

COMPARING GRANDCHILDREN'S AND GRANDPARENTS' STAKE IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the intergenerational stake hypothesis in the grandparent-grandchild relationship. The hypothesis predicts that older generations will perceive more closeness in a relationship than younger generations. Grandparent-grandchild dyads are surveyed concerning various aspects of their relationship. Using measures of closeness and an established typology of grandparent-grandchild relationship style (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1985), the study finds that grandparents perceive their relationship with their grandchildren to be considerably closer than their grandchildren perceive the relationship. However, their grandchildren perceive the relationship to be more active than their grandparents do. Explanations of these findings consistent with the intergenerational stake hypothesis are advanced. It is found that the two parties often disagree as to the nature of their relationship on the Cherlin and Furstenberg typology. Details of these disagreements are examined in detail, and implications for the grandparent-grandchild relationship are discussed.

Work in the last 30 years examining the "intergenerational stake" hypothesis describes a pattern whereby older generations tend to be more invested in imbuing future generations with the values they hold dear, and hence tend to be more committed to relationships with younger generations (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971; Giarrusso, Stallings, & Bengtson, 1995). Younger generations, by contrast, are committed to establishing autonomy from their elders, and hence are likely to report lower levels of intergenerational solidarity. This work has largely examined

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the parent-child relationship, and has found that reports of affectual solidarity are stronger from parent to child than from child to parent (Callan & Noller, 1986; Talbott, 1990). Giarrusso et al. (1995) invoke exchange theory in concluding that this is a product of differential investment in the relationship by each party. The parent has invested considerably more in the relationship over time than the child, therefore in order to maintain consistency ("equity") it is likely that the parent will perceive the relationship as closer.

Currently, no work examines whether the intergenerational stake hypothesis operates in grandparent-grandchild (GP-GC) relationships. That is, do grandparents have a greater "stake" in the lives of their grandchildren than their grandchildren do in the lives of the grandparents? Such work would be useful for a number of reasons. First, examination of this relationship will assist in understanding the process underlying the stake hypothesis. If the differences reported for the parent-child relationship are a product of exchange processes, then we might expect such differences to be somewhat weaker in the GP-GC relationship. Grandparents' investment in raising of children is typically considerably lower than parents' (although, see Hirshorn, 1998). As noted by Giarrusso et al. (1995), "it is of interest to assess how far down the generational chain the investment of affectual solidarity extends" (p. 259). A replication of the traditional intergenerational stake finding in the GP-GC relationship might suggest that grandparents feel they have invested considerably more in the relationship than the grandchildren feel they have invested. This would raise interesting questions in terms of the extent to which the perception of investment in raising children is transferred to those children's children. Alternatively, such findings might suggest that an exchange theory account of the stake hypothesis is incomplete.

Recently, research in the GP-GC relationship has grown in both volume and sophistication. A comprehensive review is not possible here, however, a good overview is provided in Szinovacz (1998). Work has shown that the GP-GC relationship is important for grandparents and grandchildren alike (Brussoni & Boon, 1998; Folwell & Grant, 1999; Kornhaber & Woodward, 1985), but that its intimacy and importance are mediated by various contextual and demographic variables. Particular foci of such research have included the role of gender and lineage in determining relational intimacy (Somary & Stricker, 1998), and the effects of an "off-time" transition to grandparenthood (Burton & Bengtson, 1985). Off-time transitions occur when the grandparent perceives that they are "too young" to be a grandparent, and can often result in role-stresses and intergenerational tensions. Examination of cross-cultural variation in the relationship has shown that descent systems influence residence patterns (Kamo, 1998). Work has also begun to examine links between dynamics of the GP-GC relationship and more general attitudes toward older people (Harwood, 2000a; Pecchioni & Croghan, 2000).

