How Do Emotional Closeness and Support From Parents Relate to Israeli and German Students' Life Satisfaction?

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Abstract

This study explores the relationships of adult children with their parents, and their impact on the child's life satisfaction, in Israel and in Germany. Structural equation models tested three types of parental support (practical, emotional, and advice) and emotional closeness as predictors of the child's life satisfaction. Israeli students aged 21 to 40 years ($N = 590$) reported significantly more frequent social support and a higher degree of emotional closeness with their mothers than German students of the same age-group ($N = 535$). Differences between the Israeli and German samples were evident in the association of fathers' support and the child's emotional closeness. Significant positive associations were found between the degree of emotional closeness with mothers and fathers and the child's life satisfaction in both Israel and Germany. These findings suggest that emotional closeness continues to play an essential and universal role in the relationships between adult children and their parents.

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Emotional Closeness and Intergenerational Support

Relationships between parents and their adult children are among the most important adult social relationships, carrying lifelong emotional bonds (Merz, Schuengel, & Schulze, 2008). Studies show the endurance of strong attachment and reciprocity (Silverstein, Conroy, Wang, Giarrusso, & Bengtson, 2002), with mutual support and care being central to the attachment. Studies also reveal that, overall, parents and adult children share positive sentiments expressed as affectual solidarity (Silverstein et al., 2002; Swartz, 2009). Emotional support is among the most common social exchanges of parents with their adult children (Cheng, Birditt, Zarit, & Fingerman, 2013; Connidis, 2010; Hogan & Eggebeen, 1995), and it is known to have strong effects on well-being even among old-aged parents (Lang & Schütze, 2002). Whereas differences in instrumental support exist, because of factors such as gender, family structure, culture, race, and availability of resources, there are few differences in affective exchanges between parents and adult children (Cheng et al., 2013; Kalmijn & Saraceno, 2008; Levitzki, 2009; Lowenstein, 2007). Causes for intergenerational support include emotional bond, family solidarity, filial norms of obligation, moral capital, cultural beliefs, reciprocity norms, contingency, the children's needs (Fingerman, Miller, Birditt, & Zarit, 2009; Fingerman et al., 2011; Lowenstein, 2007), and altruistic motivations, as well as enhanced self-esteem and control (Roll & Litwin, 2010).

Parents continue to be an important source of emotional and financial support for adult children long after the latter have left home, while adult children can provide parents with emotional support and attend to their physical needs (Cheng et al., 2013; Furstenberg, 2010; Silverstein et al., 2002). Silverstein et al. (2002) suggested that endurance of family relationships into adult years goes beyond affection or obligation and includes ongoing mutual engagement and support guided by implicit social contracts that ensure long-term reciprocity. Research on parental involvement with grown children in recent years revealed that adult children reported more frequent contact and support, and a greater consensus of shared values with parents than was the case in prior decades (Bengtson, Biblarz, & Roberts, 2002; Fingerman, Cheng, Tighe, Birditt, & Zarit, 2012).

In a study examining parental involvement with college students in Germany, Hong Kong, the United States, and Korea, the students reported frequent contacts with parents, with both practical and emotional support being received from parents on a monthly basis (Fingerman et al., 2014). As for gender differences in the quality of relationships between adults and their parents, studies revealed that mothers gave more support to their grown children and reported stronger bonds with them than did fathers (Bucx, van Wel, & Knijn, 2012; Fingerman, Cheng, Tighe, et al., 2012; Fingerman et al., 2011; Hogan, Eggebeen, & Clogg, 1993; Lawton, Silverstein, & Bengtson, 1994).

There are also findings that observed within-family differences in parents' support given to adult children (e.g., Sutor, Pillemer, & Sechrist, 2006). Mothers were more likely to provide support to unmarried children, daughters, and children who lived nearby, had health problems, and/or had provided the mothers with support. Fingerman, Sechrist, and Birditt (2013) found, however, that there were no distinct differences in the intergenerational bond between sons and daughters and their parents, indicating that filial roles have begun to shift in ways that are less gender differentiated.

Moreover, cultural, structural, and social differences shape the relationships between parents and adult children, which differ across countries (Antonucci, Birditt, Sherman, & Trinh, 2011; Hank, 2007; Lowenstein, Katz, & Gur-Yaish, 2007; Martin-Lagos Lopez, 2014). There may be differences also in opportunities to attain higher education and achieve financial independence which may affect the frequency and type of parental support (Fingerman et al., 2011; Grundy & Henretta, 2006).

Well-Being and Relationships Between Adult Children and Their Parents

Many studies have established that close, supportive personal relationships enhance well-being (Berkman & Glass, 2000; Cohen, 2004; Cohen & Janicki-Deverts, 2009; Shaw, Krause, Chatters, Connell, & Ingersoll-Dayton, 2004; Stimpson, Tyler, & Hoyt, 2005). Other studies have shown that health and well-being are associated with emotional relationships between adult children and their parents (Lowenstein, 2007; Umberson, Crosnoe, & Reczek, 2010).

Affective support from parents might improve the overall well-being of their adult children (Roberts & Bengtson, 1993). Grown children reported better adjustment and well-being when they were receiving emotional support from their parents (Fingerman, Cheng, Tighe, et al., 2012; Fingerman, Cheng, Wesselman, et al., 2012; Fingerman et al., 2013). A study that examined the relationships between perceived social support and several

components of subjective well-being (positive and negative affect, as well as satisfaction with life) among college students in Iran, Jordan, and the United States revealed that perceived support from family significantly predicted well-being in each country (Brannan, Biswas-Diener, Mohr, Mortazavi, & Stein, 2012).

