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**YOUNG ADULTS LIVING WITH PARENTS:  
COHORT CHANGE IN SATISFACTION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Objective.* This study investigates cohort change in young adults' satisfaction with parental coresidence and the effect of shifts in their social and demographic composition on their satisfaction.

*Background.* The increasing shares of young adults coresiding with parents is well documented. Young adults today and their parent's generation differ on key dimensions that may influence satisfaction with parental coresidence. If differences in satisfaction are minimal after accounting for key dimension differences this suggests compositional changes are primarily responsible for observed differences across cohorts.

*Method.* Using data from the National Survey of Families and Households and the Families and Relationships Survey young adults living in their parents' home in 1988 and 2013 are compared on their satisfaction with their living arrangement. Multiple regression is used to explain the significant difference in satisfaction between the two cohorts by controlling for differences in coresidential circumstances, sociodemographics, and health.

*Results.* This study provides evidence supporting the hypothesis that—when controlling for compositional differences between the two cohorts—young adults' satisfaction with parental coresidence has increased. The authors assert this may imply coresidence has become more normative.

*Conclusions.* Results suggest the shifting composition of the U.S. population does not explain the higher levels of satisfaction with parental coresidence among young adult Millennials compared to their Boomer counterparts of the late 1980s. The evidence indicates support for a continuation of the coresidence trend.

In the United States, leaving the parental home and establishing an independent household is part of a successful transition to adulthood. In 2018, one-third of young adults aged 18-34 were living in their parent's home, up from one-fifth in 1960 with the highest rates found among those at younger ages (Fry, 2016; Payne, 2019). Even though living with parents does not align with traditional norms and expectations about adulthood and independence, young adults living in their parents' homes typically report high levels of satisfaction with their living arrangement (Parker, 2012; Ward & Spitze, 1996). These high levels of satisfaction may be partially rooted in shifts in attitudes and norms surrounding young adult-parental co-residence, reflecting that it has become normative and attractive to stay longer in the parental home (Roberts, et al., 2016; South & Lei, 2015). As a result, young adults today might be more satisfied with their living arrangements than co-residing young adults in the 1980s. This topic is important because parent-child co-residence has implications for the well-being of young adults and their relationships with their parents (Furstenberg, 2010; Leopold, 2012; White, 1994). The parent-child relationship is an important source of economic, emotional and instrumental support for both children and parents throughout the life course (Fingerman, Cheng, Birditt, & Zarit, 2012).

The increase in young adult co-residence with parents has coincided with shifts in the social and demographic composition of the young adult population in the United States. Compared to their parents, today's young adult population is more ethnically and racially diverse (Cohn & Caumont, 2016; Colby & Ortman 2015; Martin 2013; Rumbaut & Komaie, 2010) and has higher average levels of education (Graf, 2017). At the same time, they are also facing increasing rates of poverty and inequality with lower shares living in middle class households (Cohen & Caumont 2016; Mather & Jarosz 2014) possibly due to decreasing returns to education, higher debt to income ratios and an increasing cost of living (Ermisch, 1999; Fry,

2014; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1994; Montergro & Patrinos, 2014). Further, the young adult population has experienced delays in their ages at first marriage and parenthood and increasing rates of cohabitation (Eickmeyer, 2016; Guzzo & Payne, 2018; Hemez & Manning, 2017; Lamidi, 2015). Thus, today's young adults differ from their parent's generation on several key dimensions that may account for any observed cohort effect in how satisfied young adults are living with their parents.

We analyze changes across two key cohorts (Boomers and Millennials) of young adults aged 19 to 29 in 1988 and 2013. The Boomers are represented using data from the 1987-88 National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH; <https://www.ssc.wisc.edu/nsfh/>) and the Millennials relying on the 2013 Families and Relationships Survey (FRS; <https://www.bgsu.edu/arts-and-sciences/center-for-family-demographic-research/research-at-cfdr/projects/family-and-relationships-study.html>). Building on Ward & Spitze (1996), who established parental coresidence satisfaction for the Boomers, we empirically evaluate cohort change in satisfaction with parental coresidence. Our approach addresses the full spectrum of young adult home-leaving transitions considering factors related to parental coresidence circumstances, adult child sociodemographic characteristics, household composition, as well as mental and physical health. This study provides new insights into the family experiences of a contemporary cohort of young adults and addresses how satisfaction with coresidence has changed over time.