A few research programs have focused on communication issues in the GP-GC relationship. Nussbaum and Bettini (1994) found that grandmothers talked more

than grandfathers and tended to focus on family issues, in particular family history. In contrast, grandfathers tended to talk about health issues and youth experiences. Holladay et al. (1998) asked granddaughters to talk about turning points in their relationship with their maternal grandmother, finding that granddaughters' perceptions of negative communication behaviors by the grandmother (e.g., lying, interfering) were seen in retrospect as having a negative impact on the GP-GC relationship. Harwood (2000b) has uncovered a number of predictors of communication satisfaction and GP-GC relational solidarity, including perceptions of kindness, grandparents' story-telling behaviors, and grandparent's perceptions of the grandchild's involvement in and support of the relationship. In a similar vein, Downs (1989) has shown that levels of mutual self-disclosure and grandparent story-telling in the GP-GC relationship are positively related to solidarity. Webb (1985) examined the topics that predominated in GP-GC conversation and provided opportunities for intimate GP-GC conversations. Webb found that topics such as family, school, and health are most commonly discussed.

In a different vein, Harwood (2000c) investigated the relationship between communication media choice and GP-GC communication satisfaction, finding that telephone communication is the best predictor of relational satisfaction, when communication via other media and geographical distance are controlled. Montepare, Steinberg, and Rosenberg (1992) examined actual telephone communication between grandchildren and their grandparents, finding that some features of a "baby talk" register are used when college students talk to their grandparents. Finally, work focused on examining cross-cultural variation in intergenerational communication has recently begun to consider differences between such communication within and outside the family (Cai, Giles, & Noels, 1998; Ng, Liu, Weatherall, & Loong, 1997).

In terms of the GP-GC relationship, work examining the intergenerational stake hypothesis is useful in terms of understanding the extent to which grandparents and grandchildren agree on a definition of their relationship. Disagreements about the nature of a relationship (e.g., the amount of investment or closeness) might well have consequences for the relationship in terms of a lack of shared expectations or norms. Such breakdowns in intersubjectivity have been implicated in relational problems in other contexts (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1993; Ragan & Hopper, 1984). Hence, this research aimed to examine whether the intergenerational stake hypothesis extends beyond adjacent generations, and posed the following research question.

RQ1: Do Grandparents and Grandchildren Differ in Their Perceptions of Relational Closeness?

Whether grandparents and grandchildren differ in perceptions of GP-GC closeness raises broader issues of whether they share an overall vision of the relationship. Traditionally, research on the intergenerational stake hypothesis has

examined univariate measures of affectual solidarity. The current research aimed to extend this tradition by examining richer measures of relational perceptions. In recent years, a great deal of research has gone into delineating “types” of grandparent-grandchild relationship (e.g., Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1985; Kivnick, 1982; Neugarten & Weinstein, 1964; Wood & Robertson, 1976). Such typologies are useful in helping us understand variation in the GP-GC relationship and uncovering reasons for the success or failure of this relationship.

Among the most convincing and widely referenced of these typologies is that of Cherlin and Furstenberg (1985). These authors distinguish three grandparenting styles based on grandparents’ reports of exchanging services with the grandchild, influencing the grandchild, and frequency of contact. *Detached* grandparents see their grandchildren rarely, exert little influence over them, and engage in little exchange of services. *Passive* grandparents are similar, but they see their grandchildren more frequently. *Active* grandparents either exchange more services or exert more influence, regardless of frequency of contact. Among the latter group, a further distinction is made between *supportive* grandparents (who engage in exchange with the grandchild), *authoritative* grandparents (who exert parentlike authority), and *influential* grandparents (who exert parentlike authority *and* engage in exchange). Cherlin and Furstenberg (1985) report that grandparenting style is associated with a number of variables, including the overall closeness of the relationship. Hence, from the grandparents’ point of view, the typology has predictive power and is useful for understanding the grandparents’ perspective on the relationship.

However, since these conclusions emerge *solely* from the grandparents’ reports, the extent to which this typology assesses aspects of the *relationship* remains unclear—we do not know whether the grandparent and the grandchild *agree* on these perceptions. Such agreement is crucial in terms of understanding relational success and failure. Situations in which grandparent and grandchild disagree on the definition of their relationship may result in a qualitatively different relational experience, as compared to situations in which both parties agree (see Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1993, for supporting evidence from the marital context). Hence, we examined joint reports of grandparent-grandchild dyads, and posed a second research question.

