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## **Intergenerational Relations between English Students, Graduates Living at Home, and their Parents**

Generational inequalities and the potential for conflict first became an issue for public debate in the USA in the 1980s, when the burden of public spending on pensions and health care for older people was highlighted (Binstock 1994). Older people were typically characterised as a homogenous, self-interested and unproductive group, draining the resources of the generation below them. Inequalities between younger and older people were not as strong a feature of the UK debate until much more recently.

Since the sharp decline in economic activity following the financial crisis of 2007-9, considerably more attention has been paid to the position (and life-cycle prospects) of young adults in the UK, which has been contrasted unfavourably to the position of older people. Clapham et al. (2013) have pointed out the difficulties they face in the housing market with considerable barriers to home-ownership, while Hills et al. (2015) have shown the extent to which young people in their 20s 'lost out' between 2006-08 and 2010-12 in terms of jobs, hourly wages and weekly earnings, and wealth, compared with those aged 55-64. Politicians and commentators have stressed growing intergenerational inequalities (Willetts 2010; Beckett 2010; Howker and Malik 2010), often emphasising the greater political power exercised by the older, large 'Baby Boom' generation (Willetts 2010; see also Berry 2014; van Parijs 1998), and its selfishness. Beckett (2010: 190) offered the following observation: 'The Baby Boomers kicked away their children's legs, and now they sneer at them for being lame'.

It is important to stress that there is no consensus about what constitutes the baby boom generation. Willetts (2010) dates the birth of this generation to 1945-65, and Beckett (2010) to 1945-55. However, Evandrou (1997) has identified two waves of baby boom births. The first – between 1946 and 1950 - was born in a period of post-war austerity, but entered the labour market during a period of relative

prosperity. The second, larger wave was born between 1961 and 1965 into prosperity, but entered the labour market in a period of recession. Thus by this definition, baby boomers are unlikely to be a homogenous group; nor is there sufficient evidence to argue that they constitute a 'welfare generation' (Hills, 1995; Bradshaw and Holmes, 2013).

The public debate about intergenerational fairness in regard to social policies has been dominated by the costs of public transfers, mainly in the form of pensions, and health and social care costs (albeit that the last of these is means-tested), alongside the large increase in government debt, and the burden these impose on the younger generation, many of whom are also already carrying debts incurred as students and who cannot see how they will be able to become home owners (e.g. BBC 2013). Some commentators have used 'generational accounting' – which aims to indicate the average remaining lifetime burden imposed by the government on members of a particular generation (Auerbach et al. 1992) – to press for more 'equal' treatment of younger people by radically restructuring social programmes (see especially Kotlikoff 1992; Kotlikoff and Burns 2004, 2012; XXXX), which would limit public expenditure but also level down future entitlements for the younger generation.

But intergenerational cash transfers also take place in the private sphere of the family. American sociological research has sought to show the extent of family solidarity in the face of fears about family conflict and decline (e.g. Silverstein and Bengston 1997), and European research has shown that while the direction of cash flow in the public sphere is broadly upwards, the reverse is the case with cash transfers in the family (Kohli 1999). Yet, while we know a considerable amount about the relationship between adults of working age and older people (particularly in terms of carework), we know relatively little about the nature of relationships between young adults and their (usually working age) parents.

We shall flesh out the issues raised by the arguments about the nature of the intergenerational contract in relation to both the state and the family, and then focus

on the evidence regarding financial support provided by two exploratory, qualitative studies involving relatively homogenous and predominantly advantaged samples of first, students and their parents, and of second, graduates returning to the parental home. In the first case, the position of English students has been affected by a significant change in public policy resulting in the imposition of tuition fees and loans for tuition and maintenance, and the debts that students are assumed by policymakers to carry with them into the workplace. In the second case, young graduates have been affected by the external factors identified by those commenting on intergenerational fairness, in particular: high housing costs, the lack of availability of 'graduate jobs', and low wages. The experiences of the parents of both groups of young adults are likely to have been very different.

