and that positive mother-daughter relationships in adulthood are associated with higher self-esteem in daughters (Sholomskas & Axelrod, 1986). Sholomskas and Axelrod attributed this connection to the idea of "maternal identification" as positive for women. It also seems reasonable, though, to understand this connection in terms of the positive ramifications of a sense of continuity across generations (Block, 1972; Erikson, 1963), which may be particularly relevant in mature adulthood (Erikson, 1982; Hagestad, 1985; Karp, 1991). Given this interpretation, one would expect positive relationships with either parent to contribute to women's self-esteem, because these relationships would reflect that women have found a meaningful connection with their parents on some level.

Positive relationships with parents may also be beneficial to women in midlife for more concrete reasons. As Hagestad

(1985) and Huyck (1991) pointed out, parents can be a source of emotional and physical support well into their sons' and daughters' adulthood, particularly during times of crisis such as divorce or unemployment. Conversely, because parents often remain in their children's lives well into adulthood, unpleasant relationships with parents may be a consistent source of stress. These ramifications of the parent-daughter relationship may be more prevalent in relationships with mothers than in relationships with fathers. Hagestad (1985) described family matriarchs as "ministers of the interior" who take responsibility for maintaining connections in the family and keeping track of their adult children's lives. Huyck (1991) found that mothers were much more likely than fathers to report offering assistance in daily living to their adult children. Concrete aspects of relationships with parents seem more relevant to daughters' emotional well-being, or quality of life, than to their self-esteem (although the two are no doubt related). One may expect, therefore, that although positive relationships with either parent will be linked to daughters' self-esteem, relationships with mothers will be more relevant than relationships with fathers to daughters' well-being.

The study described here was based on information from women about their parents and themselves; as such, it was necessarily based on women's experiences and perceptions of their parents' influence rather than on measures of what parents felt or intended to convey to their children. These perceptions and experiences, though, may actually be more relevant to women's relationships with their parents and experience of continuity with their parents in midlife than more direct measures of childhood experiences. Although providing continuity may be the task of the older generation (Hagestad, 1985), finding it is the task of the younger generation (Erikson, 1963), whether it is found in the belief that parents have positively influenced choices or values or simply in the emotional connection with parents implied by a positive relationship with them.

We propose that the quality of women's relationships with their parents will be related to their self-esteem in midlife. Although women may be expected to report a greater similarity to and influence of their fathers than their mothers in the domains of education and occupation, we propose a longitudinal model whereby women experience both parents' influence in a number of ways, with the quality of their adult relationships with their parents providing the most important link to subsequent emotional well-being. We based this model on (a) information about the educational and occupational attainments of women and their parents when the daughters were 37 years old, (b) measures of perceptions of parental influence, relationships with parents, and self-esteem at age 43, and (c) a measure of emotional well-being at age 48. These longitudinal data allowed us to test the predictors, correlates, and subsequent ramifications of the experience of continuity with parents. With this foundation, then, we suggest the following hypotheses.

1. Women's educational outcomes will be more similar to those of their fathers than to those of their mothers, and women will report a more positive influence of their fathers' employment than of their mothers' employment. We did not expect differences between the perceived influence of the values of mothers and of fathers, nor did we expect differences in the quality of mother-daughter and father-daughter relationships.

2. Positive relationships with parents at midlife will be associated with concurrent self-esteem.

3. Similarity between the educational and occupational attainments of women and their parents, measured when daughters were 37 years old, will predict daughters' perception at age 43 that their parents' roles and values were a positive influence in their lives.

4. The perception at age 43 that parental roles and values had a positive influence on personal roles and values will be associated with positive relationships between women and their parents.

5. Positive relationships with parents at midlife will predict subsequent well-being. Relationships with mothers may be more relevant to daughters' well-being than relationships with fathers.

## Method

### *Participants and Longitudinal Design*

The participants in this study have been involved in a longitudinal study of the Radcliffe class of 1964. Ninety-five percent of the class ( $N = 244$ ) completed the Thematic Apperception Test (Atkinson, 1958) in their 1st year at Radcliffe; questionnaires were sent to participants in 1974, 1976, 1980, 1986, and 1990. This study was based on information from the 1980 ( $n = 133$ ), 1986 ( $n = 102$ ), and 1990 ( $n = 149$ ) waves of data collection. Eighty-nine women from these waves provided enough information to be included in analyses. We compared these 89 women with the women whose responses could not be included in analyses to assess potential bias; there were no significant differences on any of the variables included in the study or on demographic variables such as education, income, and career status.