RQ2: To What Extent Do Grandparents and Grandchildren Agree on Their Perceptions of the Grandparent-Grandchild Relationship?

Finally, given that the Cherlin and Furstenberg typology provides a rich account of the relationship, more detailed examination of the nature of potential GP-GC differences was warranted. The precise nature of such differences might have implications for the intergenerational stake hypothesis (for instance, if grandparents were consistently evaluating the relationship as more or less active than

their grandchildren). Such differences are not revealed by traditional univariate measures. Hence, we posed a final research question.

RQ3: What is the Nature of Grandparent-Grandchild Differences in Evaluations of Their Relationship?

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Young adults ($N = 180$) were recruited from an introductory speech communication class at a large Midwestern US university. The class fulfills a campus-wide requirement and includes a diverse array of majors. In groups of eight to twenty people, these participants were asked to provide a mailing address for one living grandparent with whom they had spoken in the previous twelve months. The students then completed a survey about their relationship and communication with that grandparent.

A similar questionnaire was mailed to the target grandparent by the researcher, accompanied by a postage-paid reply envelope addressed to the researcher and an introductory letter. The letter explained that their grandchild had completed a questionnaire and included the grandchild's name. In the questionnaire instructions, the grandparents were asked to respond to the questionnaire thinking about the grandchild whose name was on the enclosed letter. Examination of open-ended responses to the questionnaire indicated that they understood these instructions. Grandchild and grandparent responses were connected with code numbers. Grandparents and grandchildren were clearly informed that their responses were confidential and that their grandchild/grandparent would not see their responses. A response rate of 82 percent ($N = 147$) was achieved from the grandparents. A final sample of 135 responses was usable.¹

In this set of 135 dyads, the grandchildren were 67 percent female and 33 percent male (average age = 19.96; $SD = 2.46$). Their grandparents were 82 percent grandmothers (53 percent maternal, 47 percent paternal) and 18 percent grandfathers (54 percent maternal, 46 percent paternal). The grandparents' average age was 75.29 years ($SD = 5.91$; Range = 60-98). The addresses of the grandparents were coded for location, and Kansas residents constituted 44 percent

¹Two dyads were excluded because of extensive missing data, five dyads were excluded because the questionnaire was completed by the wrong grandparent, and five dyads were excluded because the relationship was something other than a biological grandparent relationship (e.g., a step-grandparent). Responses of the grandchildren whose grandparents responded and those whose grandparents did not respond were compared. Most analyses revealed no significant differences; however, there were statistically significant ($p < .05$) relationships indicating that responses were received from grandparents whose relationship with the grandchild was somewhat more positive.

of the grandparents (other central states = 37 percent, Eastern USA = 13 percent, Western USA = 6 percent). Grandchildren and grandparents were 91 percent white, 4 percent black, 2 percent Asian, 3 percent others/missing. Among the grandchildren, 24 percent indicated that their parents were divorced.

Materials

Three measures of relational closeness were assessed. Grandparents and grandchildren were asked how emotionally close they felt to their grandchild or grandparent, respectively (5-point scale: very distant—very close), and how much they liked the other (5-point scale: dislike very much—like very much). These single item measures are relatively clear, and mirror those used successfully in previous research on grandparent-grandchild (GP-GC) communication (Brussoni & Boon, 1998; Gronvold, 1988). Participants also evaluated their general satisfaction in conversations with the other. These evaluations were performed using a shortened version of Hecht's (1978) communication satisfaction scale (5 Likert items, $\alpha = .76$ for grandparents, $.89$ for grandchildren. Example item: "I am generally satisfied with the conversations").

