

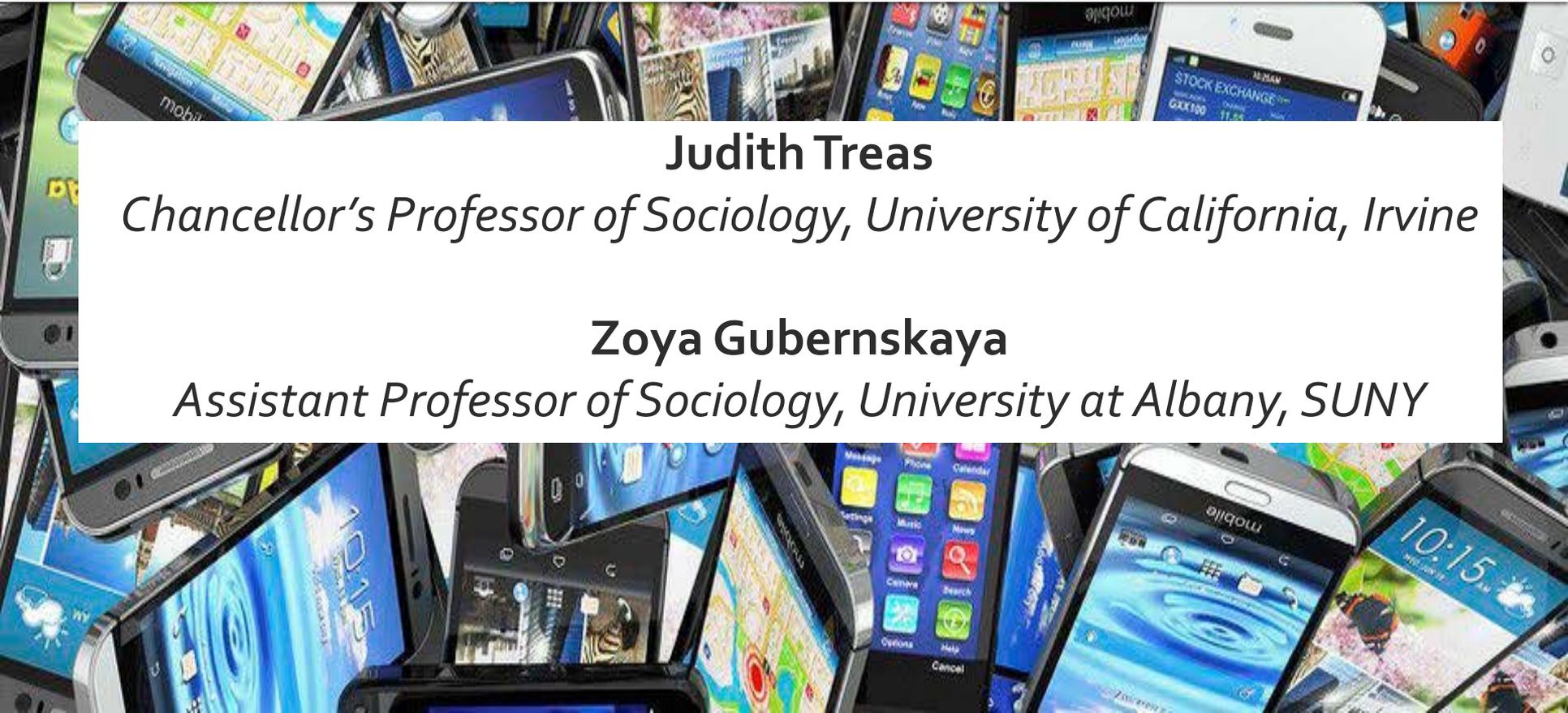
Changing Communication Technologies and Intergenerational Family Relations

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The longevity dividend

- Declining mortality
- Greater overlap in the lives of generations
- More opportunities for rich intergenerational family life
- Do opportunities translate to greater intergenerational solidarity?



Decline-of-the-extended-family thesis

- LePlay (1875) described aging parents left alone on the family farm by children who deserted the countryside for the greater economic opportunities of the cities
- Parsons (1949) wrote of the nuclear family of parents and minor children as the only functional family type given the industrial demand for mobile workers