## **Background**

### *Parental Coresidence in Young Adulthood Across Two Cohorts*

Leaving the parental home is part of a successful transition to adulthood and is often associated with other adult life course transitions including the completion of school, gainful

employment, marriage/residential partnering, and parenthood (South & Lei, 2015). Following the Great Recession, much research has focused on the rising share of young adults living in the parental home. Indeed, research indicates a significant effect of the Great Recession on greater propensity of young adults to remain and/or return to the parental home (Newman, Holupka & Ross, 2018; Qian, 2012). But these recent events belie a larger trend in parental coresidence, coined the “Third Era of Young Adults Home Leaving: Baby Boomers and After” by Gutmann, Pullum-Pinon, & Pullum (2002). The United States has experienced increasing levels of parental coresidence since the 1960s (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1994; Gutmann et al., 2002). In 1960 32% of young adult women and 42% of young adult men age 18-24 lived with their parents and in 2010 47% of young adult women and 51% of young adult men did so (Payne, 2012). Young adults who leave home may also return (boomerang). Evidence shows more recent cohorts are more likely to return home than previous cohorts (Parker 2012; Stone, Berrington, & Falkingham, 2014).

Although the levels of coresidence are well-established, fewer studies have considered how young adults feel about living with their parents (for exceptions see Parker, 2012; Ward & Spitze, 1996). Ward and Spitze (1996) examined Boomers and Parker (2012) investigated Millennials, but no studies have compared the two cohorts on their parental coresidence satisfaction. Given coresidence with parents has become more normative, we expect greater satisfaction with the living arrangement among today’s young adults.

### *Coresidential Circumstances*

In the past young adults left the parental home when they married, but as marriage continues to be delayed (or in some cases forgone) the share of young adults remaining in (or returning to) their parents’ home has increased (Buck & Scott, 1993; Furstenberg, 2000;

Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999; Setterson, 1998; Setterson & Ray, 2010). Increasing costs of housing and poor employment opportunities have made it difficult for today's young adults to establish independent households (Hallquist, Cuthbertson, Killea-Jones, Halpern, & Harris, 2011; Painter, 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2009; Wang & Morin, 2009). In contrast, when Boomers were young adults employment was not as salient in their decision to remain or return home (Ward & Spitze, 1996). Young adults who remain in the parental home may be focusing on completing their education or saving resources before they can afford to live on their own. When directly asked why they are living with their parents, the top reason given was to save money (Payne & Copp, 2013). This is consistent with recent work indicating young adults have become increasingly financially dependent on their parents (Kahn, Goldscheider, & Garcia-Mangano, 2013; Setterson & Ray, 2010).

Returning to the parental home may be viewed as a response to negative life circumstances. Research on the Boomer generation highlighted that moving back home may be internalized by the young adult as a failure and returns are associated with a stalled transition to adulthood (e.g. not holding a job, affording a place to live, successfully maintaining a romantic co-residential relationship, or transitioning to parenthood) (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1994). Further, relying on a more recent cohort Ward and Spitze (2007) found those who returned have more negative prior parent-youth relationships than their counterparts who never left. Due to the potentially negative reasons associated with boomeranging we expect that boomeranging will be associated with lower levels of satisfaction versus never having left the parental home.

Not all young adults living with parents experience the same type of home environment. Some young adults are required to contribute financially (e.g. paying room and board) while

living in their parental home (Kaplan, 2012; Kendig, Mattingly & Bianchi, 2014). Setterson and Ray (2010) report that parents are providing unprecedented levels of financial support to their young adults. One form of financial support is coresidence. During a time when young adults are supposed to reach economic independence, these financial exchanges may be a source of strain on the parent-child relationship (Ward and Spitze 1996). We expect that young adult children who are paying to live in their parents' home may experience less satisfaction than those who are not paying any room or board. As a result, if young adult millennials are less often contributing financially than boomers, then millennials may experience greater satisfaction.

Traditionally, adult child coresidence with parents is a short-term circumstance (Settersten and Ray 2010). As a result, most young adults do not intend to stay with their parents for long periods, but research indicates that as coresidence has become more common young adults are also staying longer (Fry, 2017). Some young adults will have plans to live elsewhere in the near future and others may not have any specific intentions to move out. Young adults who have plans to move out will be less satisfied than those who do not have plans. Young adult millennials may experience greater satisfaction in their parental home as they feel less pressure to leave their parental home and delay plans to move out.

#### *Cohort Change in Sociodemographics and Health*

As young adults age, they are less likely to coreside (Payne, 2016; Setterson & Ray, 2010). Given young-adult parent coresidence is less normative at older ages, we hypothesize older young adults who are living in their parents' homes will report lower levels of satisfaction with the living arrangement. Similarly, given the fact women tend to leave at younger ages, are less likely to return, and consistently have a lower prevalence of living with their parents in young adulthood compared to men (Payne, 2012; Setterson & Ray, 2010; White, 1994) we

hypothesize it is less normative, and therefore young women may report lower levels of satisfaction compared to young men.