Two thirds of the women in the sample were married within 3 years of graduation, and more than one quarter were at home full time with children at that time. Demographic characteristics of these 89 participants at age 43 (when information about relationships with parents was collected) are summarized in Table 1. As mentioned earlier, this was a predominantly White and privileged sample, but there was considerable variation in social class of origin (Stewart & Ostrove, 1993) and in personal income. When the participants were 43 years old, their parents (including stepparents) ranged in age from 56 to 94 years; however, few of the women reported any primary caregiving responsibilities for their parents.

### *Measures*

*Educational and occupational similarity.* Educational and occupational similarity between the sample women and their parents was assessed through demographic data supplied by the participants about their own academic degrees and career patterns at age 37 and about their parents' academic degrees and career patterns. Because all of the Radcliffe graduates could be considered well educated by virtue of their degrees from a prestigious and competitive university, daughters were considered highly similar to their parents in educational attainments even if their parents' educational degrees exceeded their own. Women whose degrees at age 37 exceeded those of their parents were considered less similar to them according to the level of difference between their educational degrees (e.g., a daughter with a doctoral-level degree would be less similar to her father if he had a bachelor's degree than if he had a master's degree).

Occupational role similarity for fathers was coded as low, medium, or high depending on the daughter's employment status and the father's socioeconomic status. A daughter who was on a career track (with ca-

Table 1  
*Sample Demographic Characteristics at Age 43*

Characteristic	%
Highest degree level	
Bachelor's	29.2
Master's	25.8
Doctoral	44.9
Occupational status <sup>a</sup>	
Not working for pay	21.3
Skilled, clerical, or administrative	24.7
Minor or major professional	53.9
Personal income	
Part-time	
Less than \$10,000	57.2
\$10,000–\$29,999	28.5
More than \$30,000	14.3
Full-time	
Less than \$10,000	4.1
\$10,000–\$29,999	40.8
More than \$30,000	55.1
Family income	
Less than \$35,000	22.5
\$35,000–\$74,999	30.3
More than \$75,000	47.2
Social class of origin <sup>b</sup>	
Working class	16.5
Middle class	58.8
Upper class	24.7
Marital status	
Single	9.0
Married	71.9
Divorced or separated	19.1
Children	
Yes	77.5
No	22.5

<sup>a</sup> Coded on a 7-point scale adapted for use with women's jobs (Hollingshead & Redlich, 1956). <sup>b</sup>Based on information about the type of secondary school participants attended, as well as their fathers' occupational status (Stewart & Ostrove, 1993).

reer defined as an occupation requiring advanced training and offering potential for status and upward mobility) at age 37 was considered highly similar to her father if he was employed in an occupation with minor or major professional status (i.e., an occupation requiring an advanced degree, such as teaching at the college level, law or medicine) and somewhat similar to her father if his occupation had lower status. A woman who was employed in a part-time or lower status job was considered highly similar to her father if his occupation was also lower status and somewhat similar if he was a minor or major professional. A woman who was not employed at age 37 was considered low in occupational similarity to her father regardless of his occupational status. Although more than 30% of the fathers were reported to have not worked at some time, reasons tended to be retirement, disability, or temporary difficulty finding employment rather than a nonoccupational role orientation.

Occupational role similarity with mothers was also coded as low, medium, or high and was based on information about when mothers were employed as well as information about their occupational status. Women who were on career tracks at age 37 were considered highly similar to their mothers only if their mothers were employed after having children and could be considered major professionals. In comparison with that of fathers, a higher level of status was required for mothers to be considered highly similar to their career-track daughters because the definition of career used for the Radcliffe women included criteria for status and commitment that were much less likely to be met by the

occupational patterns of the mothers than of the fathers. Occupations that have traditionally been more open to women, such as nursing and teaching, tend to have limited potential for upward mobility regardless of advanced education. Employed mothers of the Radcliffe women were also much more likely than their career-track daughters to have limited their employment to periods when their children were in elementary or high school. Women who were on career tracks were considered somewhat similar to their mothers if their mothers were employed in low- to moderate-status occupations after having children and low in similarity to their mothers if their mothers were not employed after having children.