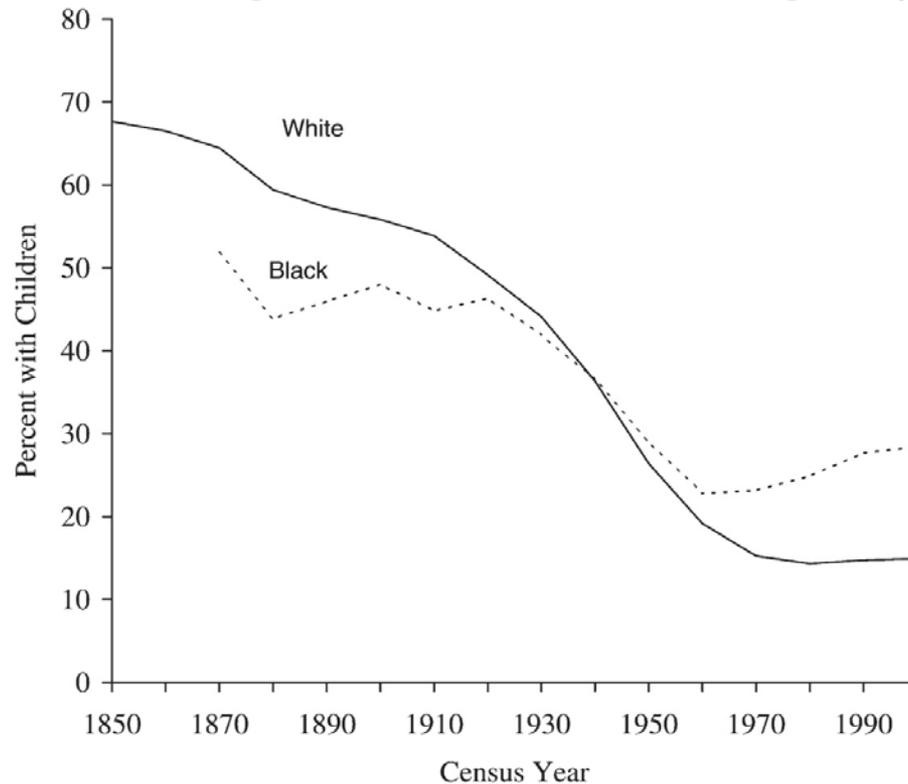
Declines in intergenerational cohesion?

Declining contact predicted by...

- Population changes
 - Less religiosity
 - Smaller family size
 - Greater schooling
 - Less geographic proximity
 - More women working for pay
 - But, what about increase in singles who are in contact more?

Evidence of decline in co-residence

Percent of Older Adults, 65+, Residing with Their Children, 18+: United States, Whites and Blacks, 1850 to 2000



Source: Figure 1 in Ruggles, Steven. 2007. The Decline of Intergenerational Co-residence in the United States, 1850-2000, *American Sociological Review* 72:964-89.

Study 1: Did contact decline?

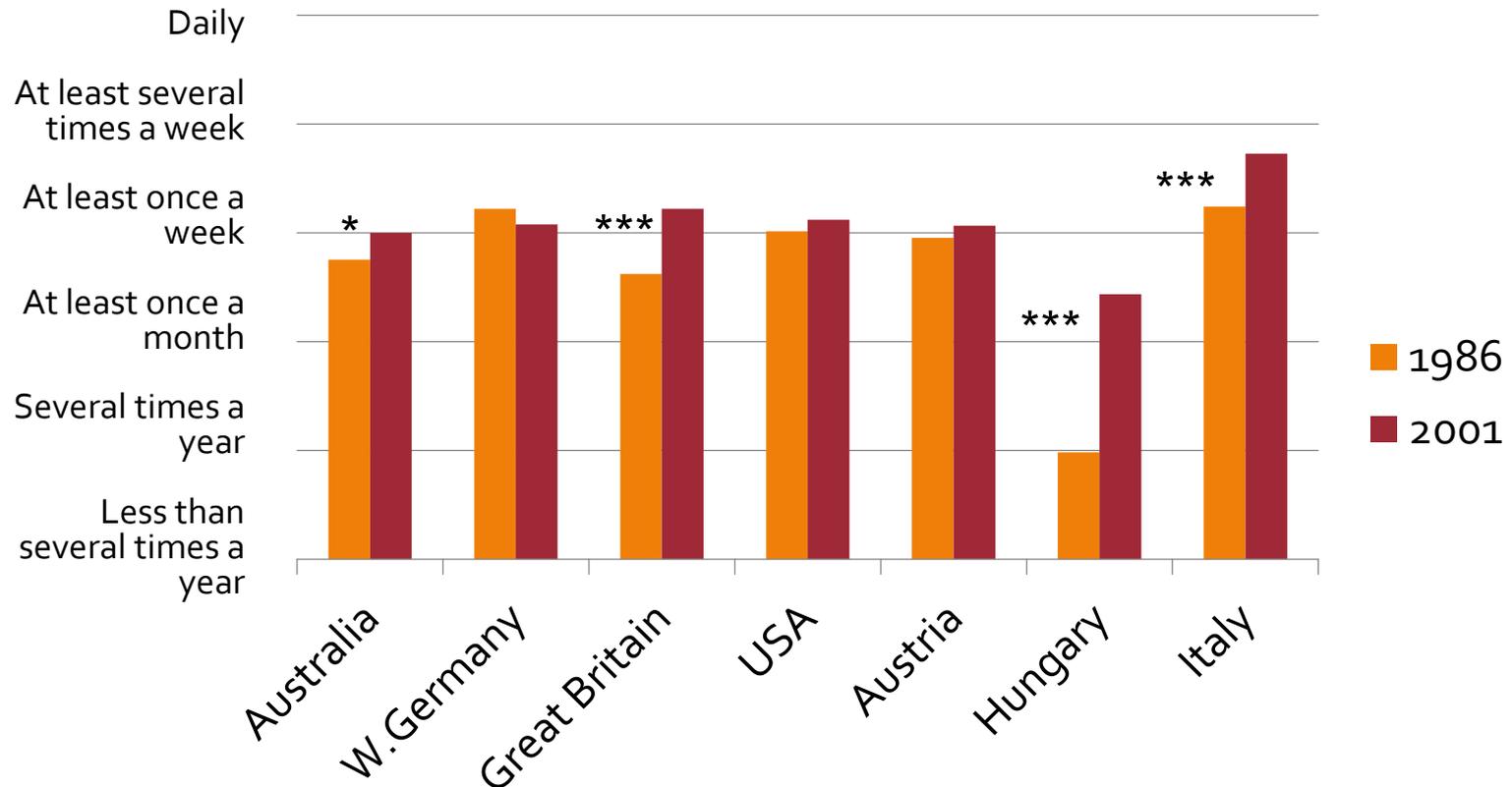
- Data: 1986 and 2001 International Social Survey Program (ISSP)
- Countries (7): Australia, Austria, West Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, US
- Sample: Non-coresident adults, 18+, with a surviving mother (N = 7,578)
- Method: Seemingly Unrelated Regression models, demographic decomposition
 - Treas, Judith and Zoya Gubernskaya. 2012. "Farewell to Moms? Maternal Contact in Seven Countries, 1986-2001." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 74: 297-311. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2012.00956.x.

