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Discrepancies in Parent's and Adult Child's Reports of Support and Contact

This study uses data on support and contact in 4,055 parent-child dyads drawn from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study to test explanations of reporting discrepancies, which focus on sources of bias and inaccurate reporting. Contrary to the generational stake hypothesis, parents' reports are not characterized by a general positive bias. Consistent with notions of self-enhancement, parents and children overreport given help and underreport received help. Parents' reports are susceptible to positive biases linked with strong feelings of family obligations. Limited evidence is found for an underreporting bias associated with dissatisfaction with support received from family. Positive reporting biases are observed in high-quality relationships. Consistent with expectations, results show greater reporting accuracy among better educated parents and children.

Research on the adult parent-child relationship tends to rely on reports of either the parent or the child. Studies using paired parent and child data show discrepancies in reports of affection, contact, and support (e.g., Aquilino, 1999; Klein Ikkink, Van Tilburg, & Knipscheer, 1999; Shapiro, 2004). From a methodological point of view, discrepancies in parents' and children's reports are a concern because they draw the reliability and validity of self-reports from a single dyad member into question. From a substantive point of view, reporting discrepancies are of interest because they possibly reflect perceptual differences that in turn provide insight into the people involved or the nature of their relationship (Aquilino, 1999).

As yet we know little about why discrepancies exist in parents' and children's reports of support and contact (Aquilino, 1999; Shapiro, 2004). Previous work on this topic lacks a theoretical underpinning of the mechanisms producing reporting discrepancies. The few existing studies have mainly taken associations with demographic characteristics into consideration (e.g., Shapiro). That is why we focus not only on establishing systematic discrepancies but also on explaining their occurrence. Our hypotheses are derived from three bodies of literature, notably that on (a) discrepant reporting about the parent-child relationship, (b) discrepant reporting about other close relationships, and (c) methodological caveats in survey questioning. We use reports of behavioral items of support and contact (emotional and instrumental support exchanges and frequency of contact) from paired non-coresiding parents and children from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS), which is a large representative multiactor data set (Dykstra et al., 2005).

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Background

Our starting point is that reporting discrepancies arise from *biases* or *inaccuracies* (Gagné & Lydon, 2004). Biases imply over- or underreporting: Phenomena are presented more positively or negatively than they are in reality. Inaccuracies imply that errors are made because of a lack of knowledge or insufficient motivation to provide correct answers. A report is the unobserved reality of what is transpiring in the relationship, plus a possible positive/negative bias, plus a random error of varying size because of inaccuracy. Biases affect the magnitude and direction of discrepancies, whereas inaccuracies only influence the magnitude of discrepancies. In statistical terms, biases increase or decrease the mean of individual reports, whereas inaccuracies increase the variance of individual reports. We discuss five hypotheses on biased reporting and two on the accuracy of reporting. The first hypothesis predicts a discrepancy based on generational position (parents vs. children). Subsequent hypotheses predict similar patterns of discrepancies in each generation.

Strictly speaking, we do not know what "actually" transpires in the parent-child relationship, so in our hypotheses on biased reporting we use the terms *overreporting* and *underreporting* only in comparison to the other's report. We cannot be certain whether the parent, child, or both are responsible for observed discrepancies.

Biases

Generational stake. The generational stake hypothesis predicts a difference in reporting between parents and children. Parents presumably give a more positive impression of the relationship, because they desire to maintain a sense of generational continuity (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971). Parents are thus expected to overreport support and contact compared to children. The generational stake hypothesis is usually applied to explain discrepant reporting of affective dimensions of the parent-child relationship, but may also be useful for measures of support and contact (Shapiro, 2004). Nevertheless, reports of events such as support and contact may be less open to bias than reports of subjective experiences. Previous findings for intergenerational support and contact items have failed to show a positive bias of parents compared to children (Klein Ikkink et al., 1999; Shapiro). Though Bengtson and Kuypers developed their hypothesis (which was then

termed "developmental stake") to explain differences in evaluations of their joint relationship between parents and postadolescent children, subsequent research has shown that a generational bias in perception exists at other stages of the adult life course (see Giarusso, Feng, & Bengtson, 2004, for an overview). We therefore feel it is appropriate to apply the generational stake hypothesis in a sample such as ours that spans a broad age range.