Cultural differences also play a role in the effects of support received from parents on the well-being of young adults. Kim, Sherman, and Taylor (2008) found that Asian college students demonstrated an aversion toward explicit types of parental support (e.g., advice, practical support, and financial support). Similar findings were found in a cross-cultural study by Fingerman et al. (2014): Students from Asian cultures received more parental support, but they felt less satisfied with that support than students from Western countries. Uchida, Kitayama, Mesquita, Reyes, and Morling (2008) compared the well-being of Asian and Euro-American students and nonstudents, and its association with perceived emotional support. Their studies suggest that culture moderates the effect of perceived emotional support on well-being and health. In Euro-American, "independent" cultural contexts, the effect of perceived emotional support on well-being tended to be weak, and it was entirely mediated by self-esteem. By contrast, in Asian, "interdependent" cultural contexts, the link between perceived emotional support and well-being was more direct. It seems that the social structure and the family culture reinforce interdependence in traditional societies and independence in modern Western societies. However, because studies reveal continuing emotional support and strong bonds between parents and children across cultures, it may indicate that what is common to the majority of families is psychological interdependence. There may be a material and practical independence combined with psychological interdependence and prevailing strong ties between parents and children (Kagitcibasi, 2005).

Interdependence according to the life span view of development (Baltes & Silverberg, 1994) encompasses both agency and attachment, independence and interdependence. It represents a balance between dependency, social connectedness, and independence/autonomy. Despite the importance of the developmental task of autonomy and separateness, relationship with parents can nourish autonomy. Integration of autonomy and relatedness was found in a study in Germany, where there was a positive association between autonomous attachment and positive relations of adolescents with parents (Grossman, Grossman, & Zimmermann, 1999). Interdependence, as suggested by Baltes and Silverberg (1994), is therefore the goal of mature adulthood and the basis of personal adjustment, life satisfaction, and generativity.

Kagitcibasi (2005) asserts that although autonomy and relatedness are human needs, some cultures may differentially prioritize the expression of

one of these. The Western world emphasizes individual agency and individuation. Thus, although support in the family may decrease in Western societies with economic development and as children mature, psychological interdependence and relatedness continue to be valued, suggesting that autonomy and relatedness coexist (Kagitcibasi, 2005). This is well demonstrated in the intergenerational family solidarity (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991) found across the five countries (Norway, England, Germany, Spain, and Israel) in the OASIS study (Lowenstein & Daatland, 2006).

As for the differences between the possible effects of support given by mothers and fathers on the child's well-being, a mixed pattern of results can be identified. On one hand, adult children's well-being was found to be more closely related to ties with mothers than to those with fathers (Umberson, 1992). Relationships between mothers and daughters are experienced as close and often more important than mother-son or father-son relationships (Baltes & Silverberg, 1994), and therefore, a stronger positive effect of mothers' support on adult children's well-being than of fathers' support is expected. On the other hand, the quality of relationships with fathers was more strongly associated with the offspring's well-being than the quality of relationships with mothers (Fingerman, Pitzer, Lefkowitz, Birditt, & Mroczek, 2008).

Students' Relationships With Their Parents

Increasing numbers of young adults are enrolling in universities worldwide (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). This prolonged education leads to prolonged intergenerational ties. Across nations, college students may be highly involved with their parents. Student status involves a continuation of adolescence in some respects, and dependency on parents may persist. Social support (e.g., interactions with family members, friends, professionals, and peers) is one of the most important protective factors in students' adjustment to a university setting (Solberg & Viliarreal, 1997).

In Western cultures, emerging adulthood includes exploration of identity, dependency on parents, and delayed responsibilities; therefore, parents' support to adult children who are in the process of achieving higher education continues (Arnett, 2000). In Asian cultures, however, individuals are less likely to experience a prolonged transition, and responsibilities toward others begin in early adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Studies examining the range of support middle-aged parents provide to grown children revealed that parents and grown children share personal concerns, offer advice, provide input on decisions, and engage in companionship, in addition to providing financial and practical help (Fingerman et al., 2009; Fingerman et al., 2011). According to these studies, parents offer nontangible forms of help (e.g., listening, advice)

more often than they provide finite resources (e.g., practical and financial support). Moreover, students typically receive greater support than nonstudents.

Cultural Values of Intergenerational Support

Cultural values regarding family support are relevant for individuals' behaviors (Becker, Beyene, Newsom, & Mayen, 2003; Fuligni, 2007; Lowenstein et al., 2007). Family norms as well as social and family policies are interrelated with family members' behavior and with intergenerational support patterns. Cultural beliefs around independence and responsibility may play an important role in parents' support. There are cultural components regarding the appropriateness of asking for and accepting intergenerational support (Brannen, 2003).

Studies in the United States (Fingerman et al., 2011), the United Kingdom (Grundy & Henretta, 2006), and other European nations found that parents provide more financial and intangible support to grown children than the reverse (Albertini, Kohli, & Vogel, 2007; Litwin, Vogel, Künemund, & Kohli, 2008) when parents are healthy. However, in Asia, rules of filial piety dictate respect and provision of support for parents even in young adulthood, and grown Asian children tend to avoid asking parents for support (Kim et al., 2008; Nelson, Badger, & Wu, 2004). Examining the relationships between parents and adult children in European countries, Hank (2007) revealed differences in familistic sociocultural patterns between Mediterranean countries (Cyprus, Italy, Greece, and Spain) and continental Europe. Dykstra and Fokkema (2011) established a typology of families with different levels of familyism, ranging from living nearby, frequent contact, and extensive parental support to autonomous support exchanges. In the Mediterranean countries with the familyism model (Hantrais, 2004), mothers are the most important source of support and care, even if children are living outside the home (Saraceno & Keck, 2010). Germany as well as France, Austria, and the United Kingdom have been included in a mixed model of familyism.