*Perceived employment role influence.* A direct measure of the perceived influence of parents' employment was based on the following question asked of women when they were 43: "How did your (father's/mother's) occupational history influence your own choices?" Responses were coded for the presence or absence of indications that the parent's employment history was a positive influence on the woman's overall role choices (e.g., whether or not to work for pay or what field to enter), a positive influence on a noncentral aspect of the woman's role choices (e.g., geographic area chosen in which to work), no influence at all (explicitly stated), a negative influence on the woman's overall role choices, or a negative influence on a noncentral aspect of the woman's role choices. These categories were not mutually exclusive; a woman may have considered her parent's overall role choice a positive influence but some less central aspect of her parent's job a negative influence. Influences on overall role choices seemed more significant than influences on noncentral aspects of role choices, so mention of the former type of influence was given 2 points (negative or positive, depending on the nature of the central influence) and mention of the latter type of influence was given 1 point (negative or positive). A scale was constructed by summing these points; the minimum scale value was -3 (for a mention of a negative specific influence and a negative general influence), and the maximum value was 3 (for a mention of a positive specific influence and a positive general influence). Interrater reliability on these items ranged from .77 to 1.00.

*Perceived value influence.* Women's perceptions, at age 43, of the overall influence of their parents' values were assessed through a series of items prefaced by "How did your (mother's/father's) views on the following subjects influence your own views?" Subjects included were women's education, women's employment, marriage, children, political attitudes, and other values. Many women clearly stated the influence of their parents' values on their own (e.g., "positive" or "no influence"); however, in cases in which the participant stated the value without making explicit the influence, raters were instructed to use behavioral evidence to assess the influence of the value. For example, the response "He strongly supported women working in any field" would be interpreted as a value with a positive influence if the woman reported having paid employment. A "not codable" option was available for cases in which reasonable judgments were not possible, however, and these responses were excluded from analysis. Interrater reliability for these judgments ranged from .95 to .96. Scales of these six influence ratings were constructed (alphas were .69 for mother's value influence and .80 for father's value influence).

*Relationship quality.* Because of the inherent complexity of the construct of relationship quality, we created an index of four measures, also administered when daughters were 43 years old. These measures were standardized and averaged to create an overall relationship quality index with alphas of .70 for mothers and .71 for fathers. This index of relationship quality ranged from negative to positive, with a high score indicating high relationship quality.

The first measure, of closeness, was quite straightforward; women were simply asked "Overall, how close are you to your (mother/father)?" Ratings were made on a 5-point scale ranging from *very close* (1) to *very distant* (5). Perceived similarity was assessed in two ways.

First, women were asked "How similar are you to your (father/mother)?" Ratings were made on a 5-point scale ranging from *very similar* (1) to *very different* (5). The second measure of perceived similarity came from a set of open-ended questions about similarities and differences with parents. Women were asked "In what ways are you similar to your (mother/father)?" and "In what ways are you different from your (mother/father)?" Individual items were counted, and a difference score was computed between the number of similarities and the number of differences. The two measures of perceived similarity were significantly correlated for both mothers ( $r = .46, p < .01$ ) and fathers ( $r = .40, p < .01$ ). Although this procedure ignored content that may have been important, the meanings women attached to these similarities and differences contributed to the measure of positive regard. After listing similarities to and differences from each parent, women were asked which of these characteristics they valued. The number of differences valued was subtracted from the number of similarities valued, creating a discrepancy score that indicated how positively the participant viewed her similarity to her parents.

**Self-esteem.** Self-esteem at age 43 was assessed by a measure of self-ideal congruence (Block & Robins, 1993). On a questionnaire titled "People I Know," participants were asked to rate themselves and eight other people, including their mother and father and the person they most admired, on 15 personality characteristics. Self-esteem was measured as the similarity, across the 15 characteristics, between the participant's ratings for herself and for the person she most admired. Preliminary analyses supported the construct validity of this measure; for example, it was significantly positively related to a Q-sort measure of participants' optimal adjustment at age 43 ( $r = .46, p < .001$ ) and negatively related to a self-report measure of participants' mood disturbance at age 43 ( $r = -.36, p < .01$ ).

**Well-being.** A summary index of subsequent well-being measures was created on the basis of information from the 1990 wave of data collection, when women were 48 years old. This index included Likert-type ratings of (a) current health, (b) energy level, (c) overall life satisfaction, (d) satisfaction with marital or relationship status, and (e) use of psychotherapy in the present or recent past. The alpha of this well-being index was .60. Although the index did not capture all dimensions of well-being (Ryff, 1989a, 1989b), it was significantly positively correlated with conceptually related measures of women's well-being at age 48, including the California Psychological Inventory (CPI; Gough, 1990) self-acceptance ( $r = .23, p < .05$ ) and well-being ( $r = .45, p < .01$ ) scales and the CPI self-realization vector ( $r = .39, p < .01$ ).