The first hypothesis predicts a discrepancy based on generational position (parents vs. children). Subsequent hypotheses predict similar patterns of discrepancies in each generation.

Self-enhancement. Research into discrepancies has repeatedly shown that people report giving more than they receive (Marsden, 1990). Such behavior can be explained in terms of self-enhancement (Fiske, 2004), a basic psychological tendency to evaluate one's own behavior and skills as better than those of others. Presumably, self-enhancement is governed by self-maintenance and self-preservation motives. Our self-enhancement hypothesis predicts that parents and children overreport what they give and underreport what they receive.

Family obligations. People differ regarding the extent to which they feel family members should support and keep in touch with their families (Gans & Silverstein, 2006). We assume that those with stronger feelings of family obligation are more easily tempted to present the interactions in their families in a more favorable light than reality allows. This brings us to our family obligations hypothesis: Parents and children with stronger family norms overreport support and contact.

Dissatisfaction with received support. Feelings about actual support exchanges could influence reporting too. Dissatisfaction might arise because support attempts are not always helpful (Uchino, 2004) or because support levels do not meet expectations. We predict that dissatisfaction with received support leads to underreporting of received support. The rationale is that underreporting support can be a means to express resentment (Klein Ikkink et al., 1999) or reduce cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957).

Relationship quality. People have a tendency to see their close relationships in an overly positive light (Gagné & Lydon, 2004). Fostering such

favorable perceptions might boost self-esteem. Assuming a general tendency toward advantageous depictions of exchanges in qualitatively better relationships, our fifth hypothesis states: Parents and children who report having a better relationship overreport support and contact.

Inaccuracies

Relationship quality (inaccuracy). In our view relationship quality is not only associated with biases, but also with the accuracy of reporting. We follow two lines of reasoning. First, people in qualitatively better relationships presumably know each other better (Coriell & Cohen, 1995) and for that reason report more accurately on their relationship. Second, people in close relationships occupy more prominent spots in each other's minds (Gagné & Lydon, 2004), leading to better imprint and recall of shared interactions, which in turn contribute to accurate reporting. Correspondence on social support items between focal respondents and their network members has been shown to be higher in closer relationships (Antonucci & Israel, 1986; Pescosolido & Wright, 2004). Our sixth hypothesis states: Parents and children who report higher relationship quality are more accurate reporters of support and contact.

Cognitive ability. Knäuper, Belli, Hill, and Regula Herzog (1997) have shown that people with poor cognitive functioning have more difficulty providing accurate answers to survey questions than those with good cognitive abilities. Following their study in which education was used as a proxy for cognitive ability, we hypothesize that more highly educated respondents are more accurate reporters.

METHOD

Sample

This study uses data from a sample of matched non-coresiding parents and children aged 15 and over drawn from the main sample of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study, which was carried out in 2002 – 2004. The data contain information on 8,161 primary respondents, aged 18 – 79, and their family members.

The primary respondents, referred to as anchors, were drawn from a random sample of private addresses in the Netherlands. The overall response rate of the anchors was 45%, which is comparable to other family surveys in the Netherlands (Dykstra et al., 2005). Response rates in the Netherlands tend to be lower than elsewhere and they seem to be declining over time (De Leeuw & De Heer, 2001; Stoop, 2005). The Dutch appear to be particularly sensitive about privacy issues. Women living alone, persons under 30, and young adults living at home are underrepresented in the sample. Anchors living with children are overrepresented. In addition to computer-assisted face-to-face interviews, anchor data were collected by means of self-completion questionnaires. The return rate for questionnaires was 92%.