Considering that Israel is a Mediterranean country with a high level of familyism and Germany belongs to a more individualistic and autonomous cultural context, we assume that there are differences between the two countries in frequency of support and in the degree of emotional closeness between adult children and their parents, because of social, cultural, and geographical factors.

A comparative study on intergenerational exchange of net transfers (given support minus received support) in Israel and in Germany (Litwin et al., 2008) revealed that the trends in net transfer exchanges were largely similar

across both countries. However, a few differences emerged in the impact of socio-demographic variables on the exchange of support. The authors suggested that these differences may be explained by differences in family characteristics in the two countries.

The Israeli Family: Background and Intergenerational Relationships

Israel is a country built by successive waves of immigration. The pattern for the mainstream Israeli family developed from the meeting of the European and Afro-Asian immigrants, whose descendants constitute in about equal proportions most of Israel's Jewish population. It combines traditional Jewish family values and norms alongside modern features. Israel thus represents a unique blending of a very family-oriented society with a developed, modern economy. The country's dedication to the nuclear family concept is evident across a host of measures. According to the OECD, Israel has one of the highest marriage rates in the developed world, at 6.3 marriages per 1,000 inhabitants relative to the OECD average of 5.0 in 2009 (OECD, 2015).

The importance of having children in Israeli life is reflected in the country's birthrates, which are the highest in the developed world (3.0 children per woman of childbearing age relative to the OECD average of 1.7 in 2010 [OECD, 2015]).

A confluence of possible factors can help explain these family dynamics (Lewin-Epstein, Stier, Braun, & Langfeldt, 2000). First, the religious values prevalent in Israeli society promote fertility. A 2010 Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics survey indicated that more than half of the Jewish population considered themselves "traditional" or more religious (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Furthermore, many of the immigrants who came to Israel from North African and Middle Eastern societies have large families with strong family ties. Finally, it may be that Israel's continuous conflict with its Arab neighbors strengthens ties within and reliance on the family (Lewin-Epstein et al., 2000). The country's small size permits close geographic proximity, such that frequent personal contact and intrafamilial involvement and assistance (from babysitting through major financial help) are normative. Narratives from in-depth interviews with middle-aged parents about their relationships with their adult children (Levitzki, 2009) reflected an ongoing sense of caring, even in the face of intergenerational conflicts and internal ambivalence. Silverstein, Lowenstein, Gans, Fan, and Oyama (2013) examined the cultural context of intergenerational support among older Jewish and Arab parents living in Israel and found cultural differences in accepting and expecting different types of intergenerational support.

Roll and Litwin (2010), who examined the support provided by Jewish parents aged 50 years and older to their adult children, revealed that support given to adult children is common in Israel. Sixty-five percent of parents continue to support their adult children even after they leave home. Mothers provide more help to their adult children, and receive more help from them, than fathers. Levitzki (2009) also found that parents reported strong emotional bonds with their adult children, such that they play a significant role in giving them all kinds of support. Higher education is highly valued in Israel. Sixty percent of high school graduates enter a bachelor's program. However, the budget for support for students in higher education is only 11.5% as compared with the average of 21.4% in OECD countries (Abramson, 2014). Findings from different institutions of higher education have revealed that most students are employed and have to cope simultaneously with studying and working (Heiman & Kariv, 2004). According to a 2016 poll, 66% of students work at least part-time during their studies, and most of them live with their parents and attend college close to where they live (Tversky, 2016). Students' dormitories are very limited in number.

The German Family: Background and Intergenerational Relationships

In Germany, there has been considerable change with regard to family values and norms over the six decades since World War II. In the 1950s, with the rise of the postwar economy, a new emphasis on family values emerged, with increasing birthrates that peaked in the early 1960s. Since then, birthrates have continuously decreased in Germany (Destatis, 2017). Today, the fertility rate in Germany has reached 1.5 births per woman, which is still among the lowest fertility rates in Europe and modern Western societies (OECD, 2014).

With regard to religious values, Germany is a secular society with nearly one-third of German citizens reporting no religious affiliation (i.e., 32.6%) and about 55% of citizens belonging to a Christian church (i.e., Protestant or Catholic). It has been argued that the secular trend away from religion in Germany also weakens family ties, which appear to be stronger in regions that are characterized by a higher percentage of adherents to religion. However, despite such secular trends in Germany, family values remain relatively strong. For example, an overwhelming majority of children (i.e., >70%) live together in one household with their married parents. Over the past decades, the number of blended families and new forms of living communities have increased, but mostly in urban regions. In Germany, it seems that the more traditional family norms in rural areas coexist with the modern