There has been a considerable amount of research on the policy changes affecting students, in particular student loan debt (e.g. Bachan 2014, Harrison et al. 2015, Christie and Munro 2003) and the structural changes affecting graduates, including reduced access to home ownership (e.g. Clapham et al. 2010; McKee, 2012; Sage et al. 2013; Stone et al., 2011). Indeed, Doling and Ronald (2010) stress that an emerging feature of what they term 'asset-based' welfare systems (involving the accumulation of property assets that increase in value over time) is a divide between different generations of home buyers with the market advantage of one generation disadvantaging another. Our focus is on family relations and support in the context of major policy and structural change. We ask about the support parents provide to their young adult children and suggest that both the balance between public and private (in the sense of familial) provision is fragile, and that tilting the balance away from the state and towards the family is as (or more) likely to exacerbate the issue of intra- as inter-generational inequality.

The Intergenerational Contract

The idea of an intergenerational contract is complicated (Laslett 1992). In terms of the role of the state it is, for example, difficult to argue that there can be a *strong* contract between those of working age and succeeding generations (let alone generations to come). More pragmatically, it is difficult to bind succeeding generations into those social programmes that are funded largely on a pay-as-you-go basis. Nevertheless, Beveridge's (1942) idea of the welfare state encompassed security from 'the cradle to the grave'. This may involve mechanisms to enable the individual to save in order to cover risks over his or her life cycle, or to redistribute resources between generations (as well as between the sexes, social classes and ethnic groups). For Willetts (2010), the macro-level intergenerational contract grew out of the support family members of different ages give to each other on a reciprocal basis. However, as Walker (1996) has pointed out in respect of the obligation to care for older family members, the micro-level intergenerational contract between family members involves a delicate balance between reciprocity, affection and duty (see also Künemund 2008). The relationship between the intergenerational contracts at the macro- and micro-levels is a crucial dimension of the debate over the pursuit of greater intergenerational fairness.

(i) *The macro-level: the state*

Contributors to the debate about intergenerational fairness agree that some notion of an intergenerational contract underpins intergenerational transfers made by welfare states. Welfare states act as (compulsory) savings banks and to redistribute resources between different people (Barr 2001). However, as Falkingham and Hills (1995) have shown, considerably more money is accounted for by life-time transfers (the savings bank function of the welfare state) than by transfers between generations (the Robin Hood function of the welfare state). Furthermore, the plea by many commentators fearful of intergenerational conflict to treat generations equally in the sense of 'the same' ignores what has hitherto been a correct assumption: that there will be economic growth and that future generations will be better off (XXXX).

Both the savings bank and the Robin Hood functions of the welfare state require successive generations to 'keep the faith': each generation must honour its obligations to the generations above and below it. The savings bank function depends on a level of trust in social policies that has become more fragile as policies, such as the financing of higher education, have become ever more subject to policy changes that transfer more responsibility for provision onto individual recipients and/or their families (Blyth, 2013; Aheir, 2000). While there is evidence of considerable intergenerational solidarity to date (Duffy et al. 2013), this may diminish in face of (i) policy change that seeks to reduce public expenditure and render individuals and families more responsible for their own welfare, and (ii) structural changes in housing and labour markets, which may make young adults as well as commentators fear that not only will they be the first generation not do better than their parents, but that they may not even do as well.

In England, both the introduction of student loans to cover the costs of higher education, and changes in the structure of the housing and labour markets has had an impact on families. Privatisation has multiple meanings and takes many forms (Starr 1988), but one of the most important is the 'great risk shift' away from the state and toward the private sphere of the family (Hacker 2006) in line with neo-liberal ideas about the importance of individual and family responsibility (Plant, 2009). The increase in tuition fees to £3000<sup>1</sup> was justified in terms of the benefits that accrue to the individual: 'The benefits of higher education for individuals are far-reaching. On average, graduates get better jobs and earn more than those without higher education' (DfES 2003: 4). However the shift from state to individual responsibility has in practice been a shift to both individuals *and* families wherever parents are willing and able to offer financial support. Similarly housing costs and the effects of the recession on graduate employment have prolonged graduates' dependence on parents, again where they are willing and able.

(ii) *The micro-level: the family*

There is a strong link between the notion of a macro-level contract between individual and state, and a micro-level contract in the family (Walker 1996; XXXX). Willetts (2010) explicitly linked these, giving primacy to family provision. However, the extent to which the aid given by family members to each other constitutes an effective alternative to state provision is debatable. Thus Hacker (2006) has traced the unravelling of the US framework of economic and social security and the process of shifting a huge and unsustainable burden of risk in relation to unemployment, retirement incomes and health care back onto families, justified by an ideological crusade for personal responsibility.

