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# The Digital Divide among Parents and Their Emerging Adult Children: Intergenerational Accounts of Technologically Assisted Family Communication

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Received: 6 November 2018; Accepted: 25 February 2019; Published: 5 March 2019



**Abstract:** A great deal of previous research has examined the profound influence of digital communication technology (e.g., texting, videoconferencing, social media usage) on family life. However, few inquiries have explored the contours of technologically assisted communication using qualitative data collected from various family members. Our study breaks new ground by using interview data collected from a split sample of parents and their emerging adult children (interviewed separately) to investigate intergenerational accounts of technologically assisted family communication. Using insights from various theoretical perspectives, we analyze thirty in-depth interviews with middle-aged parents (ages 39–62) and their corresponding emerging adult children (ages 18–29) who use technology as a significant means of communicating with one another. Our analyses reveal two overarching patterns. Discordant accounts reflect disparate intergenerational views of technologically assisted family communication. By contrast, concordant accounts provide evidence of shared intergenerational reflections on technology’s role in family life. These patterns are explained by family life complexities, technology use experiences, and intergenerational norms of communication. Our study confirms that communication technology plays a multifarious role in family life across generational lines. Implications of these findings and promising avenues for future research are discussed.

**Keywords:** new media; technology; family; communication; emerging adults; parents

## 1. Introduction

Communication technology has revolutionized interpersonal relationships and, in particular, family life and parent-child relations in recent years (see, e.g., [Bruess 2015](#); [Clark 2013](#); [Gee et al. 2018](#); [Lee and Webb 2015](#); [Lemish et al. 2017](#); [Webb and Lee 2011](#); [Webb 2015](#); [Webb et al. 2015](#); [Wright and Webb 2011](#) for reviews, syntheses, and original research). Within American households, what has come to be called technologically assisted family communication ([Webb et al. 2015](#)) is clearly here to stay. Technologically assisted family communication (e.g., texting, videoconferencing, social media usage) has been shown to have a host of advantages and disadvantages for parents and children, whether or not they live in the same household (see [Webb et al. 2015](#)). To name but a few challenges, parenting conducted by “media moms” and “digital dads” can invite children’s resistance to managing their screen time and monitoring their social media presence ([Uhls 2015](#); see also [Sharabi et al. 2015](#); [Tikkanen et al. 2015](#)). Technology has certainly created new anxieties for today’s parents, who commonly express concern about their children’s exposure to nefarious online influences ([Sharabi et al. 2015](#); [Tikkanen et al. 2015](#)). And yet, technology can be quite a parenting asset. Full-time caregivers of young children need not be as isolated as they once were, as evidenced by the cultural prominence of “mommy

blogs” (Lee and Webb 2015) and digital parenting advice forums (Dworkin et al. 2015). Moreover, young people’s departure for college is now less daunting for many parents given the nearly uninterrupted connectedness afforded by new technology (Smith 2015).

Technologically assisted communication between family members is influenced by social opportunities new media provides (e.g., Facebook family rituals, international connectedness), the cultural norms that govern the use of technology (e.g., appropriate amounts of parental contact with maturing children), and the rich diversity of technological platforms that are currently available (e.g., private messages versus public posts, texting versus calling) (Bacigalupe and Brauningner 2017; Baldassar 2007; Bruess et al. 2015; Child et al. 2015; Child and Petronio 2015; Cramer and Mabry 2015; Walker 2015). Communication devices today can keep their users in perpetual contact with family and friends. These devices have blurred conventional social boundaries. People are no longer subject to isolation from distant family and friends. In fact, isolation is something that must be carefully orchestrated, and is often negatively sanctioned by those who expect others to be accessible at all times (Child et al. 2015; Cramer and Mabry 2015; Wajcman et al. 2008; Webb 2015). In addition, when using technology, parents have the ability to maintain intensive parental relationships with their children long after education, employment, marital dissolution, or even migration has scattered the family across distant geographical locations (Bacigalupe and Brauningner 2017; Bacigalupe and Lambe 2011; Cuban 2017; Francisco 2015; Gentzler et al. 2011; Karraker 2015; Kartch and Timmerman 2015; Parreñas 2001; Madianou and Miller 2011; Smith 2015; Valentine 2006). Voluminous research reveals that such intensive, technologically mediated relationships often enhance parent-child connections but can, in many circumstances, create new problems.

Contemporary families now find themselves inundated by electronic devices, each with a particular set of rules for appropriate communication coupled with usage norms that may differ within and among families (Chesley 2005, 2006; Child et al. 2015; Cramer and Mabry 2015; McDaniel 2015; Walker 2015). Long before the advent of such communication technologies, families often provided young people with a foundation for cultivating fundamental communication skills. In the modern (pre-digital) era, for example, speech was learned principally within the confines of the home. Young people quickly learned the benefits and consequences of appropriate and inappropriate modes of communication, with youth eventually branching out of their immediate family into the wider society with tools they gained through primary socialization in the home. New media has revolutionized these longstanding patterns, as face-to-face contact and traditional written correspondence is being increasingly supplanted by remote messaging, posting to specific groups (e.g., family members, peers), and more instantaneous forms of expression directed at others situated within a web of social media contacts, online networks, and so forth.

This study is designed to illuminate the ways in which parents and their emerging adult children (Arnett 2000, 2004) render accounts of family communication and domestic relationships in the context of digital technology. We recognize that extensive prior research has been conducted on technologically assisted family communication (see, e.g., Bruess 2015; Gee et al. 2018; Webb et al. 2015 for excellent reviews and empirical studies). However, much prior interview-based research draws on individual accounts<sup>1</sup> whereby one family member has been asked about the family’s use of technology. Inspired by the pioneering work of Clark (2009, 2013), we depart from the commonly utilized single-informant approach by analyzing data drawn from parent-child dyads, that is, interviews conducted separately (individually) with fifteen pairs of parents (ages 39–62) and their respective emerging adult children

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<sup>1</sup> Parent-child surveys have been used to study the frequency and antecedents of family technology use with statistical data (Correa 2016; Friedman et al. 2017). Multiple-informant qualitative interviews with various household members have rarely been employed to study technology use. The work of Clark (2009, 2013) stands as a notable exception to this general pattern of neglect. Our study is indebted to Clark’s approach but we more narrowly focus on conversational exchanges (dyadic communication) between parents and their adult children. By contrast, Clark examined broader patterns of digital media use by various family members and even family friends. Our interviews are also more recent (2014) than those used in Clark’s studies (2001–2008). Significant technological innovations emerged between these different points in time.

(ages 18–29) ( $N = 30$ ). Following Clark's lead but with a narrower focus on technologically assisted family communication (as opposed to digital media use more broadly defined), we contend that there are significant gains to be achieved by placing different family members' viewpoints in conversation with one another through multiple-informant interviews. This purposive sample of interviewees was selected because they use technology as a key method for communicating with one another. Central to our investigation are comparative accounts of technologically assisted family communication offered across intergenerational lines by parents and their adult children, respectively. Thus, our investigation approaches this subject using a split-sample design and multigenerational lens rather than relying on one person's portrayal of complex family processes and communication patterns. Analyzing interview accounts through counterpart quotations articulated respectively by parents as one subgroup and adult children as another allows us to explore points of divergence and convergence in these two constituencies' assessments of technologically assisted family communication. Consequently, our analytical focus in this study is the generational line that demarcates middle-age parents and their young adult children. Our approach reveals that, as respective generations, parents and their adult children sometimes render disparate views of technologically assisted family communication through what we call discordant accounts. Yet, other times, parents and children express remarkably similar viewpoints concerning technologically assisted family communication, which we call concordant accounts. In short, parents and children sometimes differ and other times concur in their assessments of technologically assisted family communication. Their perspectives on this subject are often predicated on their family position, power relations within the home, and distinct intergenerational assumptions about the role of technology in social life.

Emerging adult children offer an intriguing case for investigation because their transitional age commonly positions them between a mix of autonomy and dependence with respect to their parents. Moreover, technology use differences have been documented across generations (Vaterlaus and Tulane 2015). Our study design permits us to examine these factors while paying special attention to family power (relations of domination, subordination, and resistance) and positionality (mother, father, son, daughter, siblings). We draw on agonistic theories of family power in this study (e.g., Bartkowski 1999, 2001). This agonistic approach defines power as not so much "held" or "possessed" by virtue of one's status as it is exercised through the mobilization of resources and enlistment of strategies to pursue desired ends. Technology, we charge, is one critical resource for the negotiation of relationship asymmetries among parents and their emerging adult children.

With our comparative focus on intergenerational accounts using split-sample interview data, this study adds important insights to the extensive body of scholarship addressing families' use of communication technology. We would hasten to add that, like many scholars whose work we have cited here (e.g., Walker 2015; Webb et al. 2015), we view technology as one resource—albeit an increasingly central resource—that families can enlist strategically to foster social bonds, make important decisions, negotiate conflict, and such. Thus, technology is a flexible tool that can be leveraged in many different ways and to diverse ends by various family members. That being said, we readily recognize that technologies are not neutral instruments within the home but instead have power dimensions embedded within them (Iaccheri and Tyma 2015). Young people are often more adept at technological adoption than their parents (Vaterlaus and Tulane 2015). Moreover, particular technologies may privilege certain types of users and competencies (e.g., effective blogging requires long-form composition skills whereas pointed text messaging requires concise expression capabilities). So, as a flexible resource, technology does not preconfigure family interaction. But actors within any home may exhibit different abilities to leverage media in a desired manner.