blended lifestyles in the urban regions. However, on the whole, marriage remains a common family value in Germany. According to the OECD, Germany has a marriage rate of 4.8 marriages per 10,000 inhabitants, which reflects the average value in the developed world (OECD, 2014). As in many modern societies with a long life expectancy, German families often experience caregiver responsibility for one or more older family members who are in need of help or care. There is strong evidence that the intergenerational relationships within families of three or four generations remain strong and supportive with regard to geographical proximity, frequency of contact, closeness, and supportive exchanges (e.g., Hoff, 2007; Lang & Rohr, 2012). Although not living in the same household, adult children often live in geographical proximity to their parents and report close emotional ties and mutual support (Nave-Herz, 2002). Parental transfers have also become increasingly salient for younger birth cohorts in Germany because of the decline in real wages and the growth of unemployment since the 1980s (Kurz 2004). As for higher education in Germany, about 42% percent of young adults graduate from high school, and the majority of these graduates (56% in 2012) enter a bachelor's program at a German university. More than half of the students (i.e., 56%) at German higher education institutions work in part-time employment during their studies. About 17% of students live in one household with parents or other relatives. Most students live in shared flats (28.6%) or together with a partner or a spouse (22.7%). About 18% of students live alone, and only 12% live in dormitories (Statista, 2013).

In sum, Germany has a somewhat stronger welfare regime than Israel. This is reflected in that country's higher public social expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product and the lower percentage of its population below the relative poverty line (in terms of posttax, posttransfer equivalence income). Israel, in turn, has a younger population and larger family networks (Litwin et al., 2008). Although previous studies examining the exchange of financial and practical support between older adults and their parents in Israel and in Germany (Litwin et al., 2008) did not observe major differences, the proportion of filial obligation was higher in Israel than in Germany. Moreover, the level of affection in family solidarity in Germany was found to be relatively low (Lowenstein & Daatland, 2006). This is also in accordance with findings that social welfare regimes, public policies, as well as social, historical, and cultural factors generate differences in parent-child relationships across nations (e.g., Kohli, 1999; Kohli, Albertini, & Kühnemund, 2010). In line with these assumptions and findings, we expected differences with regard to predictors of closeness and support exchanges in the relationships between young adult children and their middle-aged parents in Israel and in Germany.

The Present Study

The present study examines the relationships of adult children with their parents in Israel and in Germany. In particular, we explore the emotional closeness between adult children and their parents and the frequency of the support adult children receive from their parents. We investigate the association of these variables with Israeli and the German adult children's life satisfaction. Based on the reviewed literature that emphasized the stronger filial obligation in Israel as compared with Germany, we expected higher emotional closeness and support received from parents in Israel as compared with Germany. In a family-oriented society such as Israel, where the strong filial obligation and emotional bonds between adult children and their parents play a significant role, we expected to find stronger associations between exchange of support and emotional closeness as compared with Germany. Moreover, emotional closeness with parents might have a stronger impact on adult children's lives in Israel than in Germany, such that the closer children feel to their parents, the more satisfied they are with their lives. Therefore, these were our hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Adult children in Israel, as compared with adult children in Germany, would report stronger emotional closeness with their parents and more support received from their parents.

Hypothesis 2: Frequency of support received from parents would be more strongly and positively associated with emotional closeness with parents among adult children in Israel as compared with adult children in Germany.

Hypothesis 3: There would be a stronger positive association between emotional closeness with parents and adult children's life satisfaction in Israel as compared with Germany.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants in both countries were recruited from colleges and universities. Students from the behavioral science classes were asked to complete web-based questionnaires and recruit other students for the study. The survey was translated into English and back-translated into Hebrew and German by native speakers of the language who were fluent in English. We limited the sample by excluding participants who were older than 40 years (32 participants in the German sample and 162 participants in the Israeli sample). Because the Israeli sample was composed of adult children aged 21 years and

older, we excluded from the German sample 101 participants who were younger than 21. The final samples included 535 German adult children, all of them were natives, born in Germany, and 590 Israeli adult children, 87.1% of whom were born in Israel.

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the German and Israeli samples. The participants answered questions about each of their living parents and reported on their relationships with their mothers and their fathers separately. More female than male students participated. The students were 21 to 40 years old, most of them had two living parents, they were mostly single, and they reported being healthy. The Israeli sample comprised more females, and they were slightly older than the German participants. More Israeli participants lived with their parents, were married, and reported working and being healthy as compared with the German participants. On average, the parents of the participants were in their mid-50s, and most of them were married, employed, and healthy. The Israeli mothers and fathers were slightly older than the German mothers and fathers. Relatively more Israeli parents were working and in better health than the German parents. Moreover, more German fathers had an academic degree as compared with the Israeli fathers.

Measures

Parental Support. The participants completed the Intergenerational Support Index (ISI; Fingerman et al., 2011). The ISI assesses six types of family support: (1) practical, (2) emotional, (3) advice, (4) companionship, (5) financial assistance, and (6) listening to others talk about daily events, rated 1 (*less than once a year or not at all*), 2 (*once a year*), 3 (*a few times a year*), 4 (*monthly*), 5 (*a few times a month*), 6 (*weekly*), 7 (*a few times a week*), and 8 (*daily*). Some of these items (e.g., financial, practical, and emotional support) have been used in cross-national studies in Europe and Israel (e.g., Albertini et al., 2007; Lowenstein et al., 2007). The participants completed the six items for how much support they received from and provided to each of their parents, their mothers and fathers. In the present study, we used only three items regarding the support received from each parent: (1) practical support ("How often does your mother/father give you practical assistance? Practical assistance involves help fixing something around the house, helping with household chores, running an errand, or transportation."), (2) emotional support ("How often does your mother/father give you emotional support? Emotional support involves listening to your problems or being available when you are upset."), and (3) advice ("How often does your mother/father give

Table 1. Background Characteristics of the Participants and Their Parents.