The idea that state benefits crowd-out individual savings has been influential in the US, particularly in relation to older people (Feldstein 1974). However, Kohli's (1999) work using data from the German Aging Survey has also shown substantial cash transfers downwards from older to younger adults (in a country with a generous system of state pensions). Indeed, the sociological literature has suggested that public provision may stimulate (crowd-in) family support (Künemund 2008; also Attias Donfut and Arber 2000; Kohli 1999).

The motivation of family members is generally agreed by sociologists to stem from norms of responsibility (or obligation), ideas about reciprocity, and intimacy (affection). Künemund and Rein (1999) concluded that norms of responsibility are less stable than norms of reciprocity. However, Finch and Mason (1993) argued that all these motivations to help other family members may operate together (see also Künemund 2008). Thus the obligation to give help is conceptualised as a result of a process of negotiation that balances out giving and receiving, one kind of assistance against another, independence and interdependence. For economists, altruism and exchange are the two possible motivations, with altruism assuming a moral duty or obligation, and exchange theory proposing that giving to others is motivated by the expectation that they will reciprocate (Künemund 2008). But models of altruism and

exchange are not able to capture the complexity of the motives of individuals revealed by the sociological studies.

The balance between reciprocity, affection and obligation in respect of family support is likely to be delicate, and there is also a balance to be struck between state and family support. These issues have been explored at length in respect of the intergenerational relationships between those of working age and their ageing parents in need of care. More recently, there has been evidence of strong support by parents for young adults, both as students and as graduates in their 20s (Heath and Calvert 2013). We draw on two exploratory, qualitative empirical studies carried out in England to examine what happens to family relations and support between parents and children under adverse economic conditions. We explore what parents actually do in respect of their young adult children and why, together with the extent of similarities and differences between them. We interviewed both parents and children, but in this paper<sup>2</sup> greater attention is paid to the feelings and behaviours reported by the parents. The vast majority of parents in the two studies wanted to help their children, with most showing generosity. But there was considerable disparity between the levels of support that it was possible for parents to provide. Thus we argue that the effect of passing more responsibility for provision from the state to young people has been mitigated by the family where parents are able to do so, which in turn threatens to exacerbate *intra-generational* inequalities.

## Findings

### (i) Parents and Student Children in the Context of Policy Change

#### *Background*

As students, the parents had paid no tuition fees and almost all had received means-tested maintenance grants. However, over the last two decades loans have largely replaced grants, and since 1998, tuition fees have been levied by English universities. Following the 2004 Higher Education Act, tuition fees increased up to



£3000 from 2006/7 with repayment of tuition fee and maintenance loans starting once the graduate was earning above £15,000 a year; the loans attracted a real above inflation interest rate of 0 per cent (Barr 2012).

According to government policy in England, the student 'owns' the loans, indeed it was claimed that the changes 'take an important step in the direction of treating students as independent adults at 18' and that 'no student need rely on their parents to pay for the cost of tuition' (DfES 2003: 88). However, access to higher levels of loans and grants<sup>3</sup> are contingent on household income. In 2011/12, the students who received most parental help were from professional or managerial backgrounds (mean contribution around £2,300) and the least from manual backgrounds (mean approximately £700). Almost 8 out of 10 full-time students took out a tuition fee loan, and nearly three quarters took out a means-tested government maintenance loan, but fewer students from managerial, professional or intermediate backgrounds took out such loans than those from routine and manual work backgrounds (Pollard et al. 2013). Thus the policy changes have opened up a space for better-off parents to give significant material support to their student children (Ahier 2000).

### *Methods*

The sample comprised students studying on undergraduate degree programmes at two pre-1992 southern English universities, which tend to have more advantaged intakes (cf. Harrison 2011; West et al. 2015), and their parents, at least one of whom had been to university.<sup>4</sup> Students and parents were approached through universities' student services. Our sample comprised 28 student-parent dyads (pairs). Fifty-six in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted separately with parents and students. Interviews were carried out in the second half of 2011/12 and 2012/13.