## 2. Empirical and Theoretical Background

Technological communication among family members and parental monitoring of children's media usage are hallmarks of emerging adulthood today (Arnett 2000, 2004; Hall and Feister 2015; Smith 2015). Arnett (2000, 2004) has persuasively argued that emerging adulthood is a historically new

phase in human social development that follows adolescence and precedes full-fledged adulthood. Emerging adulthood is a phase of life composed of transition-age adults (ages 18 to late 20s) who postpone their engagement in the historical hallmarks of adulthood, such as career, marriage, childbirth, and/or home ownership (Arnett 2004). In spite of young adults' delayed involvement in the historical rites of passage for adulthood, they are legally imbued with the right to pursue independent ventures. Traditionally, adult responsibilities were assumed in rapid succession, often beginning with marriage which cascaded into parenthood and homeownership. So, the options for achieving adulthood were limited. However, emerging adulthood provides a wide array of options or paths upon which young adults might embark as they incrementally assume responsibility for their own lives. Thus, emerging adults often attend college, travel, hold jobs (not careers), cohabit with significant others (or sometimes remain living with parents), and become politically or militarily involved, often while still leaning on parental figures for some level practical guidance, emotional support, and financial assistance. The rise of emerging adulthood as a distinct phase of human development materialized in concurrence with the even more pronounced manifestation of technological development in contemporary societies.

The increasing reliance on communication technology has brought a new dynamic to an array of primary social relationships in general and family interaction in particular (Clark 2013; Gentzler et al. 2011; Hertlein 2012; Valentine 2006; Wei and Lo 2006; see also selections in Bruess 2015; Gee et al. 2018). Many forms of technologically assisted interaction, especially text-based communication, require mutual interpretation from the conversational partners since these technologies are often best suited for brief, punctuated, and sometimes asynchronous conversational exchanges. Given the high degree of interpretive latitude in the absence of face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact, people may not correctly understand the intent behind messages they receive. Quick and to-the-point instant messages or text messages may be incorrectly labeled as rude by the receiver, and sending too many of these messages might be perceived as harassment. For quite some time now, various clarifying techniques were developed to help diffuse tense messaging situations (Valentine 2006). These clarifying techniques have included what were, a couple of decades ago, considered new linguistic forms, often expressed through acronyms and shorthand, such as "LOL: laugh out loud," "ILY: I love you," "JK: just kidding," and "YOLO: you only live once." Furthermore, many people have used emoticons as methods to convey the intention of a written message, which include: :) happiness, :( sadness, <3 love, and :-p silliness or joking. With the proliferation of smartphones, emojis flourished to illustrate an even wider range of moods and objects, or visually depict people, including conversationalists themselves or subjects of message-based exchanges.

Of course, technologically assisted family communication is influenced by social contextual factors (Gee et al. 2018; McDaniel 2015; Walker 2015; see also Ganong et al. 2012; Gentzler et al. 2011; Hertlein 2012; Valentine 2006; Wei and Lo 2006). In times of high relational conflict, many rely on technology and media to reduce the level of personal contact in communication. People have different reasons for choosing communication technology as a tool to avoid direct conflict. Some people view an intemperate text message as less emotionally damaging than criticism delivered in person or by phone. There are also communication power and preference dynamics to consider, as the message recipient can choose when or if to respond to difficult criticisms delivered remotely (e.g., Cravens and Whiting 2015; Iaccheri and Tyma 2015). Where home life is concerned, rules governing technology use in families often require persistent negotiation (e.g., Cravens and Whiting 2015; McDaniel 2015; Uhls 2015). In critical legal situations, such as divorce or custody negotiations, families may prefer to communicate exclusively via text messages or email, not only to avoid direct conflict, but also to ensure that written records are kept of all agreements and conversations.

While communication technology can serve as a resource for conflict mitigation in tempestuous relationships, it can also be an instigator of conflict. Thus, the rise of digital media has led families to attempt to demarcate clear boundaries around technology use (Clark 2009, 2011, 2013; Cravens and Whiting 2015; McDaniel 2015; Uhls 2015). There are also no longer clearly delineated

boundaries between the family and the workplace (Chesley 2005, 2006; Hertlein 2012; McDaniel 2015; Wajcman et al. 2008). As technology has become increasingly mobile, demands from the private and public realms follow families into bedrooms and boardrooms across the world. Today, many people expect instantaneous communication. When individuals “go off the technology grid”—even for a short time—doing so may be viewed by families and employers as a selfish or irresponsible action. However, the persistent use of communication technology can lead to increased work spillover into the home and lower levels of satisfaction with family life, largely due to tension caused by the perceived neglect of family duties (Chesley 2005; Gentzler et al. 2011; McDaniel 2015; Wajcman et al. 2008). Therefore, families that wish to use communication technology as a positive tool often create their own boundaries and expectations for technologically assisted communication between family members.

Transnational families and parent-child dyads provide an excellent case of conflict mitigation across geographical distances through digital media (Cuban 2017; Francisco 2015; Karraker 2015). Some researchers have found that Filipina migrants practice “mobile phone parenting” (Madianou and Miller 2011) or “mothering from a distance” (Parreñas 2001) that allow these parents to reduce the often emotionally taxing effects of separation, with technology acting as an intergenerational and geographical bridge between parent and child. As transnational parents foster a sense of belonging through caregiving (Baldassar and Merla 2014), this emotional labor may be further facilitated through digital media. Overall, then, digital media may be used creatively to preserve family networks across geographical distances (Bacigalupe and Lambe 2011).

Our research focuses on how parents and their emerging adult children, as two respective groups, reflect on and recount their experiences with technologically assisted family communication. Our study places an emphasis on identifying points of discordance (divergent views) and concordance (convergent views) evident in their respective interview accounts. At the outset, we should state clearly that our interview data collected from parents and their emerging adult children yielded thick descriptions of technologically assisted family communication that do not easily fit into preconceived or uniform categories like positive or negative views of technology. Qualitative data commonly exhibit a dynamic and layered quality (Bartkowski 2004), and such is the case with our interview transcripts. Adopting a social constructionist approach, we examine interview narratives as dynamic and layered discourse that defies tidy categorization and must instead be analyzed as dense articulations recounting complex social processes. Interviews provide subjects with a platform for recounting and reflecting on meaningful experiences while also discussing motives and preferred strategies for family interaction. Unlike surveys, interviews provide opportunities for people to speak using language and terminology with which they are most comfortable and familiar. Most central to our study, because our interviews were conducted with parent-child dyads, generationally diverse perspectives on shared encounters through technology can be explored.

Our study is governed by theoretical insights from three paradigms. First, we take a cue from research on family adaptive strategies, which examines households as venues for dynamic interactions, complex social processes, and opportunities for change (Bartkowski 2001; Moen and Wethington 1992). In contrast to more static institutionalist perspectives on domestic life, family adaptive strategies focus on the motivations, tactics, and actions undertaken by family members within the broader web of malleable and negotiable domestic relationships. We conceive of technology as an increasingly critical resource that family members can deploy to manage their relationships with one another. We also recognize that strategies enlisted by family members commonly vary by social position (in our case, parents and adult children). Social actors have a situated standpoint in the sense their social position as parent or child (their “situatedness”) informs their perspective (standpoint) on technologically assisted family communication. Family adaptive strategies recognizes that individual members of a household each have their own situated standpoint and that family members’ perspectives sometimes converge and other times diverge. At the same time, we recognize that family relationships and the strategies people adopt to negotiate them vary by life stage (Smith et al. 2009). Many of our interviews address these family life course considerations.

Second, our study is informed by insights from social research on technology, particularly those focused on processes of technological adoption and digital media use (much of which we have reviewed above). Given the relatively recent rise of new technology in the long stretch of human history, previous generations (e.g., Baby Boomers) have sometimes been characterized as “digital immigrants” because they were born in eras which technology was more limited (Prensky 2001). Conversely, younger generations, beginning with Millennials, have been referred to as “digital natives” because they were raised with home computers, internet access, smartphones, and instant messaging (Prensky 2001). While we and others continue to find general merit in the digital immigrants/natives framework, some scholarship has called attention to its limitations (Bennett et al. 2008). Nuances in technology use are important to consider, such that some older persons are quite facile with new technology and distinct media use capabilities are also manifested among members of younger generations (Bennett et al. 2008; Bennett and Maton 2010; Ivan and Fernandez-Ardevol 2017; Vaterlaus and Tulane 2015). Scholarly debates aside, older and more recent studies reveal that many members of younger generations can utilize technology as an efficient tool, and rely heavily on technology and media to maintain their personal relationships, largely due to the freedom afforded by mobile technology to access information immediately (Hughes and Hans 2001; Ktoridou et al. 2012; Malikhao and Servaes 2011; Prensky 2001; Vaterlaus and Tulane 2015). In addition, those born after 1980 are clearly a population that has a very complex relationship with digital media, as they were the first generation to experience immersion in a society of technologically mediated relationships through the presence and active use of home-based, wireless, and mobile technology (Malikhao and Servaes 2011; Palfrey and Gasser 2008). Among immigrant families, for example, technologically literate children often act as “digital brokers,” serving as a bridge between their less technologically proficient parents and local resources (Katz 2010; see also Gee et al. 2018). Thus, nuanced understandings of intergenerational technological proficiency should not be discounted. However, it does seem clear that digital immigrants face learning hurdles as communication technology rapidly advances and becomes an essential facilitator of intergenerational family communication, while digital natives appear to be historically situated to enjoy both utilitarian and emotional relationships with technology (Hughes and Hans 2001; Kang 2012; Ktoridou et al. 2012; Malikhao and Servaes 2011). For the most part, parents in our study are digital immigrants, and the emerging adult children in our study are digital natives. Communication technology can therefore magnify generational cleavages. As digital immigrants, many parents today face learning hurdles in their effort to adopt new technology while their digital native children can seem to have a “natural fluency” in the adoption and use of new technology. That being said, several parents we interviewed showed remarkable adeptness at technological adoption and use.