While the circumstances of coresidence have changed, there have also been shifts in the composition of young adults. Since the late 1980s the population of young adults has expanded to become the most racially and ethnically diverse cohort in American history (Cohen & Caumont, 2016; Taylor, 2014). Historically, racial and ethnic minorities have higher rates of parental coresidence (e.g., Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999; Lei & South, 2016; Mitchell, Wister, & Gee, 2004; Setterson & Ray, 2010). These higher rates of coresidence may result in higher levels of satisfaction with parental coresidence for racial and ethnic minorities.

The percentage of young adults enrolled in college or other forms of higher education in the U.S. has increased since the late 1980s (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). At the same time, it is taking young adults longer to complete their education. Additionally, rising costs of college mean they are spending more money and taking on more debt (Bound, Lovenheim, & Turner, 2012). Young adults who are enrolled in school may require more assistance from their parents and it may be more acceptable to live with parents while being enrolled in school (Sandberg-Thoma et al., 2015). Millennials may count on their parents more to help them with their educational pursuits than Boomers. As a result, we anticipate school-enrolled Millennials may be more satisfied living at home than their Boomer counterparts.

Structural changes in the broader economy and housing market (e.g. poor job opportunities and increasing cost of living/housing), all of which were amplified by the Great Recession, are significantly influencing young adults' residential choices (Ermisch, 1999; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1994). Earlier work consistently found that if they can afford to, young adults prefer to either live alone or in non-familial arrangements (Gutman et al., 2002;



Pampel, 1983). Young adults who have jobs, are less likely to be living in their parents' homes (Avery, Goldschedier, & Spear, 1992; Whittington & Peters, 1996). While both cohorts experienced economic recessions, the unemployment rate of the 1987 market crash and subsequent early 1990s recession was lower than that experienced during the Great Recession (BLS, 2012; Pew, 2012). Given the relative severity of the Great Recession young adults living at home due to job loss or unemployment may be more satisfied than their Boomer counterparts. Further resident parents' educational attainment is found to also facilitate residential independence (Britton, 2013; Setterson & Ray, 2010). Given residential independence is preferred (Gutman et al., 2002; Pampel, 1983), we expect young adults who are holding a steady job yet remaining in their parents' home to have lower reported satisfaction with their current arrangement. Similarly, we expect young adults of more highly educated parents to be less satisfied with their parental living arrangement.

Relationship formation behaviors have changed significantly over the past twenty-five years. Most notably the increasing age at first marriage and increasing rates of cohabitation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018; Hemez & Manning, 2017). Changes in relationship formation—particularly the increasing age at first marriage and resulting decline in share of young adults marrying accounts for much (if not all) of the increase in parental coresidence over time (see Furstenberg, 2010; Kahn et al., 2017; Waite, 1994). Like marriage, cohabitation provides a path towards residential independence (Britton, 2013) and young adults who form coresidential relationships are more likely to move out of the parental home than those who remain unpartnered (South & Lei, 2015). Although forming a residential partnership hastens the exit from the parental home, relationship problems and break ups often facilitate returns (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1994). The instability of cohabiting unions (Lamidi, Manning

and Brown, forthcoming) and their short durations (Copen, Daniels, & Masher, 2013) suggest increasing opportunities to return to the parental home. As discussed earlier regarding unsuccessful attempts at “adulting,” the ending of a relationship may result in a sense of failure and as such we anticipate it is associated with lower levels of satisfaction. Further, research on parent’s satisfaction with young adult coresidence using the NSFH finds that the parent was less satisfied when their adult child returned following a breakup (Aquilino & Supple, 1991).

Becoming a parent tends to hasten the exit from the parental home and reduce the likelihood of return (Britton, 2013; Goldscheider, Hofferth & Curtin, 2014; Goldscheider, Goldscheider, St. Clair, & Hodges, 1999; South & Lei, 2015). While the average age at first birth for women has increased since the 1980s (Eickmeyer, Payne, Brown, & Manning, 2017) and fewer young adults today are living with a biological child (Anderson, 2017), it is unclear what influence this may have on how satisfied young adults are with parental coresidence. On the one hand, given the demands of childrearing and cost of childcare, living with one’s parents may provide relief in these areas resulting in higher rates of satisfaction. But it may introduce role confusion (e.g. grandparents taking on parental role for grandchild) resulting in added strain on the young adult-parent relationship resulting in lower satisfaction. Research on parent’s satisfaction with young adult coresidence using the NSFH also found parents are less satisfied when their adult child returns with a child, which may lend support to the latter hypotheses (Aquilino & Supple, 1991).

