

2019

'It's Just What You Do:' Exploring Relationships Between Young-Adult Grandchildren and their Grandfathers

Jacoby A. Leseberg

Western Oregon University, jleseberg17@mail.wou.edu

Margaret M. Manoogian

Western Oregon University, manoogim@wou.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/pure>



Part of the [Gerontology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Leseberg, Jacoby A. and Manoogian, Margaret M. (2019) "'It's Just What You Do:' Exploring Relationships Between Young-Adult Grandchildren and their Grandfathers," *PURE Insights*: Vol. 8 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/pure/vol8/iss1/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at Digital Commons@WOU. It has been accepted for inclusion in PURE Insights by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@WOU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@wou.edu, kundas@mail.wou.edu, bakersc@mail.wou.edu.

'It's Just What You Do:' Exploring Relationships Between Young-Adult Grandchildren and their Grandfathers

Abstract

The grandparent role is a dynamic and often ambivalent relationship requiring simultaneous navigation of “being there” and “not interfering” in the lives of grandchildren (Mason, May, & Clarke, 2007). These relationships change as grandchildren mature and can result in new grandparent-grandchild connections based on communication, intimacy, and mutual respect (Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008). Utilizing a sample of grandfathers and young-adult grandchildren ($N = 32$), this study investigated the impact that grandfathers have on their young-adult grandchildren. Utilizing a life course perspective, we asked: **a) How do grandfathers invest in the futures of their young-adult grandchildren? b) How do young-adult grandchildren recognize and receive their grandfather's investments in their futures?** Results suggest that grandfathers emphasized their grandparenting role but undervalued their contributions to their grandchildren. Grandfathers and grandchildren also did not always agree on the transmissions intended and received. When asked to recall meaningful memories of grandfathers, young-adult grandchildren were more likely to remember instances of shared hobbies, interests, and personal connection. Findings have implications for understanding and strengthening the ties between grandfathers and their grandchildren.

"It's Just What You Do:" Exploring Relationships Between Young-Adult Grandchildren and their Grandfathers

Jacoby A. Leseberg, Western Oregon University
Margaret Manoogian, Western Oregon University
Faculty Sponsor: **Dr. Margaret Manoogian**

The grandparent role is a dynamic and often ambivalent relationship requiring simultaneous navigation of “being there” and “not interfering” in the lives of grandchildren (Mason, May, & Clarke, 2007). These relationships change as grandchildren mature and can result in new grandparent-grandchild connections based on communication, intimacy, and mutual respect (Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008). Utilizing a sample of grandfathers and young-adult grandchildren (N = 32), this study investigated the impact that grandfathers have on their young-adult grandchildren. Utilizing a life course perspective, we asked: a) How do grandfathers invest in the futures of their young-adult grandchildren? b) How do young-adult grandchildren recognize and receive their grandfather’s investments in their futures? Results suggest that grandfathers emphasized their grandparenting role but undervalued their contributions to their grandchildren. Grandfathers and grandchildren also did not always agree on the transmissions intended and received. When asked to recall meaningful memories of grandfathers, young-adult grandchildren were more likely to remember instances of shared hobbies, interests, and personal connection. Findings have implications for understanding and strengthening the ties between grandfathers and their grandchildren.

Keywords: grandfathers, families, communication, young adults

As the older adult population continues to expand in the United States, women and men are finding that they have more time to experience grandparenthood. On average, today’s older adults can expect to spend over a third of their lifetime as a grandparent (Hayslip & Page, 2012). Additionally, grandparents are more likely to live long enough to become great grandparents and have the ability to build relationships with their grandchildren and great grandchildren over time (Connidis, 2009; Hayslip & Page, 2012). These grandparents can also look forward to healthier lives, better financial security, and more time to engage in the grandparent role (Uhlenberg, 2009). Many researchers have examined the roles and impacts of grandmothers in intergenerational relationships, yet grandfathers are under-examined and under-represented in gerontological literature (Bates, 2009; Bates & Taylor, 2013; Kelley, Whitley, & Campos, 2013). Regardless of this discrepancy, grandfathers have demonstrated no difference of interest towards their grandchildren, nor do they express any difference in a sense of responsibility associated with their roles as grandparents (Bates, 2009; Bates & Goodsell, 2013; Silverstein & Marenco, 2001; Thiele & Whelan, 2006; Thiele & Whelan, 2008).

Generativity has been established as a cornerstone of the grandparent experience (Bates, 2009; Bates & Goodsell, 2013; Erikson, 1982; Thiele & Whelan, 2006; Villar & Serrat, 2014). This concept is drawn from Erikson’s (1982) stage of generativity versus stagnation, which refers to the need or desire to invest in future generations through guidance and support, lest productivity in life be perceived as stagnant. It has been shown that the grandparent-grandchild relationship serves to fulfill and resolve this life course task (Erikson, 1950, 1982; Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008; Thiele & Whelan, 2006; Thiele & Whelan, 2008; Villar & Serrat, 2014). The concept of generativity is multidimensional and has been examined under various scopes and circumstances. Grandfathers provide a variety of supports to their grandchildren including: financial assistance; social and emotional supports, such as shared activities, childcare, mentoring, and advice-giving; and instrumental supports, such as transportation and maintenance (Bates & Goodsell, 2013; Bates, Taylor, & Stanfield, 2018; Bol & Kalmijn, 2016; Kelley, Whitley, & Campos, 2013; Landry-Meyer, Gerard, & Guzell, 2005; Mann & Leeson, 2010; Thiele & Whelan, 2008). Many grandfathers place significant value on their

roles of providing these supports to future generations (Lesperance, 2010; Mann & Leeson, 2010), and consider responsibilities such as the transference of perspective, values, and behaviors to their grandchildren as tasks tied to the grandfather role (Bates & Goodsell, 2013). Emotionally significant relationships between grandfathers and their grandchildren may also be products of choice rather than the result of social pressures (Mann & Leeson, 2010).