All the students had followed the established English tradition of moving away from the family home to attend university (cf. Holdsworth, 2009) and virtually all had

gone to university straight from school, or after taking a gap year. All were eligible for financial support from the UK Government: the tuition fee was £3,375 a year at the time of interview.<sup>5</sup> Students had nearly or recently completed the first year of their undergraduate studies. Fifteen were from one university and 13 from the other; 9 were male and 19 female. Fathers were interviewed in 6 cases, mothers in 21, and both parents in 1 case (29 parents, 28 interviews). There were 2 son/father, 7 son/mother, 4 daughter/father, 14 daughter/mother dyads; in 1 case a daughter and both parents were interviewed. Twenty-three students were white British and six were of Dutch, Irish, South African, Turkish, Irish/American and Indian origin respectively. Twenty-seven students had parents from professional or managerial occupational groups. Nineteen parents were married, seven divorced and two widowed. We deliberately focused on students whose parents had been to university and who were thus highly educated; this needs to be borne in mind when interpreting the findings.

*Parents, students and money*

The majority of parents had decided to support their student children financially. Four families (group (i)) paid all their children's higher education costs, tuition fees, accommodation and living expenses, with a mean annual parental contribution of around £10,500. Fifteen students (group( ii)) were in receipt of a tuition fee and maintenance loan and their parents provided regular financial contributions (mean annual contribution of around £4,400). Nine students (group( iii)) were in receipt of a means-tested maintenance grant, available in full when household income was less than or equal to around £50,000. Five parents in this group made regular contributions (mean around £2,000), and four, all lone mothers on low incomes, did not contribute regularly.

The vast majority of parents felt an obligation to support their student children if they were able to do so. One father in group (ii) did not give what he had promised, while two students - one from a lone mother family (group (iii)) and one estranged

from her co-resident father (group (ii)) - felt obliged to use their loans to help support their mothers (and in one case a sibling).

The key driver for parents in group (i) to pay all their children's higher education costs was to avoid their children being burdened with debt. One father said:

We can afford to fund her She'll leave university and...there's no government involvement, there's no long term tie-ins, no tax adjustment.

Another parent noted that she would 'rather sacrifice everything really and make sure that they don't, you know, have to have huge debts'. Some parents in group (ii) also expressed aversion to their children starting out in life with debt, which they themselves had been spared.

However, for many in this much larger group of parents the decision to give financial support to their student children was not without anxiety. First, a number faced the problem of how to treat subsequent children the same, especially given the rise in tuition fees (from 2012/13) in England to up to £9000 per year. Two mothers said that they would not encourage their younger offspring to attend university in the UK. Second, there was the impact on their own incomes in old age to consider. One father said that : 'every pound we give her is a pound less for our retirement', but he, like some others in group (ii), sought to protect their children as much as they could from debt. He had let his daughter take out tuition and maintenance loans, taking advantage of the relatively favourable repayment terms, but hoped that he would be able to give at least some of the money back to her in order to help her buy somewhere to live later on. Others said that while paying back the loans was the responsibility of their children, they were prepared to step in and help.

For some of the parents in group (iii), the cost of student children's living and accommodation costs came as a surprise. One mother said:

I assumed that [the government loan and grant] was enough for her to live on, how else could it be? I was absolutely shocked ..., that the maintenance [loan and grant] only paid the rent and she couldn't eat.

This mother found a job and was thus able to give her daughter a monthly allowance. Some parents in groups (ii) and (iii) seemed to have little appreciation of the size of the loans their children had taken out. This was particularly so in the case of those in group (iii) who received no financial support from their (lone) mothers: these students assumed the responsibility for organising and managing their budgets.

Interestingly, four students in groups (ii) and (iii) expressed the view that they would rather owe money to the state than be supported by their parents, largely because it would enable them to feel more independent. In groups (i) and (ii) it was much more likely that parents would help and/or supervise their children's budgets. In two cases, parents had opened their children's bank statements. A minority of parents across all groups helped with their children's finances - trying to get them to put their budgets down on paper and to make sure that they understood basic principles. One mother (in group (ii)) reported that her daughter had not understood 'the concept of, ... you've paid for something today and it hasn't gone through your account yet...'. Some parents also made the allowances they paid to their children conditional: on 'sensible drinking', on spending so many hours a week on course work, or the student getting a part-time job.

The vast majority parents were very involved – emotionally as well as financially - with their young adult children. The financial support they gave was motivated by affection and wanting the best for their children, but also by a strong sense of obligation. As one mother said:

You have an obligation to help. I would say the responsibility is ours, you know, I mean for me it's simple because we, you know, I suppose in a way inspired him to think that it would be worth getting a degree.