## Results

### *Differences Between Mothers and Fathers in Measures of Similarity, Influence, and Relationship Quality*

Descriptive statistics for variables measuring intergenerational similarity and continuity are reported in Table 2. We conducted *t* tests on all comparable measures of continuity with mothers and fathers, including each measure used in the index of relationship quality. We did not conduct a *t* test on measures of occupational similarity with mothers and fathers. Because of differences in the structure of the work lives of participants' mothers and fathers, measures of occupational similarity were constructed slightly differently for mothers and fathers and were thus not directly comparable.

As predicted, women's educational attainments in 1980 were significantly more similar to those of their fathers than to those of their mothers,  $t(72) = -5.42, p < .001$ . There were no differences between mothers and fathers on either measure of perceived parental influence.

Women did report more personal similarity to their fathers than to their mothers on one measure of this aspect of relationship quality. Women reported more similarities relative to differences in comparing themselves with their fathers than in comparing themselves with their mothers,  $t(74) = -2.55, p < .05$ . There were no significant differences between mothers and fathers in other aspects of relationship quality.

### *Correlations Between Self-Esteem and Parental Influence and Relationships*

We tested associations between self-esteem and aspects of relationships with parents using simple correlations because there was no rationale for a predictive model.

**Mother variables.** As predicted, the quality of women's relationships with their mothers was significantly correlated with daughters' concurrent self-esteem ( $n = 51; r = .38, p < .01$ ). Women who reported more positive relationships with their mothers also reported higher self-esteem.

Table 2  
*Descriptive Statistics for Continuity Variables*

Variable	Mothers		Fathers		Scale range <sup>a</sup>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Role similarity					
Education	4.11 <sub>a</sub>	1.39	4.93 <sub>b</sub>	1.55	1-7
Occupation <sup>b</sup>	2.15	0.72	2.32	0.69	1-3
Perceived influence					
Occupational role	4.67 <sub>a</sub>	1.56	4.31 <sub>a</sub>	1.36	1-7
Values	3.25 <sub>a</sub>	0.65	3.30 <sub>a</sub>	0.69	1-4
Relationship quality <sup>c</sup>					
Closeness	3.71 <sub>a</sub>	1.30	3.49 <sub>a</sub>	1.24	1-5
Personal similarity	3.39 <sub>a</sub>	1.20	3.63 <sub>a</sub>	1.01	1-5
Similarities minus differences	0.67 <sub>a</sub>	2.55	1.51 <sub>b</sub>	2.11	
Similarities valued minus differences valued	0.64 <sub>a</sub>	1.75	0.91 <sub>a</sub>	1.72	

*Note.* Means with different subscripts differ significantly at  $p < .05$ .

<sup>a</sup> All variables were scored in the positive direction. <sup>b</sup> Mothers and fathers were not compared on this variable because of differences in the construction of the variable for mothers and fathers. <sup>c</sup> These measures were standardized and averaged into an overall index of relationship quality for all analyses.

Table 3  
Intercorrelations of Father Predictor Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Educational similarity (age 37)	—	-.12	.30**	.09	.30**
2. Employment similarity (age 37)		—	.03	.25*	.04
3. Employment influence (age 43)			—	.05	.30**
4. Value influence (age 43)				—	.33***
5. Quality of relationship (age 43)					—

Note. Analyses include participants who completed all information relevant to the path analyses ( $n = 80$ ).

\*  $p \leq .05$ . \*\*  $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

*Father variables.* Self-esteem was significantly related to the quality of women's relationships with their fathers ( $n = 55$ ;  $r = .38$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Women who reported positive relationships with either parent, then, reported higher self-esteem as well. Self-esteem was also significantly related to women's perception of their fathers' employment as a positive influence ( $n = 55$ ;  $r = .25$ ,  $p < .05$ ); women who viewed their fathers as a positive influence reported higher levels of self-esteem.

#### Path Analyses

A path model leading from educational and occupational similarity at age 37, through perceived influence and relationship quality at age 43, to well-being at age 48, was tested by means of path analyses (with data for mothers and data for fathers analyzed separately) based on a series of hierarchical linear regressions. This model was based on theory and on the latent variables that our measures were designed to reflect. Questions about parental influence were explicitly retrospective and may thus be seen as conceptually preceding measures of relationship quality (which were not retrospective). The regressions began with the entry of the educational and occupational similarity measures as a block, then the two perceived influence measures as a block, and finally the measure of relationship quality, with the age 48 well-being index as the final dependent variable. Given that some measures in the regressions were collected simultaneously, alternative models are discussed.

