

Generational differences impact familial relationships:

Fostering connections between family members with larger age gaps can present many challenges. Students and faculty reflect on their personal experiences regarding the influences of generational differences on relationships within families.

Eden Leavey /
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When surrounded by family members with a wide range of communication styles, technological expertise and core beliefs – oftentimes, inherently determined by age – finding topics to connect on can feel challenging. As such, members of the community examine the factors that frequently divide families generationally and how they have overcome these differences within their own families.

Language

Gabi Dawson ('24) said there is a distinct contrast between how the older and younger generations express themselves verbally in her family.

"The way my grandparents speak is more polite and the way that I speak is very different," she said. "I just feel like conventions of speaking have changed."

Likewise, Matthew Sherman ('23) said when people with stark age gaps communicate, the discussions are "going to be much more formalized" to account for the generational differences.

In addition, Sherman said before moving to London, his immediate family would often host family gatherings during Thanksgiving and Christmas in order to maintain strong connections with one another. Yet, he said many aspects of his family events would be "segregated into age groups, for instance, a kids dinner table and an adults dinner table," due to the heightened ability to connect with people from one's own generation.

"Usually, you have conversations with people

who are mostly your age," he said. "It's just easier to relate to people your age and, like, you're mostly surrounded by people who are your age."

Furthermore, Dawson said language barriers also infiltrate the generational communication difficulties in her family as her maternal grandmother only speaks Spanish.

"When she's trying to talk to us, it's a bit frustrating because we don't know how to get a message across," she said. "We try to always have my mom or my aunt there so they can translate a bit."

Consequently, Dawson said she feels the communicative challenges hinder the quality of the connection she has with her grandmother.

"I wish I had a better relationship with my grandmother," Dawson said. "If I was able to talk to her and she was able to talk to me, I think we'd be closer."

Technology

World Languages and Cultures Teacher Whitney Nuchereno said individuals often associate generational gaps with older generations being less competent at using technology. Nuchereno said she has had experiences with introducing her mother to various devices that affirm this generational assumption.

"I tried to teach my mother how to use a computer and we almost killed each other showing her how – and this was when we had a desktop – how to use a mouse and her having both hands on it and, like, shaking it around," she said. "My sister and I gave up and got her an iPad instead."

Moreover, Hudson Hill ('24) said he communicates with family members using different digital platforms that account for each person's technological knowledge. Hill said he can text back and forth freely with his sisters but has to call his grandmother on the phone to have a con-

versation.

Nonetheless, Dawson said not everyone fits into the stereotypical traits of their generation. For instance, she said her paternal grandmother has always been technologically ahead of her time, especially in terms of her profession.

"She worked in printing, and she owned her own printing shop called 'Uptown Printing & Graphics,'" Dawson said. "So, she kind of adopted technology really early on for her generation. Especially being a woman, like she owned her own business, which was something that at the time no one had really heard of."

Similar to Dawson's grandmother, Nuchereno said she does not resemble the social media-obsessed character that her generation, millennials, are often portrayed to be. Instead of utilizing the digital world to send streaks on Snapchat or discuss controversies on Facebook, Nuchereno said she prides herself on remaining private online.

"I understand the need to want to post or publish something when you feel the angst or some sort of emotion overwhelms you," Nuchereno said. "I just don't think that's a great idea because you can always offend someone. You don't understand tone all the time."

Politics

Dawson said although her family knows one another's positions on the political spectrum, no one acknowledges the differences in views for the sake of preserving familial relationships.

"We don't necessarily want to ruin the great memories that we're having with a topic that would get people in an argument," Dawson said.

By the same standard, Nuchereno said when differing political opinions arise in a conversation, it often leads to increased tension between the two parties involved. Therefore, Nuchereno said she never talks about politics in "many social settings," oftentimes including family gatherings.

Alternatively, Sherman said he does not encounter much variety in political beliefs within

his family because all his family members represent similar positions on the political spectrum.

Moreover, Hill said political beliefs in his family have not changed much but have rather been transferred on from parent to child.

"I don't think it's politically changed through generations, maybe even it's inherently stayed the same since we're the same family," Hill said. "My mom is a Democrat and it's just passed down to me because her beliefs are a huge part of my upbringing."

Social constructs

Nuchereno said in recent years, younger generations have expressed a greater concern for breaking down stereotypes and advocating for social justice. However, she said transitioning to a more equitable society will induce more challenges for older generations, which she noted applies to her mother and grandfather's "stubbornness" to change as well.