Finally, there is value in drawing on theoretical insights from previous research on dyadic (Dunbar 2004) and family power (Bartkowski 1999, 2001). Families are sites not only for cohesion but are also marked by asymmetry and conflict. A mix of cohesion and conflict is endemic to family life and may vary across the life course (Smith et al. 2009). Current perspectives understand family power as characterized by the interplay between domination, subordination, and resistance. In this sense, power is agonistic, which is to say that efforts to exert dominance often meet with resistance and, sometimes, subversion (Burkitt 1993; Pickett 1996; see Bartkowski 1999). Moreover, power is not one-dimensional. There are various avenues through which power in households may be exercised: rule-setting and enforcement, threats or use of physical force, financial decision-making, alliances with others, and so forth. This more complex understanding of power can be seen in the everyday use of technology among family members. Digital natives and immigrants are not simply different “tribes” situated on a level domestic playing field. Rather, for some time now, younger generations have generally been able to leverage their advantage in technological adoption to suit their interests (Cooper 1994; Sharabi et al. 2015; Vaterlaus and Tulane 2015). Children may block their parents from particular posts or may create multiple social media accounts, only one of which is accessible by their parents. As digital immigrants, parents are often dependent on their children to teach them about the use of new technology, and children could provide selective instruction to preserve the

younger generation's advantage. Of course, with power being a mobile relation characterized by fluidity, parental dependency on children's technological prowess may be short-lived once parents have themselves mastered new media forms. And, of course, power is not only exercised through the adoption and use of technology. In many families, parents still enjoy positional authority with respect to making and enforcing rules (including technology use parameters) as well as financial decision-making power (including the purchase of new technology such as smartphones or the payment of monthly service plans). Previous research has suggested that parents employ a variety of strategies in mediating their children's media use, including co-use and monitoring (Clark 2013; Nikken and Schols 2015; Uhls 2015). Therefore, power is not only fluid, that is, subject to negotiation. It is also multifaceted, that is, expressed and exercised in diverse forms.

Our study weaves together insights from these various theoretical perspectives to analyze interview accounts of significant interactions between parents and their emerging adult children. Quite notably, we interviewed at least two people from each family. So, rather than approaching the family-technology nexus in a static or individualistic fashion, our split-sample design and dyadic data permit us to round out and even contrast, where appropriate, accounts of technology offered by parents as a group and their emerging adult children as a group. In this sense, our study is guided by sociology of knowledge considerations that emphasize how social actors occupy social positions that themselves influence standpoints, in our case, accounts of technologically assisted family communication. For this reason, our study is conducted under the premise that social position combines with an actor's perspective to yield a situated standpoint. We aim to reveal how the situated standpoints, respectively, of parents and children are marked by divergence or convergence in relation to digital communication technology. Indeed, this facet of our study is our most important contribution to extant research on this subject. Data intentionally drawn from two different family constituencies permit us to explore how the situated standpoints of parents and children—sometimes a particular parent's very own child—are linked, often in a point-counterpoint fashion. The key takeaway is that our use of family adaptive strategies, intergenerational technological adoption, and family power is folded into a larger concern about how accounts of family communication using technology are shaped by an actor's particular social position, in this case, as a parent or child. These insights are important to consider as we turn to the methodological considerations of this research.

### 3. Materials and Methods

This study was conducted by analyzing qualitative data generated from semi-structured interviews with thirty participants, consisting of fifteen parent and adult child dyads who frequently use multiple forms of technology and media to facilitate family communication. Semi-structured interviews are appropriate for this investigation because they provide study participants with a platform for the articulation of standpoints (perceptions), strategies (motivated actions), and stories (experiential narratives) from a highly knowledgeable sample (Bartkowski and Grettenberger 2018). Interviews allow respondents to recount relevant experiences while sharing reflections, assessments, and motivations in their own words (Laslett 1999). In this case, study participants were asked to consider and discuss their use of technology to communicate with family members. Often, participants' accounts of technologically assisted family communication were shared through the medium of narratives (stories of life experiences). In such cases, both thematic and narrative analytical techniques were employed. Thematic techniques focus on the explicit message(s) evident in interview accounts (e.g., clear recollections of using Facebook as a means of promoting family bonding). Narrative analytical techniques probe for additional meanings, including a problem-climax-denouement sequence and even countervailing patterns (e.g., discursive tensions, domination-resistance couplings) commonly expressed in the form of a story. Through the accounts shared by knowledgeable respondents, this study specifically explains how and why parents and their adult children utilize digital technology to negotiate their relationships with one another. All interviews were conducted by the first author.

Sample characteristics are featured in Tables 1 and 2. A recruitment script and pre-interview survey ensured that all participants met vital criteria for inclusion in the study sample. The pre-interview screening instrument verified extensive media usage (see Table 3). Consequently, the study is based on a purposive (that is, theoretical) sampling strategy in which subjects were intentionally recruited because they had ample exposure to the topic under investigation. The objective of this approach is not generalizability, as would be the case with a random sample. Our nonrandomized sampling framework is predicated on the subjects' extensive and immersive experiences with technology in the context of family relationships. The establishment of such attributes on the part of interviewees prior to study involvement ensures that research participants are knowledgeable, highly experienced informants concerning the study topic, namely, technology use.

**Table 1.** Personal and Family Sample Characteristics.

Participant Characteristic	All Participants	Parents	Adult Children
Number of Participants			
	30	15	15
Age (reported in years)			
	Age range: 18–62	Age range: 39–62	Age range: 18–29
Gender			
Male	6	1	5
Female	24	14	10
Racial/Ethnic Background			
Black	-	-	-
White	18	10	8
Latino	8	4	4
Other (specified)	4	1 (Native American)	1 (Cherokee)
	-	-	1 (White/Latino)
	-	-	1 (not specified)
Marital/Relationship Status			
Single	10	-	10
Cohabiting	4	1	3
Married	15	13	2
Divorced	-	-	-
Other (specified)	1 (separated)	1 (separated)	-
Number of Children			
9 children	1	1	-
6 children	2	2	-
4 children	1	1	-
3 children	7	7	-
2 children	4	4	-
1 child	4	-	4
No children	11	-	11
Number of Adult Children			
9 children were adults	1	1	-
5 children were adults	1	1	-
4 children were adults	1	1	-
3 children were adults	5	5	-
2 children were adults	5	5	-
1 child was an adult	2	2	-
No children were adults	4	-	4

**Table 2.** Work and Related Sample Characteristics.

<b>Participant Characteristic</b>	<b>All Participants</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Adult Children</b>
Number of Participants			
	30	15	15
Occupation *			
Administrative	5	2	3
Educator	4	4	-
Executive (various)	3	3	-
Healthcare	3	2	1
Professional	3	2	1
Homemaker	3	3	-
Sales	2	-	2
Student	9	-	9
Annual Household Income (all adult wage earners)			
Less than \$20,000	6	-	6
\$20,001–\$30,000	2	1	1
\$30,001–\$40,000	1	-	1
\$40,001–\$60,000	5	2	3
\$60,001–\$80,000	5	5	-
\$80,001–\$100,000	5	3	2
Over \$100,000	6	4	2
Years of Formal Education			
19 years	1	-	1
18 years	7	6	1
16 years	4	1	3
15 years	5	2	3
14 years	7	4	3
13 years	1	-	1
12 years	4	1	3
11 years	1	1	-
Religious Affiliation			
Atheist	1	-	1
Baptist	1	-	1
Catholic	3	1	2
Christian	7	4	3
Episcopal	3	2	1
Methodist	6	3	3
Non-denominational	1	1	-
No religion	6	2	4

\* Indicates one or more missing values in this report.

Although the study's overall methodology was governed by purposive sampling with specific inclusion criteria, a snowball sampling technique was also employed. Snowball sampling operates on the logic of participant referral. Recruitment began by contacting eligible members of the first author's social and professional networks about their interest in participating in this project. Consistent with a snowball sampling technique, the first author also requested that potential respondents and actual participants forward study information to other eligible families in their own social networks. These requests were circulated from several different social network starting points to elicit diversity—that is, sampling from multiple networks—where possible. Eligible participants were required to be either a parent of adult children or an emerging adult in a family that relied heavily on technology and media to facilitate communication between family members. Data collection took place from November 2013

through June 2014, with most data collected in 2014. We concede that data collected several years ago has limitations and discuss this consideration in the concluding section of the study.

The interview questionnaire (see Appendix A) inquired about a range of family and personal experiences with digital communication technology in its many forms. It also asked about strategies and motives related to technology use, appraisals of the role of technology on family relationships, and a host of other issues. These types of issues have been previously documented by excellent studies (see our foregoing review of such research). Hence, our primary concern entailed not studying technology use depicted by one family member but rather contrasting parents' and young adult children's interview accounts of technologically assisted family communication. To be sure, actual technology use often informed interview accounts because parents' and children's reflections about technologically assisted family communication were often discussed in light of experiential examples. So, where relevant, our analysis offers a careful study of accounts defined broadly to include general reflections and specifically recounted experiences, with the latter often conveyed through interview narratives. Nevertheless, given our split-sample design and use of dyadic (parent-child) interview data, our primary goal is to determine how and why parents' and children's accounts of technologically assisted family communication converge and diverge across the generational divide that separates our two subsamples.

**Table 3.** Access to Technology.

Answers	All Participants	Parents	Adult Children
Number of Participants			
	30	15	15
Computer with Internet Access at Home			
Yes	26	14	12
No	4	1	3
Personal Cell Phone			
Yes	30	15	15
No	-	-	-
Cell Phone is a Smartphone			
Yes	29	14	15
No	1	1	-
How Often Needs Help to Use Technology			
Never	13	3	10
Sometimes	17	12	5
Usually	-	-	-
Always	-	-	-

Interviews were audio-recorded, fully transcribed, and manually coded in succession by multiple persons on our research team. Due to the use of a split-sample design, transcripts were first grouped by social position (parents versus emerging adult children). Analyses were conducted independently for each subgroup to draw out major themes and identify key processes. Once these themes and processes were discerned, comparisons were drawn across subgroups, with points of divergence and convergence in accounts of technologically assisted family communication noted. Throughout the coding process, we organized the data around sensitizing concepts (Bowen 2006; Charmaz 2003), particularly those related to participant reflections and assessments concerning technologically assisted family communication. First-order sensitizing concepts were generated from our theoretical frameworks, which included family adaptive strategies (e.g., family member positionality, standpoint, aims, techniques, motives), the technology adoption process (e.g., digital fluency and capability, technology adoption leaders and followers), and family power (e.g., forms of relational asymmetries,

processes of domination, subordination, and resistance). If sensitizing concepts were observed in the data, they were reclassified as definitive concepts, called such because they are linked to documented empirical patterns (themes found in the transcripts).