*Intercorrelations of independent variables.* Many of the variables included in path analyses were significantly intercorrelated, as would be expected according to our hypotheses. For fathers, only variables that were expected to be linked in the path model (e.g., educational similarity and perceived influence of employment) were significantly correlated (see Table 3). For mothers, all independent variables other than employment influence and quality of relationship were moderately but significantly intercorrelated (see Table 4). These correlations were not large enough, however, to suggest problems of multicollinearity (Lewis-Beck, 1990).

*Path model with mother variables.* Results for the path analysis of mother variables are presented in Figure 1. As hypothesized, women whose occupational status at age 37 was similar to that of their mothers were more likely at age 43 to

report a positive influence of their mothers' employment on their own choices. Educational similarity was not related to either of the measures of perceived influence of mothers.

Also as hypothesized, women who believed that their mothers' values had positively influenced their own values also reported a more positive relationship with their mothers. There was no association, however, between perceived influence of mothers' employment roles and quality of relationships with mothers.

The quality of women's relationships with their mothers at age 43 significantly predicted their emotional well-being 5 years later. As expected, women whose relationships with their mothers were positive reported higher levels of subsequent well-being.

*Path model with father variables.* The results of the path analysis with father variables are presented in Figure 2. Women whose occupational status at age 37 was similar to that of their fathers were more likely at age 43 to report a positive influence of their fathers' values on their own values or attitudes, although they were not more likely to report a positive influence of their fathers' employment. Instead, educational similarity with fathers predicted increased perceptions of fathers' employment as a positive influence.

Several factors were significantly associated with the quality of relationships with fathers. As with mothers, the strongest predictor of relationship quality at age 43 was the perception that fathers' values were a positive influence; in other words, women who considered their fathers' values a positive influence on their own values reported significantly more positive relationships with their fathers. The perception that fathers' employment roles were a positive influence was also significantly related to good relationships with fathers, however, as was the similarity between fathers' and daughters' educational attainments.

The quality of women's relationships at age 43 with their fathers did not predict their subsequent well-being. The perception that fathers' values were a positive influence was a significantly negative predictor of age 48 emotional well-being.

## Discussion

Although there were some surprising findings, the hypotheses suggested were largely supported by the data. Women were

Table 4  
Intercorrelations of Mother Predictor Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Educational similarity (age 37)	—	.32**	.19*	.21*	.24*
2. Employment similarity (age 37)		—	.19*	.21*	.24*
3. Employment influence (age 43)			—	.27**	.10
4. Value influence (age 43)				—	.54***
5. Quality of relationship (age 43)					—

Note. Analyses include participants who completed all information relevant to the path analyses ( $n = 83$ ).

\*  $p \leq .05$ . \*\*  $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

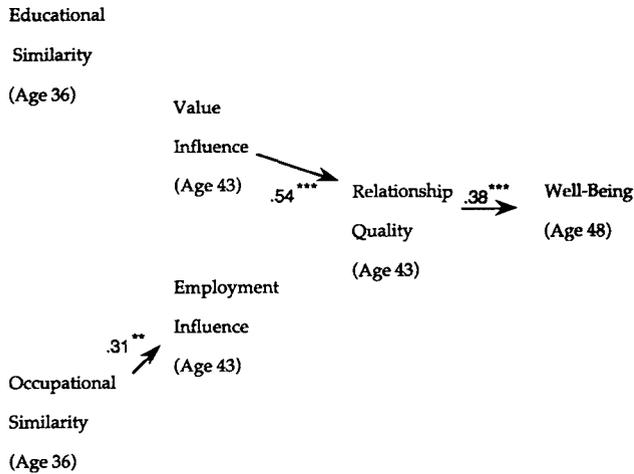


Figure 1. Path analysis predicting age 48 well-being from mother variables ( $R = .30, n = 83$ ).  
 \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

more similar to their fathers than to their mothers in education, but they did not report a greater influence of either parent, nor were their relationships with either parent significantly more positive. Positive relationships with mothers and with fathers were associated with higher levels of concurrent self-esteem. Similarity of educational and occupational attainments predicted the perception of parents as a positive influence, this perception was strongly linked to positive relationships with parents, and positive relationships with mothers (but not with fathers) predicted subsequent emotional well-being.

Relationship quality was the strongest correlate of self-esteem for both mothers and fathers. It seems reasonable that this would be the case; the relationship indexes measured far more global perceptions of the parents than did either of the measures of parental influence. It can be argued that a positive relationship with one's parents, whatever its basis, represents a connection across generations that makes more specific aspects of a relationship irrelevant. Of course, the reasons this connection might be beneficial are numerous. A positive relationship with a parent might reflect that parent's early emotional nurturance and support, which contributed to the daughter's later self-esteem. This interpretation is not inconsistent, however, with the possibility that a positive relationship with one's parents represents a healthy sense of continuity between generations.