Another factor found to both influence coresidence and to have changed over the span of the past twenty-five years is family structure. We know young adults of today are slightly less likely to have grown up in a two-parent family (Kreider & Ellis, 2011). Research done in the 1980s and 1990s found that family structure significantly influenced home leaving behavior

among young adults. Not living with both biological parents was associated with home leaving and leaving at younger ages (Aquilino, 1991b; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1989; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1998). In contrast, among a more contemporary cohort, family structure was not a significant predictor of moving out among young adults (South & Lei, 2015). Although to our knowledge no one has looked at the influence of family structure on coresidence satisfaction, Goldscheider & Goldscheider (1998) found stepparent families are more likely to expect young adults to be residentially independent. Further, parental divorce or living in a stepparent family can have negative consequences for offspring (Amato, 2000; Brown, 2006; Langton & Berger, 2011) and the relationship between offspring and parent (Amato & Booth, 1996; Riggio, 2004). We anticipate these negative consequences may manifest themselves via dissatisfaction with the young adult-parent coresidential situation.

Little to nothing is known about the effect of siblings on nest-leaving or boomeranging, let alone how their presence in the parent's household may influence a young adult's coresidential satisfaction. Only one study has examined the effect of coresident adult siblings (South & Lei, 2015), showing their presence increased the likelihood of boomeranging back to the parental home. With respect to satisfaction, we posit having other adult siblings in the household is an indicator of the normalcy of the coresidential situation—which we postulate will be reflected in higher levels of satisfaction.

In general, mental health issues are tied to difficulty in transitioning to adult roles (Gralinski-Bakker, Hauser, Billings, Allen, Lyons, & Melton, 2005). More specifically, young adults with mental health issues can have difficulties getting and keeping a job and they have more problems in school (Gralinski-Bakker et al., 2005). Indeed, a 2015 study (Sandberg-Thoma, Snyder, & Jang) found that young adults with emotional problems left the parental home

sooner, but they also had an increased likelihood of boomeranging. Further, recent scholarship indicates increases in depression and suicide attempts among young adults, particularly among the socioeconomically disadvantaged (Child Trends, 2015; Mojtabai, Olfson, Han, 2016; Olfson, Blanco, & Wall, 2017; Weinberger, Gbedemah, Martinez, Nash, Galea, & Goodwin, 2018). We expect depressive symptomology to be negatively associated with coresidential satisfaction.

With respect to physical health, much of what we know has to do with the impediments of physical disabilities on residential independence—compared to their non-disabled peers, those with a disability stay longer in the parental home (Heath, 2008; Leiter & Waugh, 2009; Pascall & Hendey, 2004). However, one study found a broader measure of physical health (e.g. self-reporting poor physical health) was not a significant predictor of moving out or moving back into the parental home (South & Lei, 2015). Mental health and physical health are linked, meaning experiencing stress, anxiety and depression today are linked to other physical health problems today as well as a higher risk of developing diseases like cancer, diabetes, and heart disease later in life. Further, the prevalence of comorbid mental and physical diseases has increased dramatically, particularly at younger ages (Druss & Walker, 2011; Sartorius, 2013). Additionally, research from the Netherlands in 2013 made headlines when they found the adult generation of today was less healthy than preceding generations (Hulsegge, Picavet et al.) and obesity rates among youth and adults in the U.S. have generally been increasing since at least the late 1990s (Hales, Carroll, Fryar, & Ogden, 2017). Given the anticipated negative relationship between depressive symptoms and satisfaction, and the comorbid association between mental and physical health, we expect a positive relationship between physical health and satisfaction.

### *Current Study*

Despite notable shifts in young adult living arrangements, no studies to date have examined changes in satisfaction. The goal of this paper is to address two key research questions. First, among young adults living in their parents' homes, are there cohort differences in their reports of how satisfied they are with their living arrangement? Given the increasing prevalence of young adult coresidence since the 1960s, we hypothesize a normalization of the living arrangement that will be reflected in higher levels of satisfaction among those in the later cohort.

Second, are cohort differences due to changes in the composition of young adults today versus 25 years ago? We rely on models that include key indicators to determine the extent to which differences in estimates of satisfaction are due to compositional shifts or changes in attitudes. If changes in satisfaction over time among coresiding young adults are attenuated when accounting for corresponding shifts in socioeconomic and demographic characteristics among coresiding young adults as well as shifts in coresidential history and circumstances, then the implication is that the change is driven by shifts in cohort composition. If not attenuated, the implication is an actual change in attitudes towards young adult-parental coresidence.

### **Data and Methods**

We rely on the 1987-88 National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH; Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988) and the Families and Relationship Survey (FRS; NCFMR, 2012). The NSFH is a national probability sample of 13,017 adults aged 19 and older that is weighted to be representative of the noninstitutionalized population of the United States. These data are ideal because in addition to providing rich information on families and households in the 1980s, the NSFH specifically asked young adults living in their parents' households about their feelings and plans regarding living with their parents. The NSFH is our source for the early cohort or boomer cohort.

