

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Conceptualising childhood as a relational status: parenting adult children in sixteenth-century England

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## Abstract

This article explores the status of child as a relational one, defined by the power dynamics between parents and children rather than the young age of the individual. This approach complicates historiographical perspectives on the transition between childhood and adulthood, usually defined by historians as independence from parental regulation. Analysis of family correspondence from early modern England is used as a case study to explore conflicting patriarchal ideals that encouraged individuals to become independent householders, but also venerated filial obedience. It shows the broader application of this research to historians considering age as a category of analysis.

## 1. Introduction

In an undated letter from c. 1560, Thomas Kitson asked his mother Margaret for £40 ‘for the bying of suche necessaries as I intend to have’. He stated that he would pay her back as soon as he could and intended to be ‘a good husband’ after repaying the expense.<sup>1</sup> Thomas was the son of a wealthy merchant who had died before his birth in 1540. At the time of this request, Thomas was likely around 20 years old and married to his second wife.<sup>2</sup> Margaret had become Countess of Bath after her third marriage in 1548. Although Thomas would have been considered an adult by many markers of the period, including his age and marital status, here he used his status as child to request financial assistance from his mother. Thomas’s appeal shows that the social signifiers of dependence and filial deference said to be distinctive of childhood could continue to characterise the lives of adults. These dependencies were complex and negotiable. In Joanne Begiato’s survey of historical research into the history of parenting, she identifies that the life cycle stage of ‘parent’ is not limited to a defined chronological period and acknowledges that ‘the shifts in parenting across the life-course are ripe for enquiry to uncover the dynamic and mutable nature of parenthood even in one lifetime.’<sup>3</sup> Historians of the family and life cycle largely explore the experiences of adults as parents.<sup>4</sup> Adults *with* parents are rarely considered. This article argues that considering the parent-child relationship as relational can offer a new perspective on the dynamic and

mutable nature of childhood, or more specifically *being a child*, across a lifetime. It asks how and in what ways the negotiable status of children continued into adulthood as children sought access to authority on a more equal basis with their parents.

Within the context of familial relationships, individuals remained in the relational position of child long after they had reached an adult chronological age.<sup>5</sup> Corinne T. Field and Nicholas L. Syrett refer to this categorisation of age as *relative*, which describes a person's position in relation to those junior or senior to themselves.<sup>6</sup> This article applies this concept to parent-child relationships, seeing the status of child as relational; the status of child could be defined by the power dynamics within family structures rather than the young age of the individual. While considering childhood as a chronological age stage ending with marriage and household formation has continued to be an excellent way to understand the life cycle in early modern society, conceptualising the concurrent and overlapping roles that could be held by individuals is revealing in a different way.<sup>7</sup> Familial roles, and the responsibilities and obligations associated with them, were complex and mutable across individual life courses.<sup>8</sup> Historiography has thus far indicated this subject without fully addressing it. A person could be both chronologically and culturally an adult who operated as the head of an independent household, but could also be a child in relational status to their own living parent. Society was made up of many inter-linked patriarchal households, and although families were generally more diverse in structure, cultural norms of masculine authority and filial obedience provided the codes for negotiating authority in this context.<sup>9</sup> As has been identified for gender relations in early modern Europe, agentic norms coexisted alongside patriarchal ones.<sup>10</sup> Adult children expected that they would be able to act independently and exert power, however, for many, a living parent meant that there would always be an authority figure with influence in their lives, regardless of their age. Much of the complexity of the negotiations of authority between parents and children came from these co-existing norms.

The study of the interdependence of parents and children across the life course has been considered by historians of the long eighteenth-century, who show that parents and children continued to share experiences and influence each other's lives and identities.<sup>11</sup> 'Transitional points' including marriage, crisis, and death, where parent-child relationships were re-positioned, have been identified as well as the significance of this relationship in forming and upholding gender identities.<sup>12</sup> Less research has been done on the sixteenth century, an era in which concepts of deference and patriarchal authority keenly shaped the roles of parent and child. When tracing the legal shift in the definition of childhood across the early modern period, Holly Brewer describes the sixteenth century as a moment in English history where 'most adults had the status of perpetual children' in society.<sup>13</sup> The widely accepted metaphor of children as obedient and submissive to their parents was transposed to the whole of society as adults were expected to be obedient to their social superiors. This moment is thus apt for analysis of what Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos highlights as the 'incompatibility between two sets of norms prevalent in early modern English society', where patriarchal ideals encouraged deference and obedience to authority figures such as parents, but individuals were expected to become independent householders, and so parents or masters themselves, as a goal of adult life.<sup>14</sup> Brewer argues that the purpose of patriarchal

authority in the sixteenth century was 'to reify status relationships' rather than defining the experiences of the young whereas Ben-Amos identifies the main features of youth as a transitional life stage.<sup>15</sup> This article explores one intersection of their arguments by asking how social signifiers of childhood remained important in the ways adult children negotiated authority in a society that defined itself by patriarchal status relationships. It reveals a different perspective on the boundaries between childhood and adulthood by considering childhood as a relational status rather than a life cycle stage bound by age or the completion of rites of passage.<sup>16</sup> Ben-Amos has criticised scholarship on parent-child relations that often encapsulates the relationship 'in terms of a set of stable properties rather than of dynamic relations that evolve across the whole life span.'<sup>17</sup> This article builds on her work by further showing the dynamic relations of the aristocratic classes of England in the sixteenth century and arguing for the significance of seeing age as a relational construction within the family.

The sources analysed in this article are largely from the second half of the sixteenth century and some cover multiple generations of the same family lines. The examples selected are from around eight families where a bulk of correspondence between parents and children has survived and so offers a sense of change across the life course. They are intended to highlight the diversity of ways in which parents and children negotiated relationships across the life cycle rather than a comprehensive overview of families across society. The nature of the surviving sources means that the families are all from literate elite social groups but there is variation in wealth and status between them. For instance, by the late sixteenth century Bess of Hardwick was one of the wealthiest women in England, married into one of its most established aristocratic dynasties, whereas, although an important family of the Norfolk gentry, the Gawdy family had less financial and social capital. The families selected sometimes intermarried so there were connections between the aristocracy and gentry that resulted in shared familial expectations and emotional expressions. The changing emotional relationships between parents and their children are seen in the tones and expression in their letters. Parents and children in the sixteenth century were generally not as emotionally expressive as in the late eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup> However, it is still possible to discern the emotional scripts through which they expressed and managed their relationships, and the ways both drew on the rhetoric of obedience. Patriarchal ideology that aimed to preserve lineage and dynasty was crucial but did not entirely obscure affection and emotion. Parents and children developed emotional scripts that were adapted to suit the tone and purpose of their letters.<sup>19</sup> Parents could be authoritative or affectionate and children could communicate in the position of obedient child or of a more companionate equal. An analysis of the tone and emotional expressions in these letters reveals the ways in which children negotiated their adult authority, while using signifiers associated with childhood.

Even once they no longer resided in the same physical spaces as their parents, adult children retained an emotional connection to them, and demonstrated that they knew how they were expected to behave and communicate with them. Negotiations between parents and children over the dependencies that continued throughout adulthood show how the wider family network was distinct from the household-family (a group of individuals not necessarily related but who shared

the same household space).<sup>20</sup> When considering the formation and expression of emotional content, Susan Broomhall argues that households should be considered distinct from families.<sup>21</sup> However, her definition of household is expanded to include emotional connections through the ‘concept’ of the household where economic and social bonds were retained as individuals operated around shared goals.<sup>22</sup> The ‘notions of power’ that Broomhall identifies as being critical in exploring emotional communities formed by households have their basis in the patriarchal structures of family life.<sup>23</sup> As adult children remained conceptually part of their parents’ household, even if they no longer physically resided there, they continued to understand and shape the emotional relationships within it. Barbara Rosenwein’s concept of ‘emotional communities’ has been criticised as weakening the implications of the concept of community as it allows for overlapping circles of emotional expression.<sup>24</sup> However, Andrew Lynch claims it is ‘most persuasive when it related strongly to an existing social unit or a specific shared enterprise’.<sup>25</sup> Early modern elite families were both and so the concept of a regime of emotions shared by a group of individuals linked by ties of blood and marriage is a useful one. Parents and their adult children used emotional articulations to negotiate authority, which is illustrated in letter conventions indicating deference or long apologies over financial difficulties.