Research on how grandchildren acknowledge and respond to generativity provided by their grandfathers is limited. Similar to their grandfathers, what is known is that grandchildren tend to consider the grandchild role as central to their identities (Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008). Moreover, grandchildren typically report that their grandparents are major influences in their lives, and those who have had their character and values significantly shaped by their grandfathers experience more positive grandchild-grandfather relationships (Wiscott & Kopera-Frye, 2000). Adult grandchildren typically describe their relationships with their grandparents as close (Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008). As grandchildren age, it is not uncommon for the amount of contact and the types of support they receive from their grandfathers to change. In general, frequency of contact between grandparents and their grandchildren is variable throughout the life course but tends to decline as grandchildren enter young-adulthood (Hakoyama & MaloneBeach, 2013; Monserud, 2011; Sciplino & Kinshott, 2019; Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008). Typically, parental involvement is a primary determinant for grandparent-grandchild contact in early development, with parents either hindering or facilitating contact with grandparents, though the latter is more common (Barnett et al., 2010; Hakoyama & MaloneBeach, 2013; Monserud, 2011, Sciplino & Kinshott, 2019). This type of gatekeeping decreases as grandchildren mature, move out of their parental homes, and assume new roles (Geurts, Poortman, Tilburg & Dykstra, 2009; Monserud, 2011). These new roles such as that of college student, husband/wife, and full-time worker have been negatively correlated with contact frequency and perceptions of intergenerational closeness between grandparents and grandchildren (Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008).

Proximity influences intergenerational relationship quality (Roberto, Allen, & Blieszner, 2001) and has been positively correlated with both grandparent-grandchild support exchanges and frequency of contact (Bates & Goodsell, 2013; Bates & Taylor, 2013; Hayslip & Page,

2012). In general, however, contact frequency has been found to be a better indicator of relationship quality than proximity (Bates & Taylor, 2013; Silverstein & Marengo, 2001) and is related to relationship closeness and role satisfaction (Bates & Taylor, 2013). Support exchanges and interactions between grandparents and their grandchildren also evolve through the life course, with relationships moving from nurturing in childhood towards more respectful and emotional relations in adulthood (Sciplino & Kinshott, 2019).

Grandfathers, in comparison to grandmothers, are less likely to discuss personal problems and family-oriented topics (Barker, 2007; Silverstein & Marengo, 2001) but are more likely to engage in discussions about experiences in youth- and health-related matters (Barker, 2007). Grandfathers are comparatively less involved with grandchildren than grandmothers (Bates & Taylor, 2013; Reitzes & Mutran, 2004; Silverstein & Marengo, 2001) with grandmothers also more likely to attend family gatherings, often acting as familial matriarchs (Mann, Khan, & Leeson, 2013; Reitzes & Mutran, 2004; Silverstein & Marengo, 2001). Grandmothers feel a greater sense of entitlement towards kinkeeping roles in families (Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008) and have historically been considered the primary facilitators for the nurturing and childcare of their grandchildren (Horsfall & Dempsey, 2015). Kinkeeping behaviors are those that keep family members in touch with the individual as well as with each other (Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008). Grandfathers typically find value in their roles through the affirmation of masculine norms established through experiences, such as child-rearing and occupational involvement earlier in life (Lesperance, 2010; Mann, Tarrant, & Leeson, 2016). Grandfathers feel that they are masculine role models through regular and reliable contact with their grandchildren (Mann, Tarrant, & Leeson, 2016). Grandfathers also tend to avoid parental roles with their grandchildren, especially disciplinary roles (Breheny, Stephens, & Spilsbury, 2013; Lesperance, 2010; Mason, May, & Clarke, 2007).

Differences in demographics play a major role in influencing approaches to grandparenting. Specifically, socioeconomic factors (Bol & Kalmijn, 2016; Silverstein & Marengo, 2001; Swartz, 2009) and cultural norms (Kelley, Whitley, & Campos, 2013; Silverstein & Marengo, 2001) hold the most sway. African American grandparents are more likely to provide financial support, engage in spiritual events, and assist in raising grandchildren than their White counterparts (Kelley, Whitley, & Campos,

2013; Silverstein & Marengo, 2001). Factors such as obligation, tradition, religious beliefs, and an absence of alternative caregivers make rural African American grandfathers more likely to engage in kinkeeping behaviors, despite a lack of resources and the presence of distress (Bullock, 2007). Financially secure grandparents are not only more capable of providing and facilitating financial assistance to their grandchildren (Silverstein & Marengo, 2001; Bol & Kalmijn, 2016), but are also more likely to be involved in their grandchildren's lives (Silverstein & Marengo, 2001) and are better able to provide instrumental support (Swartz, 2009). Grandparent education may also affect the grandchild-grandfather relationship. When proximity to grandchildren is close, college-educated grandparents are more likely to engage in shared activities with and provide childcare for their grandchildren. However, in contrast with less educated grandparents, grandparents with higher education find more personal definition and validation through their careers rather than through familial roles (Silverstein & Marengo, 2001).