For the later cohort (Millennials), we employ the FRS. The FRS is a nationally representative survey of 7,517 adults aged 18-65 in 2013. It was designed by the National Center for Family and Marriage Research (NCFMR) at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) and was modeled largely on the 1987-88 NSFH, a design strategy that facilitates analyses of family change over the past 25 years. The data were collected by GfK (formerly Knowledge Networks (KN)) employing their nationally representative on-line panel sample. The FRS is not the first social science study to be drawn from the KN panel. The KN panel was used in federally funded data collections on couples and families (Lichter & Carmalt, 2009; Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012; Sasser, Addo, & Lichter, 2012), and the quality of the panel is comparable to or exceeds those derived from RDD surveys (Chang & Krosnick, 2009). Further, data are weighted to adjust for oversampling of various subgroups (e.g. cohabiting couples).

The analytic sample for our study is drawn from both the NSFH and FRS and is limited to young adults aged 19-29 living in their parents' households (parent or parents' spouse/partner were the home owner or on the lease for the residence) at the time of the survey, who completed the coresiding young adult section of the NSFH or the Parental Coresidence section of the FRS (which mirrors the NSFH section on coresiding young adults), and who had valid responses on the dependent variable (satisfaction with parental living arrangement). Age 19 was the lower age boundary used by the NSFH team in the administration of their parental-coresidence questions and thus it is the lower boundary for our study. Most studies use an upper bound of age 29 (Arnett 2000) and therefore we also use age 29 as our upper boundary. This means the analytic sample from the NSFH is representative of young adults coresiding with parents who were born from 1959-1969 and the analytic sample from the FRS is representative of young adults coresiding with parents who were born from 1984-1994. Of the 472 NSFH respondents who

completed the Living with Parents Questionnaire, 20 were missing on coresident satisfaction, 1 was living with two mothers, and 5 reported “2 or more races/ethnicities” categories or “other” and were subsequently removed from the analytic sample. The resulting sample size from the NSFH equals 446 respondents representing a weighted percentage of 26.7% of young adults ages 19-29 in 1988 living in their parents’ home. The initial 462 young adults living with their parents in the FRS sample had 1 missing on coresident satisfaction, and 40 who reported “2 or more races/ethnicities” or “other” and were subsequently removed from the analytic sample. The resulting analytic sample from the FRS equals 420 with 35.5% of young adults ages 19-29 living with their parents, which is significantly higher ( $p < .001$ ) than the percentage in 1988.

### *Measures*

*Dependent Variable.* To measure young adults’ satisfaction with their parental living situation we employ a single item which asks, “Taking things all together, how does living with your parent(s) work out for you?” Respondents are directed to respond on a range of “very poorly” (1) to “very well” (7). The wording of the question is the same in the NSFH and FRS. The dependent variable was modeled as a continuous variable.

*Independent Variables.* The key independent variable is *cohort* and is coded as a dummy variable where 1 represents individuals born from 1984-1994 and subsequently members of the generation known as Millennials and 0 represents individuals born from 1959-1969 and members of the Baby Boomer generation.

Four domains of influence associated with parental coresidence and/or satisfaction with parental coresidence in prior research are included in these analyses: coresidence circumstances, young adult sociodemographic characteristics, household composition, and young adult health and well-being.

Coresidential circumstances include two measures 1) history, 2) plans to leave the parental home, and 3) pay any room and board. *Coresidential history* is measured with a dummy variable identifying currently coresiding young adults who answered affirmatively when directly asked if they had previously lived on their own for at least four months and moved back into their parents' home, henceforth referred to as "boomerangs." *Plans to leave the parental home* is a dummy variable giving respondents a value of 1 if they responded yes to whether they had "...any definite plans to live elsewhere in the future." Finally, they were also asked if they paid their parents anything for room and board. Those who responded yes were coded as 1 on the variable "*pay any.*"

Sociodemographic characteristics include *gender* coded as 1 for man and 0 for woman. *Age* is a continuous variable. *Race/ethnicity* of respondents is coded into three categories non-Hispanic White (hereafter referred to as White), non-Hispanic Black (hereafter referred to as Black), and Hispanic. To examine the effects of respondents' socioeconomic status, we investigate school enrollment, working status, and educational attainment of highest degree earning parent. *School enrollment* is coded as a dummy variable identifying young adults currently enrolled with a value of 1. *Work status* is measured with a dummy variable identifying respondents currently working for pay. Finally, *parental education* is measured as a four-category variable. In the FRS it is the educational attainment of the highest achieving resident parent. Unfortunately, the NSFH does not provide the educational attainment of the current resident parent, so we had to use the educational attainment of the father or step father and mother or step mother when the young adult was "about age 16" (regardless of residence) as a proxy.