Dependent variable: Maternal contact

How often do you have any contact with your mother, besides visiting, either by telephone, letter, fax or email?

- 1=less than several times a year
- 2=several times a year
- 3=at least once a month
- 4=at least once a week
- 5=at least several times a week
- 6=daily

Mean frequency of remote contacts with mother: ISSP non-coresident adults with surviving mother, 1986 & 2001



Adjusted for gender, age, marital status, number siblings, education, family income, religiosity, employment, proximity

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Why did contact increase?

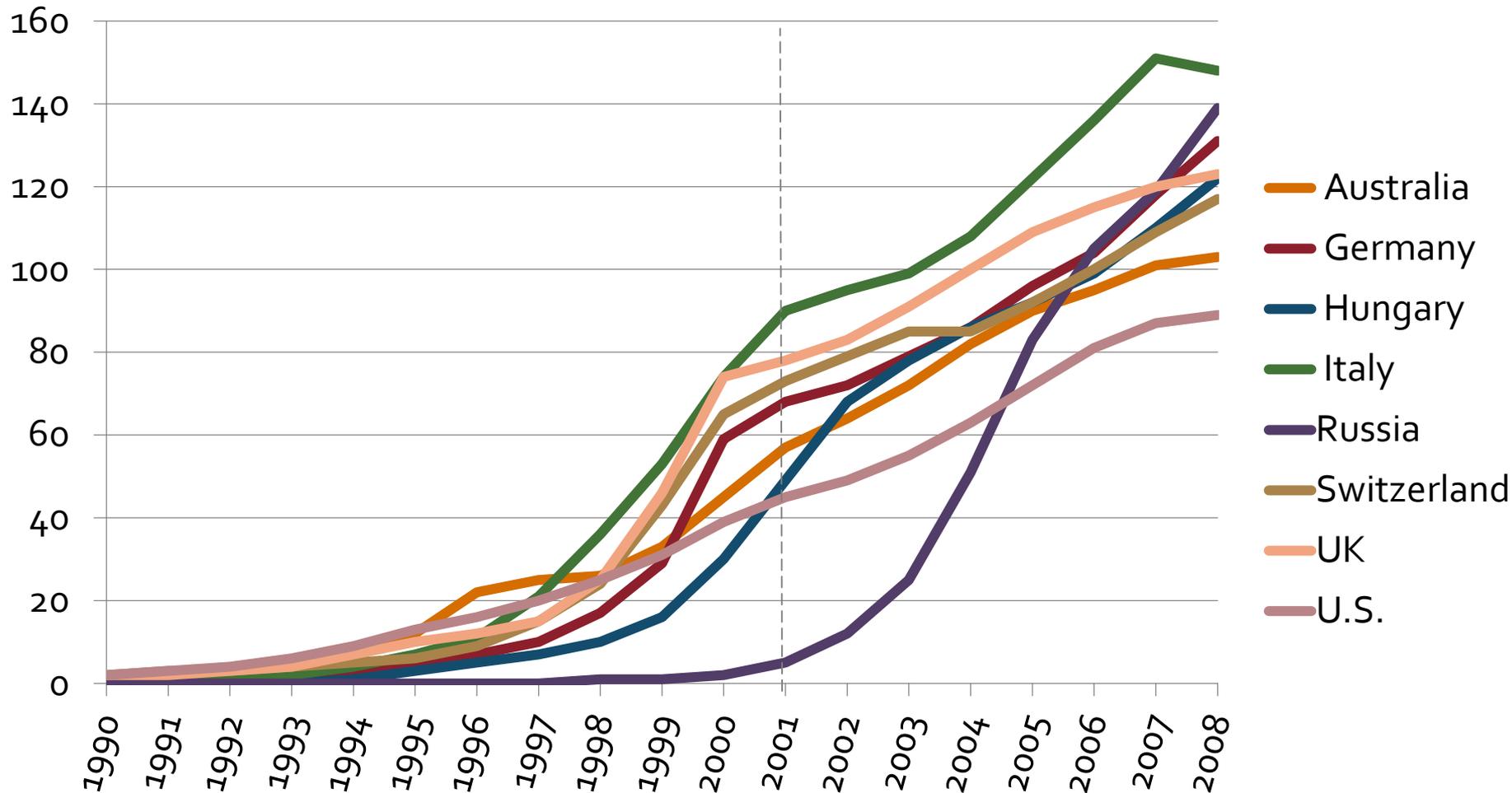
Demographic factors explain only 19% of the overall increase

No increase in maternal visits = no increased preference for maternal contact

So, what might have increased the frequency of remote contacts with mothers?