As previously stated, grandfathers have been historically less researched than grandmothers (Bates, 2009; Bates & Taylor, 2013; Kelley, Whitley, & Campos, 2013). Also, the research on young-adult grandchildren, their receptiveness to supports, and their perceptions of the grandfather role is limited. Furthermore, the grandfather-grandchild relationship can be wholly unique and dynamic, which makes dyadic research the essential approach for observing common themes and important variations. In order to confront these gaps in the empirical literature, this study adopted two theoretical frameworks through which the grandfather-grandchild relationship may be observed. First, this study utilized Erikson's (1950, 1982) theory of generativity in order to navigate the multi-faceted forms of support inherent in the grandfather-grandchild relationship. Second, this study used a life course perspective (Bengtson & Allen, 1993; Connidis, 2009) in order to identify shifts in supports, relationship closeness, and perceptions of the grandfather role across the life course. The research questions for this study included: a) How do grandfathers invest in the futures of their young-adult grandchildren?; and b) How do young-adult grandchildren recognize and receive their grandfathers' investments in their futures?

METHOD

This qualitative study emerged from a research project established in a university course and focused on the

relationships between grandfathers and their young adult grandchildren. Under the guidance of the professor, undergraduate students were methodologically trained and conducted individual interviews with grandfathers and their young adult grandchildren focusing on relationship quality, support, and shared activities.

PROCEDURE

After Institutional Review Board approval was received, student researchers completed Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) online training, were trained in qualitative research methods, and began data collection. Dyads were recruited, via convenience sampling, primarily by students and the professor. Once each member of the dyad agreed to interview, they received a copy of their respective protocol and signed informed consent forms. Participants were interviewed individually in a setting of their choice. The semi-structured protocols included 33 questions for grandfathers and 23 questions for grandchildren. Core interview questions were focused on grandchild-grandfather relationship quality and included questions such as "How often do you have contact with your grandchild/grandfather?," "Do you feel you spend enough time with your grandchild/grandfather?," and "How would you describe your relationship with your grandchild/grandfather?" Additional questions focused on the meaning of roles, the exchange of support, and intergenerational transmissions.

Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 3 hours, were recorded on audio recorders or mobile phones, and were transcribed verbatim. Data were later uploaded into MAXqda qualitative analysis software. Participant pseudonyms were used in the presentation of the data in order to maintain confidentiality.

SAMPLE

To participate in the study, study criteria included that participants were grandfathers aged 60 years or older and their young adult grandchildren were between the ages of 18 and 25 years. Both had to indicate their willingness to interview in person. In the sample, the average age of grandfathers was 71.3 years. Grandfathers' median income was between \$50k and \$75k. Grandfathers were likely to be married (87.5%) and White (94%). The grandchildren sample included 9 women and 7 men and their average age was 21.6 years.

DATA ANALYSIS

Once data were collected and transcribed, an initial research team including two undergraduate students and the professor engaged in qualitative data analysis as outlined by Berg (2007). At that time, sixty-two codes were established across grandfather and grandchild interviews. For this study, a new undergraduate researcher was trained to engage with the data. For the manuscript, the first phase of analysis involved frequent and intensive reading of all data. All grandfather and grandchild transcripts were thoroughly reviewed for common themes within the grandfather group, within the grandchild group, and between both groups. In the second phase, the researchers reviewed insights, discussed potential themes, and areas for further analysis. The third phase of data analysis involved utilization of prior coding by the original research team. All codes were integrated in the analysis and two new codes were created: 1) grandfather memory of own grandfather, and 2) grandchild memory of grandfather. The final phase required a review of all data utilizing the codes specific to the study's research questions.

RESULTS

In general, young-adult grandchildren and their grandfathers expressed cohesion in their statements of contact frequency, types of support exchanged, and overall relationship satisfaction. Grandchildren also perceived that their influence on grandfathers was positive, with their grandfathers confirming these perceptions. Regardless of past or present intergenerational conflict, young-adult grandchildren were encouraged by their parents to form meaningful relationships with their grandfathers, with parents often facilitating contact. Moreover, both grandfathers and their young-adult grandchildren confirmed that the grandfather-grandchild relationship evolved as the grandchild aged, moving from primarily nurturing in childhood towards more mutualistic and friendship-oriented interactions in young-adulthood. Grandfathers supported reports by their grandchildren that grandfather-grandchild contact had become less frequent as their grandchild aged. Both grandfathers and grandchildren were also likely to cite young-adult grandchild duties and responsibilities as primary barriers to contact frequency. Emerging themes across all interviews focused on support exchanges between grandfathers and their grandchildren, perceptions of the

grandfather role and outcomes, and the cocreation of memories and relationship ties.

“HE’S ALWAYS BEEN THERE FOR ME:”

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF SUPPORT

Nearly all grandfathers reported contributing either their time, some form of financial support, or both to their grandchildren. It was typical for grandfathers to joke that financial assistance was of greater value to their grandchildren, but they also stressed that being available for their grandchild was more significant to the grandfather role. A common sentiment was the desire to be a positive role model, a representation of what a “good man” should be. When Joe was asked what he thought he contributed to his grandchild’s life, he replied “A positive example, and security.... I will always be there for them regardless of whatever circumstances. A positive example in their lives.”