"The older you are, the more set you are in your ways," she said. "After having said something for decades and suddenly having to change those behaviors and understand them is difficult."

Likewise, Hill said family members of his who are from older generations have pushed traditional notions of masculinity onto him through gender constructs regarding appearance, due to their "old-fashioned ways."

"When I was younger, I used to have long hair and my dad and grandma hated it," he said. "They were like, 'Oh, you need short hair.' It influenced me to then go get a haircut because I felt like I had to fit into some kind of category."

Contrastingly, Dawson said her grandfather did not push his daughters into stereotypical gender roles. Instead, he encouraged them to work in a field that required a strong education background, which Dawson said was a very progressive stance for the time period.

"My grandfather was a construction worker, and he always told my mom and my aunt, 'I don't

I wish I had a better relationship with my grandmother.

- Gabi Dawson ('24)

Photo booth film

From left to right:
Hudson Hill's sisters Jessica McNeile and Ellie McNeile, Hill's niece Florence McNeile, Hill, Hill's french bulldog Bleecker



Birthyears by generation and corresponding characteristics



Source: Author and researcher Jason Dorsey

want you to support your family with physical labor,” Dawson said. “He wanted my aunt and my mom to be able to support their family using their mind and using their knowledge, and so going to school and getting an education was always really important to them.”

To combat stereotypes, Sherman said his family shares tasks and chores that are traditionally assigned to the women in a household.

“In my family, everyone cooks, it’s not based on typical gender roles,” he said. “It’s more seen as a fun thing to do. Like for Thanksgiving this year, I cooked all the meals.”

Despite the many ways in which gender roles have changed over time, Nuchereno said younger generations are still subject to stereotypical portrayals of men, namely in the media. She said while crucial steps have been taken to lessen gender stereotypes, society must continue to make progress.

“The men are still portrayed to be dominant, strong, handsome, and I feel like women have the adverse portrayal in the media, such as obeying and beautiful,” she said.

Maintaining relationships

As part of the World Language curriculum, Nuchereno said she teaches her students about the various boundaries that separate families generationally. She said by talking about what causes generational differences within classes, she hopes students will come to understand their familial relationships and meet the differences with kindness.

“It’s about teaching respect, teaching openness, teaching compassion,” she said.

Furthermore, Nuchereno said the older generations have a lot of wisdom and life experiences they can share, and when younger generations do

not want to listen, they often lose a sense of identity or importance.

Meanwhile, Sherman said family members from different generations can learn from one another concurrently. He said keeping an open mindset when interacting across generations helps his family cultivate strong relationships.

“It’s kind of fun teaching them and being able to show them new things and using terminologies that they might not know,” he said. “The younger generations teach the older ones, but I do think that there is a gap there.”

Although the rest of her family lives in California, Dawson said growing up abroad with her immediate family has motivated her to foster meaningful connections with both the individuals she lives with and the ones she visits less frequently.

“Because I’ve moved around a lot, my direct family is a consistent group of people that I know I can rely on,” she said. “Not having access to my grandparents, my cousins, my aunts and uncles, I think it also makes me appreciate them more when I’m there, which means that I try and see them as often as possible.”

Ultimately, Nuchereno said cherishing the moments one spends with their family despite communicative restrictions of generational differences is crucial as one never knows how much time they have left with a family member, particularly with someone from an older generation.

“You can’t just assume that your loved ones are going to be around forever. You can’t assume they’re even going to be around for tomorrow,” Nuchereno said. “Having lost people very suddenly has made me realize the importance of others instead of ourselves. It forces us to put ourselves in a position where we think ‘Okay, what do I need to talk to this person about? What do I want to connect with them on? Do I really know this person to their core?’”

“**The older you are, the more set you are in your ways.**”

— Whitney Nuchereno, World Languages and Cultures Teacher

Family lineage

One’s lineage is often a core aspect of their family as it can connect members across generations through shared values and traditions.

Hudson Hill (24) said he maintains relationships with his family despite generational differences due to unifying beliefs. Photos of younger members of Hill’s family are shown in newer “photo booth film” while older members are displayed in a more retro “photo album” style.

Photo album pictures

From top to bottom:
Hudson Hill’s mother Emma Hill,
Hill’s father John Eckart,
Hill’s grandmother Judy Eckart



Photos courtesy of Hudson Hill