Our data exhibited robust internal validity, that is, alignment between interviewees' stated views, motives, etc. on the hand and their description of meaningful corroborating experiences on the other. Put differently, the narratives shared by our study participants seemed quite credible, as they were often punctuated by detailed examples and thoughtful reflections. Saturation was achieved. Saturation entails the documentation of consistent responses with respect to broadly evident themes even if the particulars of the specific encounter or situation sometimes differ. Thus, fifteen parent-child interview dyads were more than sufficient to explore our research question. Coding was an iterative process. Beyond our use of sensitizing concepts, we also initially coded for positive, negative, and ambivalent appraisals of technologically assisted family communication. However, we quickly realized that this approach yielded a more flat and static analysis than was actually evident in the transcripts. In short, strongly bounded categorical codes failed to capture the richness of the data. Our detection of key themes was instead facilitated by focusing on social processes (e.g., negotiated facets of family relationships, taking actions to reset norms or expectations).

Interview discourse is typically dynamic and layered (see [Bartkowski 2004, 2007](#); [Bartkowski and Grettenberger 2018](#)), and our interview data were certainly marked by these features. By dynamic discourse, we mean that accounts (1) were often expressed across interview questions (interviews are, after all, conversational encounters with movement among topics) and (2) commonly featured reflections characterized by tensions concerning the subject being discussed (unresolved ambivalence, contradictions). Layered discourse was evident such that interviewees' accounts of technologically assisted family communication were often connected to other facets of subjects' lives (memorable family experiences or life stages, relationships with a particular parent or child, specific expectations concerning the appropriate use of technology, work versus family comparisons, etc.).

Our sensitizing concepts and these discourse-related considerations prompted a series of passes through the data with process-oriented issues in mind. Thus, our reporting of findings attempts to respect and preserve the richness of interview discourse. For this reason, in the results that follow, themes and subthemes may be apparent in any single quote. In the same manner, stories are addressed using narrative analysis techniques. These techniques are sensitive to the "storied"—that is, narratively structured and multilayered—dimensions of such data ([Bartkowski 2007](#); see also [Herman and Vervaeck 2001](#); [Rubin and Rubin 2012](#)). We are therefore careful to examine various discursive threads in any interview narrative while tracking narrative movement (e.g., problem-climax-denouement transitions). After all sensitizing concepts were exhaustively applied to govern successive passes through the transcripts, we conducted a final inductive phase of coding by using an emergent themes technique. This technique was designed to reveal patterns not evident with sensitizing concepts. The vast majority of the results reported here are derived from sensitizing concepts. In short, the analyses that follow focus primarily on interview accounts in which subjects reflected on the role and perceived influence of technology on family communication, often grounded in their personal experiences. We also prioritized reflections on interviewees' motives and efforts to enlist technology in family communication. For ease of reading, the names that we use to identify key patterns in the interview data are featured in italics throughout the following section.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. *Discordant Accounts: Competing Intergenerational Reflections on Technology*

Our reporting of results begins with an analysis of the points of divergence exhibited between parents and their emerging adult children concerning technologically assisted communication. In this section, we discuss the sharply different reflections on technology offered by these two different subgroups of interviewees. The first set of themes among discordant appraisals is what we call the

*problem of presence*. The problem of presence is experienced by parents and children alike, but quite differently by each group. We begin by exploring how the problem of presence emerges for parents. Thereafter, we examine this issue in relation to emerging adult children.

Parents were more inclined than their emerging adult children to report that the use of technology and media interfere with healthy family functioning. Some parents contended that technology undermined quality family time and often created an atmosphere of tension. One way in which parents experienced the problem of presence occurred when technologically mediated interaction with non-family members was prioritized over immediately available face-to-face connections with close family members. So, in this case, it was not that technologically assisted family communication per se was the problem. Rather, technology use by children facilitated communication with non-family members, which was seen as undermining family togetherness and “quality time” between parents and children. Given previous research (reviewed above), this finding is not altogether unexpected. On this point, there was clear evidence of generational differences, with the middle-aged parent subgroup in our sample more inclined than their emerging adult children to value literal “face-time”—not to be confused with Apple’s smartly named videoconferencing platform. Several parents discussed how tensions often arose during family events or gatherings when one or more individuals—typically, their children, and sometimes the very child we had interviewed—became engrossed in a conversation through a mobile device (e.g., smartphone or tablet). Parents in our sample quite commonly indicated that they wanted their adult children to value the rare occasions when their whole family was able to get together. Others were concerned that essential elements of having a healthy family life, including adequate sleep, the timely completion of chores, and the prioritization of homework suffered when time spent on a mobile device crowded out such family and personal obligations. Parents would limit screen time or take children’s phones altogether to solve this problem of presence on the part of their children. Moreover, many respondents reported that one of the few rigid rules concerning technology that their families attempted to enforce was that family members should silence and put away their mobile devices for the duration of an in-person visit. One of our middle-aged parents, Elizabeth Ingalls, discussed this situation and described how she sometimes even employed technology to convey her feelings of displeasure when her daughters became absorbed in their mobile devices:

Occasionally if we’re all out eating somewhere, their father and I will sit there and look at [Natalie and Jessica] doing this {demonstrates hunching over a cell phone and texting}. A time or two, I’ve actually taken my phone out and texted them, “Put your phones away!”

These small battles against technological intrusion on family time were cited repeatedly by parents as a source of ongoing conflict within families. For their part, emerging adult children did not discuss the use of technology as a distraction from family life. The absence of this discourse from their interview accounts when asked about problems or conflicts surrounding technology use among family members was telling. Rather, if children approached the issue at all, it was in terms of sanctions that they had received for engaging in technologically assisted communication with friends during family time or for neglecting other responsibilities (e.g., chores, homework). Jessica Ingalls, the daughter of Elizabeth Ingalls, did concur that her mother was sometimes frustrated with her and her sister’s phone use during family get-togethers. But from Jessica’s perspective, this was not a serious issue. Moreover, her account is discordant because Jessica claimed that she was allied not only with her sister in committing this infraction. Her father was also a culprit in perpetrating techno-intrusion on family life. Thus, her perspective stands in contrast to that of her mother. As Jessica explained:

I know my mom doesn’t always like it when we’re all on our phones, and we’re eating. My dad included, because he’ll get work calls and stuff. But yeah, I can tell that it kind of bugs her, for sure. But I wouldn’t say it’s like a huge issue. I think it’s kind of a half-joking thing when she says anything about it. I think it’s there, but it’s not a huge thing.

In short, then, emerging adult children sometimes recognized that their use of technology caused friction within the home. However, they did not see this friction in terms of being “distracted” or

undermining family time. They were simply staying connected with friends through the means they normally used to do so. Digital immigrant parents saw problems in the erosion of family togetherness where their digital native children did not. Yet, while unclear expectations surrounding the appropriate time and place for technology use sometimes sparked tension, most families were able to resolve the issue peacefully. Typically, parents and their emerging adult children had come to a tenuous agreement that, in certain situations, especially when visiting older family members (e.g., grandparents), individuals would respect the time they had with one another by limiting the number of times they checked their smartphone. Compliance with this norm was commonly characterized by parents as a sign of “respect,” and the mentions of grandparent visits are particularly illuminating. Grandparents are two generations removed from the emerging adult digital native children and, as far-flung digital immigrants, were presumed to be—or perhaps were—less technologically tolerant and savvy.

As noted, mobile devices were also perceived by parents as intrusive into family responsibilities (children’s homework and chores) and the atmosphere that parents wished to establish in their home (avoiding foul language, explicit images, etc.). These problem of presence considerations were noticeably missing from children’s accounts of technology use, other than mentioning how they bristled at and often attempted to dodge restrictions meted out by their parents. One mother, Inez Solari, described a situation in which her son, Leo, began to engage in media consumption that became disruptive to the function of their household. Inez recounted the rules she needed to impose:

We’ve had to set rules—rules on the dates and times, because Leo will get off that schedule. Especially after he graduated [high school]. He was sleeping late and staying up really late into the night on the computer. His pattern was messed up. So, we had to argue with him a little about that—like, “You need to get up. You have chores to do. You got to do it. You can’t just be on the computer all day.” He gets upset that we’re arguing, but it’s because he’s on the internet, or he’s just hanging around the house, or watching television . . . Then he’s out there at the pool with his friends, but he doesn’t want to help out. So, we restrict him from the computer, and that’s what causes the tension . . . “Well then, go get your own computer, put it in your own room, pay half the electricity bill, and then you can do whatever you want!” Those are the kinds of things we get into. [My oldest son], not so much because he doesn’t live [in my home]. But when he did, it was the same.

Inez’s description of her conflict with her son, Leo, indicates that his status as a residential emerging adult child granted her latitude to decide the kinds of activities she would allow her son to engage in while still living under her roof and using technology (e.g., cell phone, computer, television) for which she paid. Her exercise of power was linked to the financial resources she provided to make technology—and even the electricity—available to Leo. While this particular instance was not mediated through technology, the tension concerning Leo was a direct result of his life revolving around media consumption. In a move that clearly indicates Inez’s commitment to continue exercising her parental authority, Inez began to enforce rules and boundaries surrounding media consumption that she hoped would spur Leo into choosing more productive daily pursuits. Inez openly admitted to policing websites visited by her son and his phone bills because she felt an urgency to make sure that Leo, who she characterized as “naïve” and “gullible,” was engaging in healthy lifestyle choices.