This article begins by highlighting the tensions that could exist in the initial transition period after marriage as a child retained his or her status as child but became a spouse, a role associated with independence and adult agency. It goes on to show the varied forms of support children continued to request from their parents, particularly relating to financial and health matters. The article concludes by examining the new perspectives that studying relational family status as a category of analysis can offer to understanding the experience of adulthood, and the links between individual agency and familial obligations in the past.

## 2. Independence and parental authority

Becoming independent was part of the process of becoming an adult as individuals began careers, inherited land and money, or married.<sup>26</sup> There is no distinct line between dependence and independence, as adults ‘alternate between autonomy and interdependence’ throughout their lives.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, becoming independent was an aspirational status for adults. Independence has been identified as a feature of ideal masculinity in early modern England, and as achievable for women, both financially and in terms of decision-making.<sup>28</sup> Demographic analysis and the model of the north-western European marriage pattern has shown that for many in early modern England, setting up an independent household usually occurred in a person’s late 20s, although for elite social classes, marriage could occur earlier and wealth could be inherited at any time.<sup>29</sup> The experience of the elite is in some ways unusual, but there was variation in the process of becoming independent across society. Analysing the records of aristocratic and gentry families demonstrates some of the ways in which attaining independence from one’s parents was a complicated process. Children may have achieved some of the markers of adulthood but in relational terms remained children in their family hierarchy.

Conduct literature shows that contemporary writers were aware of the difficulties faced by parents as their children grew up. Anonymous publication *The Office of*

*Christian Parents* has a lengthy section discussing the parent-child relationship after a child's marriage.<sup>30</sup> The author acknowledged that parents 'can never cast off the feeling care, watchfull eie, and loving desire, which they have naturally engraven in them towards their children.'<sup>31</sup> However, although the duty and interest parents had for their children was perpetual and appropriate, parents had to show respect to married children, especially in their own houses.<sup>32</sup> These instructions reveal the distinctive situation in which early modern families had to negotiate changes to hierarchies of authority. Achieving the status of householder was a significant marker of adult independence in patriarchal terms, and in the lived experiences of families. However, patriarchal ideals also stated that children should be obedient to parents, and the practicalities of family life in the sixteenth century meant that households did not operate as independent units. In early modern society, the family as a whole had an enhanced significance to the survival and success of individuals, therefore relative status within the family was a significant factor in the personal authority and decision-making of an individual. Many decisions that are today considered 'individual', like starting work or getting married, were part of collective family strategies.<sup>33</sup> The reputations of all members of a family were crucial to obtaining social and economic credit, and so related households were dependent on each other.<sup>34</sup> The practices of trying to ensure that each individual, couple, or household acted in these interests were often expressed through emotional rhetoric in correspondence.<sup>35</sup> Ties of kin were of crucial importance to economic and social success, thus navigating complex patriarchal expectations required careful negotiation.

Negotiation of authority in families often began when a child was newly married. Marriage was not 'the point of no return when the break from parental control was completed'.<sup>36</sup> Parents and adult children had generally reached a 'delicate balance of power' by the time they married, where children were no longer expected to obey their parents' orders.<sup>37</sup> However, this balance was often still being negotiated well into a child's adulthood. Parents had a conception of how their child should behave, not solely linked to their age or independence, so many newly-married children found they were expected to continue in an obedient position in the family hierarchy.<sup>38</sup> For aristocratic and gentry couples, the newlyweds would most likely have lived with one set of parents after their wedding. Not being under their own roof could cause problems for children who wanted to be acknowledged as adults in their new status as part of a married couple but were not the masters or mistresses of their own households. This was an issue for John Thynne and Joan Hayward after they married in 1576. The couple had no home of their own initially because the house bestowed on them was the subject of legal disputes, so they lived separately with their in-laws.<sup>39</sup> John lived in London with Joan's father Rowland Hayward, a leading politician and former Lord Mayor of the city.<sup>40</sup> Joan lived with John's father (also named John) and his wife Dorothy at their estate, Longleat, in Wiltshire. John found himself, married and at the age of around 27, facing discipline and criticism from his father. His father criticised the clothes John wore and supported his father-in-law in attempting to assert some control over him. Alison Wall suggests that these problems were caused by the young John's refusal to accept the control of his father-in-law, though the situation could equally be viewed as his parents not reneging control of him.<sup>41</sup> Joan had a

no more harmonious relationship with her mother-in-law, Dorothy. She told John about the 'accustomed courtesy' of his stepmother 'which I may count a hell to heavenly joys' and suggested she would like to leave the household if she were able.<sup>42</sup>

The Thynne correspondence demonstrates that the performance of appropriate emotions was part of the process of negotiation between parents and adult children at this transitional life cycle stage.<sup>43</sup> John's new wife wrote to him begging him to accept the authority of her father, albeit only to make their lives easier. One letter is particularly revealing as Joan acknowledged her father's anger was not borne solely from John's behaviour:

the first time I found him much moved with anger as it seemed to me. But afterward I found his anger was not so much as it was to the outward show, as he said, to make you humble yourself and know your duty towards him, as it is the part of a natural son to do to his father as I need not reveal it unto you, for you know it very well.<sup>44</sup>

The 'outward show' of obedience was crucial to John's relationship with his father-in-law and an important part of the negotiation of authority between the two men. Authority was practised through the performance of anger intended to manipulate John into acts of humility and obedience.<sup>45</sup> John was dependent on his father-in-law who acted as a surrogate parental figure. Support from John's biological father added legitimacy to Rowland's attempts at regulating John's behaviour. Despite her own dispute with her mother-in-law, Joan was aware that John knew exactly how he was expected to behave as an obedient child, albeit an adult one, and pleaded with him to apologise and formally announce his failings in a letter. She advised that he write this letter in his own hand rather than using a scribe, as further proof of his filial obedience.<sup>46</sup> In later life, Joan did not support the decisions of her son Thomas's parents-in-law who encouraged him to marry their daughter without informing or seeking permission from his own parents. For a woman who had come to understand the rhetoric of obedience in her own youth, the idea that her son had been manipulated by his parents-in-law and accepted their authority over his own provoked considerable anger and distress.<sup>47</sup>

Fathers saw it as their duty to guide their sons in becoming successful husbands, fathers and householders. Young men in early modern England were expected to be obedient during their childhood and youth but this was part of a socialisation process where they would eventually become adult authority figures in their own patriarchal households.<sup>48</sup> Marriage was a crucial rite of passage enabling men to move from dependence to social and political maturity.<sup>49</sup> Fred Tromley's reassessment of William Cecil's *Ten Precepts* to his younger son Robert argues that William's instructions were penned to an older Robert, aged about 24, because he had reached this age without becoming the head of his own household, despite his initial successes establishing himself in political circles.<sup>50</sup> For Robert Cecil the setting up of a household preceded his marriage but for an eldest son like John Thynne, marriage preceded inheriting his estate. The reality for a son of the aristocracy or gentry was that his parents had significant influence over his living situation and financial independence before and after marriage, so expected obedience and for their

counsel to be heeded. These young men were not truly adults in a functional sense until they could live independently. Perhaps some of John's refusal to act in a sufficiently deferential way reflects the frustration of achieving the supposed position of authority as a husband to find that expectations of obedience from childhood and youth did not disappear.

Daughters could also be subject to expectations of obedience in a patriarchal system where their gender and relational status put them below their parents and husband in the family hierarchy. In the case of Joan Thynne and her mother-in-law, age may have come into conflict with relational status in the negotiation of their relationship. Joan's comments suggest that she expected a more respectful relationship with her mother-in-law, a woman who was likely only around 10 years older than her.<sup>51</sup> It appears that the two women struggled to find a balance between friendly courtesy between married adult women and the deference expected from daughter to mother. While advising her husband to outwardly show deference to his father-in-law, Joan openly criticised her own mother-in-law. Dorothy was warned by her friend Margaret, Countess of Derby, about the accusations she had heard from Joan at court and advised 'Suffer not such moths quietly to harbour in your gown till they fret a hole in your nearer garment.'<sup>52</sup> The accusations, which Margaret believed to be lies, were that Dorothy did not allow Joan to have 'meat, drink or any other thing needful' and mocked her behind her back.<sup>53</sup> Thus the impact of this tension on their wider networks can be seen as Joan's comments threatened Dorothy's reputation.