Mobile Phone Subscriptions per 100 Persons: 1990-2008



Source: World Bank Online Data Base <http://data.worldbank.org/>

Did everyone benefit equally from tech?

Dueling predictions

- **Utopian (Dimaggio et al. 2001)**
 - More interaction
 - Reduced disparities in contact
- **Dystopian**
 - Lost social capital from retreat into virtual worlds (*Putnam 2000*)
 - New inequalities from the digital divide (*Norris 2001*)

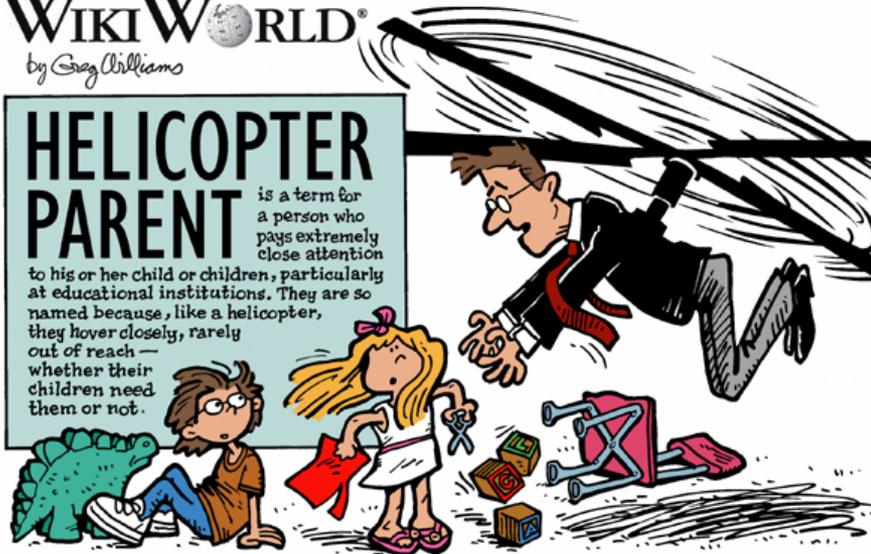


Popular dystopian view of parent-child contact

WIKI WORLD[®]
by Greg Williams

HELICOPTER PARENT

is a term for a person who pays extremely close attention to his or her child or children, particularly at educational institutions. They are so named because, like a helicopter, they hover closely, rarely out of reach — whether their children need them or not.