The problem of presence also manifested itself for parents in the form of children’s potentially unsupervised use of media technology. This manifestation of the problem of presence underscored parents’ worries about their lack of monitoring—literally, their supervisory absence—concerning their children’s online activities. The challenges associated with having a persistent parental presence through technology and remaining steadfastly committed to parental oversight in children’s technology use loomed large in the interview account of another mother, Rosa Leman:

When [my children] were younger, thinking they were funny and typing in something—like butt.com—and then them seeing images that they can never get out of their head again and being mortified and embarrassed that it even popped up. Or even intentionally—I mean,

especially because they have little siblings in the house—thinking it’s funny to watch a news commentary where there’s bad language or inappropriate subject matter, or intentionally looking at something that I would never want their siblings to see. Giving out personal information online—you name it, they’ve probably done it, and I probably caught them. “Oh, I’ll buy this off Amazon . . . ” and they use their debit card, but it’s all the way in China. There’s been a lot of different things. Technology is definitely not the greatest thing in the world. Although I think it has its place and I think it has some benefits, I think there’s a lot of downsides to it as well. Our conflict is [kids] staying up late, not doing homework because of being on technology. So, they’re staying up late, they’re not getting their homework done, their grades are falling. Seeing inappropriate things and getting sucked in to that. Posting pictures—oh my god. That was a huge one before Donovan was 18—him thinking it was fun to post pictures on bodybuilding websites, and I’m just like, “There’s not much left to the imagination.” Then once he was 18, he didn’t care. He was posting stuff all over the place, and there was not really much I could say at that point because he was moving out. He went off to college, so I kind of just had to take it. It was kind of sad. There’s a lot of negatives and there’s a lot of things.

This particular facet of the problem of presence emerged quite differently for children. While parents lamented their children’s lack of family presence (veritable absence) due to technology or the challenges associated with constantly monitoring children’s media usage, children complained that their parents were overly present in their lives through the use of digital communications media. Many children felt tightly tethered to their parents through the use of digital technology and struggled to break free. Ironically, a device that was so liberating in its ability to foster strong peer relationships often felt like a leash to emerging adult children, whose parents used technology to “intrude” into their children’s lives, at least as the latter perceived it. Several emerging adults interviewed for our study recounted how intrusive their parents or other adult family members were with respect to social media by, for example, either commenting online about their children’s social media posts or engaging their children offline about their posts. Emerging adult Bianca Guevara felt like adult relatives had ganged up on her through Facebook, so she took steps to reduce her exposure to such scrutiny through a common act of resistance, namely, unfriending relatives.

[There was conflict] with Facebook. Once my aunts on my dad’s side all got into—they like to gossip a lot, and it’s all women on that side, my dad’s the only male. So when [Facebook] started coming about and everybody started getting it, my aunts were saying to my grandma, “Did you know Bianca’s doing this or that?” Or they’ll tell my dad. I’m just like, are you kidding me? I have my dad on [Facebook]. There’s no need to go tell other people—[my dad] already knows. I deleted all of them. My dad still has it. But when my cousins post something, my grandma says, “Did you know they did this and this?” It’s just irritating. You want to say something like, “Don’t tell me—I already know.” If they’re going to put it out there for everybody to see, then what does it matter? I already know. That would . . . cause problems—everybody’s in everyone’s business over there. It’s ridiculous.

For their part, parents felt like Facebook and, more broadly, social media were the key means through which they could receive a steady flow of information—literally, a news feed—about critical developments in their children’s lives. Several parents commented that one of the primary means through which they learned about important happenings in their children’s lives was through Facebook or similar media. This situation needed to be treated delicately by parents, as they well recognized, because their children were savvy enough social media users to block their parents from select social media posts if parents overstepped the boundary preferences of their children. What made these accounts discordant was the sharp contrast evident between parents and children regarding social media presence. Parents did not want technology to distract their children from normal family commitments and wanted to use technology to stay connected with or monitor their children. Children

rejected the characterization of technology as a distraction and commonly tried to avoid their parents' efforts at technologically mediated monitoring.

Discordant accounts of technologically assisted family communication also emerged in the form of *digital expression preferences*. Parents and children often used technology to accomplish very specific goals. As noted above, those goals may be quite different across generational lines, such that parents use technology to remain in touch with children even as children use it to bolster their peer relationships while attempting to escape the clutches of their caregivers. Technology, however, is not a neutral instrument through which social actors pursue desirable objectives. Technological platforms are governed by intrinsic use rules. Intrinsic use rules are "built in" to technological platforms. One example of an intrinsic use rule is using Twitter for short-form communication and using email, phone calls, or blogs for long-form or more dense communication. Another, open to some debate these days, is that face-to-face communication is more intimate than phone calls, which themselves are more intimate than messaging. There are also extrinsic rules that socially develop around technology use, such as not sending lengthy text messages that would occupy more than a full screen on a typical mobile device.

Parents and adult children were well aware of the rules governing technology use, but generational differences were often evident in terms of their choice of technological medium given their distinctive preferences for expression. Several parents mentioned preferring phone calls or (for some) email as a means of communication with their children and other family members. Yet, they readily conceded that this preference was typically not shared by their children. Lynne Beringer, one mother interviewed in our study, admitted that her two children had different approaches to communicating with her. Although neither of them preferred phone calls as a primary means of communication, Saul (her son who we interviewed) would call her back but would not generally initiate a conversation with a phone call. Also, Lynne is not fluent at texting. Her interview account captures a number of use rules and generational distinctions in communication preferences. Lynne states flatly:

Well, I guess there are certain expectations. I know if I call Saul and it goes to voicemail, I can expect him to call me back in short order. I know that if I call [my oldest daughter], she will never call me back. {Laughter} She will text me later, but she won't return my call. So there are different ones that they use [technology] differently, and I think some of them have the same complaint about me—"I texted you and you don't text me back." But I don't like to text. I would rather them just call me, unless it's something quick like, "Out of milk." And early on, actually that is what we did use technology for, and we told them specifically, "Only use this, only call me, or send a text if we're out of something, or you need me—just a quick, short message." That's all I really wanted from it. But it's funny, the youngest [daughter], she'll text, "When are you coming home," or these long, drawn out—"Can I go over to my friend's house, because blah, blah, blah, blah . . ." This whole long list. It's like, oh my gosh. Just call. Do you really expect me to respond to something that long on this little [device]? My thumbs don't work that way, so I'm doing this [texting] with one finger! There are expectations and it is frustrating to me and their dad if we're trying to get ahold of them and they're not responding—with each other, too! That's a frustration. When someone is ignoring their technology and they're not communicating with you. That's frustrating because now you've got all these ways to communicate, but if you're still not getting a response—that's very, very frustrating.

Most children generally wished to avoid long-form expression and instead preferred parent-child communication that could be conveyed more succinctly. Part of this generational difference can be explained by the rise of genuinely mobile technology and the decline of the desktop computer during the past fifteen or so years. Saul Beringer's communication preferences contrasted in just this way with those of his mother. When asked about the types of digital communication technology he preferred to use, Saul was tellingly succinct in his response. "Now, Facebook, Instagram. I don't really use Twitter. Texting, cell phone—those are probably the main ones I use. Email? I don't really use email a lot, but I

get it through my phone. Really, my phone is kind of the portal to everything else. Whereas before it was just through the computer, now I can kind of go anywhere and still have access to those things. But I would say email is probably the least [used]. But the most is probably texting or sharing through Facebook.”

Digital expression preferences were also affected by other considerations. Some children discussed that they could express themselves more boldly through messaging than they could in a face-to-face conversation. Among the children who reported feeling emboldened by text messaging was Leo, the 18 year-old residential son of Inez Solari. Leo explained that he sometimes felt like text messaging enabled him to communicate messages that he would be reluctant to express over the phone or in person. According to his account, Leo’s father would start “text fights” with inflammatory messages but Leo could hold his own using this particular communication medium in a way that would not be possible during a face-to-face encounter. When these conflicts reached their apex, his parents would attempt to switch to a communication medium that was most comfortable for them, namely, talking by phone. Tellingly, Leo would avoid such calls. As Leo explains:

My dad is more of a texter—if he’s angry, he’ll send me a text. We’ll get in text fights . . . I had this thing that I would say a lot of things even if I was scared to say them. I used to send texts to my parents telling them to go fuck themselves. I just always had this thing like, “Why are you attacking me? Why are you doing this? You’re abusive!” Then they would get angry and just call me. If my mom is angry at me, she’ll call me. Actually, that’s why I avoid her calls—the way my mother talks to me on the phone is the same as if she’s in person, so sometimes she doesn’t shut up. Sometimes I don’t shut up. She will call me ten times.

It is interesting to contrast Leo’s account of technologically assisted family communication, which focuses on a conflict, with that of his mom. Inez, Leo’s mother, has a very benign view of technology and her digital communication preferences. While Inez frequently texts at work (out of expedience), she much prefers talking by phone. But her children do not prefer this means of communication and would most certainly not respond to an email from her. So, Inez has more or less accepted her children’s communication preferences as her own.

We used to talk on the phone more, especially when they didn’t have a cell phone. I had a cell phone and they had the home phone. We used to talk more, because they would have to pick up the phone when it rang. Now they have their own phone and they don’t always answer, whether it’s not on or they can’t hear it. With Leo, I can never reach him, but he’s always charging the phone and leaving it in his room. It’s really hard for me to get ahold of him. With [my oldest son], he answers my calls a lot, but if he’s asleep or out playing basketball, it’s really hard to reach him. As far as reaching them, it’s always just the phone. We never, ever email each other. None of us do. We don’t write each other letters—maybe I should just to freak them out one day! {Laughs}

Therefore, a family member’s choice of communication medium is not simply a product of personal preference. Digital expression preferences are closely connected to the power dynamics endemic to the parent-child relationship and generational communication patterns. Several children clearly conveyed their preferences for texting or other short-form communication to their parents, perhaps knowing that this form of communication gave their parents less of an ability to control the substance and tenor of communication.

#### 4.2. Concordant Accounts: Shared Intergenerational Reflections on Technology

There were a number of instances in which parents and their emerging adult children offered similar accounts about technologically assisted family communication. Parents and children alike agreed that technology was often essential for *family relationship maintenance*. Two types of stories about family relationship maintenance were shared by parents and their emerging adult children. The

first form of family relationship maintenance was *fostering parent-child cohesion*. Nowhere was this cohesion-bolstering pattern more evident than when adult children lived considerable distances from their parents. In such cases, technology was instrumental in creating a persistent connection that was welcomed by parents and children alike. And when emerging adult children had their own children, they especially valued observing grandparent-grandchild interactions that were made possible by technology (often, videoconferencing given the richness of this medium).