Associations between women's similarity to their parents in educational and occupational attainments and women's perceptions of parental influence have interesting methodological and theoretical ramifications. On a methodological level, these links support the validity of the measures of perceived parental influence. As discussed earlier, these measures were not expected to mirror the past exactly; however, they would add little to our analysis if, in fact, they reflected nothing more than charitable feelings toward parents.

On a theoretical level, the inclusion of these similarity items in regression analyses allowed us to test our notion that perceptions of influence would relate more strongly to relationship quality than would measures of behavioral similarity. Sim-

ilarity between the education level of fathers and that of daughters was a significant predictor of relationship quality with fathers, but measures of perceived influence of fathers were stronger predictors in this model, and perceived influence of values was the only significant predictor of relationship quality with mothers. As hypothesized, the perceived positive influence of values was strongly associated with a good relationship with both father and mother. This result is consistent with Rossi and Rossi's (1990) finding that value consensus is associated with quality of parent-child relationships and with extensive research in the social psychological literature that has supported links between similarity and interpersonal attraction (Byrne, Baskett, & Hodges, 1971; Johnson, 1989). Given the strength of the association between value influence and relationships with parents and the inconsistency of the associations between role similarity and relationships with parents, it seems safe to conclude that these women were flexible enough to find a common ground with their parents outside of similar choices and experiences.

That employment role influence was associated with relationship quality for fathers but not for mothers may say something about the expectations women bring to these relationships by midlife. It seems likely that the women in this sample accepted as a given that their mothers' role choices were more constrained than their own. In the cases in which mothers and daughters made different role choices, similarity of values between the two women may indicate that the mother agreed with the daughter's decision to explore nontraditional roles. A considerable amount of subtle and blatant coercion accompanied women's exodus from wartime employment; many women undoubtedly welcomed increased opportunities for their daughters. It is important to note, however, that influence of mother's employment was correlated .31 ( $p = .001$ ) with value influence, indicating that mothers' values and influence often were congruent. This suggests the possibility that many of the women whose mothers did not share their values about employment were able to find continuity with their mothers' values in other

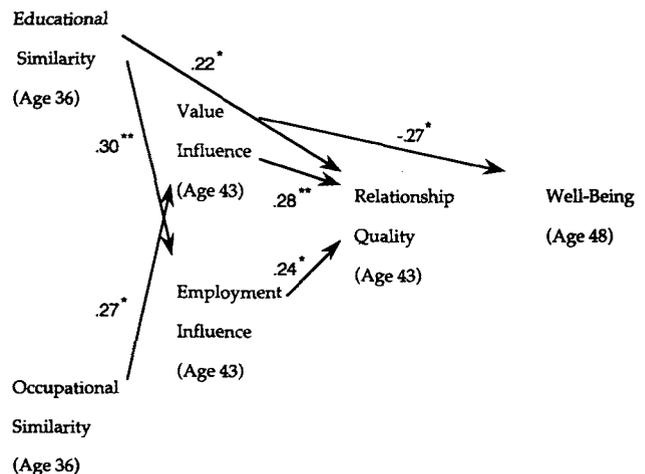


Figure 2. Path analysis predicting age 48 well-being from father variables ( $R = .27, n = 80$ ).  
 \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

domains. The "other values" mentioned in the values section, for example, often included generally positive characteristics such as tolerance and commitment to helping others; respect for a person's global values could easily be as important to the relationship with that person as similarity of values in terms of employment.

Influence of father's employment, however, was not correlated with value influence. This supports the suggestion made earlier that these fathers' values in terms of women's employment may have been particularly ambiguous because they were not directly reflected in behavior. It is possible, then, that fathers who were reported to have had a positive influence on their daughters' career choices encouraged their daughters' career interests regardless of their basic values in terms of gender roles. Several women mentioned that their fathers were opposed to their wives working outside the home or even to women's paid employment in general but made exceptions for their gifted daughters. A father's support of his daughter's career goals regardless of his values in terms of gender roles may have been a significant validation of his respect and acceptance of her talents and abilities; it would not be surprising for this validation to contribute to a strong relationship between them. It is interesting to note that women's perceptions of the influence of their fathers' values and employment were both positively correlated with women's self-esteem, whereas neither of these measures of maternal influence was correlated significantly with self-esteem. Fathers' validation of their daughters' goals and life choices may thus have been important to the women's sense of themselves as well as to their relationships with their fathers.