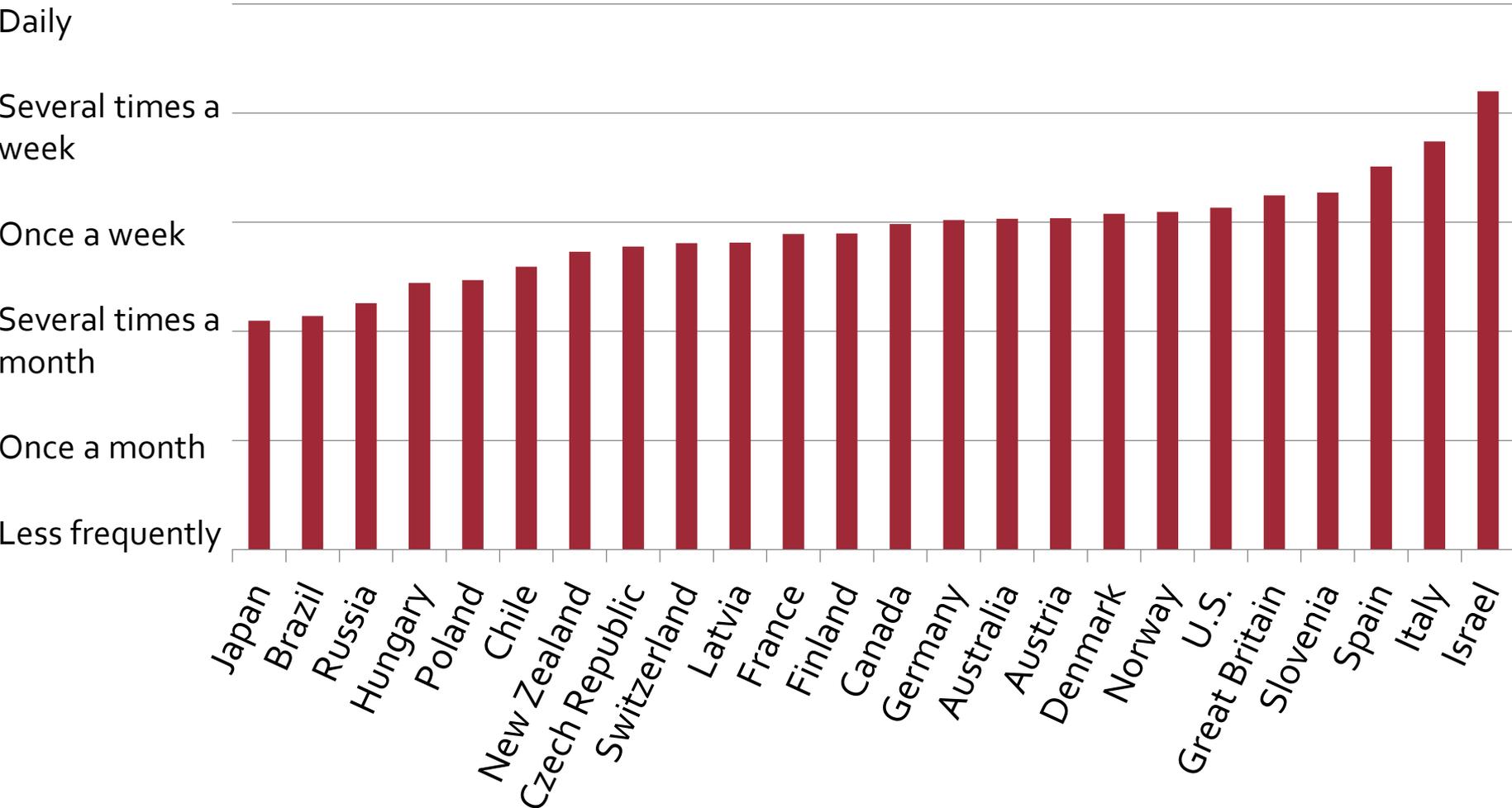
Although the term seems to have been in use as far back as 1991, it only gained wide currency when American college administrators began using it in the early 2000s as late-wave baby-boomer parents earned notoriety for practices such as calling their children each morning to wake them up for class and complaining to their professors about grades the children had received.

The rise of the cell phone is often blamed for the explosion of helicopter parenting; it has been called "the world's longest umbilical cord."

Study 2: Contact declined, but did mobile phones matter?

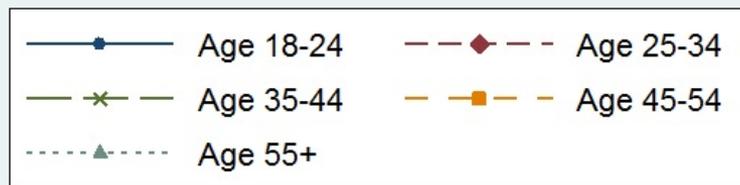
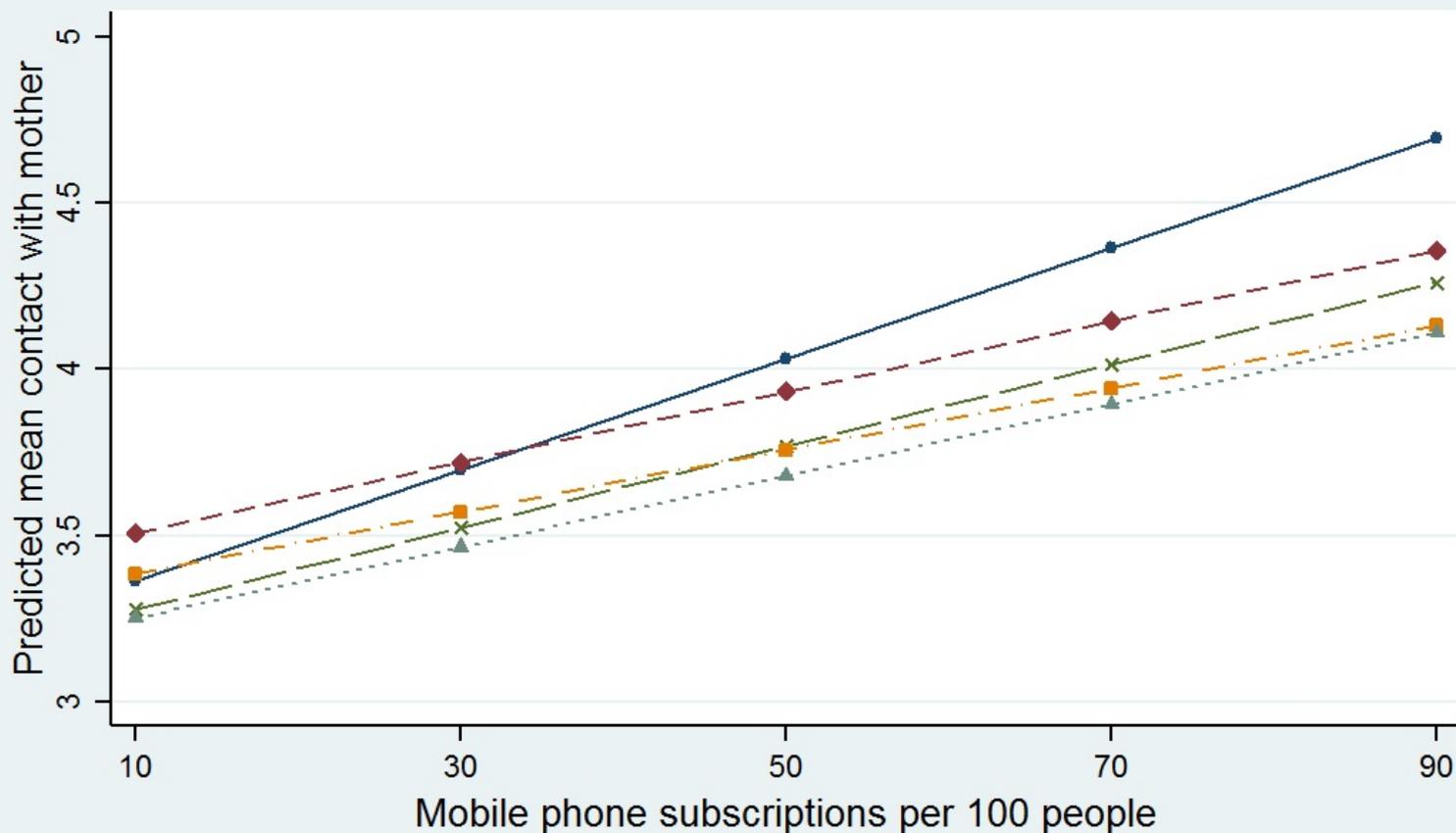
- Data: 2001 International Social Survey Program (ISSP); country-level data on prevalence of mobile phones (World Bank)
- Countries (24): Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, and the U.S.
- Sample: Non-co-resident adults, 18+, with a surviving mother (N=12,313)
- Method: Random intercept regression models (with cross-level interactions) link ISSP contact frequency to country mobile phone subscriptions per 100 persons
 - Gubernskaya, Zoya and Judith Treas. 2016. "Call Home? Mobile Phones and Contacts with Mother in 24 Countries." *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 78(5): 1237–1249. doi: 10.1111/jomf.12342.