Roughly half of sampled grandfathers also offered some type of instrumental support, such as home maintenance and car repairs. Most grandfathers also reported that much of their grandfather role, and therein the types of generativity they provided, was influenced by and adapted from their experiences as fathers to their own children. Grandfathers stated that they appraised their performance as fathers as reflective of what they did or did not provide to their children, then applied what they perceived to have been effective to the grandfather-grandchild relationship while eliminating or omitting what was perceived as not effective. For grandfathers, this often meant the elimination or mitigation of disciplinary practices. As Michael shares his views on the grandfather role, “Well, I think it’s a supportive role... but everybody needs to learn for themselves. It can’t be like we’re lecturing them. Oh, we don’t do that.” Michael also goes on to state “Because what we’re doing is we’re making up time that we could have been spending with our own kids.”

All grandfathers reported that time spent with their grandchildren was the most meaningful contribution their grandchildren had provided. Grandfathers explained that these interactions provided opportunities to develop relational closeness, maintain solidarity, and, in general, keep abreast of events in one another’s lives. Jack shared how his grandchild helps him “Yeah, they provide a lot of humor, and, uh, a lot of entertainment actually... the kids never had a TV when they grew up, so we read a

lot and we talk, we play together, we talk together.” A small number of grandfathers stated that their grandchildren had assisted them with technology or home upkeep, but the majority of grandfathers were identified as being (by both themselves and their grandchildren) almost entirely independent.

Despite acknowledging the social and emotional dimensions of the support they provided, grandfathers were apt to devalue or diminish the impacts of these supports on their grandchildren. As Al, a grandfather, stated: “What [do] I contribute? Nagging. You know I mean. That was a big job, alright you know, and time.” This is juxtaposed to the insights provided by young-adult grandchildren. Grandchildren, while acknowledging the various dimensions of support provided by their grandfathers, placed increased value on emotional and social exchanges. As Kelly stated, “He’s always been there for me. Not always physically, but if I ever needed to talk to someone. I could go to him... I could tell him anything... he’s always been the one I could turn to for anything.”

Grandfathers also expressed an obligation to provide support, but downplayed the personal impact providing these supports had on their grandchildren. Intergenerational exchanges, including emotional and social exchanges, were seen as a byproduct of the familial and/or grandfather role. As such, the desire to provide assistance and guidance to grandchildren was framed as a means of fulfilling those expectations. Greg, a grandfather, explained: “It’s just part of being family and raising children, you know? You got to nurture them along the way and help them out.” Grandfathers were also likely to broach the topic of barriers (health, proximity, personality traits) to their grandchildren as a means of mitigating their potential for interactions. When asked if he thought the grandfather role was an important one, Carl stated, “Not significantly important I think because of my emotional and relational dysfunction. But I enjoy being with them and they enjoy being with me.”

Grandchildren, however, acknowledged their grandfathers’ barriers and expressed an appreciation for the efforts their grandfathers made despite these obstacles. Grandchildren were understanding of individual differences and expressed their own attempts at bridging social gaps. In reference to her grandfather meeting role expectations, April responded, “Totally! Yeah he meets expectations [of a grandfather]... he doesn’t catch on to hints. So, we have to work on

communication skills a little bit because he’s not the most talented at communication.”

When asked what contributions they felt their grandfathers had made in their lives, grandchildren were just as likely to refer to forms of financial support as they were to social and emotional exchanges. However, the vast majority of grandchildren would ultimately determine emotional and social support as having greater significance in their lives. All grandchildren expressed some form of appreciation towards their grandfathers, even those whose grandfather-grandchild relationship could be considered passive or disengaged. Any effort grandfathers made to be active in their grandchild’s life seemed to be viewed as positive and was met with gratitude, no matter how small the gesture. Grandfathers placed the most value on social exchanges both to and from their grandchildren, and all dyads expressed at least some cohesion in reporting the types of social and emotional interactions.

**“IT DEPENDS MORE ON WHAT MY WIFE IS DOING:”
PERCEPTIONS OF INFLUENCES ON
GRANDCHILDREN**

Regarding the grandfather role, grandfathers tended to undersell the influence their role had on their young-adult grandchildren. When asked how providing support to his grandchild made him feel, Al replied:

Well, [it] probably doesn’t make me feel either way, or one way or the other. It’s just what you do. You’re grandpa. It’s just what you do, you know- so it’s not a big deal one way or the other.

Diminishment of the grandfather role was especially prominent when grandfathers compared themselves to grandmothers. Bill explained, “Eh, I’m not as good at it as she [grandmother] is.” Grandfathers tended to view grandmothers as the more influential or important grandparent. Even grandfathers who placed increased value on the grandfather role and the support they provided undervalued the importance of the grandfather role in comparison to that of the grandmother. Regardless of how positive grandfathers perceived themselves, the respective grandmother was often credited as more influential. As Mark shared, “I feel that it’s a great role, an important one, but again I depend more on what my wife is doing.”

Despite undervaluing or comparative analysis, grandfathers expressed and embraced a sense of responsibility attached to the grandfather role. In fact, the majority of responsibilities grandfathers felt regarding their grandchildren stemmed not from age-related influences (such as experience), but rather from the act of being a grandfather itself. As Jack explained: “Special responsibilities...? No, not really. I feel responsible to be the grandparent.” John supports his peer, somewhat jokingly, in this regard by stating, “Here’s the reality. Here’s the old man with the money. We have to tolerate him.” Grandchildren tended to hold an alternative view of their grandfathers, placing a high social status and value upon their roles in the family dynamic. Grandfathers were often viewed as influencers and as examples of moral and spiritual mentors. Ben provided an example of such an instance:

He’s a great man... if I didn’t have my father, I would probably turn to my grandfather as my first point of reference, moral compass, I guess. Any decisions, big decisions I had in my life I would probably turn to him first.