A series of questions from Cherlin and Furstenberg (1985) was asked to classify the GP-GC relationship into types. Four yes/no items assessed the levels of *exchange* between the parties: whether the respondent had helped or been helped by the target, either with things they were doing or with errands. In addition, both parties were asked whether the grandparent had disciplined the grandchild, given advice to the grandchild, consulted with the grandchild's parents about the grandchild, corrected the grandchild when the grandchild did something the grandparent disapproved of, and whether the grandchild had discussed problems with the grandparent. These latter items measured the degree of *parentlike behavior* of the grandparent. The first three items in this section were again yes/no type items. Participants responded to the remaining two items on a 4-point scale (often, sometimes, hardly ever, never). As described by Cherlin and Furstenberg (1985), "often" and "sometimes" were classified as positive responses, "hardly ever" and "never" as negative responses. A subsequent section of the questionnaire assessed frequency of GP-GC communication by asking how often the two individuals spoke to each other (seven options: "almost daily"—"almost never").

Preliminary Analysis

Responses to the Cherlin and Furstenberg (1985) questions were analyzed in the way described by those authors. Specifically, factor analysis was performed on the nine items (not including the measure of frequency of communication), and a two-factor solution emerged for both the grandparents and grandchildren. The solutions were the same as those reported by Cherlin and Furstenberg (1985). The four items concerning help between the parties loaded together to form

a scale measuring *exchange*. The five other items loaded together to form a scale measuring *parentlike behavior* of the grandparent toward the grandchild. Positive responses to items on the scales were summed to provide a 0-4 scale of exchange and a 0-5 scale of parentlike behavior for both the grandparent and the grandchild. Participants scoring above two on the exchange scale and above three on the parentlike behavior scale were described as scoring *high* on those scales, others were described as scoring *low*. Based on these scores, grandparents and grandchildren were independently assigned relational types as described by Cherlin and Furstenberg (1985; see Introduction). Individuals who described both exchange and parentlike behavior as low were classified as *detached* if they spoke to each other less than a few times a month, or *passive* if they spoke to each other at least a few times a month. Those who scored high on either exchange or parentlike behavior were described as *active*, no matter how often they spoke to one another. Among the *active* group, those who scored high on parentlike behavior were described as *authoritative*, those who scored high on exchange were labeled *supportive*, and those who scored high on both were labeled *influential*.²

Cherlin and Furstenberg's (1985) sample approximated a national probability sample³, hence we were interested in whether our convenience sample would display a similar distribution of GP-GC relationship types. As can be seen in Table 1, more of our grandparents rated their relationship as supportive, and fewer rated it as influential than the grandparents in the original study. Among the grandchildren in the current study, a smaller proportion rated their relationship as detached, and a greater number rated it as supportive than the grandparents in the original study (there were no grandchildren in the original study). In general, though, the table shows that the proportions of each type are not dramatically different across the two studies. Specific differences between grandparents and grandchildren in the current study are described below.⁴

²The only exception to Cherlin and Furstenberg's (1985) procedure was that their question asked respondents how often they had "seen" their grandchild. Ours asked grandparents and grandchildren how often they "talked to" their grandchild/grandparent. The change was made to reflect the fact that communication may occur without "seeing" (e.g., via telephone). We should note that in 1986 Cherlin and Furstenberg presented a slightly different classification system. This paper focused on their 1985 typology because it offers more fine-grained relational differentiations.

³Specifically, Cherlin and Furstenberg's (1985) data were from the grandparents of a nationally representative sample of children (aged 13 to 17 years).

⁴To compare with Cherlin and Furstenberg (1985), analyses were run examining covariation of relationship type and demographic factors. Consistent with Cherlin and Furstenberg, active and detached grandparents were significantly younger than passive grandparents, and detached grandparents lived significantly further from their grandchildren than the other types. Similarly, trends emerged suggesting that nonwhite grandparents were more active in their grandchildren's lives than white grandparents. Finally, no sex differences emerged in the current data.

Table 1. Comparison of Category Size in Current Study versus Cherlin & Furstenberg (1985) Study

	Detached	Passive	Supportive	Authoritative	Influential
Grandchildren	16	23	28	12	21
Grandparents	25	24	34	6	10
Cherlin & Furstenberg (1985)	26	29	17	9	19

Note: Table entries are percentages of entire sample. For some rows percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding error. Cherlin and Furstenberg report percentages rounded to the nearest whole number, so this level of measurement was adopted for the current table.