Most students in receipt of money from their parents felt grateful. Only four students assumed that they would be supported or felt positively entitled to support. As one female student put it: ‘...well, I think if they were as well off as they are now, I’d be annoyed [if they failed to offer financial support]’.

While Government policy in England assumes that students are responsible for the debt, it is often the case that student loans are a family matter. Many more school leavers go to university now than was the case for their parents’ generation.<sup>6</sup> To that extent, opportunities are more available to a wider section of society. However, the changes to government policy in England have not had the effect of treating students as ‘independent adults at 18’ (above p.8). The position of those who took full responsibility for the financial support they receive from the government was very different from those who do not because their parents have been able to make regular financial contributions. This was expressed particularly clearly by one student – the son of a lone mother on a low income – who was in receipt of tuition fee and maintenance loans and a maintenance grant; he lamented his ‘brute luck’ compared to his peers who were in receipt of money from their parents:

I’m not here because I’m rich, you know. I’m here because I’ve got the grades and I just feel like sometimes I’m sort of on a lower rung because lots of people I know have... a much more strong source of income, whether it be parents or whatever. It’s not their fault, but I don’t have that so I feel like I’m sometimes on a bit of a lower rung.

## (ii) Parents and Graduate Children Returning Home

### *Background*

Our second example of parent/young adult relationships focuses on graduates in England who return to the parental home – often referred to in the press as ‘boomerang children’.

In the UK, 26 per cent of 20-34 year olds were living with their parents in 2013, and 49 per cent of 20 to 24 year olds, an increase of 7 percentage points since 2008. Whereas the older generation usually continued to live away from home after graduation, as many as half of today's graduates live with a parent at ages 22-24 (Stone et al. 2011). Indeed, finishing full-time higher education is one of the main reasons for returning home across socio-economic groups for both men and women (Berrington et al. 2012). Recent graduates aged 21-30 have had consistently higher unemployment rates than older graduates, but the percentage working in a non-graduate (and usually lower paid) job has also increased since 2008-9 (ONS 2012). In addition, the increase in the number of young adults living in the parental home has also coincided with an increase in the average house price paid by first time buyers of 40 per cent between 2002 and 2011 (ONS 2012a). This is particularly important given the role that home ownership now plays as an asset securing the individual's welfare in old age through the release of housing equity (McKee 2012).

### *Methods*

Interviewees were approached through an alumni organization of a pre-1992 university in southern England with an above-average representation of students from middle-class backgrounds. We made contact with recent graduates, identified as being below 30 years of age, who gave their current address as their parental home, and also with alumni graduating between 1970 and 1985 and therefore potentially of the parent generation. Six dyads (12 interviewees) were contacted via recent graduates and 21 (42 interviewees) via parents. In-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out separately with 27 parents and 27 co-resident, graduate children between January and September 2013. Nineteen graduates were female and 8 were male. They were aged between 21 and 29 years (mean age 24). There were 12 mother/daughter, 5 mother/son, 7 father/daughter, and 3 father/son dyads.

The age range of the graduates was 21 to 29, with the majority, 24 in total, aged between 22 and 25.

Twenty-two graduates lived with their mother and father, 1 with her mother and stepfather, 3 with a single mother and 1 with a single father. Twenty were White British, 4 South Asian British and 3 of mixed ethnicity (Asian/White British). Twenty-five graduates had attended pre-1992 universities in England and Wales and two had attended post-1992 universities. Graduates had lived with their parents for between three months and seven and a half years (mean 22 months). When graduates first returned to the parental home, 7 were in full- or part-time work, 5 in unpaid internships or volunteering, 9 were studying and 6 were unemployed. At the time of the interview, 18 were in full-time and four in part-time work; 3 were studying (and in part-time work); and 2 had no paid work (1 was an unpaid intern and 1 was unemployed).

Eight parents had already paid for all the tuition and living costs of their children while at university (the tuition fees in England at the time were up to £3,375 a year). The remaining graduates had taken out a government tuition fee loan and means-tested maintenance loan.

#### *Parents, Co-resident Graduates and Money*

The vast majority of parents and children regarded return as inevitable: the graduate lacked a sufficiently well paid job to be able to afford to rent or buy housing. It is important to note that all but two parents had enough space easily to accommodate the graduate returner, and a further two mentioned spontaneously that co-residence would be very difficult in a small house or flat.