Variable	German sample (N = 535)			Israeli sample (N = 590)			Difference test
	Range	Mean (SD)	Proportion (%)	Range	Mean (SD)	Proportion (%)	
<i>Participant characteristics</i>							
Age, years	21-40	25.08 (4.02)	69	21-40	25.68 (3.03) ^a	81	$t(992.78) = -2.79^{**}$ $\chi^2(1) = 21.88^{***}$
Female			8			55.2 ^b	$\chi^2(1) = 282.92^{***}$
Coreidence with parents			6.9			15.4	$\chi^2(1) = 20.14^{***}$
Partnered ^c			53.3			83 ^d	$\chi^2(1) = 112.33^{***}$
Works			87.1			98.8	$\chi^2(1) = 61.09^{***}$
Favorable health status ^e							
<i>Mother characteristics</i>							
Age, years	39-76	53.13 (6.27) ^f	84 ^h	38-79	54.69 (6.47) ^g	84.4 ⁱ	$t(1082) = -4.04^{***}$ $\chi^2(1) = 0.02$
Partnered ^c			39.7 ⁱ			44 ^k	$\chi^2(1) = 2.07$
Academic degree			63.7 ^j			75.9 ^m	$\chi^2(1) = 19.25^{***}$
Works			73.3 ⁿ			88.9 ^o	$\chi^2(1) = 43.91^{***}$
Favorable health status ^e							
<i>Father characteristics</i>							
Age, years	42-85	55.84 (6.78) ^p	89.7 ^r	41-78	57.56 (6.05) ^q	90 ^s	$t(936) = -4.11^{***}$ $\chi^2(1) = 0.02$
Partnered ^c			54.9 ^t			40.7 ^u	$\chi^2(1) = 18.93^{***}$
Academic degree			65.8 ^v			85.2 ^w	$\chi^2(1) = 49.16^{***}$
Works			70.5 ^x			87.3 ^y	$\chi^2(1) = 40.62^{***}$
Favorable health status ^e							

Note. All the data were reported by the child participant. Ns differ because of missing values. SD = standard deviation.

^aN = 558. ^bN = 589. ^cPartnered" includes married, remarried, or living with a partner; "unpartnered" includes single, divorced, widowed, or separated. ^dN = 560. ^e"Unfavorable health status" includes fair or poor health status; "favorable health status" includes good, very good, or excellent health status. ^fN = 511. ^gN = 573. ^hN = 513. ⁱN = 365. ^jN = 517. ^kN = 557. ^lN = 518. ^mN = 576. ⁿN = 517. ^oN = 427. ^pN = 511. ^qN = 436. ^rN = 360. ^sN = 439. ^tN = 499. ^uN = 439. ^vN = 519. ^wN = 434. ^xN = 511.

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

you advice? Advice involves helping with a decision or suggesting things you could do.”). The three items that were chosen are clear and distinct dimensions of support received from parents.

Emotional Closeness. The participants were asked to rate the degree of emotional closeness with each of their parents on a single-item measure (“Taking everything into consideration, how close do you feel to your mother/father?”) ranging from 1 (*low*) to 5 (*high*).¹

Life Satisfaction. This single-item measure was constructed to assess life satisfaction as the cognitive aspect of subjective well-being (Diener, Gohm, Suh, & Oishi, 2000). Life satisfaction was assessed by the item “All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?” The participants answered the question using a 10-point scale ranging from 1 (*dissatisfied*) to 10 (*satisfied*). In the present study, the scale was modified to a 1 to 5 scale.²

Analytic Strategy

To compare the mean scores of the study variables across the two samples, we conducted one-way ANCOVAs (analyses of covariance) with culture (Israel vs. Germany) as the independent variable and each of the study variables as dependent variables. In these analyses, we controlled for child’s age (in years), child’s gender (man/woman), child’s couplehood (partnered/not partnered), and whether living with either mother or father, or both parents (yes/no).

To compare the regression paths of the study variables between the Israeli and German samples, four structural equation models were created, one for relationships with mothers and one for relationships with fathers in each sample. The general model is presented in Figure 1. Each of the models controlled for child’s age (in years), child’s gender (man/woman), child’s couplehood (partnered/not partnered), and whether living with either mother or father, or both parents (yes/no). The controlled variables were entered into the model as exogenous variables associated with each of the support variables, emotional closeness, and life satisfaction. Two path comparisons were conducted: (1) between the Israeli mothers and German mothers and (2) between the Israeli fathers and German fathers (see Table 3). The path comparisons were conducted by constraining each path to be equal across the two models and observing the chi-square change between the unconstrained and the constrained models.

Figure 1. The general model.

Results

Differences in Frequency of Support and Degree of Emotional Closeness With Parents Between the Israeli and German Samples (Hypothesis 1)

Table 2 presents an overview of the mean differences between the Israeli and German mothers as well as between the Israeli and German fathers with regard to our first hypothesis.

Frequency of Support. Overall, the Israeli adult children reported significantly more frequent support received from each of their parents as compared with the German adult children across all three types of support (practical support, emotional support, and advice). The differences in frequency of emotional support were the largest, with strong effect sizes.

Emotional Closeness. The Israeli adult children reported a significantly higher degree of emotional closeness with their mothers than the German adult children. However, the effect size of the difference was rather small. No significant difference was found in the degree of emotional closeness of the Israeli and German adult children with their fathers.

Associations of Frequency of Support and Degree of Emotional Closeness With Parents in the Israeli and German Samples (Hypothesis 2)

Table 3 presents the comparison between the structural equation models in the Israeli and German samples with regard to parental support and emotional closeness.