Mean frequency of remote maternal contact for adult non-coresident children, 2001



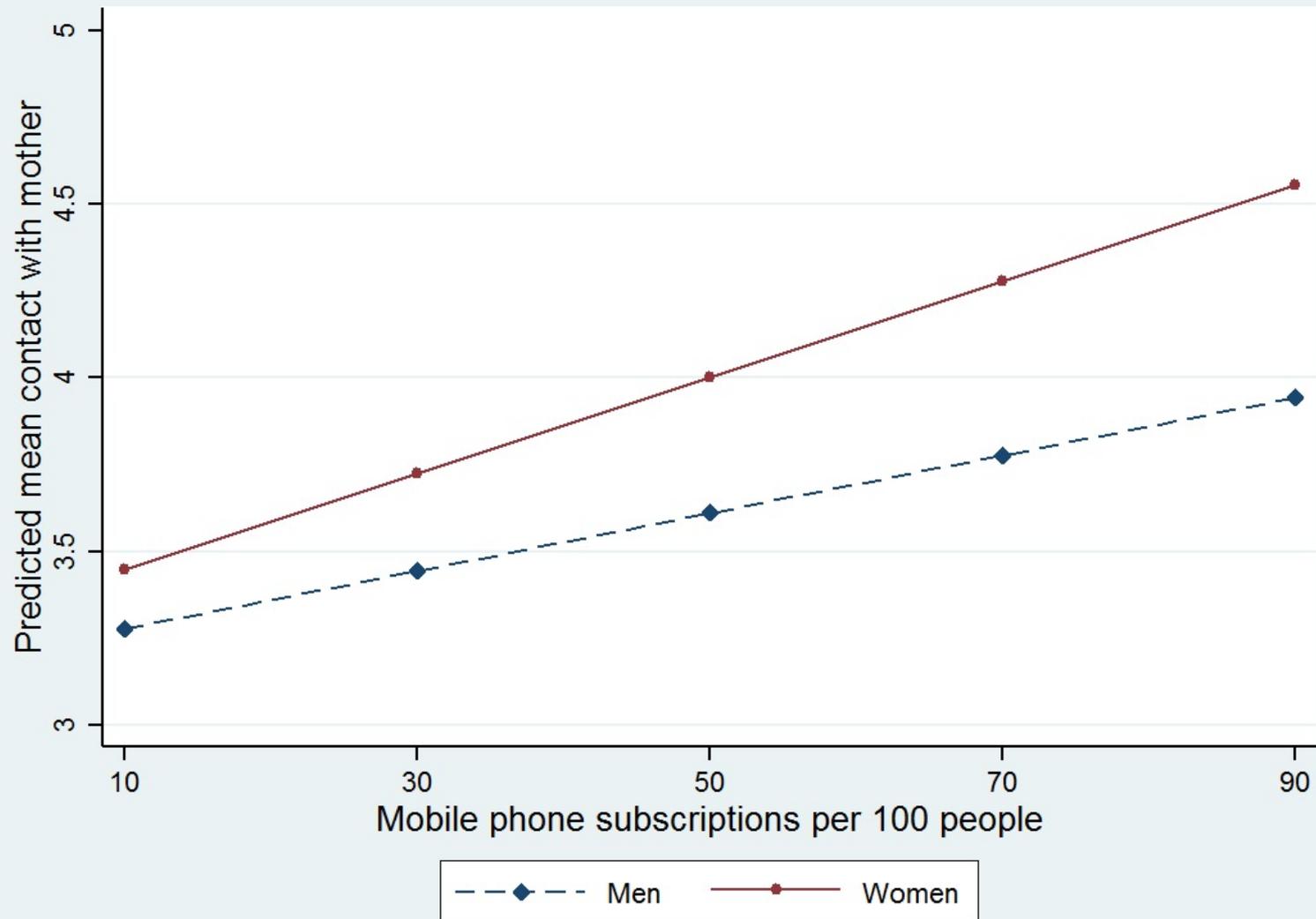
Where mobile phone subscriptions are high...