In respect of paying rent, three groups of families were identified. In group (i) (18 cases) the parents did not consider charging rent. As one mother put it: 'I don't know if we ever discussed it. She's too broke to pay us anything at the moment, frankly'. In nine of these cases the graduate was either in precarious, low paid

employment or unemployed. Another three graduates were engaged in further study, and for seven graduates norms militated against the charging of rent. Two graduates in this group, one male and one female, felt that it would be 'cruel' or 'ridiculous for their parents to ask for a contribution because they were earning very little.

In group (ii) (five cases) the parents considered charging rent, but did not do so. In group (iii) (four cases) regular financial contributions of between £100 and £400 per month (short of a market rent, but often enough to cover a household bill, such as council tax) were demanded by parents and paid by graduates. Sage et al.'s (2013) study of graduate returners in England also found that a minority (33 per cent) made a financial contribution to household costs. Parents in group (i) tended to encourage their graduate children to save if they were in a position to do so, while in group (ii) some fathers enforced saving instead of requiring them to make financial contributions.

In addition, several parents continued to give allowances to their children, generally in line with the money they had received as students. One mother had considered reducing the allowance when her daughter returned home but did not want to 'make it harder than it is...why make her have to live on the bare minimum?' However, there was sometimes considerable tension about allowances, for example in the case of another mother who stopped her daughter's allowance and then worried that she was doing 'everything wrong' and that she was 'a terrible parent'. About a quarter of the parents had paid for family holidays for their children, given or loaned small amounts of money, or allowed the use of a car. The most common contribution made by graduates was a (limited) amount of shopping.

Employment in the form of a 'graduate, career job' was essential for the graduates to be able to make a meaningful contribution to household finances and eventually move out of the parental home. In terms of jobs, only five of the recent graduates had been employed full-time on their initial return, but 18 were in full-time work by the time of interview and only one remained completely without work. Only



three had a 'career job' when they returned home, but 14 had achieved this goal by the time of interview. However, whereas only four had temporary work when they first returned, eight had work of this kind by the time of interview.

Most parents had continued to 'mentor' their children, advising on job applications. In one case the graduate referred to planning 'a campaign' of job search with his mother and nearly a quarter (6) got a job as a result of contacts provided by the parent. In some dyads the parent tried to nudge or nag the graduate into making applications. As one mother said: 'I get frustrated...it can go weeks and then you suddenly say, "well, have you applied for anything?"'. However, crucially, parents were allowing their graduate children to take the *time* to find a job that they wanted. As one mother put it:

We are very modern parents, we do not put pressure on them to do anything other than follow their ... natural inclinations.

Both parents and children were positive about co-residence if the graduate had found a full-time career job, or was undertaking further study closely allied to a career. In most of these cases, parents were able to envisage the child moving out as soon as he or she had amassed enough savings to rent a flat or to buy, usually only possible with further parental help. Conversely, parents and children were both negative about co-residence if the child had failed to secure a 'graduate career job'. One daughter with a first class humanities degree working in a non-graduate job spoke of her 'dashed expectations...I feel like I'm in a nightmare I don't understand', while her mother said that she was 'scared' about her daughter's lack of prospects and the absence of a 'plan'. In nine dyads both parents and children expressed overwhelmingly negative feelings about co-residence. All these graduates lacked a career job and were not contributing financially to their households. Parents worried that their young adult children found living at home too comfortable and too easy – 'a feathered nest' (Avery et al. 1992).

The parental home and support were often a crucial safety net for graduates, offering them the time necessary to pursue their chosen careers. The majority of parents felt that they had an obligation, responsibility or duty to support and provide for their adult children, but they were unsure as to the extent of the obligation. As one father said:

...we want them to feel that they've got every right to see it as their home but weighed against that is a sense that they need to recognise that this was their nest, and the nest that they would be expected to leave and leave us to be in our home...

Problems arose for parents as a result of uncertainty in terms of the length of co-residence, especially if the child had not secured a graduate job, and the fact that they had no experience to draw on in managing the situation and making sure that the adult child would be able to cope financially on their own.