During the interviews, extensive information was gathered about the anchor's relationship with a maximum of eight family members (parents, siblings, children). Permission was asked to send self-completion questionnaires to, among others, one randomly selected biological or adoptive parent and two randomly selected biological or adoptive children aged 15 and over. These criteria were met by 7,150 anchors. Given the design of the study, information on maximally three parent-child relationships per anchor is available. We restricted our analyses to parents and children who were not living in the anchor's household to avoid patterns of support and contact being confounded with coresidence. Some 6,962 anchors had at least one such relationship (97.4% of 7,150). A total of 4,935 non-coresident parents (61.1% of a total of 8,080) and 4,940 (70.0% of a total of 7,055) non-coresident children belonging to the 6,962 anchors were randomly selected during the computer-assisted interview. Valid self-completion questionnaires from 1,802 parents of anchors (response rate of 36.5%) and 2,259 children of anchors (response rate of 45.7%) were received. Refusal by anchors to permit contacting their parents and children was the main reason for nonresponse (40.0% for their parents and 28.7% for their children). Auxiliary analyses (not reported here) showed that nonresponse was higher for poor-quality dyads (as reported by anchor) and for dyads involving older, male, and lower-educated family members. Six parent-child dyads were left out of the analyses (0.1% of all dyads) because multiactor reports were absent. Our analyses are based on 4,055 parent-child dyads nested in 3,290 anchors, where reports from both members of the dyad were available for at least one support or contact item.

Dependent variables. The dependent variables were constructed using the differences between parent and child reports of support and contact. Questions about whether the anchors provided support to or received support from parent/child in the last 3 months and questions on the frequency of contact in the last year were asked in the interview with the anchor. The self-completion family member questionnaires provided the perspective of the parent/child. Two kinds of instrumental support (helping in the household and with odd jobs) and two kinds of emotional support (showing interest and giving advice) were assessed. For each type of support, there were questions about giving and about receiving, leading to a total of eight items. The answer categories were $0 = $ *not at all*, $1 = $ *once or twice*, and $2 = $ *several times*. Anchors and family members answered a question about the frequency of face-to-face contact and one about contact by phone, mail, or e-mail in the past 12 months. The answer categories ranged from $0 = $ *never* to $6 = $ *daily*. Note that all items were behavioral frequency questions (Burton & Blair, 1991), which have been the focus of research on the quality of survey questions.

The difference scores for each of the support and contact items were computed from the perspective of the parent (who is either the anchor or the anchor's parent). To create the difference score we subtracted the child's report from that of the parent. Reports of giving support by the parent were matched with reports of receiving by the child and vice versa. A positive difference score indicates the parent reports a higher level of support/contact compared to the child; a negative score indicates the reverse. For the give/receive support items the difference scores ranged from -2 to 2 and for the frequency of contact items from -6 to 6.

Independent variables. Several scales were created using Likert-type items from the anchor and family member self-completion questionnaires with answer options ranging from $1 = $ *strongly disagree* to $5 = $ *strongly agree*. *Parental obligations* were the measure of the parent's family norms. Three items were used ($\alpha = .78$): "Parents should support their adult children if they need it," "Parents should help their adult children financially it they need it," and "Pa-

rents should provide lodging to their adult children if they need it." *Filial obligations* were the measure of the child's family norms. Four items were used ($\alpha = .72$): "Children should look after their sick parents," "In old age, parents must be able to live in with their children," "Children who live close to their parents should visit them at least once a week," and "Children should take unpaid leave to look after their sick parents." Two three-item scales were created, one for the parent and one for the child, as measures of *dissatisfaction* with support exchanges in the family. The items were "I give my family more than they give me," "I feel my family should give me more support than I receive now," and "I receive enough help and advice from my family" (reverse coded; $\alpha = .69$ for parents and $\alpha = .72$ for children).

In the cases where the parent/child was the anchor, the measures of relationship quality and education were taken from the face-to-face interview. To assess *relationship quality*, parents and children were asked: "How would you describe your relationship with [child/parent]?" Answer categories varied from $1 = $ *not so good* to $4 = $ *very good*. The highest attained *level of education* was used as an indicator of the cognitive ability of respondents. The original variable was recoded into four categories, ranging from $1 = $ *primary school*, $2 = $ *lower secondary or lower vocational*, $3 = $ *higher secondary or general vocational*, to $4 = $ *higher vocational, university or higher*.

Data collection artifacts. Two variables were included to account for the possibility that data collection procedures produced biases and inaccuracies. The first was the number of months between the anchor's interview and the receipt of the family member questionnaire. The time difference controlled for possible discrepancies resulting from the anchor and the parent/child reporting on different time periods. The second was a dummy variable indicating whether the parent was the anchor respondent. The aim was to capture a possible method effect, given that anchors were interviewed face to face and family members filled in a self-completion questionnaire (De Leeuw, 2005). The presence of an interviewer might have made anchors' reports more susceptible to social desirability bias (Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000), implying a tendency toward overreporting.