Although self-esteem was correlated with quality of relationship with father as well as with quality of relationship with mother, only quality of relationship with mother was a positive predictor of well-being. As discussed earlier, this difference may be due to the tendency for fathers to be less involved than mothers in their adult children's lives (Hagestad, 1985; Huyck, 1991), making the father-daughter relationship less relevant to daughters' emotional well-being. Perhaps, as we suggested earlier, our measure of well-being captured women's overall adjustment and life satisfaction, whereas our measure of self-esteem captured women's more abstract images of themselves, developed and maintained over a long period of time. Feeling good about either parent may be part of feeling good about oneself, but day-to-day emotional benefits of positive relationships may stem primarily from the contact and emotional support provided more often by mothers than by fathers.

Although the finding that relationships with mothers had a greater influence on later well-being than relationships with fathers is consistent with the emphasis on mother-daughter relationships in the psychological literature, the finding that the influence of fathers' values was a negative predictor of well-being was initially somewhat surprising. It is important to note that the influence of mothers' values was also a negative predictor of well-being, although the path coefficient ( $\beta = -.23$ ) was only marginally significant. The consistency of the two findings suggests that they should be discussed as common to relationships with both parents. Further analyses revealed that the association between father's value influence and well-being could be attributed mainly to influence in the domains of women's education and women's employment and could not be explained

simply by whether fathers supported or opposed women's participation in education and employment or by women's role choices in these domains. The influence of fathers' values in terms of education was related to women's graduate education, for example, but graduate education was not related to well-being. Thus, the negative associations between perceived parental influence and women's well-being do not seem to be an artifact of differences in women's choices or in parents' values.

Although we have emphasized the importance of women's continuity with the values of their parents' generation, Erikson (1963) also emphasized the importance of adults' connection with the values formed by their own generation. Stewart and Healy (1989) found that women who considered themselves similar to their mothers scored higher on emotional adaptation immediately after the birth of their first child than women who considered themselves different from their mothers, but this pattern reversed 28 months later. At this point, because many of the women had returned to jobs, Stewart and Healy suggested that women who identified with their mothers may have suffered from the conflict between their mothers' values in terms of family roles and the values in regard to family roles women of their own generation were developing in the late 1970s, when the original study was conducted. Similarly, the women in the present study who identified with their parents' values may have experienced difficulty reconciling those values with the values and life circumstances of their cohort.

This interpretation was supported by our analyses of the domains responsible for the negative association between the influence of parental values and well-being. The domains responsible for the negative link were those in which parental values may have been particularly incompatible with cohort values: fathers' values in terms of women's education and employment and mothers' values in regard to children. Women who based their educational and occupational tracks on their fathers' models could not have found in those models preparation for experiences of gender discrimination or for the complexity of balancing work and family roles. Women who emulated their mothers' approach to raising children may have been particularly conflicted about combining the mother role with a paid work role, as most of the women in this sample did at some point. In both cases, women may have been troubled by their inability to live up to respected but problematic parental models or may simply have experienced stress from trying to combine these models with the norms of their cohort.

Given the strong differences in expectations of the maternal and paternal role during the postwar years, differences in the structure and ramifications of mother-daughter and father-daughter relationships were to be expected. It is striking, though, that these differences were so subtle and role based. These women did not report significantly more positive relationships with mothers or with fathers, nor did they report being more positively influenced by mothers or by fathers. Instead, daughters seemed to shape their relationships to social realities, finding continuity with each parent in contexts in which it was most appropriate. Similarity with and influence of mothers' occupational roles were simply not relevant to relationships between these mothers and daughters, who made role choices in strikingly different social contexts. These factors were relevant for women's relationships with their fathers, however. Given the

likelihood that daughters of this cohort interacted more often with their mothers than with their fathers, tangible adult connections with fathers in the domains of education and occupation were understandably significant in midlife perceptions of the father-daughter relationship.