Household composition captures with whom the respondent lives and is gauged by four variables: relationship status, living with a child, current family structure, and presence of adult siblings. *Relationship status* of the young adult is a three-category variable indicating whether the respondent is in a coresidential union (either married or cohabiting), in a dating relationship, or single. Married or cohabiting had to be collapsed into a single category because in the NSFH sample too few coresiding young adults were cohabiting (n=5) and in the FRS sample too few were married (n=13) or cohabiting (n=18). *Living with a child* is a dummy variable indicating the presence of a biological/adopted child of the respondent in the household. *Family structure* is a three-category variable distinguishing between young adults living with both a mother and father (biological, adoptive, or step), only a mother, or only a father. We also examine the effect of the presence of resident adult siblings with a dummy variable (1 = yes, 0 = no).

Finally, to gauge the effect of respondents' health we included measures of mental and physical health. *Mental health* is a scale comprised from a series of twelve questions designed to measure frequency of experiencing depressive symptoms in the past week across multiple domains. Examples include "On how many days during the past week did you: feel bothered by things that usually don't bother?" and "On how many days during the past week did you: not feel like eating; your appetite was poor?" To preserve as many respondents as possible, we retained a respondent if they answered at least two items. The scale is composed of the average of the responses across nonmissing items. The reliability of the scale was consistently high in each sample (NSFH alpha = .93; FRS alpha = .94). With respect to *physical health*, respondents in both samples were asked "Compared with other people your age, how would you describe your health?" Responses range from "very poor" (1) to "excellent" (5). A dichotomous variable was created where all those who answered "good" (4) or "excellent" (5) were coded as "1."

### *Analytic Strategy*

This project documents trends in young adults' satisfaction with living in their parents' homes between two cohorts 25 years apart. The analysis proceeds in two steps. First, we present descriptive statistics on both cohorts as well as bivariate associations to identify cohort differences. Second, we present results of pooled nested multiple regression analyses to determine whether the cohort coefficient remains associated with satisfaction with the inclusion of covariates. Our first model assesses whether there is a cohort differential in satisfaction. Model 2 adds the parental coresidence history and circumstances indicators. Model 3 adds the young adults' sociodemographic characteristics and household composition and the measures of young adults' health and well-being.

### *Results*

#### *Descriptive Analysis*

Table 1 presents the satisfaction and socioeconomic characteristics of young adults living with their parents in the two cohorts. These results indicate significant differences in the four domains investigated. Mean scores on satisfaction were significantly higher among 2013 young adults at 5.9 ( $p < .05$ ), whereas on average young adults in 1988 had a mean satisfaction of 5.6 (see, Table 1). About one-third of young adults in 1988 reported the living arrangement works "very well" (7), which is slightly lower than their 2013 counterparts with nearly two-fifths reporting it did so (not shown). Regarding coresidential circumstances, large shares of Millennials (61.4%) reported having lived on their own for at least four months compared with the Boomers (41%). Paying parents room and board was not a common occurrence regardless of cohort, however Millennials were significantly less likely to do so compared to their Boomer counterparts. Young adults in 1988 were less racially/ethnically diverse, with nearly three-fourths identifying as White. In contrast, among the 2013 cohort the proportion White dropped to

Table 1: *Characteristics of Young Adults Living in Their Parent's Homes in 1988 and 2013*  
*Weighted Means/Proportions*

	1988/NSFH (n=446)	2013/FRS (n=420)
<b>Coreidence Circumstances</b>		
Satisfaction	5.6	5.9 *
Boomerang	41.6%	61.4% ***
Plans to move out	70.2%	67.3%
Pay room or board	30.4%	17.5% ***
<b>Socio-demographics</b>		
Age	21.7	22.4
Gender		
Men	59.2%	58.4%
Women	40.8%	41.6%
Race/Ethnicity		
White	72.6%	61.6% **
Black	17.9%	9.2% **
Hispanic	9.5%	29.2% ***
Currently enrolled in school	27.6%	43.2% ***
Currently working for pay	75.0%	59.9% ***
Highest educated resident-parent's educational attainment		
Less than high school	19.7%	3.9% ***
High school/GED	43.0%	21.7% ***
Some College	16.8%	27.5% **
Bachelor's degree or higher	20.6%	47.0% ***
<b>Household Composition</b>		
Relationship status		
Single	54.4%	62.4%
Dating	40.8%	28.1% ***
Married/Cohabiting	4.8%	9.5% *
Biological/Adopted child in household	8.7%	7.6%
Resident-parent gender composition		
Mother, only	22.9%	32.6% **
Father, only	3.9%	4.7%
Mother and Father	73.2%	62.7% **
Adult Resident Sibling	46.0%	39.5%
<b>Health</b>		
Frequency of depressive symptoms in the last week	1.5	1.1 ***
In good physical health	87.3%	79.5% **

\*p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

61.6% with nearly one third reporting Hispanic ethnicity (versus 9.5% among the 1988 cohort). A significantly smaller share of coresiding young adults in 2013 were Black—9.2% versus 17.9% among those in 1988. We also observe a significantly larger share enrolled in school (43.2% vs. 27.6%;  $p < .001$ ) but a smaller share working for pay in the later cohort (59.9% vs. 75%;  $p < .001$ ). The parents of the young adults in the 2013 cohort had also achieved higher levels of educational attainment. Nearly three-quarters of their resident parents had at least some college education compared to just over a third of the 1988 cohort's parents. Nearly half (47%) had at least a bachelor's degree compared to one-fifth (20.6%;  $p < .001$ ) among the parents of the 1988 cohort.