Table 2. Results of ANCOVA Analyses Testing the Mean Differences Between the German and Israeli Samples.

Variable	Mothers				Fathers			
	Mean (SD)		Test statistic	Effect size	Mean (SD)		Test statistic	Effect size
	German sample (N = 535)	Israeli sample (N = 590)			German sample (N = 535)	Israeli sample (N = 590)		
Practical support ^a	3.76 (0.10)	4.51 (0.10)	$F(1, 1,001) = 24.05^{***}$	$\eta_p^2 = .02$	3.82 (0.10)	4.61 (0.10)	$F(1, 889) = 25.43^{***}$	$\eta_p^2 = .03$
Emotional support ^a	4.58 (0.09)	6.77 (0.09)	$F(1, 1,001) = 266.62^{***}$	$\eta_p^2 = .21$	3.54 (0.11)	5.33 (0.10)	$F(1, 889) = 124.60^{***}$	$\eta_p^2 = .12$
Advice ^a	4.58 (0.09)	6.35 (0.09)	$F(1, 1,001) = 184.34^{***}$	$\eta_p^2 = .16$	4.21 (0.11)	5.36 (0.10)	$F(1, 889) = 54.21^{***}$	$\eta_p^2 = .06$
Emotional closeness ^b	3.94 (0.06)	4.19 (0.06)	$F(1, 939) = 8.53^{**}$	$\eta_p^2 = .01$	3.71 (0.06)	3.76 (0.06)	$F(1, 866) = 0.25$	$\eta_p^2 = .00$

Note. Results are based on the children's reports of parental support frequency as well as emotional closeness with each of their parents. The analyses controlled for child's age (in years), child's gender (man/woman), child's couplehood (partnered/not partnered), and whether living with either mother or father, or both parents (yes/no). Means and standard deviations are adjusted. ANCOVA = analysis of covariance.

^aRated on a scale of 1 (less than once a year or never) to 8 (daily). ^bRated on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high).

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

Table 3. Structural Equation Modeling Predicting Life Satisfaction of Adult Child From Emotional Closeness and Support Received From Parents.

Regression path	Standardized regression coefficient (β)				Chi-square change ($\Delta\chi^2$)	
	German mothers ^a	German fathers ^b	Israeli mothers ^c	Israeli fathers ^d	German mothers $\neq$ Israeli mothers	German fathers $\neq$ Israeli fathers
Practical support $\rightarrow$ emotional closeness	-.00	.11*	-.08	-.01	1.19	3.55
Emotional support $\rightarrow$ emotional closeness	.59***	.48***	.39***	.34***	1.40	5.74*
Advice $\rightarrow$ emotional closeness	.13*	.13**	.26***	.37***	3.27	7.05**
Emotional closeness $\rightarrow$ life satisfaction	.18***	.19***	.17***	.21***	0.69	0.40

Note. The model includes maximum likelihood estimates with maximum likelihood missing data imputations. The models controlled for child's age (in years), child's gender (man/woman), child's couplehood (partnered/not partnered), and whether living with either mother or father, or both parents (yes/no). The controlled variables were entered into the model as exogenous variables associated with each of the support variables, emotional closeness, and life satisfaction. Entries for the last two columns are chi-square differences ($\Delta\chi^2$) between an unconstrained model and a model constraining a certain path to be equal across the two groups.

^a $\chi^2 = 3.96$, df (degrees of freedom) = 3, $p = .266$, CMIN/ $df = 1.32$, RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) = .024. ^b $\chi^2 = 1.25$, $df = 3$, $p = .742$, CMIN/ $df = 0.42$, RMSEA = .000.

^c $\chi^2 = 10.44$, $df = 3$, $p = .015$, CMIN/ $df = 3.48$, RMSEA = .065. ^d $\chi^2 = 20.24$, $df = 3$, $p = .000$, CMIN/ $df = 6.75$, RMSEA = .099.

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

Practical Support. No differences were found between the Israeli and German samples in the associations between frequency of practical support and the degree of emotional closeness with mothers or fathers. However, a significant positive association was found between practical support and emotional closeness with German fathers, whereas no such association was found with Israeli fathers.

Emotional Support. A stronger positive association was found between the frequency of emotional support of fathers and emotional closeness in

Germany as compared with Israel. No difference was found in the association between frequency of emotional support and degree of emotional closeness between the Israeli and German mothers. Overall, there were strong and significant associations between the frequency of emotional support and the degree of emotional closeness with fathers and with mothers in both samples.

Advice. A stronger positive association was found between the frequency of advice received from fathers and emotional closeness in the Israeli sample as compared with the German sample. No such difference was found with regard to the Israeli and German mothers. Overall, there were significant and positive associations between advice and emotional closeness with mothers and with fathers in both countries.

Associations of Degree of Emotional Closeness and the Children's Life Satisfaction in the Israeli and German Samples (Hypothesis 3)

Table 3 presents the comparison between the structural equation models in the Israeli and German samples with regard to emotional closeness and life satisfaction. No differences were found in the associations between the degree of emotional closeness with both mothers and fathers and the child's life satisfaction in the Israeli and German samples. Overall, significant positive associations were found between the degree of emotional closeness with both mothers and fathers and the child's life satisfaction in both countries.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationships of adult children with their parents and their impact on the child's life satisfaction comparatively in Israel and in Germany. We examined the degree of emotional closeness of the Israeli and German adult children with their mothers and fathers, the frequency of three types of parental support received, and the adult children's life satisfaction.