In the case of Suffolk gentry couple Elizabeth and Charles Forth, who married in 1582, Ralph Houlbrooke has also revealed the complex ways in which gender affected negotiations of authority between parents and newly-married children. In legal battles a decade after the breakdown of the marriage, Charles's father Robert indicated that Elizabeth had not been sufficiently submissive and obedient to him or his son.<sup>54</sup> In this case, Charles's mother Frances appeared more supportive of her daughter-in-law's needs in the marriage. She saw the potential value of setting up the young couple in their own household in an attempt to save their deteriorating relationship.<sup>55</sup> It was unsuccessful but her efforts suggest that parents were both able to empathise with the difficulties of this stage of family life, and identify that a newly married couple might require some level of independence.

As parents were heavily involved in the first marriages of their children, so they were involved if these marriages ended, particularly if there were unresolved legal or financial issues. Bess of Hardwick was central in arranging the marriage of her son Charles to Margaret Kitson in around 1581.<sup>56</sup> Margaret had died by July 1582 and Bess took on her son's cause to ensure that he inherited the lands he had been promised by her parents, regardless of the short duration of the union. She petitioned Sir Thomas Cornwallis, Margaret's maternal grandfather, hoping he would influence Margaret's father Thomas Kitson (his son-in-law) to deal with Charles 'as his owne child'. Thomas Kitson had no sons and Bess's letter emphasised the mutual love that had existed between Charles and Margaret, hoping that Thomas would consider Charles a natural fit as his heir.<sup>57</sup> Charles's 'good & dutyfull behaviour' was listed as an important sign of his suitability, further demonstrating the importance of duty and obligation adult children were required to show to parents-in-law.<sup>58</sup>

Bess's petitioning and negotiating on behalf of her son continued for over a decade to 1594 when she wrote to Margaret's mother Elizabeth to make sure Charles was granted the lands he was due.<sup>59</sup> By 1594 Charles was 40 years old, but he encouraged, or at least allowed, his mother to invoke her status as his wealthy and well-connected parent to benefit his cause. She had previously corresponded with contacts such as her 'louynge frend', politician and lawyer Thomas, fourth Baron Paget, to assist her with the matter.<sup>60</sup> In her letter to Elizabeth, Bess invoked the covenants made by her and her eldest son William when negotiating the match, which Elizabeth was now bound to. She emphasised the family connections by referring to Thomas and Elizabeth Kitson as 'brother' and 'sister', and Margaret as 'daughter'. The letter was sent in advance of a visit from Charles to London where Bess encouraged the Kitson family to correspond with him there. It seems likely that Charles believed it would be in his favour to involve his mother in the ongoing negotiations. As an exceptionally wealthy woman with extensive political connections, Bess was able to wield a significant amount of influence over family, friends and employees.<sup>61</sup> However, her involvement in the lives of her children was not exceptional. Parents remained important parts of their children's networks to advocate for them as adults.

As part of their adult networks, married children could influence the reputation of their parents. Credit was a social relationship with implications that went beyond a purely financial status.<sup>62</sup> Even once they were part of a separate household, and so technically a separate unit of economic activity, children retained ties to their parents that were significant enough to influence the creditworthiness of the whole family.<sup>63</sup> As well as advocating for them, parents could offer support if their children faced marital difficulties.<sup>64</sup> Sir Robert Sidney arranged a marriage for his eldest daughter Mary to Sir Robert Wroth in 1604, and took an interest in their relationship immediately afterwards. Only a month after Mary's marriage, Robert reported to his wife Barbara that he had met his son-in-law in London:

I find by him that there was somewhat that doth discontent him: but the particulars I could not get out from him: only that he protests that he cannot take any exceptions to his wife nor her carriage towards him. It were very soon for an unkindness to begin: and therefore whatsoever the matters be, I pray you let all things be carried in the best manner till we all so meet. For mine enemies would be very glad for such an occasion to make themselves merry at me.<sup>65</sup>

That Robert was still concerned with his daughter's life and social interactions after her marriage suggests a child was still seen as strongly connected to the household unit of her parents. For men, children were 'a visible embodiment of their father's values or capabilities'.<sup>66</sup> Family credit was also important to women, who relied on their family reputations as much as men.<sup>67</sup> Even though Mary was part of a separate household as an adult married woman, Robert Sidney's concerns about his reputation being affected by his children's behaviour would have been understood by his wife.

Parents needed to remain involved in their children's lives after they had married, and achieved one of the symbolic markers of adulthood, because they were



still seen as connected to and responsible for their children after this point. A child acting against parental authority or entering into a dysfunctional marriage could damage a family's reputation for reliability by going against accepted cultural norms of how families were expected to conduct themselves.<sup>68</sup> Linked reputations were one reason parents continued to instruct and expect obedience from their children, even after they had transitioned to life in their own households or family units. Applying these signifiers of childhood to adult children was often a process of negotiation as the dynamic of the parent-child relationship changed.

### 3. Financial support

In times of financial need it was common, and often encouraged, that children turn first to their parents. Children may have looked forward to the independence and authority they gained after marriage, setting up independent households, or both, but it was sensible to remain outwardly obedient to parents who could be an important source of support throughout life. In 1581 21-year-old Bassingbourne Gawdy wrote a long letter to his father, an important figure in Norfolk gentry society, apologising profusely for 'most grievous my unthriftiness of growing to be indebted' by the 'deare price' of 26 pounds. His letter is an extended apology for his own failings as a son. Bassingbourne imagined what his father must be feeling about this news and answered his expected unhappiness with emotional expressions of his own. Many were couched around the idea of duty, for example, 'let me be bounden in suche doble bondes of duty bothe for youre suffering and for-geving'.<sup>69</sup> Bassingbourne opened his letter by stating that others had counselled him to write to his father and, indeed, his uncle had already written two days earlier to appeal on behalf of his nephew, writing, 'He does not desire to live unless he has your favour'.<sup>70</sup> Bassingbourne appealed to his father's goodness, patience and love, even though he felt ashamed for discrediting himself to the knowledge of his friends and foes. He stated that he was unwilling to displease his parents but realised that 'begging for pittie to get helpe and be releved' was the best option. Nevertheless, he requested that his mother was kept from the knowledge of his getting into debt. Younger children were able to make use of characteristics associated with childhood to influence their parents to listen to their grievances, for example crying and other physical suffering.<sup>71</sup> Bassingbourne's letter demonstrates that adults could continue to draw on childhood signifiers in order to elicit a similar response from their parents. Although not admitting to crying, expressing vulnerability and shame was a reminder to parents of their continued responsibilities. In this case, Bassingbourne's words indicate that obligations for support could be accompanied by emotions of pain and unhappiness for parents too.

Parents were expected to assist with their children's financial problems, even if the child had to ask in a penitent manner. The financial obligations of parents to their children were common to all social classes. However, for wealthier children, there could be a subtext behind youthful dependence on a parent as an expression of social status where they could demonstrate 'access to, if not formal ownership of resources'.<sup>72</sup> Bassingbourne Gawdy's 1581 letter was written when he was unmarried and studying at the Inner Temple. Thus he was technically still part of his father's household, having not met that cultural marker of adulthood despite his age.

However, he continued to ask his father for money after he was married. In an undated letter from after his marriage, he asked his father to pay some debts for him as he was worried about discrediting himself to a 'Sir Bacon'.<sup>73</sup> In 1600, George Manners wrote to his father John, the youngest brother of the second Earl of Rutland, to let him know that he and his family had arrived safely at their new home, but 'we have no provision for our needs'.<sup>74</sup> He stated that he would 'wholly apply' himself to get out of the situation but then asked for his father's 'advice and furtherance', which must have been a polite request for financial assistance. Shepard and Spicksley have shown that the wealth of gentlemen was fairly even across the life cycle after the age of 25. However, their analysis does not include real estate, which they acknowledge means this pattern is unlikely to be representative.<sup>75</sup> Childhood as a relational status was profoundly shaped by inheritance. The wealth of aristocratic and gentry children was directly related to the wealth of their parents and the life cycle moments of marriage and parental death where this wealth became available to them. It may be that contacting parents for financial assistance was not always a shameful action in a social group where children were bound into the financial solvency of their fathers, particularly eldest sons who would be the primary inheritors of the family's wealth and status.