Controls. Age and gender of the parent (1 = *father*) and child (1 = *son*) and a dummy variable indicating whether parent and child were of the same gender were included (1 = *same-gender*) as controls because they were found to affect reporting differences in previous work (Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Shapiro, 2004). Another reason for including controls for age and gender was that, as described earlier, response rates for the self-completion questionnaires were lower for older and male family members. Table 1 reports descriptive statistics for the independent variables, data collection artifacts, and controls.

Analytic Procedure

Data showing parent-child reporting differences and percentages of correspondence are difficult to interpret, because there is no clear benchmark for how similar the reports ought to be (Glass & Polisar, 1987). One possibility is to use scores of randomly matched parents and children as a point of reference. Levels of agreement should be higher in family dyads than in dyads of randomly matched parents and children. We first randomly matched parents and children from the original sample 100 times. Then we computed the mean absolute differences and the percentages of correspondence in each of these random samples (which had the same size as the original sample) and took the mean value of the obtained scores as a benchmark. In addition, we compared parent-child discrepancies in the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study with those reported by Shapiro (2004) for similar items in the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH).

We employed a two-step procedure to obtain a model for discrepant reporting. First, we estimated separate heteroskedastic regression models for the 10 parent-child difference scores on the support and contact items. In heteroskedastic regression models the variance is not held constant for all observations like in Ordinary Least Squares regression but can be explicitly modeled. We modeled the *mean* of the parent-child difference scores to assess biases and the *variance* to assess inaccuracies (with the INTREG command in Stata; StataCorp, 2005a). Variables that, according to our hypotheses, were responsible for biases were added to the mean part of the models, whereas those presumably responsible for inaccuracies were added to the variance part. The controls were added to both the mean and variance parts of the models. Education was added to the variance part because we hypothesized it would decrease the variance of the difference score. It was also added to the mean part as a control because, as described earlier, higher educated family members (as reported by anchors) were less likely to return the self-completion questionnaire.

Second, the models for the separate difference scores were combined into a single model using Seemingly Unrelated Estimation (SUE). SUE is quite similar to Seemingly Unrelated Regression (see Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001, for an application), but it extends to models other than Ordinary Least Squares. SUE is an appropriate technique when outcomes are related, as is the case with the 10 support and contact items, which pertain to the same parent-child relationship. SUE combines the (co)variance structure of

Table 1. *Descriptives of Independent Variables, Data Collection Artifacts, and Controls (Unadjusted, Unweighted)*

	Parent			Child			Dyad		
	M	*SD*	Range	*M*	*SD*	Range	*M*	*SD*	Range
Obligations	3.67	0.72	1 – 5	2.86	0.70	1 – 5			
Dissatisfaction	2.38	0.72	1 – 5	2.10	0.65	1 – 5			
Relationship quality	3.63	0.55	1 – 4	3.36	0.73	1 – 4			
Education	2.49	1.03	1 – 4	3.24	0.77	1 – 4			
Age	63.54	9.58	34 – 95	35.08	8.70	14 – 70			
Male (1 = *yes*)	0.39	0.49	0 – 1	0.40	0.49	0 – 1			
Same gender (1 = *yes*)							0.53	0.50	0 – 1
Time difference (months)							0.56	0.50	0 – 20.7
Parent = anchor (1 = *yes*)							0.60	0.49	0 – 1
N dyads in SUE analysis	4,055								
N anchors in SUE analysis	3,290								

the separate regressions to calculate the simultaneous sandwich/robust (co)variance structure (StataCorp, 2005b). The coefficients produced by SUE are identical to those of the 10 heteroskedastic models, but the standard errors are adjusted for covariance. In the present analysis the standard errors were also corrected for the nesting of parent-child dyads in anchors by specifying the cluster option in SUE.

