

Managing the third person in the therapy room

The increase in intergenerational
closeness, and how it shows up in the
therapy room

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What we will cover today

- ▶ This presentation draws on my personal experience of working with Millennials in private practice, and research undertaken for a Therapy Today article.
- ▶ It will start with a brief exploration of research into the increase in ‘intergenerational closeness’ (around 20 mins).
- ▶ We will move into pair/triad work, and an interactive session that will invite you to reflect on your own ethical decision-making, by discussing case studies.
- ▶ ** NB To protect client confidentiality, these vignettes have been amalgamated from several examples of my work, rather than relating to any particular client.*
- ▶ We will come back together to discuss our insights.
- ▶ If time, we will end with a Q&A session.



Millennials: A snapshot

- ▶ A third will never afford their own home
- ▶ More likely than previous generations to come out with a first-class degree and a significant debt
- ▶ Many end up in jobs for which they are over-qualified
- ▶ Experiencing increasing levels of perfectionism, and pressure to outperform their peers
- ▶ Emotionally intelligent, compassionate, aware



Millennials grew up with parents who spent more time with them than previous generations

Giulia M. Dotti Sani, Judith Treas. **Educational Gradients in Parents' Child-Care Time Across Countries, 1965-2012.** *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 2016; 78 (4): 1083 DOI: [10.1111/jomf.12305](https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12305)

From 'benign neglect' to helicopter parent?

- ▶ Attachment theory of the 1960s and 70s had begun to hit the mainstream in the late 80s and 90s, with Millennial children the first generation to benefit from 'high parent engagement', also known as 'helicopter parenting'.
- ▶ The rise of mass media (television, magazines, and later the internet and digital platforms) reflected and conveyed norms about parenting to the wider public. Parenting books hit the mainstream - suddenly there was a 'right' and a 'wrong' way to parent. By 1997, there were five times as many parenting books published than in 1975.
- ▶ At the same time, an increase in traffic on roads meant that allowing children the 'play out' unsupervised was no longer the norm. 'Playdates' and extra-curricular activities were invented, with children's free-time being scheduled and managed by their parents.

Intergenerational closeness is on the rise

Fingerman, KL. The ascension of parent off-spring ties. *The Psychologist* 2016; 29, 114-115

Fingerman KL. Millennials and Their Parents: Implications of the New Young Adulthood for Midlife Adults. *Innov Aging*. 2017;1(3):igx026. doi:10.1093/geroni/igx026

Potential drivers of increased intergenerational closeness

- ▶ Shift away from 'romantic' pairs being the primary relationship (eg young people spend longer time unmarried; parents more likely to be divorced)
- ▶ Longevity - generations spend more time together
- ▶ New middle age:- '60 is the new 40'. Parents are more likely to share similar views, values and interests as younger people; they are more likely to remain in the workplace for longer; and take part in active hobbies and activities.
- ▶ More incidence of co-residence between young adults and their parents, largely driven by economic factors
- ▶ Rise of single parents. Mothers who raise children alone typically have stronger ties when those children grow into young adults.
- ▶ New technology. Smartphones have made it easier to call and text, and digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Facetime and Skype has made frequency of communication in general more accessible.

Conflict and ambivalence

Fingerman's research has shown that in adulthood, grown-up children and their parents experience three types of emotional experiences:

- 1 Positive feelings of affection
- 2 Conflict and negative feelings such as worry, disappointment, or irritation
- 3 Ambivalent or mixed feelings

Millennials are close to their parents, but the relationship can be complicated and conflicted. Parents find it difficult to accept that today's young adults are not achieving the 'markers of adulthood', such as finishing education, getting a secure job, owning their own home or marrying, in the same timescale as they did.

Parents report distress and poor psychological wellbeing when their adult children experience life crises such as a divorce, unemployment or a health issue.

By contrast, when parents offer young adults support on a weekly basis or more often, the grown-up children report greater life satisfaction and better emotional wellbeing

Fingerman, KL. The ascension of parent off-spring ties. The Psychologist 2016; 29, 114-115

A third of the costs of parenting
are spent on children after the
age of 18

Mintz, S. The prime of life: A history of modern adulthood. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press; 2015.

The 'prolonged youth'

- ▶ Young adults spend more time in education and experience greater challenges finding jobs. Between 1998 and 2018, the average age people left full-time education increased from 17.8 years to 19.3 years (*ONS 2019: Milestones, journeying into adulthood*)
- ▶ Young people are marrying later, so a prolonged period of 'singlehood' or serial relationships with different partners raises the importance of ties to a parent during young adulthood
- ▶ Delayed parenthood - average age of having first child is now 29, two years later than it was in 1997.
- ▶ Young people today are less likely to achieve traditional markers of adulthood such as completion of education, marriage, moving out of the parental home or securing a job with a liveable wage as they did in the mid to late 20th century
- ▶ Living with parents is now the most common living arrangement for young adults aged 18-34 (UK ONS)
- ▶ The average age of first-time marriage increased in 2015 to 33 for men and 31 for women (up from ages 30 and 27 respectively in 1997). (UK ONS)

Case study 1: 'Erin'

- ▶ Erin is a 24-year-old post-grad student living away from home who is dealing with severe anxiety and panic attacks
- ▶ Mum contacted you by telephone and arranged for Erin to come to you for weekly counselling during student term time. Mum pays you directly after each session by bank transfer
- ▶ Mum emails you to tell you how difficult it is for her to find the money for the sessions, and asking for a progress report, and asking when Erin might 'be better'. She occasionally rings you before Erin's session to let you know she is 'worried about Erin'.
- ▶ Erin is making progress, but slowly. How do you respond?
- ▶ What are the ethical considerations here? What if anything do you tell Mum about Erin's progress?
- ▶ Do you let Erin know about Mum making contact?