Nevertheless, it was good letter-writing practice to apologise effusively when asking for help, and the emotions described by children and their parents reveal the reason these performances were deemed necessary. Expressions of shame on the part of the child indicated the wider implications of their poor choices, and acknowledged that their situation and their father's response was unlikely to remain private. Actions that jeopardised the family's wealth, such as amassing significant debts, could have an impact on the creditworthiness of the family as a whole. Also in the 1580s, George Talbot, sixth Earl of Shrewsbury, became embroiled in a lengthy and public disagreement with his eldest son Gilbert, partly caused by Gilbert's financial situation. Gilbert, aged 32, an MP, and a husband and father, appealed to George after asking for money, pleading, 'My days of payment are now at hand and I put myself at your mercy, resolved to change my manner of living, and never more to trouble you with such entreaties.'<sup>76</sup> George accused Gilbert of obscuring the truth about his finances and working against him with his step-mother, adding:

Theis are no small matters and howe you should soo spend all this and bring yourself soo farre into debte I cannot but mervail, and with grief thinke of yt. Well, in hope of better hereafter, for her Majesties sake I will doo thus much nowe, which you knowe is a gret deale more then your behavior and desertes have geven me cause.<sup>77</sup>

The situation deteriorated until Gilbert left court. He wrote to William Cecil that the 'feare and terror' of 'the tempest of his [father's] wordes' had kept him away.<sup>78</sup> The descriptions of feeling and expressing strong emotions of grief, anger and fear show the depth of significance of this episode for both father and son. Cecil attempted to intervene by supporting Gilbert in a letter to his father, arguing that he did not have enough to live on as the heir to his line and so was not able to keep out of debt.<sup>79</sup> The acknowledgement that eldest sons were usually

granted larger portions to live on can be found in an earlier letter between Gilbert and his stepmother Bess. They discussed how much his younger stepbrother Charles Cavendish should be granted on his marriage, stating that the suggested £400 per year was 'as large a proporcon as eny Erle allowethe his eldest sonne during his owne lyfte.'<sup>80</sup> There was often little secrecy around these financial negotiations, which could involve parents, siblings and friends. William Cecil's attempt to draw George's attention to the appropriate sum needed for an eldest son to live adequately seemed to help repair the relationship between George and Gilbert, who later reconciled.

Historians have noted the potential for breakdowns in father-son relationships. Ralph Houlbrooke's analysis of the diaries of Puritan ministers concludes that adolescence may have been a difficult period as fathers attempted to maintain surveillance of their sons' behaviour.<sup>81</sup> He states that this may not be the case for all social classes but Heal and Holmes also note tensions in gentry families, usually over issues of inheritance and money.<sup>82</sup> These tensions can also be seen in aristocratic families. Sons were often deeply worried about offending their fathers and saw that their financial problems could have consequences for their reputations and standing within the family. Anger was a responsible reaction to a child threatening the welfare of the family through irresponsible behaviour.<sup>83</sup> This certainly seems to have been the case with George Talbot's expressions in response to his son's debts. It could also be understood as a public performance of masculinity. Fathers admonished their sons' claims to masculine authority in the form of extravagant behaviour as a way of projecting their own masculine judgement and restraint.<sup>84</sup> In the cases of Bassingbourne Gawdy and Gilbert Talbot, the friends and kin who involved themselves in the disagreements recognised that anger was a justified response to the situations, but appealed to parents to show toleration. Parents could be criticised for involving themselves too much in their adult children's lives, but also for reacting too angrily when their children failed to act like the responsible adults they were expected to be.

Not all correspondence about money was a source of tension, but further examples show how involved parents remained with this part of their children's adult lives, including for their married daughters. The lengthy dealing with his son's financial affairs caused a rift between George and Gilbert Talbot in the 1580s, but George's correspondence shows that he gave money to his married daughter Grace, who was resident at court around that time.<sup>85</sup> In 1605 Robert Sidney, having seen that his eldest daughter Mary had asked for money in a letter, indicated to his wife that it would be fine if she gave her some as he would repay it when he returned home. His concern was: 'I should be very loath that she [Mary] did want.'<sup>86</sup> At this time, Mary had been married for almost a year, but her father still felt responsible for providing for her. There is no mention of her husband or obvious reason why he could not support his new wife. After his daughter Grace's marriage to Francis Fortescue in 1590, John Manners wrote to her father-in-law Sir John Fortescue, then Lord Chancellor, to confirm that he had sent the full payment of her marriage portion. However, in the same letter he also asked Fortescue to bestow £100 of the money to Francis to clear him of debt, as an act of a 'natural kind parent'. He wanted to make sure that by clearing his debts, his son-in-law could go on to 'be a good husband and live in an orderly

way' therefore ensuring a financially stable life for his daughter. Even after she was married, Grace's father was the appropriate person to try to arrange the couple's financial situation, with the agreement of her father-in-law.<sup>87</sup> Grace Manners' exact age is not known, but at the time of their marriage in 1590 Francis was around the age of 27, so they were not a particularly young married couple. John Manners demonstrated a combination of financial responsibility and care for his daughter's wellbeing that extended well into the couple's adult years. Material concerns existed outside of the negotiations around financial settlements that dominated much of parental involvement in their child's marriage arrangement.<sup>88</sup> In the case of Robert Sidney, he initially struggled to pay all of the settlement required at the time of Mary's marriage, but his concern about her everyday expenses was somewhat later when the settlement issue had been resolved. Although cultural ideals around marriage imagined new husbands providing for their wives and households, it was clearly not unusual for a woman's natal family to supplement this if necessary.

Parents provided financial support to their children into their adult lives and beyond the contracts drawn up on marriage arrangement, especially for gentry and aristocratic children who could not always access independent funds while their father was still alive. This role meant that parents could continue to regulate their children's behaviour as financial control shaped the relational bond. Accessing financial support when indebted required children to draw on an emotional script expressing shame and acknowledging possible parental anger. In less serious cases, or cases where daughters required support, these requests and transactions were still carefully managed through polite and often deferential correspondence.

#### 4. Wellbeing and Healthcare

Parent and adult child relationships were not always dominated by tensions over the right to assert authority, or concern about reputations. Enduring bonds led to parents and children providing each other emotional and material support throughout their lives. Considering the status of children as relational reveals the nuances of the parent-child relationship as both parent and child aged. Parents and children could continue to draw on the signifiers of childhood dependencies to provide or request support, but could also engage with each other as adults as children became householders and parents themselves.

Parents could play a significant role in their children's adult lives as a source of emotional support and care, as well as material support. Evidence for both roles can be seen in the same letters. In the early seventeenth century, Lettice Gawdy wrote to her father, Robert Knollis, to ask for various favours including sending clothes for her and her two young sons. This letter was partly sent because her parents' location in London meant they could obtain better quality goods than she could in Norwich, however she also asked for news of Robert's business exploits and expressed a wish for him to visit her.<sup>89</sup> Even when separated from their children, as most aristocratic and gentry parents were, they could provide advice and express their affection through correspondence. In Charles Framlingham's letter to his ill daughter Anne Gawdy, wife of Bassingbourne Gawdy, he stated that he would 'gladly do anything for her a father can do' including sending a servant who

could play music for her to pass the time, and to contact his wife to hurry to her to see if she could help.<sup>90</sup> It is in adulthood where it is apparent how important these letters could be, as opposed to the often more formal letters sent by adolescent children as part of their education. Eleanor, daughter of William Paston IV, married Thomas Manners, later Earl of Rutland, in 1525 and her increased status may have led to a more equal relationship between father and daughter.<sup>91</sup> Their letters are warm in tone and read like a conversation between two adults who value each other's opinions. Although her letters were written in deferential language to acknowledge her respect for her father, she asked to be kept informed of news and passed on news of her own to him.<sup>92</sup> He continued to offer her advice and expressed a desire to see her, in one letter apologising for being delayed on his visit to her.<sup>93</sup>

By their nature, letters reveal how parents dealt with separation from their children. It was common in parents' letters to their adult children to express a desire to see or hear from them. In a letter to her eldest daughter Mary, who was aged around 30, Bess of Hardwick stated the urgent request, 'Let me heare this nighte how you and your good Lorde doth else shall I not slepe quiatly.'<sup>94</sup> Robert Sidney regularly informed his wife about his plans to visit his adult children. His relationship with Mary appeared to be independent to the relationship between her and her mother Barbara, and he often seems to have seen his daughter without Barbara being present. On one occasion after finishing a period of work at the royal court, he opted to see Mary before returning home to his wife, writing to Barbara: 'I will make haste to see you, but first I will see my daughter Wroth, with whom I have not been yet since the progress'.<sup>95</sup> The provision of comfort for parents was a key element of filial duty in the eighteenth century.<sup>96</sup> Despite less explicit cultural commentary on affection and love as an aspirational quality of fatherhood in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, fathers also articulated the comfort they could derive from a loving relationship with an adult child.