Missing values on the independent variables and controls were replaced by the mean of 16 groups ($2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ categorization on the basis of male/female, parent/child, anchor/family member, and whether the family member questionnaire was returned within 3 months). Analyses with and without setting the missing values to these group means did not produce substantially different results. The percentage of data with missing values on the independent variables was 2.6%.

RESULTS

Reporting Discrepancies

The top part of Table 2 shows discrepancies in parent-child reports for family and random dyads. For all items, the absolute mean differences are smaller and the percentage of corresponding answers is higher for family dyads than for random dyads, as one would expect. These differences are particularly pronounced for the contact items. For example, the same frequency of face-to-face contact is reported in 61% of family dyads versus 26% in random dyads. Reporting discrepancies in family dyads are smallest for the interest and household support items and for face-to-face contact.

The levels of correspondence in parent-child reports observed in the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study resemble those found in the NSFH (see Shapiro, 2004). In both studies, approximately half of the dyads showed correspondence in reports of instrumental support. Correspondence on emotional support was lower in the NSFH: Around 30% of paired parents and children gave identical answers (vs. around 55% in the Dutch data). Note, however, that Shapiro collapsed the advice and interest questions into a single item. The biggest difference between the two surveys concerns the correspondence on the frequency of face-to-face contact. In the U.S. data correspondence was around 20%, compared to over 60% in the Dutch.

Table 2. *Mean Differences and Percentage Correspondence in Parent-Child Reports of Support and Contact in Family and Random Dyads*

	Given by Parents				Received by Parents				Frequency of Contact	
	Advice	Interest	Household	Odd Jobs	Advice	Interest	Household	Odd Jobs	Face to Face	Phone, Mail, E-mail
Mean difference family dyads (absolute)	.60	.32	.41	.56	.63	.35	.45	.58	.41	.78
Mean difference random dyads (absolute)	.77	.38	.68	.85	.76	.41	.65	.79	1.16	1.22
% correspondence family dyads	47	72	66	54	44	68	63	50	61	44
% correspondence random dyads	36	67	51	37	37	63	50	37	26	26
Mean reported by parent	2.12	2.80	1.48	1.70	1.92	2.73	1.37	1.63	4.71	5.01
Mean parent-child difference	.04	.05**	.03	−.04**	−.08**	−.01	−.15**	−.14**	.05**	.12**
% parent overreports	28	16	18	22	25	16	12	19	22	32
% parent underreports	25	12	16	25	31	16	25	31	17	24
N dyads per item	3,732	3,980	3,695	3,797	3,715	3,969	3,733	3,893	4,026	4,021

**$p < .001$, two-sided paired *t* tests.

The lower part of Table 2 provides information on the direction of reporting discrepancies. Positive difference scores indicate overreporting, and negative scores indicate underreporting by the parent. Paired *t* tests show that for all measures, except for advice and help with household tasks given by parents and interest received by parents, mean differences in parent-child reports differ significantly from zero. Parents generally report showing more interest than their children report receiving. They also generally report receiving less advice and instrumental support than their children report giving. Not surprisingly, the percentages of over- and underreporting show a similar pattern. Parents more often overreport than underreport what they give to their children and vice versa. Help with odd jobs given by parents is an exception: Here parents report giving less than their children report receiving. Finally, Table 2 shows that parents overreport the frequency of contact.

A comparison with the NSFH of percentages of over- and underreporting can only be made for the frequency of contact items. The difference is remarkable: Children overreported the frequency of contact in about 70% of U.S. dyads compared to around 20% in Dutch dyads. Frequency of contact between parents and children is generally higher in the Netherlands than in the United States (cf. Shapiro, 2004), given that the geographic distances separating family members are much smaller. As Burton and Blair (1991) have suggested, correspondence in reports is generally greater for more frequent interactions than for occasional get-togethers.

Determinants of Reporting Discrepancies

The results of the Seemingly Unrelated Estimation of the 10 intergenerational support and contact difference scores are shown in Table 3. The signs of the coefficients should be interpreted in the following way: A positive coefficient indicates the parent overreports support and contact compared to the child; a negative coefficient indicates the parent underreports. For the variance, a positive coefficient indicates a higher variance and thus lower accuracy of reporting.