Norms were also important for some parents, echoing Finch and Mason's (1993) comment about the importance of 'the proper thing to do', one mother said that housing a graduate child was what her friends and neighbours expected to have to do. Only the South Asian parents, for whom returning home to live was normative for the community, were completely relaxed about co-residence and continued financial dependence for an extended period, but they in their turn hoped – if not expected - that their children would reciprocate and look after them in old age. A further four white parents also expressed the hope that their children would reciprocate. In the words of a father:

I think the contract I feel between me and her is...I look after you now when you're young and you look after me when I'm old. That's how I hope things will turn out.

But one mother was emphatic that her daughter should *not* have to reciprocate.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our empirical work showed considerable commitment on the part of parents to their young adult children, in terms of financial and practical support, despite a majority expressing feelings of anxiety about their own welfare in old age as well as about the prospects of their young adult children. The vast majority of student children in receipt of financial help from their parents expressed their gratitude; a few students from families making the highest contributions expressed a sense of entitlement: 'they can afford it'. Co-resident graduates were more likely than the students to expect to be able to return home, not least because a growing number of their peer group were having to do the same.

In the case of both students' tuition fees and the need for graduates to return to the parental home, parents and children were facing a relatively new situation. Some parents railed against a government policy that encouraged student debt, comparing the situation their children faced to their own free university education, and almost all felt that they had to try to reduce the burden of the student loan debt if they could afford to do so. While the small minority of very well-off parents may well have paid all the costs for their children under any policy regime, for others the extra payments they were making in respect of their children because of policy changes were sufficient to affect their own savings for old age.

Parents also recognised that their graduate children faced not only a difficult labour market, but also a well-nigh impossible housing market, and felt that they had a responsibility to support their children - if they could - financially, allowing them the time to secure a 'good job', as well as by offering help with job applications and providing job contacts where possible. However, in the case of the graduate returners, who also on occasion received a financial allowance from parents as well as (usually) a free place to live for an indeterminate period of time, parental anxiety was often high, largely in response to the uncertainty of the situation.

Taken together, both groups of parents were likely to be financially supporting their children for much longer than had been the case for their own parents – through

the university years and beyond - sometimes at the expense of their own pension provision, and sometimes with concern about the probability of having to repeat the whole process with any younger children.

Unlike Künemund and Rein's (1999) findings (above p.6), norms of responsibility/obligation were particularly important in accounting for the support provided by parents. The parents of students and of graduates in our two samples felt strongly about their responsibility to help. A few rejected the idea of responsibility/obligation as their main motive, emphasising instead their love for their children. But as Finch and Mason (1993) observed, a sense of obligation *together* with affection created a strong feeling as to the 'proper thing to do'. While no parent voiced an expectation of reciprocity in terms of help from their children in old age as the main motivation, a small minority had hopes in this regard. However, norms as to how to behave in either set of parent/child relationships were lacking for all but the South Asian parents, who adhered strongly both to ideas about their responsibility to support their children and that they should be helped in their old age. However, a minority of parents did try to make support conditional, in the case of students on steady work and sensible living, and in the case of graduates on job search above all, and saving once in work.

Many parents of students were not sure how much to do on behalf of their children, in particular how much money would be considered reasonable for living expenses. In the case of the parents of graduates, there was considerable uncertainty about how much financial help to give, if any, and about how best to promote the independence of their children, sharpened in many cases by uncertainty about how long it would take the graduate to leave home and the impact of the costs of co-residence on the parents' own finances. As one mother put it, there was no 'roadmap' to guide parents faced with additional years of co-residence with their young adult children.

Thus the pressure on families to help children who are remaining dependent for longer has increased and in our sample the vast majority of parents who could, supported their children. According to government policy regarding the changes in funding higher education, students assume responsibility for tuition and maintenance loans and ensuing debt. But our qualitative data make clear how far the responsibility has become a family rather than an individual matter for those parents who can afford to help their children. In the case of the graduate sample, parents who had often supported their children as students sometimes continued to do so via allowances, and more often than not, the provision of free (or cheap) accommodation. Thus, while at the societal level the advantage of the older generation may be perceived as disadvantaging the younger – as in the case of the housing market (Doling and Ronald, 2010) – such disadvantage may be mitigated at the household level. Our data suggest that the shift of responsibility to families has major implications for the nature of both the micro- and macro-intergenerational contracts, even in the case of predominantly advantaged young people and their parents:

- (i) At the family and household level, parents' show strong feelings of responsibility to support their young adult children. But these feelings are also often a source of tension and anxiety. Parents are often uncertain as to how long support may be required and, unless they are particularly well off, can worry about conflicting demands for their money, especially in respect of saving for their own old age.
- (ii) At the societal level, privatisation to the family has resulted in better-off parents paying off some or all of their student children's debts and giving the financial support and shelter that allows their graduate children time to pursue their career goals, as well helping in the crucial matter of job search and work contacts. Such demonstrations of family solidarity are likely to contribute to growing *intra-generational* inequalities.