A life cycle moment in which reciprocal care and support in the relationship is particularly apparent was during the pregnancy and childbirth of a daughter. Lettice Gawdy's letter to her father to request clothes includes a humorous comment about her many pregnancies. She had been sent clothes by her mother but wrote, 'I have had so many children that they have worn through all my things and therefore I must try my friends again for I trust that you have some old shirts in a corner for me or some old things'.<sup>97</sup> Bequests from family played an important role in a woman's experience of fertility and childbirth. These items could also become 'biological objects' reflecting the affectionate relationship between giver and receiver.<sup>98</sup> Although Lettice signed herself off to her father with the formulaic 'your duty full dauter to command', she sealed this letter with coloured silk, a symbol of love and friendship. When writing as part of a regular correspondence with a close family member, many letter-writers in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries appear less bound by formulaic conventions. Lettice's letter shows that formulaic conventions could coexist with more informal expression.

Pregnancy and birth were not matters of concern solely for women and could be an important part of relationship building between fathers and their adult daughters. Men often expressed joy and relief at the safe delivery and the health of their pregnant daughters. In a letter of 1590, George Manners happily informed his

father of his sister's pregnancy reporting that she 'never looked better, she is verye bigge and looketh for a happy howre wich God send her.'<sup>99</sup> In some cases fathers took on a primary care role, for example Jane Paget, the first wife of Thomas Kitson, was staying with her father William in June 1558 when she 'was brought to bed of a goodly boye'.<sup>100</sup> William reported news of the birth to Jane's mother-in-law Margaret, and indirectly to Thomas who had remained at home with his mother. He beseeched Margaret and Thomas 'to beare with her absence' as he felt he had to keep her with him to receive the best care as she recovered. He referred to trouble she had had 'before her going thither with the grene sicknes' indicating a prior knowledge of her health needs that he could remedy with access to 'the advise of the best learned in England'. He suggested that perhaps Thomas would want to come to collect Jane once she was well enough to travel but later, when suggesting that Thomas would be made very welcome if he wished to visit, acknowledged this would be 'if your Ladiship will licenn him to come'. This letter indicates that both parents still held ultimate authority over the movements of their children, especially when linked to healthcare. Thomas was aged 18 in 1558 and Jane likely a similar age. Their young age and lack of independent household and means appears to have taken precedence over their status as married adults. Thomas's letter of c.1560 requesting financial support from his mother indicates the potential benefits of this arrangement. It is possible that Thomas and Jane were in agreement with their parents over their continued care and support.

William Paget's care for his daughter's health demonstrates that caring responsibilities were not necessarily divided by gender. Fathers often cared for young children during illness, and expressed emotional distress upon seeing them in pain.<sup>101</sup> This appears to have continued as a concern into their children's adult lives. Many of Robert Sidney's letters to his wife in the 1580s and 1590s contained concern and enquiries about the young children he was separated from by an overseas post. In 1603 he was granted a post at the court of James I and thus spent most of his time in London. As adults, his children frequently had business in or visited the city so, in a reversal of roles, he began to inform their mother of their wellbeing. On one occasion he passed on a letter from married daughter Katherine to his wife writing, 'your daughter Maunsell who is not with child and still ill of ague so as God willing, I mean to have her up afore winter.'<sup>102</sup> His concluding remark implies that Katherine was with neither of them so must have corresponded with her father primarily to pass on news. This short comment also shows that Robert was interested and kept informed of his daughter's health and possible pregnancies. A few years earlier, Katherine had miscarried and Robert reported the news to his wife, also sending a servant to Katherine's house to check on her health.<sup>103</sup> As with his daughters, after his son Robert had married, Robert Sidney appeared as informed and concerned about the health and pregnancies of his new daughter-in-law Dorothy, referring to her light-heartedly as 'the great belly' in one letter.<sup>104</sup>

Letters from mothers to their pregnant daughters more commonly offered practical advice and help, usually based on their own experiences. Margaret and Anne Clifford, wife and only daughter of the third Earl of Cumberland, are an example of a supportive mother-and-daughter relationship largely carried out through correspondence.<sup>105</sup> The pair discussed all the issues Anne faced in her married life, including prolonged legal wrangling over her father's will, in which he had excluded

his daughter by bequeathing his estates to his brother and subsequent male heirs. During this stressful time, their correspondence about Anne's young daughter Margaret, presumably named for her grandmother, clearly provided a welcome respite for the women and demonstrates the strength of their mother-daughter bond in the face of adversity. Margaret often referred to her granddaughter in letters, usually as 'sweet bab' or 'sweet baby' and once as 'sweet daughter'.<sup>106</sup> Margaret gave advice to Anne about weaning her daughter that she should wait 18 months, 'for so was it with you and on of your brothers'.<sup>107</sup> In the correspondence of the Willoughby family there are 'very kind letters' to Bridget Willoughby from her mother in the 1590s when she was heavily pregnant. Elizabeth Willoughby sent Bridget wine and encouraged her to ask for whatever she needed.<sup>108</sup> These practices show that parents were a crucial source of support for daughters during pregnancy and birth, both offering useful material goods, and practical and emotional support.

The gradual shift from deferential attitudes to greater equality and reciprocity point to the continued dynamic of relationships between parents and their adult children. Ben-Amos argues that by the time children reached their mid- to late-20s, their relationship with their parents 'had been transformed'.<sup>109</sup> The examples presented here support this conclusion to the extent that a change in tone is evident between parents and adult married children. Despite continuing to use deferential language and terms, children appear to have developed a more equal and reciprocal style of correspondence, reflective of their own more equal status with their parents. Ageing meant that parents and children renegotiated their relationships in terms of who held authority and how they related emotionally to one another, but they continued to exist in a relational structure governed by the expectations of a patriarchal society. Children may have been bound by the concept of filial duty to show deference and act as sources of comfort and support for their parents, especially as they aged, but it is clear that they also benefitted from, and often relied on, the ongoing comfort and support their parents could offer.<sup>110</sup> Evidence from these sixteenth-century families supports research on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that reciprocal support between parents and children was rarely equal.<sup>111</sup> Correspondence between elite families reveals little of care arrangements made for elderly parents. Their wealth allowed members of this social group to retain political, emotional and financial control in their old age, and thus they were less reliant on family support than those lower down the social scale.<sup>112</sup> The main evidence of reciprocity from children at this level of society appears to be in their friendship and emotional support.

## 5. Conclusion

Relational family status played a central role in the dynamics of interpersonal relationships in late sixteenth century England. The pressures from parents and in-laws, the value of parental assistance and advice, and the gradual shift towards greater reciprocity demonstrate the ongoing adaption of the parent-child relationship. As hierarchies within families were negotiated, some of the social signifiers of childhood extended beyond the life cycle stage associated with a young chronological age. Evidence from the correspondence of adult children demonstrates that letter writing was a performative practice of affection and respect and an

important part of expressing continuing conformity to ideals of deference.<sup>113</sup> Obedience was a sought after ideal for adults at all levels of social hierarchies and actively practised.<sup>114</sup> Children could benefit from performing an obedient role in their correspondence and the language of obedience formed part of the negotiation of their relational status with their parents. Letter conventions were expected social conventions and almost never ignored.<sup>115</sup> They are particularly apparent at a stage in the life cycle where children were adults, often with their own households and families, but their parents were not yet old, infirm, and in need of care. The nature of these sources as part of exchanges initiated by emotional states of need or distress generally represents the experiences of children who required support, not those in positions of strength or accomplishment.<sup>116</sup> Even in more reciprocal exchanges, these expressions remained important. Parents knew they had to allow their children more authority, and recognise their adult life stage, but filial obedience was still expected, even if in an outwardly performative manner.