Everyone, but especially the young, has more frequent maternal contact.



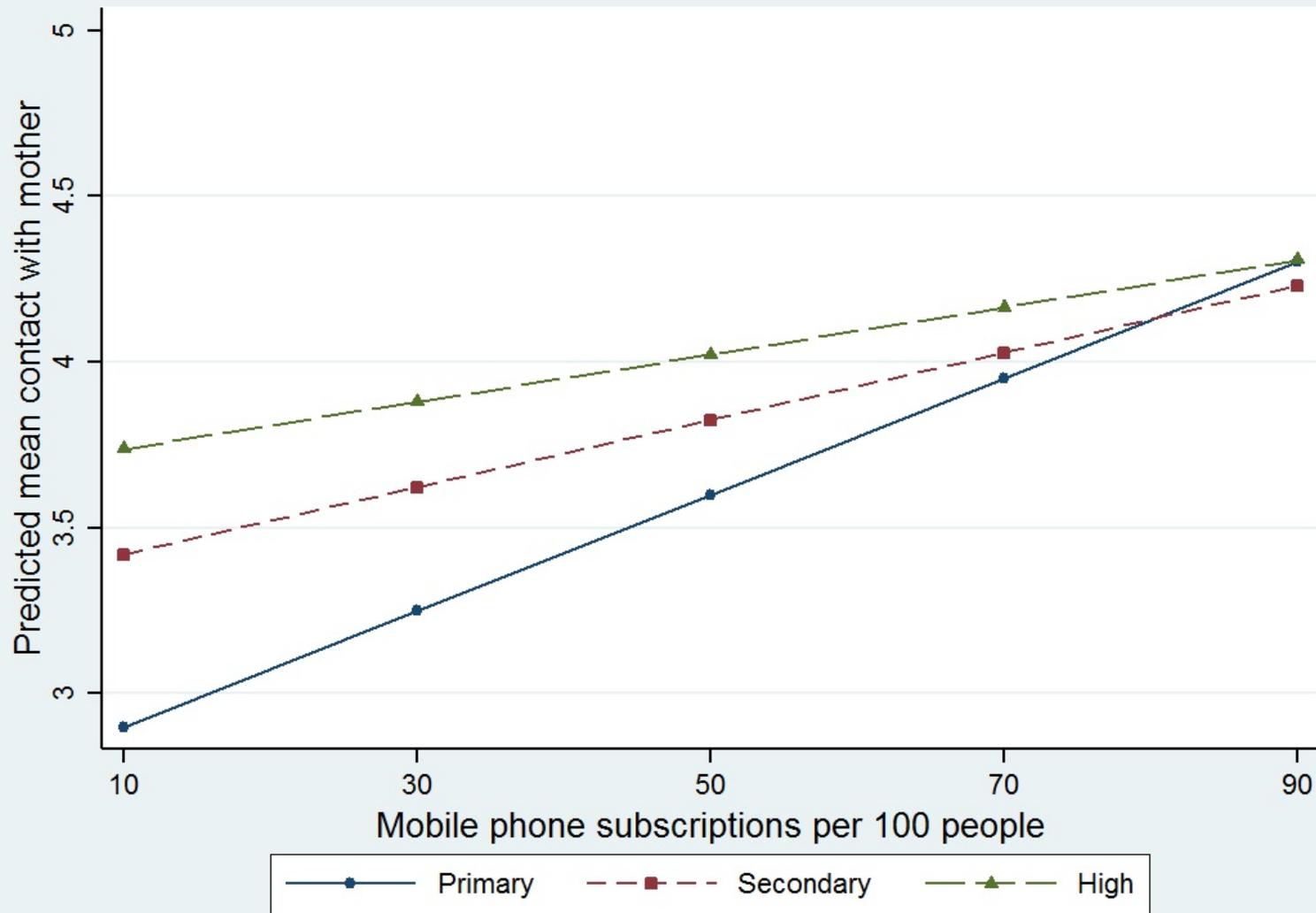
Where mobile phone subscriptions were high...

Men, but especially women, have higher frequency of maternal contact.