RESULTS

RQ1: Do Grandparents and Grandchildren Differ in Their Perceptions of Relational Closeness?

RQ1 was examined using paired-samples *t*-tests comparing grandparent and grandchild responses to the three measures of relational closeness. All three measures yielded significant results. Emotional closeness was rated higher by the grandparents ($M = 4.32$, $SD = .74$) than by the grandchildren ($M = 4.04$, $SD = .93$), $t(133) = 3.83$, $p < .001$, $eta^2 = .10$. Liking of the relational partner was also rated higher by the grandparent ($M = 4.97$, $SD = .17$) than the grandchild ($M = 4.83$, $SD = .45$), $t(133) = 3.84$, $p < .001$, $eta^2 = .10$. Finally, grandparents' ratings of communication satisfaction were also higher ($M = 4.40$, $SD = .51$) than those of their grandchildren ($M = 4.18$, $SD = .74$), $t(133) = 3.30$, $p = .001$, $eta^2 = .08$. These findings support application of the intergenerational stake hypothesis to the grandparent-grandchild relationship.

RQ2: To What Extent Do Grandparents and Grandchildren Agree on Their Perceptions of the Grandparent-Grandchild Relationship?

Cross-tabulations of the grandparents' and the grandchildren's responses to Cherlin and Furstenberg's (1985) three-way classification (detached/passive/active) were examined. The relationship between the responses was statistically significant (Cramer's $V = .32$, $p < .001$), indicating some level of GP-GC agreement on the nature of their relationship. However, as can be seen from Table 2, only 10 percent of variance in the responses is shared between grandparents and grandchildren ($V^2 = .10$). Of 131 dyads, only 64 (49 percent) agreed on classification of their relationship—approximately 53 dyads would be expected to

Table 2. Cross-Tabulation of Grandparent and Grandchild Assessments of GP-GC Relationship on Three-Category Typology (Frequencies Indicate Number of GP-GC Dyads)

		Grandparents' Ratings			Row Total (%)
		Detached	Passive	Active	
Grand-children's Ratings	Detached	14	1	5	20 (15.3)
	Passive	4	7	18	29 (22.1)
	Active	15	24	43	82 (62.6)
Column Total (%)		33 (25.2)	32 (24.4)	66 (50.4)	131 (100.0)

agree simply by chance. It is worth noting that the volume of disagreement is matched by its degree. In 20 instances (15 percent of cases) the dyads provided assessments that were diametrically opposed (i.e., active versus detached).

The picture is similar when including the subcategories of the "active" category (i.e., the five-category typology). The relationship between the grandparents' and grandchildren's responses is again weak but significant (Cramer's $V = .27$, $p = .002$; $V^2 = .07$). As can be seen from Table 3, only 44 dyads (34 percent) agree on the definition of their relationship (Chance agreement = 22 percent). Only 23 of 43 dyads in the three active categories agree on their relational definition (53 percent).

RQ3: What is the Nature of Grandparent-Grandchild Differences in Evaluations of Their Relationship?

It is worth examining the meaning of these GP-GC differences for the intergenerational stake hypothesis. Examination of Table 2 reveals that there are more disagreements in which the grandchildren view the relationship as *more active* than their grandparents (43: 64 percent than vice versa 24: 36 percent). In combination with the earlier data on closeness, we view such differences as supporting the intergenerational stake hypothesis. The grandparents' higher perceptions of relational closeness and lower perceptions of activity reflect a pattern of desiring additional involvement. In contrast, the grandchildren's ratings of lower closeness and higher activity appear to accord a lower priority to additional involvement in the relationship.