When adult children left the household of their parents, ongoing ties of obligation and filial deference complicated their new place in the kin network. Individual households are a valid distinction when considering the basic economic units of society, but reputation often went beyond the boundaries of a household. Adult children remained linked to the household of their parents through their relational familial ties. They negotiated new roles in the family hierarchy as they reached an adult age, married, and formed independent households, although not necessarily in that order. By understanding the relational status of childhood in this hierarchy, this article demonstrates that conflict and tension in the relationship could come about precisely because of the changing positions children held as adults in their parents' households, or as part of an independent household yet still highly invested in their relationships with wider family.<sup>117</sup> Many of the examples in this article are of adult children who were too materially dependent to be fully functional adults. The nature of parent-child relationships in the sixteenth century meant the ongoing parental intervention was an acceptable enactment of patriarchal values and obligations.

Separating the signifiers of childhood from an association with age enables historians to explore the significance of the relational status of child. Changing cultural boundaries between childhood and adulthood in early modern England were shaped by religious and political authorities. It was possible to be legally defined and culturally understood as an adult, but continue to inhabit the relational status of child. Brewer warns historians against conflating patriarchal and fatherly authority as all adults had the potential to be seen as children under patriarchal political theory, but there were different levels of hierarchies within family networks. By the early eighteenth century parental authority increased in areas like consent to marriage, even though political thinkers increasingly defined the category of childhood by age when arguing for the importance of consent in government.<sup>118</sup> Parental authority continued to play a significant role in family life throughout the early modern period as cultural codes were replicated to children from the teaching and behaviour of their parents.<sup>119</sup> Considering childhood as relational would also be useful in exploring these tensions in later periods where patriarchal norms had adapted to suit new political concerns, but where fatherly authority was still a major factor in family hierarchies and the assertion of power in social groups.



As well as expanding the analytical potential of childhood as a relational stage, this article invites further consideration of the experience of adulthood in early modern society. Although the life cycle is now a common lens through which to analyse social and cultural history, adulthood as a distinct stage rarely receives dedicated attention. As the norm by which other stages are measured, the dominance of adults in sources has made the study of childhood and old age a more common focus for historical enquiry. Adulthood was also a life stage during which individuals developed and changed. Deborah Youngs dedicates a chapter of her study of the late medieval life cycle to exploring the stage of adulthood as a social category with its own attributes and changing meanings.<sup>120</sup> She states that for most, adulthood was not 'one long stretch of sameness' but a process of development, however her discussion of parenting focuses solely on the experience of adults *as* parents but not of adults *with* parents.<sup>121</sup> Similarly, Alex Shepard comprehensively assesses the ways in which ideals of masculinity shaped the lives of adult men in early modern England but only reflects on the parent-child relationship up until the point of marriage.<sup>122</sup> Particularly for elder sons and daughters, there could be an extended period where their parents were relatively young, and certainly not infirm and in need of care. Thus both parents and children were in the life stage of 'adulthood' but had different experiences of this stage, partly determined by their position in the family hierarchy. For parents and children, the stages of independent parent caring for dependent child and independent child caring for dependent parent did not always follow directly, or might never follow at all. For the children cited in this article, becoming an adult did not mean their relationships with their parents were no longer marked by the codes of deference and obedience associated with childhood, but that they were able to play a more active role in negotiating their place in the power hierarchies of the family.

Understanding life cycle stages as relational in the context of interpersonal relationships opens up a new way of understanding family life. The default stage of adulthood, rarely considered by historians, was one of balancing various roles within the structures of age, gender and social status. Considering the relational bonds individuals negotiated and maintained with family members through their lives adds another layer of understanding about hierarchies of authority and affection. The continuing status of child is thus of significant interest to historians interested in the complexity of interpersonal dynamics within the patriarchal structures underpinning family life. Relational age status is a fruitful category of analysis to consider the links between individual agency and the interdependence of the familial network.

## Notes

- 1 Cambridge University Library, Hengrave Hall MS 88/1/26 (c. 1560?).
- 2 Thomas Kitson married for the first time in 1557. He lived with his mother immediately after his first marriage so it is likely that this letter was written later, probably after his second marriage in 1560 and before his mother's death in 1561.
- 3 Joanne Begiato (Bailey), 'The history of mum and dad: recent historical research on parenting in England from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries', *History Compass* 12, 6 (2014), 502.
- 4 Linda Pollock, *Forgotten children: parent-child relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge, 1983); Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, 'Reciprocal bonding: parents and their offspring in early modern England', *Journal of Family History* 25, 3 (2000), 291–312; Sandra Cavallo and Silvia Evangelisti eds., *A cultural*

history of childhood and family, vol. 3 the early modern age (Oxford, 2010); Merridee L. Bailey, *Socialising the child in late medieval England, c. 1400–1600* (Woodbridge, 2011); Joanne Begiato (Bailey), *Parenting in England 1760–1830: emotion, identity, and generation* (Oxford, 2012).

5 Lynn Botelho and Pat Thane, 'Introduction', in Lynn Botelho and Pat Thane eds., *Women and ageing in British society since 1500* (Harlow, 2001), 4 considers the difference between chronological, cultural and functional definitions of age stages.

6 Corinne T. Field and Nicholas L. Syrett, 'Chronological age: a useful category of historical analysis, introduction', *The American Historical Review* 125, 2 (2020), 374.

7 Lucy Underwood, *Childhood, youth and religious dissent in post-reformation England* (Basingstoke, 2014), 4; Anna French, *Children of wrath: possession, prophecy and the young in early modern England* (Farnham, 2015), 13 both use marriage and the setting up of an independent household as the cut off point for their analyses of early modern childhood. Steven Mintz, 'Reflections on age as a category of historical analysis', *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, 1 (2008), 93 considers the usefulness of analysing power hierarchies based on chronological and cultural understandings of age.

8 Tamara K. Hareven, *Families, history and social change: life-course and cross-cultural perspectives* (Boulder, Colorado, 2000), 332; Leonore Davidoff, 'Kinship as a categorical concept: a case study of nineteenth century English siblings', *Journal of Social History* 39, 2 (2005), 411.

9 Lyndan Warner ed., *Stepfamilies in Europe, 1400–1800* (Abingdon, 2018) shows the diversity of families formed and reformed by marriage and extra-marital relationship across early modern Europe; Amy Froide, *Never married: singlewomen in early modern England* (Oxford, 2005) has outlined the range of experiences of never married single women living in early modern England and there has been a body of research conducted on the lives of widows including Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner eds., *Widowhood in medieval and early modern Europe* (Abingdon, 2014). Kimberly Schutte, 'Marrying out in the sixteenth century' subsequent marriages of aristocratic women in the Tudor era', *Journal of Family History* 38, 1 (2013), 3–16 has shown that even noble women in sixteenth century England were able to marry outside of social and familial expectations, especially on subsequent marriages.

10 Allyson M. Poska, 'The case for agentic gender norms for women in early modern Europe', *Gender and History* 30, 2 (2018), 354–5.

11 Elizabeth Foyster, 'Parenting was for life, not just for childhood: the role of parents in the married lives of their children in early modern England', *History* 86 (2001), 313–27; Joanne Begiato (Bailey), 'The "after-life" of parenting: memory, parentage, and personal identity in Britain c. 1760–1830', *Journal of Family History*, 35 (2010), 249–70.

12 Begiato, *Parenting in England*, 173; Foyster, 'Parenting', 313–27; Henry French and Mark Rothery, *Man's estate: landed gentry masculinities 1660–1900* (Oxford, 2012), 185–234.

13 Holly Brewer, *By birth or consent: children, law, and the Anglo-American revolution in authority* (Chapel Hill, 2007), 2.

14 Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and youth in early modern England* (New Haven, 1994), 238.