Accounts of parent-child cohesion were evident from parents when they compared family communication to work-related communication. Parents commonly explained that work-related communication in which they engaged was practical and instrumental, that is, necessary to complete a task at the office. The same distinctions were often drawn by emerging adult children, but they contrasted meaningful family communication with more superficial peer communication. Emerging adult Donovan Leman captured this peer versus family distinction quite well:

With my friends, if you'll pardon the phrase, I'll shoot the shit with them. Very rarely is it that I have a deep meaningful conversation with [friends]. I can count on one hand the number of instances where I've had a deep meaningful conversation with someone over text message. But with my family, it's always something pertinent or something meaningful. For example, if my mom knows that I've been having a bad day or something, she will send me funny pictures via text message or say something encouraging. Or if something big happens—like, "Oh hey, we're going back home [to their home state], are you able to make it?" Or, for example, my brother called me up the other day and said, "Hey, mom is graduating. Are you able to come? I'll come get you." So, it's a lot more meaningful when I talk to my family. It's just not as often as I talk to my friends. Because it's very easy to have a trivial conversation with somebody to pass the time or fill time.

A second form of family relationship maintenance entailed using technology to mitigate family conflict. Here again, parents and children alike recounted instances of *family conflict mitigation*, thereby making these accounts intergenerationally concordant. For some parents and children, digital communication technology came together to create a neutral space in which to work through family tensions at the convenience of family members. Many parents and children depended on technology to facilitate necessary conversations about sensitive topics. When circumstances warranted, some respondents used multiple technological mediums to express their needs or frustrations. In most cases, participants felt that technology and media served as a tool to resolve their conflicts, rather than to encourage them. Some parents and children explained that they preferred to address sensitive topics through some form of messaging instead of reacting vocally in the heat of a conversation. Respondents felt that when they were able to take the time to write out a text message, they could reconsider and recast their emotions if they felt they were being too harsh or emotional. Lisa Ferrera recounted how she and her oldest daughter would sometimes combine phone calls and text messaging when they needed to have emotionally charged conversations. Her comments harken back to the complexity of digital expression preferences while also addressing conflict mitigation:

[My oldest daughter] might bring up a topic via text or phone call, or we'll start with a text and then I get frustrated because I have so much to say and I can't type fast enough. So, I'll just call her. But then sometimes our tone of voice will escalate and I'll know we're not getting anywhere, so I'll hang up, wait, and then I'll start texting her again. {Laughs} Or depending on our emotions—emotions is [sic] huge—sometimes if I need to approach her with something, I might text her rather than call her to take out my tone. Sometimes when I text her, she will read into it and get angry. I'll say, "I'm trying to help you," but she doesn't take it that way . . . But yeah, with [my oldest daughter] sometimes we will go back and forth using different technology, just to give ourselves a break and see if we can communicate better with a different mode of technology. The texting wasn't working, so I call her, and then we just talk over each other and don't listen to one another. So then I say, "This isn't

going anywhere, I'm going to go." Then I will start the topic up again via text because then you can methodically think about your answer before you give it. Where if you're talking, sometimes you just shout it out, and maybe you didn't mean it.

Conflict mitigation sometimes took different forms for parents and children. But the similarities in these patterns are unmistakable. Iris Goddard explained that her son was a recently recovering heroin addict. During the peak of his drug use, she would use technology as a buffer when communicating messages to him about whether or not he was welcome to come home for a visit:

[With my son], because if he wanted to come home, it was like, "You're not coming home high." A lot of it was dealt with by technology with him, because I didn't want him here. It wasn't because I didn't love him; it was because it just wasn't my son. There was probably a lot of stuff brought up [through technology] with him that I'm sure he didn't like, but that's just tough.

Iris proudly announced that after her son went into recovery, she decided to purchase a cell phone for him so they could begin to reconnect and rebuild their parent-child relationship after years of struggle between the two of them. She also hoped that, in the near future, he would be able to get a computer so they could Skype and she could make more of a visual determination of how his health was faring. Like many other parents and adult children in this study, Iris managed her relationship with her emerging adult child by creating boundaries in problem areas, while being willing to remove barriers when circumstances changed for the better. Similar to parental monitoring and intimate surveillance of children through new technologies (see [Leaver 2017](#)), this account also reveals the polyvalent character of family power, because Iris could bond with her recovering son through Skype videoconferencing while also monitoring his drug use by scrutinizing his appearance.

Imogene Campbell, a daughter in our study, also used communication technology to mitigate conflict and maintain family relationships during a difficult time. Her challenging life event was an unintended pregnancy. Rather than taking advantage of multiple opportunities to address this very sensitive topic at a time when she could be face-to-face with her parents, Imogene described herself as having "chickened out." Ultimately, she chose to relay a significant message to her mother via a cell phone call. Underscoring the complexities of family power, her mother agreed to tell Imogene's father of their daughter's premarital pregnancy. However, Imogene agreed that she had incurred a significant debt to her mom for delivering on this difficult "danger-zone" favor:

I told my parents that I was pregnant over the phone . . . So, on two occasions, I was in [my home city], and I had the opportunity to tell them, but I chickened out. I really just didn't want to be there for the yelling or everything in my face . . . I was really afraid to tell my dad. I didn't want to be in the same room with him. I kind of wanted my mom as a buffer. So, I really took the easy chicken way out where I told my mom over the phone, which took me at least four or five weeks to work up the courage to tell her on the phone. And then I was like, "Can you tell Dad?" She was like, "Well, you owe me." I told her, "I know, I'm just too afraid." . . . Really, I was just afraid of the emotional repercussions of all that—you know, being yelled at, that sort disappointed look on his face like, "You're not married! I can't believe that!" . . . So yeah, I don't think I should have done that in that particular way, but I chose [technology] as an out because I knew that this was going to be an hour conversation on the phone, Mom doesn't have to see how red I am, how I'm shaking. I can just do some word-vomit on the phone, then hang up and be out of that danger-zone.

Technologically inspired conflict mitigation took a very interesting turn for Jenna Holmes, a daughter in our sample of emerging adult children. Jenna was in the middle of events that seemed to be leading to her parents' divorce. Her sense of being stuck in the middle of her parents' impending divorce was confirmed through technology, and she used that very same medium to tell her parents to leave her out of their problems.

My parents had a couple of times in my life where they have discussed divorce, and it never went through, but it gets pretty far, to where you think, “Crap, they might actually break up this time.” . . . I was living with a roommate near [my university], and I remember one morning not going in to school because they were having one of these things where, literally, it seemed like I would have one [parent] on the phone, and I’d get a beep and would have to flash over the other one, and then I’d get a beep because the other one hung up frustrated and I’d have to flash over . . . I just wanted to be like, “Listen guys, I’m going to turn this off and you guys are going to deal with this by yourself.”

Concordant parent-child accounts of technologically assisted family communication were not only evident with respect to family relationship maintenance. A second set of concordant parent-child accounts surfaced when study participants were asked to evaluate the role of technology in family life. Nearly to a person, parents and their emerging adult children offered *mixed assessments of the impact of digital communication technology on family life*. In short, all interviewees characterized technology as part blessing, part curse, though admittedly more of the former. Keep in mind that our interview sample is composed of frequent users of digital communication technology, so they likely have a predisposition to emphasize its virtues. Technologically averse individuals would not have been eligible to interview with us. Virtually all respondents acknowledged that while they were grateful for the freedom and abilities afforded by technology and media, they understood that it came with a cost. Parents and children concurred that communication technology was needed because everyone’s lives were so busy. However, they also seemed to hint that technology is a facilitator of a good portion of that busyness by raising the expectation that people be accessible to their employers and social circles outside of traditional business or socializing hours. Thus, while technology was a resource that allowed family members to maintain a positive presence with one another, it created strain when demands from outside the family were expected to be met within the home. When asked to imagine their lives and relationships without the convenience of digital communication technology, most gave a variety of pensive and often nostalgic answers.

Amelia Rios, a 42-year-old preschool teacher, expressed reservations about the centrality of technology and media in family communication. Amelia explained that she believed that, without technology, life would be experienced at a less frantic pace. Amelia felt that the busyness of a contemporary lifestyle required technology to serve as a coping mechanism, which sometimes impeded deeper levels of familial intimacy:

[Without technology], there would be a lot more quality time with one another. A lot more bonding time. A lot more wanting to be around one another, because that would be all you have. Not that we don’t have that right now, but it would be looked for a lot more. The communications between everybody would be a lot better compared to the way it is right now because of all the technology that’s available out there for everybody. But it would be a lot nicer. It wouldn’t be so hectic. It would be a lot slower and easygoing. I really feel that today everything is just so rushed. Everybody’s in a rush to get from one place to another. We can’t really enjoy one another the way that at one time you were able to, without worrying about tomorrow or a few hours from now. It would be a lot more easygoing compared to the way we are right now.

Amelia’s sentiments were echoed by many other respondents, both parents and their emerging adult children. Many, particularly parents, seemed to wish they could carve out more face-to-face time with their families. Some, like Wallace Ingalls, an interviewed parent, believed that less reliance on technology for communication would result in more high-quality interactions within his family:

I certainly think [without technology] it would be more of the verbal communication than using texting, for instance. In some ways, it would definitely enhance communication on one side, and on the other, [communication] would be less frequent . . . I just—probably a

poor choice in words, enhanced—but just being able to have more one-on-one conversation, as opposed to texting back and forth. I just think it would open up that opportunity to have more one-on-one talking back and forth, as opposed to technology. That, to me, would be favorable sometimes.

Yet, many of these same parents and children spoke with concern about how difficult it would be to make plans with family members, or how uncomfortable it would be to not have technology's ability to communicate information in a timely fashion. Most participants thought that without modern technology or media, they would likely initiate more frequent in-person visits or begin writing letters to one another—letters, they explained, would be similar to emailing or texting, but without the instantaneous gratification. In the absence of technology as a cultural resource for making family plans, most assumed that family functions would be planned far in advance and with little room for impromptu meetings or changes in event plans. Wallace Ingalls' 25-year-old daughter, Jessica, lived about one hour away from her parents' home. Jessica explained how her parent-child relationship might shift without the conveniences of technology:

I think that the times where [my parents and I] would see each other would be more special. There would be more to keep each other updated on. I'm a person who likes to write, so I'm sure I would be writing letters, and that would be a lot of fun. It's always nice to read what's going on with someone, I think. That would be nice, but I certainly think it would be harder, too. Because if you want to tell something right away, but you can't—maybe if we didn't know about technology, that would be one thing. But if it were to be taken away that would be frustrating not being able to talk to someone like you were used to.