Finally, while grandfathers usually viewed relationships quality with their grandchildren as being relatively static over the life course, grandchildren often reported that their relationships with their grandfathers had become stronger as they approached and entered adulthood. Jessica explained, “I’d say that we’ve gotten closer as I’ve gotten older... I got much closer to him and kind of really got to take in like all of the knowledge he actually has.”

“WE JUST TALKED THE WHOLE TIME:” CREATING MEMORIES TOGETHER

In interviews, grandchildren were asked to provide a “special memory” of their grandfather. Of the 16 young-adult grandchildren interviewed, 13 responded to this question by either directly referring to or mentioning some form of shared activity with their grandfather. Shared activities mentioned could be categorized into two different groups: educational shared activities (n = 4) and recreational shared activities (n = 9). Educational shared activities centered on generativity, the transmission of knowledge from grandfather to grandchild, and were found in two areas: skills-focused transmissions and story-focused transmissions. Skills-focused activities involved passing on abilities or talents, such as when Marissa’s grandfather taught her

how to ride a bike: “Yeah, when he taught me how to ride a bike. It was really fun, and he, he was the one who taught me how to ride without training wheels.” Story-focused activities revolved around the sharing of important stories, moral guidelines, and faith-based teachings, typically passing from grandfather to grandchild. For his special memory, Tanner recalled, “Yeah Bible study, you know, and all the little things that happen while we’re in Bible study... we’ve had tons of fun, awesome experiences.”

As opposed to educational shared activities, recreational shared activities did not involve expressed transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. Recreational shared activities were more commonly referenced and took two forms: outings and stay-ins. Shared outing activities involved those that required a departure from the home, often a vacation or trip. Outings could range from short term day trips to whole week-long excursions. One key feature of shared outing activities was that the grandparents, usually the grandfather, typically organized and oversaw outing related activities. Grant recalled, “When I was 14 or 15, we went on a hunting trip to Central Oregon... We drove around aimlessly for like three or four days, and we just talked the whole time.” Shared stay-in activities were those that occurred within the home, whether in the grandfather’s home, the young-adult grandchild’s home, or the grandchild’s parental home. These activities were typically brief or short-term in length, spanning less than a day. Shared interests were typically the focal point for shared stay-in activities, as demonstrated by Jennifer when she explained, “I use to stay the night at his house a lot and my grandma would go to bed and he would stay up late with me and watch movies and pop popcorn... it was the best night ever.”

Questions designed to ask grandfather participants about their own experience as grandchildren yielded inconclusive results. Most grandfathers reported either extremely limited or no contact with their own grandfathers. The majority of these grandfathers died at early ages, thus limiting their experience and historical frameworks for the grandfather role. When asked about his relationship with his grandparents, Nate said, “Well, I didn’t have much of a relationship with my grandparents. That is unfortunate, my grandfather on my dad’s side died before I was born.” Due to their lack of role models, grandfathers appeared to develop their own frameworks to enact roles, including the types of generative activities they performed. These roles may have emerged as a

product of what grandfathers wished to see in the grandfather role and may have also been shaped by social expectations of what and how a grandfather is and should act.

DISCUSSION

Grandfather-grandchild cohesion was commonly observed across interviews. As demonstrated by Sheehan & Petrovic (2008), both grandfathers and grandchildren in this study acknowledged the personal importance of their roles in their intergenerational relationships, indicating these roles as central to their identities. Parents of grandchildren also were found to be key players in fostering relational closeness and frequency of contact between grandchildren and their grandfathers (Barnett et al., 2010; Hakoyama & MaloneBeach, 2013; Monesrud, 2011). Shifts in supports and interactions across the life course also were reported by both grandfathers and grandchildren. Grandfathers assessed grandchild needs based on grandchild age, interests, and experience, then adjusted the types of generative acts they participated in to better fit those needs. Sciplino & Kinshott (2019) identified these transitions as typical processes of the grandfather-grandchild relationship, wherein both parties recognize maturation of the grandchild and engage in gradual adjustment of behaviors and supports more appropriate for adult relationships. Both grandfathers and their grandchildren reported that contact between them had steadily diminished as grandchildren aged. Sheehan & Petrovic (2008) found that grandchild age is typically negatively correlated with frequency of contact, and that grandchildren experience the most regular contact with their grandparents at younger ages. The same research also found that grandparent health is linked to contact frequency (Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008). While grandfathers referred to their health as a barrier to contact, their grandchildren often disregarded these as a hindrance and, in some cases, used them to justify the need for increased contact. Research into in-person contact frequency between grandfathers and grandchildren has demonstrated that grandfathers will refer to their grandchild's adult responsibilities and duties as reasons for diminished visitation (Roberto, Allen, & Blieszner, 2001). Both grandchildren and grandfathers in this study were asked if they felt that they spent enough time with one another, with both parties often referencing new grandchild roles or responsibilities as primary barriers to more frequent contact.