It is also worth noting that the majority (63 percent) of the disagreements occur when one partner views the relationship as active and the other views it as passive. These disagreements do not concern the *frequency* of contact in the relationship. Rather, they are disagreements about whether *concrete behaviors*

Table 3. Cross-Tabulation of Grandparent and Grandchild Assessments of GP-GC Relationship on Five-Category Typology (Frequencies Indicate Number of GP-GC Dyads)

		Grandparents' Ratings					Row Total (%)
		Detached	Passive	Supportive	Authoritative	Influential	
Grand-children's Ratings	Detached	14	1	3	1	1	20 (15.3)
	Passive	4	7	13	3	2	29 (22.1)
	Supportive	5	9	18	1	4	37 (28.2)
	Authoritative	6	4	3	1	2	16 (12.2)
	Influential	4	11	8	2	4	29 (22.1)
	Column Total (%)	33 (25.2)	32 (24.4)	45 (34.4)	8 (6.1)	13 (9.9)	131(100.0)

Note: Slight discrepancies between this and Table 1 are a result of missing data from four grandparents.

have occurred in the relationship. In contrast, only five disagreements (7 percent) are determined solely by differences between grandparents' and grandchildren's ratings on the frequency of contact measure (i.e., detached-passive disagreements). In other words, there appears to be a considerable lack of intersubjectivity between these grandparents and grandchildren about the nature of their relationship, including the enactment of specific behaviors within the relationship.

DISCUSSION

These results offer an interesting perspective on the intergenerational stake hypothesis. First, they offer considerable support for the hypothesis in the grandparent-grandchild (GP-GC) relationship when using traditional measures of relational closeness and satisfaction. Second, the results indicate that perceptions of closeness in the relationship do not work in parallel with measures of activity. The findings combine to tell us that grandparents and grandchildren often share quite different perceptions of their relationships. This reinforces suggestions that are increasingly common in the literature: that researchers should strive to gain dyadic data wherever possible. Data from one side of a relationship cannot provide a complete picture.

Considerable and consistent support emerged for the intergenerational stake hypothesis from our measures of closeness. As in the parent-child relationship, grandparents view their relationship with their grandchildren as considerably closer than the grandchildren perceive the relationship. The current data indicate that this effect extends to perceptions of liking, and also perceptions of satisfaction in communication with the partner. The effect sizes in the current analysis were moderate (η^2 in .10 range), which matches Giarrusso et al.'s (1995) characterization of the effect in parent-child relationships (although they do not explicitly report effect sizes).

The measures from the relational typology suggest a more complex picture, although perhaps one that complements the stake hypothesis. Overall, the grandchildren perceived their relationship with their grandparents to be considerably more active than do their grandparents. It is likely that these ratings may be a product of an implicit comparison process. Given grandchildren's and grandparents' different perceptions of relational closeness, it is possible that they have different expectations for the prevalence of particular behaviors within the relationship. This might result in them having different thresholds for affirming the occurrence of a behavior. Thus, grandchildren may "count" a behavior as having occurred based on a single incident. In contrast, grandparents may only respond affirmatively if it is a regular, ongoing feature of the relationship. Such a finding would support the stake hypothesis and would be consistent with the findings on our closeness variables (see Harwood & Lin, 2000). Future theoretical accounts for the intergenerational stake hypothesis should consider the existence of effects beyond the parent-child dyad.

The findings summarized in Tables 2 and 3 send a crucial message that has been made before in the literature (Szinovacz, 1998). There are no empty cells in either table, indicating that a wide range of relationship types is possible in this relationship—rich variation is possible beyond the stereotypical conceptions of what a GP-GC relationship “should” look like. The current data add to this by acknowledging that one dimension of diversity is the extent to which dyads are “mixed” (i.e., the involved parties have divergent definitions of their relationship).

An additional important pattern in Table 3 is that supportive relationships appear much more common in both parties’ evaluations than authoritative relationships—Cherlin and Furstenberg’s (1985) data are consistent with this. Exchange of services and helping behaviors appear to be more prevalent in the GP-GC relationship than are parentlike influences from the grandparent. Grandparent *and* grandchild reports indicate that when parentlike influences do occur it tends to be in *conjunction* with helping behaviors rather than in isolation. This is interesting in light of other research on intergenerational relations. In particular, the theme of “helping” comes up repeatedly in younger adults’ accounts of their encounters with older adults (Harwood, 1998). In the current data, we received 87 reports from grandchildren indicating that they helped their grandparents, but only 56 reports of their grandparents helping them (grandparents’ reports reflected an almost identical pattern). Hence, the current data support earlier suggestions that help from young to old is a dominant theme in intergenerational relations. Clearly, of course, these data relate to a specific type of helping (with errands and chores), and not other types (e.g., with making important decisions: see Harwood, McKee, & Lin, 2000).