Like Jessica, many respondents believed that technology and media allowed for practical communication that worked to make life less stressful for families. Participants reported that updates between parents and adult children were shared quickly and easily through technology and media. Thus, small daily emergencies were coordinated and resolved before becoming issues that required in-person mediation. While most families claimed that they selectively managed conflicts through phone calls or text messaging, ultimately the stories they shared about their families reveal that technology empowered them to resolve family conundrums before they could escalate into conflicts or tense situations.

Respondents nearly unanimously confirmed that they knew their relationships with their parents and children would be very different if not for the intervention of digital communication technology. Some respondents expressed alarm at even considering what form their relationships with their parents or adult children would take if their ability to communicate instantly with their family was taken away. Although most felt that they would find other ways of communicating and coping with family matters, nearly everyone explained that they felt very dependent on digital communication technology and had difficulties conceptualizing what life would be like without it. Parents often uncomfortably recalled their own young adulthoods, and imagined how they would feel if they were limited to the technology they and their parents had available in the 1970s and 1980s. These parents readily explained that they knew far more about their adult children's daily lives than past generations had been privy to, and expressed gratitude for the level of access they were now afforded to their children—access made possible only through the technological revolution that began in the 1990s and accelerated thereafter. Patricia Holmes was especially adamant that she would find it emotionally challenging to be a parent without the luxury of immediate communication with her children:

My relationship with my parents was totally different than the relationship I have with my kids. I think I know what's going on with my kids. I know what they're doing. My dad didn't have a clue what I did once I walked out of that house. At the time, he probably didn't know who my friends were—it was totally different. I would not want to be a parent back then. Not at all . . . I know I didn't talk to my dad every day. You just lived your life and

got together for Sunday dinner. It was totally different. [Without technology] you wouldn't know anything about [your adult children]. You can't learn what's going on in their life in an hour. I would never want to be a parent back then . . . I used to know people—this never happened to me—but when [my friends] had a car wreck, their parents didn't know. There was no way to know. I can't imagine being a parent back then—it would be awful.

Like Patricia, for most parents, the thought of not being able to reach their emerging adult children on a regular basis seemed to invoke feelings of anxiety. They were so accustomed to being involved and aware of what was going on in their children's lives that they were unable to bear the thought of being left out. Most parents believed that their adult children would be "lost" without technology to guide their daily schedules and facilitate their social connections. Many pondered over what other innovations might become available in the future, noting that their adult children would likely have even more communication tools at their disposal when they started families of their own.

Adult children seemed a bit more ambivalent about the concept of going without technology, which seems to support the idea of the Millennial generation's digital nativity. Young adults believed that they would still be emotionally close to their parents, regardless of whether they had technology and media available as a cultural resource for communication. Since most adult children lived nearby their parents (within a one-hour drive), they assumed that the relationship they had with their parents would persist, albeit sometimes in a more practical manner. Patricia Holmes' 29-year-old daughter, Jenna, imagined that, in the absence of technology, the relationship between her and her mother would shift from the friendship bond they had developed through cell phone calls and text messages to a utilitarian relationship that would be more focused on how and when they could assist one another by meeting practical needs:

I don't know if [my parents] would be as connected to the way I live my life—as selfish as it sounds—like hour to hour. I don't know that they would know me as well. They live a quarter mile away, so we do live in this existence where they would still be there and could still help me out, but our relationship would be different because I think it would be more of a practical use for them as opposed to like a friendship element that technology allows us. You know, if [technology] was just gone, it would be more like, "We need help with this, let's go to my parents' [house] . . ." [Technology] opens up something more deep than just what you need from your parents—it causes you to scratch a little deeper with them.

Here, Jenna articulated what most respondents felt about the idea of being without technology to facilitate family relationships. Digital communication technology and social media move family relationships away from a perfunctory, utilitarian, or obligatory character toward new possibilities for cultivating meaningful relationships between parents and their adult children. When relationships between parents and adult children can be cultivated outside of the traditional asymmetrical parent-child context, family members may eventually find themselves sharing a more egalitarian connection predicated on mutuality.

The findings detailed here have revealed that digital communication technology can serve as a bridge or a barrier depending on the situation at hand. Families are ultimately responsible to control the pace and quality their relationships. Through various forms of technology and media, parents and adult children now have much greater latitude in choosing how they maintain or manage the ebb and flow of their relationships. Saul Beringer reflects on this very concept as he closes his interview with a hopeful and insightful observation about technology's role in family life:

It's not always easy as new technologies come up and new things become accepted. I think it's definitely changed the way people relate to one another in a lot of ways. But ultimately, I think it's up to each person to do their own thinking and make sure that they're using [technology] in a way that benefits their relationships and causes them to become closer—especially when there's physical distance—instead of becoming less close. That means you can be really far

away from someone relationally, but have a lot of information going back and forth through social media. It comes down to being honest and transparent, developing relationships with your family and your parents that are like that. It changes through different phases of life, but as Facebook or things like it come along, you're able to share what's going on and it helps to show that different members of the family really do care about what's going on with you, and you can keep those bonds strong for the times when you're apart.

## 5. Discussion

This study set out to augment existing research on the range of potential influences that digital communication technology can exert on families, with attention to discordant and concordant accounts of technologically assisted family communication rendered by parents and their emerging adult children. Informed by a set of pioneering multiple-informant studies about family media usage (Clark 2009, 2013), our qualitative interview data focused more narrowly on technologically assisted family communication among parent-child dyads. We found technology to be a flexible relational resource for family interaction between parents and their young adult children. Our findings confirm and update Clark's formidable scholarly contributions with more recent data given relatively new advances in communication technology. Admittedly, even newer data than ours are needed given the pace of technological advancements during the past five years. Regrettably, there are relatively few studies that use multiple-informant interviews within a given family to render a rich portrait of complex family processes related to communication technology.

In short, we found that digital communication technology sometimes averts and other times foments family problems. Where family communication is concerned, technology is clearly a double-edged sword. Our study was informed by three theoretical frameworks: family adaptive strategies, technological adoption, and family power. Emerging adult children are an intriguing case to examine because of their transitional status, constituted by a mix of reliance on parents and autonomy as young adults. Where our study departed from most previous investigations concerns our use of a split-sample design and our analysis of dyadic data to contrast parents' and adult children's accounts related to technologically assisted family communication. Securing interview data from emerging adults and their parents (dyads interviewed separately) provided additional insight into the ongoing dynamics between these respective sets of family members. Among other findings, we discovered that parents and their emerging adult children sometimes render very different depictions of technologically assisted family communication, which we called discordant accounts. Yet, at other times, parents and their adult children exhibit remarkable agreement in their views, which we called concordant accounts. More fascinating yet, we found rich discourse in these interviews, such that parents and their emerging adult children offer layered—and even contradictory—reflections about technologically assisted communication. To be sure, other studies have examined patterns like these. But there is much to be gained by putting various family members' voices, expressed through one-on-one interviews, into conversation with one another through richly comparative data analysis (see Clark 2009, 2013).

How are we to make sense of the presence of both discordant and concordant accounts among parents and children? Three possible explanations are especially compelling. First, it is possible that technologically assisted family communication is really no different than other forms of family interaction. Communication within families has long been characterized by complexity, contradiction, and ambivalence (Bartkowski 2001). The pattern revealed in our data certainly fits with this model, as points of disagreement about technologically assisted family communication are intermingled with points of agreement. In short, a mix of discordance and concordance may characterize all or nearly all forms of family interaction. So, the patterns we have observed concerning technologically assisted family communication may simply mirror family interaction writ large.

Second, and in direct contrast to the foregoing explanation, technologically assisted family communication may mark some significant changes in family life. At the very least, the frequency (number of occurrences) and density (overall amount) of family communication has likely increased

with the advent of digital communication technology, particularly when family members do not share the same household. Increases in frequency and density of communication could deepen ambivalent feelings that were already very much a part of family relationships. In short, technology may serve to exacerbate moments of nearness and distance among family members, thereby magnifying what some have called an “approach-avoidance dance” within American homes (Rubin 1990). Where what we have called “the problem of presence” is concerned, parents complain about their children’s technologically inspired distractedness and inattention even as children do all in their power to escape the now technologically mediated clutches of their monitoring caregivers.

It is also clear that different types of digital media may be enlisted in technologically assisted family communication quite strategically by particular family members to pursue their aims and disseminate their values. Families are sites for the exercise of domination, subordination, and resistance—in a word, power. Digital communication technologies and their attendant use rules are now very much a part of these family power dynamics. “Texting wars” are more likely to be won by a family member who is capable of communicating through pointed succinct messaging rather than long-form prose. Phone calling and blogging favor eloquence in long-form communication. And remote messaging permits the articulation of views and feelings that may be more difficult to convey in a face-to-face encounter. Technologies are not neutral instruments but rather have rules that govern them, intrinsically as with micro-blogging character limits or extrinsically as with social norms that emerge concerning their proper use. During times of conflict or difficulty, family members who have particular communication capacities can leverage the intrinsic or extrinsic rules of technology use and their own preferred medium to their advantage. Our study has reaffirmed prior investigations inasmuch as we found that challenging phases in family life often encouraged family members to learn or adapt to new technologically mediated methods of communication while indicating how this process may alternatively strengthen or weaken relationship bonds.

Replicating and extending some findings that have emerged in previous research (reviewed above), we found many instances in which technology supported positive communication between parents and adult children. Decisions to leave home are less emotionally straining, and emerging adults no longer fear losing the ability to gain emotional and practical support from their parents. Shared family schedules and events can remain flexible yet organized thanks to group communication made possible through technology like text messaging and email. Parents and their adult children are now able to schedule and observe changes in family plans through their mobile devices without worrying about missing important updates. Conflict can be uniquely mediated through technology by keeping an automatic written record of correspondence, and by allowing conversational partners to conveniently utilize multiple technological resources when choosing how or when to initiate conversations about tension-laden or emotional subjects.