With respect to household composition, the 2013 cohort was less likely to be in a dating relationship (28.1% vs. 40.8%;  $p < .001$ ), however a larger share of the 2013 cohort were in a coresidential union (e.g. married or cohabiting). Although the majority of coresiding young adults were living with both a mother and father regardless of cohort, as expected, a smaller share of Millennial young adults were doing so (62.7% vs. 73.2%;  $p < .01$ ). This is offset by a larger share of Millennials living with only a mother—nearly one third vs. less than a quarter among Boomers. Finally, a significantly smaller share of the 2013 cohort reported being in good or excellent health ( $p < .01$ ), but at the same time they had significantly fewer depressive symptoms ( $p < .001$ ).

#### *Multivariate Analyses*

The objective of this study is to determine whether there were cohort changes in the satisfaction of young adults living with their parents. Model 1 in Table 2 indicates the bivariate analyses support the hypothesis that the later cohort was more satisfied with their living arrangements. We find the levels are 0.25 greater, on average, in the later cohort ( $p < .05$ ).

Table 2: Results from Ordinary Least Squares Models Predicting Coresidence Satisfaction of Young Adults in 1987 & 2013 (n = 866)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	B/(SE)	B/(SE)	B/(SE)
<b>2013 Cohort</b>	0.25 *	0.24 *	0.26 *
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.13)
<b>Coresidence History and Circumstances</b>			
Boomerang		-0.23 *	-0.22
		(0.11)	(0.11)
Plans to move out		-0.34 **	-0.41 ***
		(0.11)	(0.11)
Pay room or board		-0.42 **	-0.30 *
		(0.15)	(0.15)
<b>Socio-demographics</b>			
Age			0.01
			(0.02)
Gender (Women, ref)			
Men			-0.03
			(0.11)
Race/Ethnicity (White, ref)			
Black			0.36 *
			(0.14)
Hispanic			0.25
			(0.15)
Currently enrolled in school			0.11
			(0.12)
Currently working for pay			-0.01
			(0.11)
Highest resident-parent's educational attainment (Bachelor's degree, ref)			
Less than high school			0.20
			(0.19)
High school/GED			0.07
			(0.15)
Some College			-0.12
			(0.16)
<b>Household Composition</b>			
Relationship status (Married/Cohabiting, ref)			
Single			0.11
			(0.25)
Dating			0.13

				(0.26)
Biological/Adopted child in household				-0.06
				(0.21)
Resident-parent gender composition(Mother and Father, ref)				
Mother, only				-0.17
				(0.13)
Father, only				-0.28
				(0.20)
Adult resident sibling				0.17
				(0.11)
<b>Health</b>				
Frequency of depressive symptoms in the last week				-0.20 ***
				(0.05)
In good physical health				0.50 **
				(0.17)
Constant	5.60 ***	6.06 ***	5.39 ***	
	(0.08)	(0.11)	(0.57)	
F	5.27 *	6.35 ***	4.02 ***	
R-squared	0.01	0.05	0.13	

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

Model 2 includes indicators of coresidence circumstances. The inclusion of these variables did not mediate the relationship between cohort and satisfaction. As expected, having already lived independently (i.e. boomerang), having definite plans to live elsewhere, and paying room board all had a significant and negative relationship with satisfaction.

The final model includes the remaining three domains investigated: young adult sociodemographic characteristics, household composition, and young adult health and well-being. Coresiding young adults in the 2013 cohort were significantly more satisfied than their counterparts in 1988 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Although the full roster of control variables did not account for the association between cohort and satisfaction, several were significantly associated with satisfaction. Young adults with plans to move out and those paying room and board were less satisfied than their counterparts without plans to move and who were not paying room and board. Coresident Black young adults were significantly more satisfied than their White counterparts ( $p < .05$ ). As expected coresiding young adults with good physical health reported higher levels of satisfaction ( $p < .01$ ) and young adults who scored higher on depressive symptoms had significantly lower satisfaction ( $p < .001$ ). Despite not being able to explain the cohort difference in satisfaction, the final model accounts for 13% of the variation in satisfaction between the two cohorts. This evidence provides support for the hypothesis that controlling for compositional differences between the two cohorts, satisfaction has increased. This cohort effect signals that coresidence has become more normative.