We expected that the different cultural and social components of the two countries would be differentially manifested in the intergenerational relationships. Thus, in Israel, being a small and more traditional, family-oriented society with a unique historical, cultural, and geographical background, the relationships between adult children and their parents would involve more support from parents and would be characterized by stronger emotional closeness than the relationships of the German adult children and their

parents. Moreover, we expected that in comparison with Germany, emotional closeness in Israel would be more closely linked with receiving social support from parents and that emotional closeness would be more strongly associated with the child's life satisfaction.

In our first hypothesis, we predicted higher frequency of support and higher degree of emotional closeness with parents in Israel as compared with Germany. In accordance with our expectations, the Israeli adult children reported significantly more frequent support from their mothers and from their fathers than the German adult children, across all three modes of support (practical support, emotional support, and advice). The Israeli adult children also reported a significantly higher degree of emotional closeness with their mothers than the German adult children. No difference was found in emotional closeness with fathers between the Israeli and German samples.

These findings may be explained by the cultural and social differences between Israel and Germany. As suggested by Brannen (2003), cultural beliefs may play an important role in the relationships between parents and their children as well as in the exchange of support and in the appropriateness of asking for help and accepting intergenerational support. Israel is considered a more family-oriented society than Germany, with a strong emphasis on intense intergenerational relationships and support (Levitzki, 2009; Lowenstein & Daatland, 2006; Roll & Litwin, 2010). Moreover, the continuous threat to Israel's national security may enhance familistic behavior, because anxiety and awareness of personal danger are likely to raise the individual's need for intimate affiliation and a secure emotional base (Peres & Katz, 1981). Having a strong affectual solidarity, it is not surprising that adult children in Israel reported higher frequency of support received from their parents. It is interesting to note that adult children in Israel reported a higher degree of closeness with their mothers than adult children in Germany but no differences were found with regard to emotional closeness with fathers. Such findings may reflect the different gender roles in Germany and in Israel. For example, gender roles among young adult and still childless Germans today are strongly egalitarian rather than traditionally defined (e.g., Lamprecht, Wagner, & Lang, 2008; Williams & Best, 1990).

In Israel, although the country as a whole has adopted an egalitarian ideology, with an egalitarian educational system and opportunities open to men and women alike, a notable portion of the population still adhere to traditional values (Lavee & Katz, 2003). More than a third of the men (39%) and about a third of the women (29%) in Israel express traditional values (Gross, 1999). Moreover, women in Israel are more invested in raising their children and spend more time than men at home (Moore, 2012). These findings may explain the strong emotional closeness to mothers in Israel.

In Hypothesis 2, we compared the associations of frequency of support and the degree of emotional closeness with parents in the Israeli and German samples. No difference was found in the association between frequency of practical support and degree of emotional closeness between the Israeli and German mothers and fathers. These findings may indicate that the relationships between receiving practical support and emotional closeness of adult children with their parents are not culture specific.

A stronger positive association was found between the frequency of emotional support of fathers and emotional closeness in Germany as compared with Israel. No difference was found in the association between frequency of emotional support and the degree of emotional closeness with mothers between the Israeli and German samples. These findings may be explained by the relatively more egalitarian gender roles in Germany as compared with Israel, where fathers, like mothers, are involved more often in expressive relationships within the family. Overall, there were strong and significant associations between frequency of emotional support and the degree of emotional closeness with mothers and with fathers in both samples, supporting the notion that emotional support is important to adult children.

As for advice and emotional closeness, in both countries, significant positive associations were found between the frequency of advice received from mothers and fathers and emotional closeness with them. A stronger positive association was found between the frequency of advice received from fathers and emotional closeness in Israel as compared with Germany. No such difference was found with regard to the Israeli and German mothers. It appears that relationships with mothers may universally be more "protected" or nonnegotiable, as was suggested by Lowenstein and Daatland (2006) in their study of exchange of support between older adults and aging parents in Germany and Israel. In the OASIS study, emotional closeness with mothers was not substantially associated with help to mothers, although it was a factor in help to fathers. The authors suggested that exchange with fathers may be more dependent on compatibility, duty, and needs.

As for cultural differences between Israel and Germany, these findings may once more indicate some differences. Respect for parents is strongly valued in Israel, as manifested in the fifth commandment of the Jewish tradition: "Honor thy father and thy mother." Living in a more traditional and familial society, where men are regarded as the head of their families, as well as because many Israeli men are respected for their long army service and reserve duties, adult children in Israel may be more likely to appreciate advice given by their fathers as compared with adult children in Germany.

In a comparative study of Indian and German adolescents (Inglehart, Basañez, & Moreno, 1998), the majority of German respondents valued

independence as important. In a more recent comparative study (Albert, Trommsdorff, & Mishra, 2007), the German adolescents showed tendencies to be more anxious regarding their mothers' use of control as compared with the Indian adolescents. The authors suggested that parental control in Germany may be a source of conflict for adolescents striving for autonomy in a culture of independence. The same conflict may exist regarding advice from parents, which can be experienced by German young adults as challenging or interfering with their independence. A study of 902 German adults aged 20 to 86 years and their relationships with their parents, partners, siblings, and friends (Buhl, 2009) revealed evidence for gender difference in child-parent relationships. Relationships with mothers, as with siblings, were seen as supportive and more equal than relationships with fathers and friends. Relationships with German mothers seem "peer-like," as suggested by Arnett (2000) and Smollar and Youniss (1989). However, relationships of German adult children and their fathers were perceived as more powerful. Buhl (2009) argued that such gender differences may be attributed to the fact that relationships with mothers are characterized by a higher degree of connectedness, intimacy, companionship, and support. Fathers, however, appear to "remain fathers instead of turning into friends" (p. 247), even in middle and late adulthood. This may explain some of the differences found in our study regarding German mothers' and fathers' advice and emotional closeness.