15 Brewer, *By birth or consent*, 29; Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and youth*, 8.

16 Numerous studies of childhood in history have considered this life cycle stage and its associated transitions and rites of passage: Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh eds., *Gender and early modern constructions of childhood* (Farnham, 2011); Hannah Newton, *The sick child in early modern England, 1580–1720* (Oxford, 2012); Maria Luddy and James M. Smith eds., *Children, childhood and Irish society, 1500 to the present* (Dublin, 2014); Janay Nugent and Elizabeth Ewan eds., *Children and youth in premodern Scotland*, (Woodbridge, 2015); Simon Sleight and Shirleene Robinson eds., *Children, childhood and youth in the British world*, (London, 2016).

17 Ben-Amos, 'Reciprocal bonding', 291.

18 Begiato, *Parenting in England*, 22–47.

19 Linda Pollock, 'Anger and the negotiation of relationships in early modern England', *The Historical Journal* 47, 3 (2004), 582; Diane Watt, 'Letters' in Susan Broomhall ed., *Early modern emotions: an introduction* (Abingdon, 2016), 123; James Daybell, 'Social negotiations in correspondence between mothers and daughters in Tudor and early Stuart England', *Women's History Review* 24, 4 (2015), 502–27; James Daybell, *The material letter in early modern England: manuscript letters and the culture and practices of letter-writing, 1512–1635* (Basingstoke, 2012), 93–4.

20 Naomi Tadmor, 'The concept of the household-family in eighteenth-century England', *Past and Present* 151, 1 (1996), 111–40.

- 21 Susan Broomhall, 'Emotions in the household' in Susan Broomhall ed., *Emotions in the household, 1200–1900* (Basingstoke, 2008), 1–2.
- 22 Ibid. 16–7.
- 23 Ibid. 14.
- 24 Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional communities in the early middle ages* (Ithaca, New York, 2006).
- 25 Andrew Lynch, 'Emotional community' in *Early Modern Emotions*, 4–6.
- 26 Laura Gowing, *Gender relations in early modern England* (London, 2012), 47.
- 27 Bengt Sandin, 'History of children and childhood – being and becoming, dependent and independent', *The American Historical Review* 125, 4 (2020), 1311.
- 28 Susan D. Amussen, "'The part of a Christian man": the cultural politics of manhood in early modern England', in Susan D. Amussen and Mark A. Kishlanksy eds., *Political culture and cultural politics in early modern England: essays presented to David Underdown* (Manchester, 1995), 217; Pamela Sharpe, 'Dealing with love: the ambiguous independence of the single woman in early modern England', *Gender and History* 11, 2 (1999), 209–32.
- 29 Katherine A. Lynch, *Individuals, families and communities: the urban foundations of western society* (Cambridge, 2003), 8–12; Peter Laslett, 'Characteristics of the western family considered over time', in Peter Laslett ed., *Family life and illicit love in earlier generations: essays in historical sociology* (Cambridge and New York, 1977), 13–4; David I. Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli, 'Introduction' in David I. Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli eds., *The history of the European family, vol. 1, family life in early modern times. 1500–1789* (New Haven, 2001), xiv–xv; E. A. Wrigley, 'European marriage patterns and their implications: John Hajnal's essay and historical demography during the last half-century', in Chris Briggs, P.M. Kitson and S. J. Thompson eds., *Population, welfare and economic change in Britain, 1290–1834* (London, 2014), 15–42.
- 30 These texts can be viewed as descriptive, rather than only prescriptive, and in part their popularity can be explained by the fact that they reflected the lives of their readers. These readers were largely the expanding group of urban bourgeoisie but many Puritan writers benefitted from the support of aristocratic patrons thus were able to appeal to a wider range of social groups. Kathleen M. Davies, 'Continuity and change in literary advice on marriage', in R. B. Outhwaite ed., *Marriage and society: studies in the social history of marriage* (London, 1981), 76–7.
- 31 *The office of Christian parents: shewing how children are to be governed throughout all ages and times of their life* (Cambridge, 1616), 208.
- 32 Ibid. 216.
- 33 Hareven, *Families*, 14.
- 34 Craig Muldrew, *The economy of obligation: the culture of credit and social relations in early modern England* (Basingstoke, 1998), 4.
- 35 Katie Barclay, 'Family and Household' in *Early Modern Emotions*, 246.
- 36 Foyster, 'Parenting', 314.
- 37 Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and youth*, 234.
- 38 Anna French, 'Locating the early modern child', in Anna French ed., *Early modern childhood: an introduction* (London, 2019).
- 39 Alison Wall ed., *Two Elizabethan women: correspondence of Joan and Maria Thynne 1575–1611* (Wiltshire Record Society, vol. 38, 1983), xx.
- 40 Ibid. xx.
- 41 Ibid. xx.
- 42 Ibid. 2 (7 December 1576).
- 43 Susan Broomhall, 'Introduction: authority, gender, and emotions in late medieval and early modern England', in Susan Broomhall ed., *Authority, gender and emotions in late medieval and early modern England* (Basingstoke, 2015), 2.
- 44 *Two Elizabethan Women*, 3 (1576).
- 45 Pollock, 'Anger', 582.
- 46 Graham T. Williams, *Women's epistolary utterance: a study of the letters of Joan and Maria Thynne, 1575–1611* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 2013), 40.
- 47 Alison Wall, 'For love, money or politics? A clandestine marriage and the Elizabethan court of Arches', *The Historical Journal* 38 (1995), 511–33; Williams, *Women's epistolary utterance*, 189–218.
- 48 Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of manhood in early modern England* (Oxford, 2003), 23–38.

49 Ibid. 74–5.

50 Fred B. Tromly, ‘Lord Burghley’s ‘ten precepts’ for his son, Robert Cecil: a new date and interpretation’, *Historical Research* **88**, 239 (2015), 189–90.

51 Dorothy’s birthdate is unknown but her marriage to John Thynne took place in 1566 and she gave birth to a son in 1586 so a birthdate in the late 1540s is likely. Joan was baptised in 1558: *Two Elizabethan women*, xvii.

52 *Two Elizabethan women*, 55–6 (3 March 1577).

53 Ibid.

54 Ralph Houlbrooke, *Love and dishonour in Elizabethan England: two families and a failed marriage* (Woodbridge, 2018), 238.

55 Ibid. 139–40, 233.

56 ID 227, Bess of Hardwick to Gilbert Talbot, Master Clarke and William Cavendish, earl of Devonshire, 31 January 1580/1, in *Bess of Hardwick’s Letters: The Complete Correspondence, c.1550–1608*, ed. by Alison Wiggins, Alan Bryson, Daniel Starza Smith, Anke Timmermann and Graham Williams, University of Glasgow, web development by Katherine Rogers, University of Sheffield Humanities Research Institute (April 2013), accessed February 2020, <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=227>; ID 105, Bess of Hardwick to Lord Thomas Paget, 10 June 1582, in *Bess of Hardwick’s Letters: The Complete Correspondence, c.1550–1608*, ed. by Alison Wiggins et al., accessed February 2020, <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=105>

57 ID 175, Bess of Hardwick to Sir Thomas Cornwallis, 15 July 1582, in *Bess of Hardwick’s Letters: The Complete Correspondence, c.1550–1608*, ed. by Alison Wiggins et al., accessed February 2020, <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=175>

58 Ibid.

59 CUL Hengrave 88/2/81 (8 April 1594).

60 ID 105, Bess of Hardwick to Lord Thomas Paget, 10 June 1582, in *Bess of Hardwick’s Letters: The Complete Correspondence, c.1550–1608*, ed. by Alison Wiggins et al., accessed February 2020, <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=105>

61 James Daybell, ‘“Suche newes as on the Quenes hye wayes we have mett”: the news and intelligence networks of Elizabeth Talbot, countess of Shrewsbury (c. 1527–1608)’, in James Daybell ed., *Women and politics in early modern England, 1450–1700* (London, 2004), 114–31 analyses the wide network of connections managed by Bess; Lisa Hopkins ed., *Bess of Hardwick: new perspectives* (Manchester, 2019) explores various aspects of Bess’s life, including her family and household governance.

62 Muldrew, *The economy of obligation*, 328.

63 Ibid. 4.

64 Foyster, ‘Parenting’, 313.

65 Margaret P. Hannay, Noel J. Kinnamon and Michael G. Brennan eds., *Domestic politics and family absence: the correspondence (1588–1621) of Robert Sidney, first earl of Leicester, and Barbara Gamage Sidney, countess of Leicester*, (Aldershot, 2005), 123 (10 October 1604).