Where mobile phone subscriptions high...

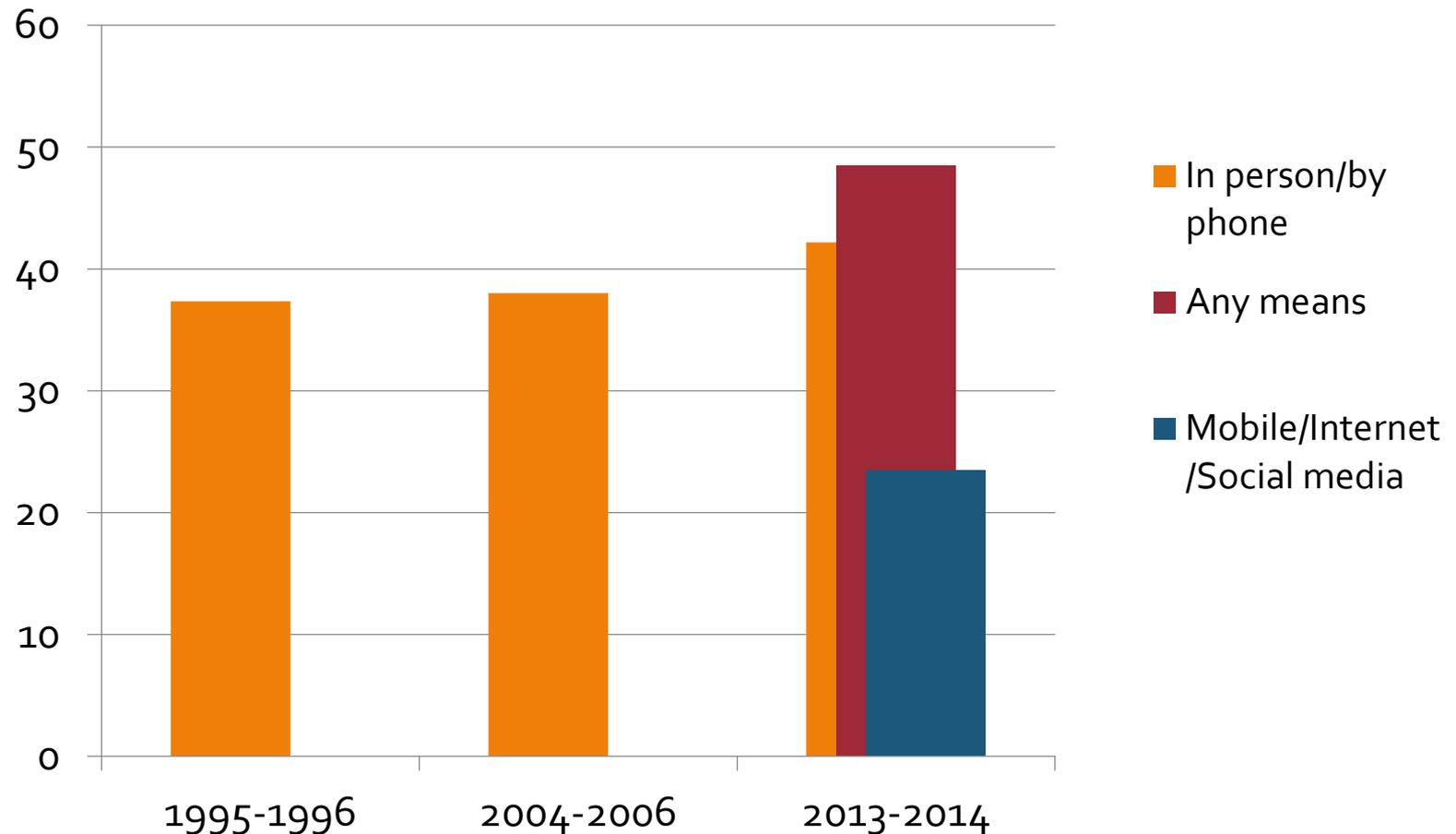
Everyone, but especially the less educated, shows more frequent maternal contact.



Study 3: Is kin contact still increasing?

- Data: Midlife in the United States (MIDUS)—3 waves of longitudinal panel (1995-1996), (2004-2006) and (2013-2014)
- Country: U.S. only
- Sample: Adults, 24-74, in 1995-1996 (N= 6,377)
- Dependent variable:
 - Contact with “family members” in person or by phone
 - 2013-14 only: Kin contact using social media
- Method: Fixed effects regression models

Percent of U.S. adults reporting daily contact with family members (MIDUS) by year



Conclusions

- Cross-national analyses point to increases in remote contacts between grown children and their mothers.
- The increase in remote contact, at least in part, seems linked to availability of mobile phones.
- Inequality results mixed—increased by age and gender but decreased by educational disadvantage.
- The trend to greater kin contact in the US continues, partly do to the rise in new social media.

The Longevity Dividend?

- Longer lives are an opportunity for greater intergenerational solidarity
- To reap the dividend, look to social structure, including technology, that supports family cohesion



Coming Soon. A Self-Driving Car for Family Get-Togethers?

Thank you!