Israeli students, however, living in a Western culture with a mixture of modernity and tradition, may be more inclined for interdependence and therefore may feel better with their parents' advice. A somewhat different explanation for these findings may be that in Israel young adults mature earlier than in Germany because most of the young adults begin army service at the age of 18 years, which lasts at least 2 years. The army service is a significant developmental phase when young adults are exposed to challenging experiences that may enhance processes of separation and individuation. Thus, at the age of 21 years and older, they may be relatively more mature, less rebellious, and more attentive to their fathers' advice than German adult children.

This is in line with the life span developmental perspective (Baltes & Silverberg, 1994), whereby in adulthood dependency and independence seem to meld into interdependency, requiring agency and autonomy. As a result, highly developed autonomous individuals may have also a highly developed sense of caring and respect for others. They can thus enjoy both receiving and giving advice, reflecting also the willingness to help and care and be helped and cared for, which empowers both the self and the other (Gilligan, 1982).

Another explanation relates to the fact that there is an external and continuous threat to national security in Israel, and the fact that healthy males in

Israel are required by law to do reserve duty every year adds a unique dimension to Israeli life in general and to male roles in the family in particular (Sagi, Koren, & Weinburg, 1987). The relationships between adult children and their fathers in Israel might therefore become more reciprocal and equal. It thus appears from these results that whereas adult children in Israel feel closer to their fathers when they receive advice from them their German counterparts' relationships with their fathers rely more heavily on the emotional support they receive from them.

Significant positive associations were found in both countries between the degree of emotional closeness with both mothers and fathers, and the children's life satisfaction. These findings support previous studies showing that close personal relationships contribute to well-being (Roberts & Bengtson, 1993) and that, in particular, emotional support from parents is associated with adult children's well-being (Fingerman, Cheng, Tighe, et al., 2012; Fingerman, Cheng, Wesselman, et al., 2012; Fingerman et al., 2013). This also indicates that emotional closeness is a strong and autonomous component in the parent-child relationship that adds to the child's well-being. This contribution seems robust and unrelated to the cultural differences between Israel and Germany, thus supporting the idea that interdependence is universal and in the nature of adult development (Baltes & Silverberg, 1994)

Limitations

The cross-national comparison contains inherent limitations (Cohen, 2007) where comparable samples across nations are difficult to obtain. The students from Israel may have differed from the students from Germany in ways that elicit greater parental support. Moreover, the students from both countries do not represent the multicultural and multistratified nature of these societies. Therefore, the convenience sampling method of this study limits the external validity of the comparison between the two nations. We tried to address this issue by using similar methods of data collection and controlling for socio-demographic variables. The comparability between the samples was also limited by differences between the Israeli and German item ranges of the scales assessing emotional closeness and life satisfaction. This limitation was addressed by adjusting these scales to the same ranges in both samples. The single-item measures of these variables present another limitation of this study. Multi-item measurement is needed to improve the measurement of emotional closeness and life satisfaction in future research. Moreover, the use of self-report assessments by the children only is subject to social desirability. These results may not be similar to what the respondents' parents may report if they were asked to answer similar questions regarding their support

to their sons and daughters (Cheng et al., 2013; Lin, 2008; Zarit, Birditt, & Fingerman, 2014). Examining reports of parents of adult children may test the validity of the present study's results. Finally, the cross-sectional method applied by the current study does not allow for causal inference.

Conclusion

In sum, our study indicates that emotional closeness between adult children and their parents is tied to the support received from the parents and the well-being of the children in both Israel and Germany, and it continues to play a significant role in the relationships even after the children grow up and leave home. With regard to the associations of support received from each parent and the child's emotional closeness, all of the differences between the Israeli and German samples were evident in the father, but not in the mother, support. This may indicate that emotional closeness with the father is more culturally dependent on the support received from the parent than emotional closeness with the mother. The most striking difference between the two samples was the stronger contribution of advice to emotional closeness with fathers in Israel as compared with Germany. Alongside the consistent findings that showed more frequent support from, as well as higher levels of emotional closeness with parents in Israel as compared with Germany, this finding may shed light on the closer nature of the adult child–parent relationships in Israel as compared with Germany.

Cultural, social, historical, and geographical factors may explain some of the differences in the type of support between the two nations (Kohli, 1999; Kohli et al., 2010), but in general, the differences are minor and there are more similarities than differences, supporting the notion that the quality of the relationships between children and their parents is universal. Moreover, it seems that emotional closeness can be considered emotional capital, a significant component in the relationships of adult children and their parents that explains the frequency of support as well as the children's life satisfaction.

Since the majority of our sample were students who are in the process of academic and professional development and in a phase of life where they may be more dependent on their parents' support, it is interesting to note the significant role that emotional closeness plays in their well-being.

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Notes

1. In the Israeli questionnaire, this item was rated on a 1 to 10 scale. The Israeli scale was converted into a 1 to 5 scale to correspond with the German scale.
2. In the German questionnaire, this item was rated on a 1 to 10 scale. The German scale was converted into a 1 to 5 scale to correspond with the Israeli. scale.

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