Our two studies showed considerable differences in the capacity of parents to cope with the increased level and duration of support that was being expected, even though the vast majority of the students and graduates in our samples had attended pre-1992 universities and were likely to have parents best placed to help. Students attending post-1992 universities tend to be less advantaged (Harrison, 2011) and are considerably less likely to be able to draw on parental largesse.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the position of children who do not go to university and their parents is likely to be worse still (Jones et al. 2006). Indeed, the shift in the balance of support for young adults towards families and away from the state and the labour market (in terms of providing 'good jobs') almost certainly increases intra-generational inequalities more generally (Barr 2001 and XXXX).

Both political commentators and academics have recognised the importance of intergenerational transfers at the micro-level of the family, albeit failing to acknowledge the inequalities within generations by focusing on so-called 'baby boomers' as an undifferentiated group. But they have also tended to insist that older generations and the large baby boom generation in particular behave selfishly when it comes to stating their political priorities and to exercising their 'grey power' in their electoral support for the social programmes aimed at older people. Thus Willetts (2010) has maintained that the baby boomers may be good parents, but not good citizens. However as Davidson (2014) has commented, there is little evidence for bad citizenship. Rather, social attitudes reveal considerable solidarity (Duffy et al. 2013). In any case, both young adults *and* their parents have reason to be disappointed by recent government policies in England, in relation to rising tuition fees in the case of the former and the lack of progress in providing affordable, high quality social care in the case of the latter.

Willetts (2010: 263-4) has had little to offer by way of solution other than exhorting the parent generation to behave as 'good citizens' and to think more about valuing reciprocal, future benefits as a nation as well as at the individual level.

However, he does not consider the implications for the role of the state, because according to the dictates of neo-liberalism, pursued in relation to higher education policy in England first by the Conservatives, then New Labour and aggressively since 2010 by the Coalition Government in which Willetts was a Minister, markets and a high reliance on personal responsibility take pride of place. Under the Conservatives elected in 2015, this is set to continue with the abolition of maintenance grants for students from low income families and further tuition fee increases. But to rely more on family provision in an age of extreme inequality in wealth and income (Hills 2004; Piketty 2014; Atkinson 2015) exacerbates inequality further. Intergenerational justice relies on there being 'limits to markets' (Sandel 2013), and a willingness on the part of the state to act to support the kinds of redistribution that are required if the macro-level intergenerational contract is to continue.

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### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Education is a devolved responsibility in the UK and in Scotland, no tuition fees are charged for Scottish students who meet the eligibility criteria and are resident in Scotland (Student Awards Agency Scotland 2015)

<sup>2</sup> For further information, see West et al., 2015 and forthcoming, Lewis et al. forthcoming a and b.

<sup>3</sup> Government maintenance grants are to be withdrawn from 2016/17.

<sup>4</sup> Almost all the parents had graduated from British universities and, as students, had received means-tested local authority maintenance grants with local authorities generally paying tuition fees to universities, which set them apart from their children.

<sup>5</sup> Student tuition fees were introduced in England in 1998/99 and capped at £1000; in 2006/7 fees were increased and capped at £3000; from 2012/13 fees were capped at £9000. Means-tested loans and grants were available to cover living expenses (see West et al. 2015).

<sup>6</sup> In 1970 the participation rate in the UK was 8% (Bolton 2012); in 2012, in England, it had increased to 24% (DBIS 2014).

<sup>7</sup> There were some limitations to our studies. Both explored the experiences of predominantly middle-class parents and their children who were attending/had

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attended, pre-1992 universities; this limits our ability to generalise our findings to the wider population of parents, student children and co-resident graduates, hence our tentative speculation. We did not have parents' ages so were not able to directly compare how parents of different ages supported their young adult children and the extent of variation (if any). The relationships between parents and adult children were, if not always close, not acrimonious, which further restricted broader generalisations.

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