Finally, when grandparents rate a relationship as more active than their grandchildren, these disagreements are largely in the “supportive” category. Relative to their grandchildren, there are a substantial number of grandparents who perceive more giving, receiving, and asking for help than their grandchildren perceive. In contrast, very few grandparents report engaging in more parentlike behaviors than their grandchildren perceive.

Limitations

First, we should note that the data in this paper were based on responses to a limited number of self-report items concerning the relationship. While these measures have demonstrated reliability and validity, future research should attempt to incorporate more detailed and in-depth measures of the relationship. Second, given that the grandchildren in this study were college students, the sample was not representative of all GP-GC relationships (particularly in terms of grandchild and grandparent age, and probably socio-economic status). That said, the similarity of frequencies of the various types to those reported by Cherlin and Furstenberg (1985) suggests that our sample is not radically different from

their nationally representative sample. We would also note that the grandparents were very diverse on at least one key variable—age (range = 60-98). The sample is also skewed in that there are more female grandchildren in the sample, and subjects responded about grandmothers substantially more than grandfathers. The course from which the grandchildren volunteered had a majority female enrollment, in addition to which approximately 61 percent of over-70s are female, and with increasing age the gender imbalance grows larger. Hence, the college student respondents were considerably more likely to have grandmothers than grandfathers (Matthews & Sprey, 1985; Spitze & Ward, 1998). Finally, the sample was somewhat homogenous in terms of the positivity of the relationships we examined. The mode of data collection undoubtedly contributed to this bias (i.e., grandchildren with negative perceptions of their grandparents may have elected not to participate, grandparents with a negative view of their grandchildren may have elected not to return the questionnaire). Hence, the results probably do not generalize to extremely dissatisfying relationships. In the future, it will be important to examine situations in which the GP-GC relationship is not functioning well and the degree of intersubjectivity in those relationships. This might be accomplished by dictating to respondents which grandparent they should report on (e.g., “Respond with regard to your paternal grandfather”). Of course, comparisons using such designs would be complicated by the fact that most respondents do not have all options available to them (their paternal grandfather may be dead). An alternative is to randomly assign subjects to respond with regard to a favorite versus a least favorite grandparent, which should, at the very least, increase variation on certain measures (see Folwell & Grant, 1999).

Future Directions

The research reported here suggests more profitable lines for future work. First, in order to understand the intergenerational stake hypothesis more completely, it may be worth examining various other family relationships: can we uncover similar patterns in relationships between older and younger siblings, in step-relationships, or in other more distant relationships (e.g., aunt/uncle-niece/nephew relationships). In addition, it might be interesting to examine whether the effect generalizes to intergenerational perceptions as a whole (i.e., between older people as a group and younger people as a group, absent a family relationship). Such findings would provide useful information in constructing theoretical accounts of the intergenerational stake hypothesis. For example, are material investment and rational exchange the most appropriate interpretive tools for understanding the effect (Rossi, 1995)? Second, the “mixed” relationship types that we uncovered based on Cherlin and Furstenberg’s typology could be examined to uncover the consequences of their lack of intersubjectivity for their relationship. When perceptions of the relationship are

radically different, does this result in frequent disagreements or underlying tensions concerning shared activities, willingness to visit, or asymmetries in initiation of interaction?

These future directions would help us understand more about relational dynamics in this important family relationship, and provide a greater understanding of the stake that all individuals hold in their relationships with other family members. Ultimately, it is hoped that this work will result in more satisfying and intimate GP-GC communication and relationships. Such relationships would be a positive force in both parties' lives.

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