While respondents clearly described these and other benefits of using technology, they also expressed an undercurrent of concern regarding technology’s role in subverting traditionally defined face-to-face connectedness. On this point, parents and their adult children spoke with one concordant voice. Families willingly took advantage of the conveniences offered by digital communication technology and social media, but some admitted to feeling that the broad social expectation of constant accessibility caused them to feel stressed and overextended. Several participants felt the quality of their communication would be enhanced without the presence of technology, simply because the time families spend with one another would become more valuable and less subject to outside intrusion. Without the distraction of mobile devices, the face-to-face time respondents would spend with their loved ones could be more focused on the people in the room, rather than on the people trying to reach them through their mobile devices. These desires for more personal or high-quality communication (as opposed to quick perfunctory updates) indicate that a critical juncture has emerged where overarching cultural rules for communication and connectivity may once again be redefined for the purpose of protecting crucial boundaries within and between families, all of which could result in a more conscientious or balanced approach to using technology as a mode of communication.

Many of the theoretical arguments we presented in this study were justified by our findings. Interviewees' assessments revealed prevalent views that communication between parents and adult children was a priority in their families. Throughout emerging adults' metamorphosis into independent adulthood, parents and children alike strategically adapted to technology by developing innovative ways to promote cohesion and mitigate conflict between parents and emerging adults. Yet, while young adults commonly took advantage of multiple avenues of contact afforded by digital communication technology, their parents reported relying most heavily on cell phone calls and text messaging. These varying patterns of usage likely represent generational differences in comfort and sophistication with the multiple forms of communication technology available today (Prensky 2001; Sharabi et al. 2015; Vaterlaus and Tulane 2015). Younger generations in our sample do seem to be digital natives in contrast to their digital immigrant parents, even though all are frequent users of communication technology. At the same time, we have recognized the problematic nature of these immigrant/native categories, such that some parents are often remarkably facile with technology. Those who exhibit this capability are much more competent in negotiating technologically assisted communication with their emerging adult children.

Broader implications found in this study ultimately point to the reinforcement of two key insights initially addressed in previous research. First, digital technologies, in some sense, seem to change the options for communication within families and perhaps alter the nature of that communication. With constant contact and the proliferation of technological forms, technology acts as a double-edged sword (Kartch and Timmerman 2015). Rich technology, such as videoconferencing and picture-sharing platforms coupled with commenting capabilities, can bridge the divide that previously kept families in different locales quite separate from one another. Moving away no longer means losing touch. And yet, some forms of new technology, particularly messaging, can undermine the potential richness of communication in favor of punctuated and abbreviated exchanges. Of course, as digital natives, young people may not be looking for rich communication. Rather than being passive recipients of technology or communication being a mere cultural add-on, people in all areas of social life, including within families, actively reshape technology and use it to pursue their preferred form of staying connected (Bargh and McKenna 2004; Gleick 1999; Hughes and Hans 2001; Padilla-Walker et al. 2012).

Second, our study provides additional evidence to support the argument that digital communication technology contributes to the rise of a historically new phase of the life course called emerging adulthood (Arnett 2000). Such technology serves as an enabler and facilitator of an extended form of concerted cultivation, which entails the careful management of children's activities as they mature (Lareau 2011; see also Hall and Feister 2015). Technology is an essential tool used by emerging adults and may place them in a position of social advantage because emerging adults are digital natives (Hall and Feister 2015). Our findings indicate that parents and their adult children engage in a delicate dance in which emerging adulthood is often deliberately orchestrated and managed by parents through the exertion of a protracted form of concerted cultivation. After a period of intensive support and affirmation from parents, emerging adults typically become confident in their own abilities to navigate independence. When emerging adults become familiar with the steps of adulthood and begin to make independent choices without the necessity of intensive parental coaching, they have the freedom to choose how or if they will include their parents in their daily lives. The adult children in our study who had achieved a state of maturity generally chose to develop deep friendships with their parents, and these parent-child friendships were supported and enhanced through technologically assisted communication.

Although not central to our study, adult children often reported that they had deeper bonds and more frequent interactions with their mothers than with their fathers. This connected presence between mothers and their adult children appears to be related to the fact that mothers were generally the primary caregivers of young children, and the emotional bonds fostered during childhood were carried into adulthood as relationships matured, thereby underscoring the gendered character of technologically assisted communication (e.g., Kang 2012; Lee and Webb 2015). In parent-child

friendships that had achieved a level of balance in terms of power dynamics, some role reversal became apparent, as adult children frequently began to assume an affirming and supportive role in coaching their parents through the traumas of middle age (e.g., divorce, illness, death). That mothers continue to act as a caregiver to their adult children can be seen as a vestige of the traditional family order; women are still the kin-keepers, they are just keeping kin through digital technology. Thus, while technology may function as a reinvention of the family, there is still a reproduction of old hierarchies, particularly among digital natives/immigrants and the reproduction of emotion work and caregiving by mothers and women in the family. This latter point can be seen in early scholarship that demonstrated that women are more likely than men to use technology for communication (Jackson et al. 2001; Weiser 2000), and that mothers especially may practice distant mothering through transnational communication that is mediated through digital media (Madianou and Miller 2011; Parreñas 2001; see also Karraker 2015; Lee and Webb 2015).

The findings produced by this study are valuable principally for placing counterpart interview accounts of parents as a group in dialogue with those of their emerging adult children as a group. Our study altered the unit of analysis from the individual respondent's reflections on technologically assisted family communication to parents' and children's respective accounts of digital technology in the context of their relationships. And yet, this study is not without limitations. First, the majority of data used in our study were collected in 2014. Digital technology has continued to evolve during the past five years. Thus, an effort to extend our findings with more current data presents itself as an attractive prospect. Second, our data were collected in a particular region of the country, with much of it occurring within and around Texas. Conducting research with a wider variety of parents and children situated across the U.S., and in other countries, might significantly add to the findings revealed here (e.g., Bacigalupe and Brauning 2017). Strategies for enlisting technology are no doubt contingent on social context, and the sample of interviewees featured here was situated in a relatively circumscribed geographical area. Third, it might be useful to examine different technology use strategies implemented among children of different ages. Current research would benefit from examinations of parent-child technology use among young people of different ages (e.g., preteens, early teens, late teens, and transition-age adults). Until such research is conducted, our study's comparison of parents' and children's appraisals of technologically assisted family communication offers a meaningful extension to the robust body of scholarship on this important topic.

**Author Contributions:** Study conceptualization, data collection, several waves of data analysis, and writing of the original draft were conducted by C.K.B. with regular guidance and input from J.P.B.; apart from project supervision, J.P.B. offered analytical, interpretive, and writing contributions while conducting data reanalysis and subsequent revisions in response to reviewers' comments; T.H. provided writing, review, and editing contributions, as well as select conceptual framing. All authors contributed to the final interpretations offered in this manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Acknowledgments:** The authors thank Melinda Lundquist Denton, Michael Miller, and the anonymous reviewers for comments on an earlier draft of this manuscript.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Appendix A. Interview Guide

1. [a] Can you describe your first experience with digital communication technology (CT) available these days such as internet, cell phone, or email? [b] Around the time of your first experience with this technology, with whom did you generally communicate using it? [c] Was it ever difficult to adapt to changes in CT?
2. [a] What kinds of CT do you use now? [b] Do you use different CT for different situations or people? If so, please describe. [c] What are the differences between your use of CT with families, friends, and coworkers? [d] How do you decide which kind of CT to use before initiating communication with parents/adult children?

3. [a] Can you describe a time when you misplaced, left behind, or could not access your phone, the internet, or other CT? If so, can you explain what happened and how you felt about the situation? [b] Were there any positive or negative things that happened because you could not use this CT?
4. [a] Tell me about how you used CT to communicate with your parents/children when you/they were growing up. [b] Now that you/they are an adult, how has your use of CT to stay in touch with family changed? [c] Describe any rules or expectations your family has regarding the use of CT? Do you have varying expectations for each family member?
5. [a] Describe how often you use CT to connect with your parents/adult children (i.e., texting, email, phone calls, social networking websites, group calendars, instant chats, etc.)? [b] Which CT is your favorite method of communication with them, and why? [c] Does this method of communication vary according to the topic of conversation? If so, please describe.
6. Communicating with family members often results in opportunities to build stronger relationships. In what ways do you and your parents/adult children use CT to become closer?
7. [a] Can you give an example of an important time when you were not physically present with your parents/adult children but CT allowed you to feel present or connected with them? [b] Do you have samples of texts, emails, etc., illustrating this sense of connectedness that you would like to read to me?
8. In our daily lives, we are often barraged with communication from work, family, school, marketers, etc. Describe an approach you have for responding to your parents'/adult children's communication that differs from the way you treat communication from other people.
9. [a] When your parents/adult children miss a call or message from you, how long does it usually take for them to get back in touch? [b] Based on the length of time your parents/adult children take to respond to you, how do you feel about the importance they put on communicating with you? [Prompt: Failed to meet your expectations?]
10. [a] Some people feel that certain kinds of conversations are communicated better in person or over the phone. Can you describe any experiences you have had with your parents/adult children using CT to bring up a topic that you felt was inappropriate or too sensitive to communicate about through CT? [b] How did you feel about and address the inappropriate communication?
11. [a] Can you tell me about a time when you were accused by your parents/adult children of using CT inappropriately to communicate a sensitive message? [b] Have you ever used CT in a way that you later regretted? If so, how did that change the way you now use CT?
12. [a] Conflict is a part of family life. Can you tell me about a time you had a conflict with your parents/adult children that took place using CT? [b] Has CT ever caused a conflict in your family? [c] How did that situation get resolved? Did technology play a part in how the conflict was managed?
13. [a] In what ways has CT affected the quality of your communication with parents/adult children – mostly positive, mostly negative, or mixed feelings? Please elaborate. [b] How do you think your parents/adult children feel about using CT to stay connected? [c] Imagine you lived in a time that had no modern CT. In what ways would your relationship with your parents/adult children be different?
14. Thanks for interviewing with me. Do you have any closing thoughts on this topic?

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