## **Discussion**

Although substantial attention has been given to the increasing share of young adults living in the parental home and the changing composition of coresiding young adults, few studies have examined young adults' satisfaction with the living arrangement, and none have examined

whether satisfaction has changed over time. The changes in living arrangements and population composition have coincided with changes in the nature of the parent-child relationship with the result being an increased focus on the quality of the parent-child relationship (Umberson, Pudrovska, & Reczek, 2010). This relationship is characterized by an emotional investment by the parents and a more nuanced understanding of the child as an individual (Hareven, 2000; Mitchell, 2006). In short, the parent-child relationship is an important source of support and well-being across the lifecourse for both the adult child and the parent, and interactions early in adulthood can set the stage for interactions later in life when roles may reverse and parents are dependent upon their children (Fingerman, Cheng, Birditt, & Zarit, 2012; Knoester, 2003; Koropecj-Cox, 2002). More specifically, research indicates co-residence has implications for the well-being of young adults and their relationships with their parents (Furstenberg, 2010; Leopold, 2012; White, 1994). Understanding these implications is important as members of the Baby Boomer generation find themselves providing support to their aging parents as well as their adult children. Similarly, these responsibilities will be transferred on to their own adult children as they move through the lifecourse. This study partially addresses the gap in our understanding of the qualitative effects of young adult-parental coresidence on American families by focusing on cohort differences in young adults' satisfaction with their parental living arrangement. This study provides evidence supporting the hypothesis that net of compositional differences between the two cohorts, young adults' satisfaction with parental coresidence has increased. We interpret this as meaning coresidence has become more normative.

The adult child-parent relationship has implications for parents in the long term. Given continued longevity, parents of young adults today may someday find themselves in the position to be cared for by their adult children. Extending aide to their young adult child may establish an



expectation of future reciprocity, wherein the adult child may someday be expected to provide support to their aging parents. Extended coresidence throughout the young adult years may either facilitate or inhibit such support—whether monetary, instrumental, or emotional. Indeed, research shows children are prone to provide support to their aging parents if they received support during their young adult years (Silverstein, Conroy, Wang, Giarrusson, & Bengtson, 2002), and children who move out later maintain a closer relationship with their parents and are more likely to provide support to their parents (Leopold, 212). This support, however, may be contingent on more qualitative aspects of the relationship. If the interpersonal interactions were negative, this may strain the relationship leading to less future upward support. Conversely, positive interactions may facilitate future support (Cheng, Birditt, Zarit, & Fingerman, 2013). However, if increased satisfaction is indicative of normalization of adult child-parent coresidence and a delaying of adulthood, it implies support may be expected by the adult child. Indeed, a larger share of adult children expect support than does the share of mothers expect to provide (Goldscheider, Thornton & Yang, 2001). If that is the case, the idea of reciprocity may not be salient to the adult child. More understanding of the effects of extended coresidence on later-life parent-child relationships is needed particularly regarding later returns of support.

Although our study moves the field forward by demonstrating a cohort effect in satisfaction with parental coresidence among two generations of young adults, it also has a few limitations. First, we lack information on other possible key sociodemographic factors, including information on debt, military experience, and immigration (Cohen & Caumont 2016). Thus, we are unable to determine whether compositional changes in these factors account for cohort differences in satisfaction. Similarly, we are not able to account for geographic context of the place of residence. Ideally, we would capture geographic variation in key economic dimensions,

such as cost-of-living, unemployment rates, rates of foreclosures, or median household income. It may be that living in areas with higher average costs of living have resulted in larger shares of young adult-parental coresidence over time, and this has enhanced the normalcy of the living arrangement and subsequent higher levels of satisfaction.

Third, we are not able to account for differences in parent-child relationship processes. We are making an assumption that satisfaction with the living arrangement is an indicator of increased normality of the relationship. Instead, we may be capturing cohort change in the nature of the parent-child relationship—we cannot say definitively that this is not the case. Future research would benefit from more nuanced measures of the child-parent dynamic including distinctions between other types of support given such as emotional, practical, financial, and technical as well as parent-child specific relationship quality measures.

Overall, this study makes a key contribution to our understanding of the increasing share of young adults living in their parents' home by examining young adults' satisfaction with the living arrangement. The results suggest the shifting composition of the U.S. population does not explain the higher levels of satisfaction with parental coresidence among young adult Millennials compared to their Boomer counterparts of the late 1980s. As the markers of adulthood (completion of schooling/training, gainful employment, residential independence, establishment of coresidential unions, and parenthood) continue to be more elusive, the evidence that satisfaction with parental coresidence has increased indicates support for a continuation of the coresidence trend. The result may be sustained growth in intergenerationally extended or multigenerational households.

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