Grandfathers reported being most generative when providing either socioemotional or financial support to their grandchildren. Traditional masculine roles place significant value on occupation as a core aspect of identity for many men (Lesperance, 2010); therefore, it would be common to witness their role as financial providers maintained through the life course and into older adulthood. Providing financial support to grandchildren may then fulfill these grandfathers' desires to impart and maintain masculine roles through the family system (Lesperance, 2010; Mann, Tarrant, & Leeson, 2016). Grandfathers also reported that much of their grandfather role was adapted from their earlier roles as fathers. Many masculine norms may be fulfilled during this period in a grandfather's life and can become essential components to a grandfather's identity as they age and engage in acts of generativity with their grandchildren (Lesperance, 2010; Mann, Tarrant, & Leeson, 2016). However, many aspects of the father role may create some ambivalence once the grandfather role is adopted. Grandfathers often reported weighing the benefits of various components they experienced and acted upon as fathers and found that disciplinary actions were detrimental to their relationships with their children. Research confirms this type of appraisal and has demonstrated that grandfathers typically avoid engaging in disciplinary interactions with their grandchildren (Lesperance, 2010; Mann, Tarrant, & Leeson, 2016).

Grandfathers in this study placed less value on the emotional and social support that they provided to their grandchildren and perceived the impact of these supports on their grandchildren as being of little consequence. This is juxtaposed with reports from the grandchildren. Studies have shown that grandfathers typically find value in the grandfather role through masculine norms developed over the life course (Lesperance, 2010; Mann, Tarrant, & Leeson, 2016) and value their positions as masculine role models in their family systems (Mann, Tarrant, & Leeson, 2016). Social and emotional exchanges with grandchildren may not meet this image of masculinity that many grandfathers might seek to fulfill, and thus may cause a perceptual reassessment of the value of those exchanges for both themselves and their grandchildren.

In evaluating responsibilities attached to the grandfather role, grandfathers also were apt to shoulder mentoring and other supportive duties as extensions of their role as grandfathers and expressed an obligation to provide such. Bates & Goodsell (2013) observed that

grandfathers view the transfer of behaviors, values, and experiential perspectives to their grandchildren as inherent to the grandfather role. Mann and Leeson (2010) showed that grandfathers typically place much higher value on the grandparent role, but grandfathers in this sample were hesitant to credit their roles as important in their grandchildren's lives. This may be in part due to a lack of personal experience with the grandfather role in their own lives, wherein behaviors and "norms" for grandfathers were likely individually developed based on social expectations of masculine norms. These, in turn, may have influenced grandfathers' perceptions of their own value and influence.

Perhaps a byproduct of traditional gendered norms that consider grandmothers as more critical to family systems (Lesperance, 2010; Mann, Tarrant, & Leeson, 2016), grandfathers in this study were quicker to diminish the value of the grandfather role in comparison to the grandmother role. Grandmothers have been historically considered to be the kinkeepers, childcare providers, and overall more nurturing grandparent by both society and family gerontological literature (Horsfall & Dempsey, 2015; Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008). Furthermore, grandmothers often report feeling closer to their grandchildren than grandfathers (Bates & Goodsell, 2003; Bates & Taylor, 2013; Geurts, Poortman, Tilburg, & Dykstra, 2009; Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008), which may have affected grandfather perceptions. Grandfathers also adhered to expectations of role integration. Grandfathers, similar to grandmothers, place significant value on the grandparent role (Silverstein & Marenco, 2001) and often adopt it as a central component to their identities. Despite this pattern being present in our grandfather sample, several grandfathers nonetheless still downplayed its importance.

Grandchildren were more likely to report that grandfather-grandchild relationship quality had improved as they aged, and that they felt closer to their grandfathers now that they were adults. It has been shown that grandfathers who are more involved in the development of their grandchildren's character and values experience more positive relationships with their grandchildren (Wiscott & Kopera-Frye, 2000). By the time a grandchild reaches adulthood, it stands to reason that a significant amount of these influential interactions may have occurred, especially for more involved grandfathers, and that stronger ties between grandfather and grandchild have developed as a result. Erikson (1950, 1982) also stated that each stage of the life course

comes with its own tasks to negotiate in order to developmentally progress to the next stage. Generative grandfathers, in providing assistance and support to their grandchildren, have the opportunity to assist their grandchildren with navigating each of these tasks. This, in turn, may build upon the strength of the grandfather-grandchild role as grandfathers play an important part in their grandchildren's development. Simultaneously, older adult grandfathers fulfill their own life stage task in providing generativity to the next generation (Erikson, 1950, 1982).

One role that is reportedly emphasized among grandfathers by researchers is the act of creating pleasant and fond memories for their grandchildren through quality time spent with them (Lesperance, 2010). Family leisure also has been shown to be important in developing family bonds across multiple generations (Hebblethwaite, 2015). The results from this study demonstrate just how important these shared activities may truly be to grandchildren. Shared activities and family leisure involve the navigation of intergenerational ambivalence caused by non-interference norms (Mason, May, & Clark, 2007) clashing with aspirations towards generativity (Hebblethwaite, 2015). More importantly, these shared activities provide cascading opportunities for acts of generativity between grandfathers and their grandchildren (Hebblethwaite, 2015). Due to this, shared activities fulfill high value goals for the grandfather role by providing mentorship, transference of cultural traditions and rituals, and engagement in forms of instrumental support with their grandchildren (Mann & Leeson, 2010). Activities that may be viewed as masculine may satisfy some grandfathers' desires to impart masculine norms, practices, or demonstrations, therein reaffirming gendered identity (Lesperance, 2010; Mann, Tarrant, & Leeson, 2016). Shared activities can also facilitate extended and more frequent contact between grandfathers and their grandchildren, which research shows to be correlated with relationship closeness and role satisfaction (Bates & Taylor, 2013). Grandchildren report that they experience stronger, more positive relationships with their grandparents if their personalities are similar to or resembling that of their own (Wiscott & Kopera-Frye, 2000). Shared activities provide common ground for grandfathers and grandchildren by which mutuality, resemblance, and cohesion may occur or be discovered.