Table 3 shows the mean predicted parent-child difference scores, controlling for all other effects. These means are the same as the constants when all variables are standardized. The generational stake hypothesis predicts positive mean difference scores for all items, whereas the self-

enhancement hypothesis predicts positive mean difference scores for support given by parents and negative mean difference scores for support received by parents. Results show that parents overreport given support (with the exception of help with odd jobs), underreport received support, and overreport the frequency of contact. The unadjusted mean difference scores in Table 2 showed a similar pattern. Overall, the findings for the support items are better in line with the self-enhancement hypothesis than with the generational stake hypothesis. Parental overreporting of the frequency of contact is consistent with the generational stake hypothesis. Note, however, that the self-enhancement hypothesis makes no prediction about reporting discrepancies regarding the frequency of contact.

The prediction that parents and children with stronger feelings of family obligation overreport support and contact is only partially corroborated. Parents who more strongly feel that family members should support one another overreport giving and receiving advice, receiving help with household tasks and odd jobs, and the frequency of contact by telephone, mail, and e-mail. Obligations felt by children show no associations with reporting discrepancies.

We hypothesized that parents and children who are dissatisfied with the level of support received from their families would underreport received support. Table 3 provides little evidence sustaining the dissatisfaction hypothesis: Parental and filial dissatisfaction show no associations with discrepancies in reports of received advice and received instrumental support. Only the findings for received interest are in line with the hypothesis. Parental dissatisfaction is related to underreporting of received interest. Children's dissatisfaction is also associated with underreporting of received interest (a positive coefficient indicates that children report receiving less than parents report giving).

We expected that perceived relationship quality would be associated with overreporting by parents and children of support and contact. The findings are generally consistent with this hypothesis. Parents who highly rate the quality of the relationship with their children tend to overreport exchanges of advice and interest and the frequency of contact. Children who highly rate the quality of the relationship with their parents show a tendency to overreport all items. Interestingly, among parents, perceived relationship quality is not associated with discrepancies

Table 3. *Seemingly Unrelated Estimates of Heteroskedastic Regressions of Parent-Child Reporting Differences for 10 Support and Contact Items*

	Given by Parents					Received by Parents					Frequency of Contact		
	H	Advice	Interest	Household	Odd Jobs	H	Advice	Interest	Household	Odd Jobs	H	Face to Face	Phone, Mail, E-mail
Effects on Mean													
Mean predicted difference[a]	+	.042**	.044**	.029**	−.039**	+	−.076**	−.006*	−.155**	−.141**	+	.054**	.122**
Obligations parent	+	.057*	.022	.014	.029	+	.067**	.019	.040*	.067**	+	.031	.068*
Obligations child	−	−.023	.006	−.037	−.004	−	.000	−.009	−.036	−.029	−	−.016	−.024
Dissatisfaction parent	?	.018	−.016	.008	.041	−	−.049	−.034*	−.007	−.013	?	−.000	.002
Dissatisfaction child	+	.057	.036*	−.012	.005	?	.008	.046*	−.045*	−.021	?	.002	−.012
Relationship quality parent	+	.097**	.101**	.049	.065	+	.149**	.189**	.009	.048	+	.105**	.183**
Relationship quality child	−	−.250**	−.192**	−.038	−.095**	−	−.110**	−.128**	−.073**	−.069**	−	−.084**	−.161**
Time difference	?	−.001	.003	.006	.003	?	−.006	.002	.003	.000	?	.000	−.000
Parent = anchor	?	.128**	.006	.036	−.150**	?	.019	−.042	.067*	−.213**	?	.241**	.034
Constant		.289	.217	−.171	−.160		−.546*	−.216	.311	.345		−.180	−.102
Effects on ln(variance)													
Relationship quality parent	−	.048	−.158**	.042	.039	−	.041	−.176**	.091**	.110**	−	−.018	−.007
Relationship quality child	−	−.010	−.251**	.150**	.078**	−	.007	−.162**	.090**	.068**	−	−.006	.014
Education parent	−	−.027	−.092**	−.006	−.019	−	−.009	−.071**	−.001	−.021	−	−.023	−.050**
Education child	−	−.015	−.104**	−.015	−.001	−	−.006	−.126**	−.037	−.054**	−	−.052**	−.146**
Time difference	?	.004	−.002	.010	−.000	?	−.005	.007	.003	−.008	?	.017**	.013*
Parent = anchor	?	.048	.046	.040	.045	?	.010	−.018	−.041	.003	?	.028	−.020
Constant		−.409*	.582**	−.198	.148		−.263	1.145**	−.827**	−.561**		.130	.698**
N dyads in SUE		4,055											
N anchors		3,290											
N dyads per item		3,732	3,980	3,695	3,797		3,715	3,969	3,733	3,893		4,026	4,021
$\chi^2(df = 15)$ of original models		220.0	234.2	59.5	89.4		81.5	181.9	73.6	114.0		178.9	84.2