It is important to note that adult well-being is a complex and multidimensional construct (Ryff, 1989a, 1989b) and that many factors, such as adequate resources and the quality of women's roles and relationships with partners, influence women's well-being in midlife (Mitchell & Helson, 1990; Vandewater, Ostrove, & Stewart, 1994). These factors do not, however, seem to account for the associations we found between women's relationships with their parents and self-esteem and well-being. Stewart and Ostrove (1993) found that neither adult social class nor social class of origin was related to well-being for women in this sample; these participants were relatively homogeneous and advantaged in social class at midlife, and social class of origin seemed to have implications for subtle beliefs and expectations rather than for well-being or life outcomes. Vandewater et al. (1994) found that role quality and role combination were directly and indirectly linked to midlife well-being for women in this sample, but they did not find links between women's roles per se (e.g., whether or not women had children or the status of their occupations) and well-being. Links between women's relationships with their parents and midlife self-esteem and well-being thus cannot be explained as an artifact of underlying links between social class or life outcomes and women's well-being. Instead, there is reason to believe that the quality of women's relationships with their parents, as well as important factors such as the quality of employment roles and relationships with partners, contributes to midlife well-being.

George and Gold (1991) identified the trends toward fewer children in families and increased longevity of family members as the most significant changes in family structure during the last century. These trends have considerable implications for the life courses of North American women; George and Gold cited estimates that the percentage of their married years Canadian women spent rearing minor children dropped from 90% during the 1830s to 40% during the 1950s (Gee, 1986; as cited in George & Gold, 1991), whereas the number of years American women spent as daughters of living parents nearly tripled between 1800 and 1980 (Watkins, Menken, & Bongaarts, 1987; as cited in George & Gold, 1991). Perhaps the popularity of books aimed at helping women improve their relationships with their mothers and of books coming from the men's movement that have placed similar emphasis on reconciliation between men and their fathers (Bly, 1990; Keen, 1991) reflects the growing importance of these relationships as longevity increases. Although our study indicated that the exclusive focus on same-sex parent-child relationships is unjustified, this interest in forging positive adult relationships with parents may represent a growing recognition that the parent-child relationship is meaningful well after children have grown up.

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### Correction to Maylor

In the article "Aging and Forgetting in Prospective and Retrospective Memory Tasks," by Elizabeth A. Maylor (*Psychology and Aging*, 1993, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 420–428), there is an error in the picture recognition data. This was one of the tasks administered in an earlier group testing session (see p. 421). The number of false positives for an older participant was incorrectly entered onto the data sheet as 31 instead of only 13. Changes to the results reported in the article are as follows:

1. In Table 1, the mean number of hits minus false positives for the older age group should be 13.28 ( $SD = 5.72$ ). The analysis of variance (ANOVA) for picture recognition in Table 1 should read  $F(1, 84) = 8.73$ ,  $MSE = 39.42$ ,  $p < .005$ .
2. Four factors extracted by principal-components analysis (pp. 424–425) accounted for 40%, 15%, 12%, and 9% of the variance, with corresponding eigenvalues of 3.99, 1.47, 1.15, and 0.88. After orthogonal (varimax) rotation, loadings greater than .45 were as follows: Culture Fair (.84), AH4 (.84), coding speed (.78), spatial locations (.69), learning (.67), and picture recognition (.45) for Factor 1; Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale—Revised Vocabulary (.92) and Mill Hill (.89) for Factor 2; coding recall (.91) for Factor 3; and memory loss (.92) for Factor 4.
3. The general ability variable in Tables 4–6 includes picture recognition scores. In Table 4, the means for general ability should be 0.058 ( $SD = 0.778$ ),  $-0.107$  ( $SD = 0.831$ ), and  $-0.031$  ( $SD = 0.565$ ) for two, one, and zero memory successes, respectively. The ANOVA should read  $F(2, 83) = 0.37$ ,  $MSE = 0.57$ ,  $p > .1$ . In Table 5, the means for general ability should be  $-0.439$  ( $SD = 0.726$ ) for subsequent forgetting present and 0.211 ( $SD = 0.693$ ) for subsequent forgetting absent. The ANOVA should read  $F(1, 77) = 13.62$ ,  $MSE = 0.49$ ,  $p < .0005$ . In Table 6, the means for general ability should be  $-0.094$  ( $SD = 0.719$ ) for subsequent recovery present and  $-0.764$  ( $SD = 0.790$ ) for subsequent recovery absent. The ANOVA should read  $F(1, 48) = 6.69$ ,  $MSE = 0.54$ ,  $p < .05$ .
4. The  $t$  values in the multiple regression analysis on page 426 should be 2.47 ( $p < .05$ ) for age and  $-1.57$  ( $p > .1$ ) for general ability.
5. On page 427, it should read that "general ability was a poor predictor of initial performance (0.1% variance) but was a good predictor of whether participants subsequently forgot (15.1% variance) or recovered (12.2% variance)."

It can be noted that, in all cases, the changes are very minor and do not alter any of the conclusions drawn in the article.