Implications of this study are directly tied to the dynamic grandchild-grandfather relationship. Primarily, these

results underscore the importance of the grandfather role in the lives of their young-adult grandchildren. Regardless of underrepresentation in empirical research (Bates & Taylor, 2013; Kelly, Whitley, & Campos, 2013) or role devaluation by grandfathers themselves, grandchildren confirmed that their grandfathers were significant influences in their lives and major players in their developmental trajectories throughout the lifecourse. These results also suggest that grandfathers mitigating perceptions of positive influence is a trait tied to the grandfather role itself, wherein providing support to grandchildren is viewed as a responsibility rather than an opportunity. Lastly, these results indicate that shared activities between grandfathers and their grandchildren are vital in establishing perceptions of grandfathers and play a key part in developing contextual frameworks for the grandfather role. By providing opportunities for generativity, shared activities may be pivotal in establishing mutuality and nurturing common interests between grandfathers and their grandchildren.

One limitation of this study was the high SES sampling of grandfathers. Research has shown that grandparents with higher income are more likely to provide financial support and are typically better able to engage in in-person contact with their grandchildren (Silverstein & Marengo, 2001). Also, most of the grandfathers were married in this sample, which studies have shown can greatly increase grandfathers' involvement with their grandchildren (Hayslip & Page, 2012; Sheenan & Petrovic, 2008). A more diverse sample may shed more light on the variability and similarities across the relationships that occur among grandfathers and their young adult grandchildren. In addition, the potential for social pressure towards providing strictly positive relational information to interviewers may have influenced participant responses. Finally, dependence upon student researchers, particularly in large groups, may have implications for interview consistency and depth.

Future research should focus on highlighting men and their roles as grandfathers. More diverse populations may give more insight into the common themes across grandfather-grandchild relationships. As well, increased diversity may help establish any key differences in these relationships brought on by demographic variation. Continued study in this field could also dive deeper into the biopsychosocial influences that govern grandfather perceptions of the grandfather role, specifically those that result in devaluation or mitigation of one's perceived influence. Future studies should also examine how

grandchildren acknowledge the individual contributions of each grandparent, including how role expectations and relationship quality are directly affected. Finally, future research should examine the role of shared activities in curating memories and establishing grandparent legacy for grandchildren. The results presented here suggest that grandchild interpretations of their grandfathers are strongly influenced by activities and events that they have shared. Continued investigation into the dynamic nature of the grandfather-grandchild relationship may shed light on the various cornerstones and intricacies that serve to define both of these roles.

REFERENCES

- Barker, V. (2007). Young adults' reactions to grandparent painful self-disclosure: The influence of grandparent sex and over motivation for communication. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 64(3), 195-215. doi: 10.2190/KTNU-0373-20W7-4781
- Barnett, M. A., Scaramella, L. V., Neppl, T. K., Ontai, L., & Conger, R. D. (2010). Intergenerational relationship quality, gender, and grandparent involvement. *Family Relations*, 59(1), 28-44. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3729.2009.00584.x
- Bates, J. S. (2009). Generative grandfathering: A conceptual framework for nurturing grandchildren. *Marriage & Family Review*, 45(4), 331-352. doi: 10.1080/01494920802537548
- Bates, J. S., & Goodsell, T. L. (2013). Male kin relationships: Grandfathers, grandsons, and generativity. *Marriage & Family Review*. 49(1), 26-50. doi: 10.1080/01494929.2012.728555
- Bates, J. S., & Taylor, A. C. (2013). Grandfather involvement: Contact frequency, participation in activities, and commitment. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 21(3), 305-322. doi: 10.3149/jms.2103.305
- Bates, J. S., Taylor, A. C., & Stanfield, M. H. (2018). Variations in grandfathering: Characteristics of involved, passive, and disengaged grandfathers.