Note: Unstandardized coefficients shown and standard errors corrected for clustering of parent-child dyads in families. One-sided when hypothesis specified, otherwise two-sided. The signs in the H (of Hypothesized effects) columns: + indicates overreporting by the parent/underreporting by the child; − indicates underreporting by the parent/overreporting by the child. Effects of controls: father, son, and same-gender dummy, age and education of the parent and child are included but not shown. Robust standard errors corrected for clustering in anchors.

[a]Mean predicted parent-child difference score according to model (i.e., same as constant when all variables are standardized).

p < .01. **p* < .001.

in the reporting of exchanges of instrumental support. It is unclear how to account for this finding. Perhaps exchanges of instrumental support are more clearly viewed as expressions of affection and caring by members of the younger generation than by the older generation.

We now turn to effects on the accuracy (variance) of the difference scores. Note that the natural logarithm of the variance is modeled. The natural logarithm of a variance between 0 and 1 is negative and that of a variance higher than 1 is positive. In general, the results fail to show that reporting is more accurate in higher quality relationships (i.e., the variance in differences scores is lower). Greater accuracy associated with better relationship quality is observed only for the reports of interest items. Contrary to the hypothesis, relationship quality is associated with less accuracy in the reporting of exchanges of instrumental support. This pattern is observed among both parents and children, but for parents the effect only holds for the instrumental support they receive. Perceived relationship quality has no influence on the accuracy of reports of contact.

Consistent with our hypothesis, parents' and children's level of education is generally associated with more accurate reporting. Associations do not always reach significance, however. More highly educated parents and children tend to be more accurate reporters of exchanges of interest and of the frequency of contact by telephone, mail and e-mail. In addition, more highly educated children are more accurate reporters of help with odd jobs given to parents and the frequency of face-to-face contact.

Finally, Table 3 shows whether data collection procedures are responsible for biases and inaccuracies. The time difference in months between the anchor interview and the receipt of the questionnaire by the family member produces no biases in reporting support and contact. Whereas a larger time interval does not affect the accuracy of reporting support, it is associated with greater inaccuracy of reporting contact frequency. Apparently, it does not matter if reports on support exchanges pertain to different time periods. Shapiro's (2004) study based on NSFH data also failed to find effects of time differences. The longer time frame might produce inaccuracy in reports of frequency of contact because many family interactions are structured by time-bound events such as birthdays, funerals, religious celebrations, and holidays.

The parent is anchor dummy variable examines possible effects linked with collecting the data face to face versus through written self-reports. Systematic effects do not emerge. In dyads where the parent is the anchor, parental overreporting is observed for three items, parental underreporting for two, and no reporting differences are evident for five items. The method of data collection shows no association with the accuracy of reporting. The presence of non-systematic biases suggests nevertheless that researchers should make an effort to adopt the same method of data collection for all respondents so that design effects do not obscure the validity of the findings.

DISCUSSION

This study used a large sample of matched parents and children in the Netherlands to examine discrepancies in reports of support and contact. Between 28% and 56% of parent-child dyads show reporting discrepancies. Randomly matched dyads, which served as a benchmark, show higher levels of discrepancies (between 33% and 74%). The findings indicate, on the one hand, that parents and children have a shared social reality: Support exchanges and contact are, to a large extent, perceived and reported as such by both dyad members. The discrepancies, on the other hand, point to social construction: Parents' and children's perceptions of and reports on support and contact are colored by their expectations, motivations, and feelings about their relationships.