Ethical issues

CONFIDENTIALTY

- ▶ Under the BACP Ethical Framework, 'Our commitment to clients', we agree to 'show respect by protecting client confidentiality and privacy' (3b). We also agree to 'maintain integrity by being honest about the work' (5a)
- ▶ Our commitment to confidentiality is with the client. I would not be prepared to discuss the details of her sessions with Mum even with her permission. That this is in Erin's best interests should be clearly explained to Mum.
- ▶ BACP Ethical Framework Good Practice Point 10: 'Under exceptional circumstances, the need to safeguard our clients or others from serious harm may require us to override our commitment to making our client's wishes and confidentiality our primary concern. We may need to act in ways that will support any investigations or actions necessary to prevent serious harm to clients or others.' We could let Erin's Mum know if she is in serious danger of harming herself.

TRUST

- ▶ Good Practice, Point 12: 'We will do everything we can to develop and protect our clients' trust'

CONTRACTING

- ▶ Good Practice, Point 31: 'We will give careful consideration to how we reach agreement with clients and will contract with them about the terms on which our services will be provided. Attention will be given to:
 - ▶ c) stating clearly how a clients' confidentiality and privacy will be protected and any circumstances in which confidential or private information will be communicated to others

Details of third-party payment could be included in the client contract, along with what communication will be carried out with the third party eg acknowledgement of payment only

- ▶ Would a better scenario would be for the client to pay you then be reimbursed by her Mum?

Case study 2: 'Tom'

- ▶ Tom is a 32-year-old whose mood and confidence have been affected by his recent split with his long-term girlfriend.
- ▶ Tom does not live with his parents, but they are funding his sessions (although he arranged them directly with you).
- ▶ You send the parents an invoice by email on a monthly basis in arrears.
- ▶ Tom regularly does not attend sessions (missing on average, one in every three or four), usually texting you at the last moment to say he can't make it as he's busy at work. Your contract states that cancellations with less than 24 hours' notice will be charged for.
- ▶ You feel increasingly uncomfortable that some of the sessions you are billing his parents for are not attended, but that they have no awareness of this.
- ▶ You have asked Tom to be honest with his parents about his attendance but so far, he has not had that conversation.
- ▶ Do you break Tom's confidentiality if you inform the parents when you bill which sessions were attended?
- ▶ Is it ethical to continue to work with Tom?

Ethical issues

RESPECT

BACP Ethical Framework (2018), Good Practice section, Point 21: 'We will respect our clients' privacy and dignity'.

- ▶ You could recontract with Tom to indicate which sessions have been attended when you invoice. But arguably, even with his permission to do this, you could be breaching the trust between you and his confidentiality. A better scenario is for Tom to agree to tell his parent when he does not attend.
- ▶ Of course, there needs to be a discussion about his ambivalence in attending. Is it connected to the knowledge that his parents will pay you, and therefore, he does not feel he will be letting you down by not coming?

CONTRACTING

BACP Ethical Framework (2018), Good Practice, Point 31: 'We will give careful consideration to how we reach agreement with clients and will contract with them about the terms on which our services will be provided. Attention will be given to:

- ▶ c) stating clearly how a clients' confidentiality and privacy will be protected and any circumstances in which confidential or private information will be communicated to others
- ▶ e) keep a record of what has been agreed and of any changes or clarification when they occur

Case study 3: 'Skye'

- ▶ Skye, 24, has been living at home since she graduated. She is working in the fashion industry but not earning enough to move out
- ▶ She has come to therapy because she feels directionless and that life is more difficult for her than for her peers
- ▶ Her sessions are paid for by Skye, but part-funded by Mum. Skye lives alone with Mum (her parents are divorced and her older siblings have left home)
- ▶ Skye tells you that Mum has told Skye that she must focus on her difficult relationship with her father, which Mum sees as the root of all Skye's problems
- ▶ Skye reports that Mum regularly asks her if she has 'really got to the bottom of' the issue with her Dad yet. But most of the sessions are spent dealing with Skye's complex emotions about her mother, who she is very close to, but also finds overbearing
- ▶ How do you manage the impact of Mum's agenda on the therapy?
- ▶ Would you agree to Mum attending a session with Skye? Or seeing you on her own?

Ethical issues

COMPETENCE

2018 BACP Ethical Framework, 'Our commitment to clients', Point 2: We have agreed that we will work to professional standards by:

- ▶ 2a Working within our competence.'
- ▶ 2c Collaborating with colleagues to improve the quality of what is being offered to clients.

REFERRING ON

2018 BACP Ethical Framework, 'Good Practice', Working to Professional Standards, Point 13:

'We must be competent to deliver the services being offered to at least fundamental professional standards or better. When we consider satisfying professional standards requires consulting others with relevant expertise, seeking second opinions, or making referrals, we will do so in ways that meet our commitments and obligation for client and confidentiality and data protection. By agreeing to let Mum come to a session, you could be working outside of your competence, unless you have training in family system therapy, for instance.'

Any questions?



Any questions, comments or feedback, do contact me



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