- Contemporary Social Science, 13(2), 187-202. doi: 10.1080/21582041.2018.1433868
- Berg, B. L. (2007). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences: 6th edition*. Boston: Pearson Education Allyn & Bacon.
- Bol, T., & Kalmijn, M. (2016). Grandparents' resources and grandchildren's schooling: Does grandparental involvement moderate the grandparent effect? *Social Science Research*, 55, 155-170. doi: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2015.09.011
- Breheny, M., Stephens, C., & Spilsbury, L. (2013). Involvement without interference: How grandparents negotiate intergenerational expectations in relationships with grandchildren. *Journal of Family Studies*, 19(2), 174-184. doi: 10.5172/jfs.2013.19.2.174
- Bullock, K. (2007). Grandfathers raising grandchildren: An exploration of African American kinship networks. *Journal of Health & Social Policy*, 22(3/4), 181-197. doi: 10.1300/J045v22n0312
- Connidis, I. A. (2009). *Family ties & aging*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications.
- Erikson, E. H. (1950). *Childhood and society*. New York: Norton.
- Erikson, E. H. (1982). *The life cycle completed: A review*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Geurts, T., Poortman, A., van Tilburg, T., & Dykstra, P. A. (2009). Contact between grandchildren and their grandparents in early adulthood. *Journal of Family Issues*, 30(12), 1698-1713. doi: 10.1177/0192513X09336340
- Hakoyama, M., & MaloneBeach, E. E. (2013). Predictors of grandparent-grandchild closeness: An ecological perspective. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 11(1), 32-49. doi: 10.1080/15350770.2013.753834
- Hayslip, B., & Page, K. S. (2012). Grandparenthood: Grandchild and great-grandchild relationships. In *Handbook of Families and Aging* (pp. 183-212). Santa Barbara, California: Praeger.
- Hebblethwaite, S. (2015). Understanding ambivalence in family leisure among three-generation families: 'It's all part of the package'. *Annals of Leisure Research*, 18(3), 359-376. doi: 10.1080/11745398.2015.1063443
- Horsfall, B., & Dempsey, D. (2015). Grandparents doing gender: Experiences of grandmothers and grandfathers caring for grandchildren in Australia. *Journal of Sociology*, 51(4), 1070-1084. doi: 10.1177/1440783313498945
- Kelley, S. J., Whitley, D. M., & Campos, P. E. (2013). Psychological distress in African American grandmothers raising grandchildren: The contribution of child behavior problems, physical health, and family resources. *Research in Nursing and Health*, 36(4), 373-385. doi: 10.1002/nur.21542
- Landry-Meyer, L., Gerard, J. M., & Guzell, J. R. (2005). Caregiver stress among grandparents raising grandchildren: The functional role of social support. *Marriage & Family Review*, 37(1-2), 171-190. doi: 10.1300/J002v37n01_11
- Lesperance, D. (2010). Legacy, influence, and keeping the distance: Two grandfathers, three stories. *Journal of Men's Studies*, 18(3), 199-217. doi: 10.3149/jms.1803.199
- Mann, R., Khan, H. T., & Leeson, G. W. (2013). Variations in grandchildren's perceptions of their grandfathers and grandmothers: Dynamics of age and gender. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 11(4), 380-395. doi: 10.1080/15350770.2013.839326
- Mann, R., & Leeson, G. (2010). Grandfathers in contemporary families in Britain: Evidence from qualitative research. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 8(3), 234-248. doi: 10.1080/15350770.2010.498774
- Mann, R., Tarrant, A., & Leeson, G. W. (2016). Grandfatherhood: Shifting masculinities in later life. *Sociology*, 50(3), 594-610. doi: 10.1177/0038038515572586
- Mason, J., May, V., & Clarke, L. (2007). Ambivalence and the paradoxes of grandparenting. *The*

- Sociological Review, 55(4), 687-706. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-954X.2007.00748.x
- Mills, T. L., Wakeman, M. A., & Fea, C. B. (2001). Adult grandchildren's perceptions of emotional closeness and consensus with their maternal and paternal grandparents. *Journal of Family Issues*, 22(4), 427-455. doi: 10.1177/019251301022004003
- Monserud, M. A. (2011). Changes in grandchildren's adult role statuses and their relationships with grandparents. *Journal of Family Issues*, 32(4), 425-451. doi: 10.1177/0192513X10384466
- Reitzes, D. C., & Mutran, E. J. (2004). Grandparenthood: Factors influencing frequency of grandparent-grandchildren contact and grandparent role satisfaction. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 59(1), S9-S16. doi: 10.1093/geronb/59.1.S9
- Roberto, K. A., Allen, K. R., & Blieszner, R. (2001). Grandfathers' perceptions and expectations of relationships with their adult grandchildren. *Journal of Family Issues*, 22(4), 407-426. doi: 10.1177/019251301022004002
- Sciplino, C., & Kinshott, M. (2019). Adult grandchildren's perspectives on the grandparent-grandchild relationship from childhood to adulthood. *Educational Gerontology*, 45(2), 134-145. doi: 10.1080/03601277.2019.1584354
- Sheehan, N., & Petrovic, K. (2008). Grandparents and their adult grandchildren: Recurring themes from the literature. *Marriage and Family Review*, 44(1), 99-124. doi: 10.1080/01494920802185520
- Silverstein, M., & Marengo, A. (2001). How Americans enact the grandparent role across the family life course. *Journal of Family Issues*, 22(4), 493-522. doi: 10.1177/019251301022004006
- Swartz, T. T. (2009). Intergenerational family relations in adulthood: Patterns, variations, and implications in the contemporary United States. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 35, 191-212. doi: 10.1146/annurev.soc.34.040507.134615
- Thiele, D. M., & Whelan, T. A. (2006). The nature and dimensions of the grandparent role. *Marriage and Family Review*, 40(1), 93-108. doi: 10.1300/J002v40n01_06
- Thiele, D., & Whelan, T. (2008). The relationship between grandparent satisfaction, meaning, and generativity. *International Journal of Aging & Human Development*, 66(1), 21-48. doi: 10.2190/AG.66.1.b
- Uhlenberg, P. (2009). Children in an aging society. *Journal of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 64(4), 489-496. doi: 10.1093/geronb/gbp001
- Villar, F., & Serrat, R. (2014). A field in search of concepts: The relevance of generativity to understanding intergenerational relationships. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 12(4), 381-397. doi: 10.1080/15350770.2014.960352
- Wiscott, R., & Kopera-Frye, K. (2000). Sharing of culture: Adult grandchildren's perceptions of intergenerational relations. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 51(3), 199-215. doi: 10.2190/0UY5-MXXP-W81K-VXCU