Our explanations of reporting discrepancies focus on sources of bias and inaccurate reporting. We do not find a "parent-more-positive-than-child" bias for reports of support as expected by the generational stake hypothesis. Rather, both parents and children have a tendency to overreport what they give and underreport what they receive, which is consistent with notions of self-enhancement. The findings for contact are in line with the generational stake hypothesis: Parents overreport the frequency of contact. Interestingly, parental reports are susceptible to positive biases linked with strong feelings of family obligations, whereas filial reports are not. Apparently, parents' perceptions of interactions with their children are more strongly colored by personal norms than are their children's perceptions of the same events.

Family obligation can be viewed as an aspect of parents' desire for intergenerational continuity. Following this view, the finding that stronger feelings of family obligation are linked with parents' positive bias in reporting (but are unrelated to children's reports) is consistent with the generational stake hypothesis. So our study yields mixed results with regard to this hypothesis. We fail to find a general positive bias in parents' reports of support. Nevertheless, parental overreporting of the frequency of contact and the positive biases in parental reports associated with strong feelings of obligation are in line with the generational stake hypothesis.

The results show only limited evidence for a presumed bias toward underreporting among parents and children who are dissatisfied with the support received from their families. An underreporting bias associated with dissatisfaction is observed only for received interest and not for received advice and practical help. Finally, the results reveal positive biases for reports on support exchanges and contact in dyads that are characterized as being of high quality. This high-quality positive bias holds for both parents and children.

Though better relationship quality is associated with positive reporting biases, we do not find the expected greater reporting accuracy. Apparently, parents and children in high-quality relationships have a general tendency to overreport support exchanges and contact, but this tendency is not manifested to the same degree in all dyads. Consistent with expectations, we find greater reporting accuracy among better-educated parents and children.

The Netherlands Kinship Panel Study offers a first-rate opportunity to study matched parents and children in a large representative sample, but there is an important limitation. A substantial proportion of the parents and children of the anchors who were targeted to complete questionnaires did not do so. Ancillary analyses revealed that our multiactor data pertain to a positive selection of parents and children who get along reasonably well. In the analyses we dealt with this selection in three ways. First, we also carried out the analyses with weighted data, and the results were not substantially different. Second, we controlled for characteristics associated with family member nonresponse, such as gender, age, and level of education. Third, relationship quality was explicitly modeled as a determinant of reporting discrepancies. Though response rates were

higher for better-quality parent-child ties, multiactor data from poorer-quality relationships were far from lacking (2.9% of parents and 11.8% of children described their relationship as either "not so good" or "reasonable"). Despite the positive selectivity in the sample, relationship quality proved to be an important predictor of reporting discrepancies. The conclusion is warranted that selectivity resulting from nonresponse is not a serious threat to the internal validity of our study.

In addition, note that we had no actual measures of over- and underreporting, only differences in parent-child reports. Given the absence of an objective benchmark, "true" over- and underreporting cannot be established. Though objective indicators of parent-child interactions would be welcome supplements to our study, we nevertheless feel that subjective reports yield substantive information in and of themselves.

This study makes a unique contribution to research on reporting discrepancies by distinguishing biases and inaccuracies, and by developing testable hypotheses for these two sources of reporting discrepancies. As a result, we have established systematic reporting discrepancies linked with a tendency toward self-enhancement, feelings of family obligation, the perceived quality of the parent-child relationship, and levels of education. We provide evidence that reporting discrepancies are not just methodological noise, but rather partly reflect insightful information about family members and their relationships. The finding that parents and children who report having a high-quality relationship overreport support exchanges and contact serves as a case in point. A generally positive outlook on life might predispose respondents to see their relationships in an overly positive light and to overreport support and contact (cf. Srivastava, McGonigal, Richards, Butler, & Gross, 2006). If so, the association between relationship quality and overreporting is attributable to having an optimistic disposition. Alternatively, research on close relationships has suggested that positive biases help make relationships work (Gable, Reis, & Downey, 2003; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). People in close relationships harbor "positive illusions" about each other: They emphasize their partners' virtues, and are motivated to overlook their faults. A certain level of favorable deception seems to be basic to happy relationships. Our study suggests that such a mechanism also applies to close parent-child relationships.

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