66 French and Rothery, *Man’s estate*, 222.

67 Marjorie K. McIntosh, ‘Women, credit, and family relationships in England, 1300–1620’, *Journal of Family History* **30**, 2 (2005), 145–6.

68 Muldrew, *The economy of obligation*, 149–50.

69 British Library Additional MS 36989 f. 338 (20 April [1581]).

70 HMC *Report on the Manuscripts of the Family of Gawdy, formerly of Norfolk* (London, 1885), 16 (18 April 1581).

71 Rachel Winchcombe, ‘“If you love me you will redeeme me’: strategies of childhood in Richard Frethorne’s letters home’, *Cultural and Social History* **17**, 2 (2020), 9–11.

72 Alexandra Shepard, *Accounting for oneself: worth, status, and the social order in early modern England* (Oxford, 2015), 194.

73 Brit. Libr., Add. MS 36989 f. 351 (c. 1580s). With a likely date in the 1580s, ‘Sir Bacon’ could be Francis Bacon who was working at Gray’s Inn during this period, as was Bassingbourne.

74 HMC *Report on the Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Rutland, C. G. B., preserved at Belvoir Castle* (London, 4 vols, 1888–1905), 360 (15 May 1600).

75 Alexandra Shepard and Judith Spicksley, ‘Worth, age, and social status in early modern England’, *Economic History Review* **64**, 2 (2011), 525.

- 76 HMC Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Marquis of Bath preserved at Longleat, Wiltshire (London, 5 vols, 1904–1981), 57–8 (17 September 1585).
- 77 Ibid. 58–9 (24 September 1585).
- 78 Ibid. 71 (24 July 1586).
- 79 Ibid. 87–8 (6 March 1587/8).
- 80 ID 227, Bess of Hardwick to Gilbert Talbot, Master Clarke and William Cavendish, earl of Devonshire, 31 January 1580/1, in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters: The Complete Correspondence, c.1550–1608*, ed. by Alison Wiggins et al., accessed February 2020, <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=227>.
- 81 Ralph Houlbrooke, *English family life, 1576–1716: an anthology from diaries* (Oxford, 1988), 12.
- 82 Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The gentry in England and Wales, 1500–1700* (Basingstoke, 1994), 81.
- 83 Pollock, 'Anger', 582.
- 84 French and Rothery, *Man's estate*, 221 find this for fathers and sons in the eighteenth century.
- 85 HMC Bath, 34–5 (19 May 1581).
- 86 Hannay et al., *Domestic politics and family absence*, 124–5 (25 August 1605).
- 87 HMC Rutland, 284 (16 November 1590).
- 88 Barbara J. Harris, *English aristocratic women, 1450–1550: marriage and family, property and careers* (Oxford, 2002), 43–9.
- 89 Brit. Libr., Add. MS 27395 f. 127 (no date).
- 90 HMC Gawdy, 45 (26 April 1594). The author of the calendar notes that this is 'a very affectionate letter'.
- 91 James Daybell, *Women letter-writers in Tudor England* (Oxford, 2006), 177–8.
- 92 Brit. Libr., Add. MS 27447 f. 74, 75, 76 (c. 1525–1544).
- 93 HMC Rutland, 31 (21 September 1543).
- 94 ID 181, Bess of Hardwick to Mary Talbot, [1580s], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters: The Complete Correspondence, c.1550–1608*, ed. by Alison Wiggins et al., accessed February 2020, <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=181>
- 95 Hannay et al., *Domestic politics and family absence*, 126 (7 October 1606).
- 96 Begiato, *Parenting in England*, 27, 47.
- 97 Brit. Libr., Add MS 27395 f. 125 (no date).
- 98 Katherine French, 'The material culture of childbirth in late Medieval London and its suburbs', *Journal of Women's History* 28, 2 (2016), 129–32.
- 99 HMC Rutland, 286 (21 December 1590).
- 100 CUL Hengrave 88/1/115 (24 June 1558).
- 101 Newton, *The sick child*, 102–3, 126.
- 102 Hannay et al., *Domestic politics and family absence*, 166–7 (24 August 1611).
- 103 Ibid. 135 (8 August 1608).
- 104 Ibid. 202 (21 July 1617).
- 105 Daybell, 'Social negotiations', 502–27.
- 106 Cumbria Archive Centre, Kendal, WD/HOTH/3/44/5 f. 13, 15, 16, 18; (1615–1617). At this time, the term 'granddaughter' was not in common use so these terms are not unusual.
- 107 CAC WD/HOTH/3/44/5 f. 11 (9 April 1615).
- 108 HMC Middleton, 570. These comments were written by descendent of the family and compiler of a report on the archives in the eighteenth century, Cassandra Willoughby. The original letters that she describes no longer survive.
- 109 Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and youth*, 234.
- 110 Begiato, *Parenting in England*, 229; Ben-Amos, 'Human bonding: parents and their offspring in early modern England', *University of Oxford Discussion Papers in Economic and Social History* 17 (1997), 13.
- 111 Ben-Amos, 'Reciprocal bonding', 305.
- 112 Harris, *English aristocratic women*, 127–74 shows how the financial stability of most aristocratic widows enabled them to remain in positions of importance in their families. For poorer elderly people, support form children was just one method of support: Lynn Botelho, "'The old woman's wish": widows by the family fire? Widows' old age provisions in rural England, 1500–1700', *The History of the Family* 7, 1 (2002), 59–78; Claire S. Schen, 'Strategies of poor aged women and widows in sixteenth-century London', in *Women and Ageing*, 13–30.
- 113 Katie Barclay, 'Performance and performativity' in *Early Modern Emotions*, 14; Daybell, *The material letter*, 144.

- 114 Linda Pollock, 'Being Obedient in Early Modern England' (Disruptions to Authority conference, University of Portsmouth, 14 June 2021).
- 115 Daybell, *The material letter*, 53; Diana G. Barnes, 'Epistolary literature', in *Early Modern Emotions*, 95–6.
- 116 Daybell, 'Social negotiations', 521.
- 117 Katie Barclay, 'Family and household', 246.
- 118 Brewer, *By birth or consent*, 339.
- 119 French and Rothery, *Man's Estate*, 246 show this for values of masculinity in eighteenth and nineteenth century families.
- 120 Deborah Youngs, *The life cycle in Western Europe, c. 1300–1500* (Manchester, 2006), 126.
- 121 Ibid. 156–7.
- 122 Shepard, *Meanings of manhood*.

### French Abstract

Cet article explore l'enfance en tant que statut relationnel, défini par des dynamiques de pouvoir entre parents et enfants plutôt que par la classe d'âge du jeune mineur. Cette approche complique les perspectives historiographiques concernant la transition entre enfance et âge adulte, généralement définie par les historiens comme émancipation plaçant l'individu indépendant hors de l'autorité parentale. L'étude analyse le cas anglais d'une correspondance familiale datant de l'époque moderne. Sont explorés les idéaux patriarcaux de type conflictuel qui encourageaient d'un côté les individus à devenir des chefs de ménage indépendants, mais de l'autre, en même temps, prônaient de leur part une obéissance filiale soumise. L'article offre une application plus large de la recherche aux historiens qui considèrent l'âge comme une catégorie d'analyse.

### German Abstract

Dieser Beitrag untersucht den Status von Kindern als einen relationalen, der durch die Machtdynamik zwischen Eltern und Kindern definiert wird statt durch das niedrige Alter der Person. Dieser Ansatz erweitert die historiographischen Perspektiven auf den Übergang zwischen Kindheit und Erwachsenenalter, die von Historikern normalerweise als Unabhängigkeit von elterlicher Reglementierung definiert wird. Eine Analyse von Familienkorrespondenz aus dem frühneuzeitlichen England dient als Fallstudie zur Erforschung widerstreitender patriarchalischer Ideale, die Kinder zur unabhängigen Haushaltsführung ermunterten, aber ebenso kindlichen Gehorsam hochhielten. Es zeigt sich, dass dieser Ansatz für Historiker, die das Alter als analytische Kategorie in Erwägung ziehen, weitreichende Anwendungsmöglichkeiten verspricht.