

GRANDPARENT–GRANDCHILD RELATIONSHIPS: A PROPOSED MUTUALITY MODEL WITH A FOCUS ON YOUNG CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

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Everyone needs to have access both to grandparents and grandchildren in order to be a full human being.

Margaret Mead, "Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years"

■ Introduction

Writing this chapter on grandparent–grandchild relationships has been an exciting adventure. It is not often that scholars get a chance to comment on a subject that they wrote about 48 years earlier. Our interest in grandparenthood started during the 1960s when we (Eva and Boaz) were graduate students at the University of Chicago. Our mentor, Bernice Neugarten, had just published her landmark article with Carol Weinstein (1964) on different typologies of grandparenting styles. Our early study of grandparenthood coincided with the birth of our two children and we were hoping to provide them with the opportunity for having meaningful interactions with their grandparents. Pursuing these interests professionally, we published two articles on the subject. One was based on an empirical study of grandchildren in three age groups and focused on “Grandparenthood from the Perspective of the Developing Grandchild” (B. Kahana & Kahana, 1970). The other, offered “Theoretical and Research Perspectives on Grandparenthood” (E. Kahana & Kahana, 1971).

We did not return to publishing about grandparenthood until 45 years after our original papers. In 2015, we were already grandparents ourselves. At this time, our personal life combined the challenges of coping with stressful life events and the opportunities that grandparents have in providing support to their adult children. Our beloved grandson Ezekiel (Zeke), the first son of our older son and coauthor Jeffrey, was diagnosed at age 2 with autism. Zeke is a happy and loving child and our relationship with him is a source of joy in our lives. Our experiences with Zeke and his parents motivated us to write about the potential role of grandparents in supporting families who are coping with challenges of raising a child with disabilities and serving as advocates for their grandchild. Our article, “Childhood Autism and Proactive Family Coping,” was published in 2015 in the *Journal of Intergenerational Relations* (E. Kahana et al., 2015). This paper affirmed our long-term interest in grandparenthood.

We find it very gratifying that our two early articles on the subject of grandparenthood are still alive and well in 2018 and are being regularly cited 50 years after their initial publication. Consideration of citing articles of our two papers published in the early 1970s reveals a treasure trove of ideas about the significance and meaning of grandparenthood written in subsequent decades. But little, if any, of this empirical research focused on young children. For this chapter, we have done a systematic review of the literature on the subject of grandparent–grandchild relationships, particularly as relevant to young children and adolescents. We have also identified critical areas where scholarly research is presently absent in addressing these relationships. We were particularly surprised by the absence of research considering the mutuality in grandparent–grandchild relations and the perspective of grandchildren.

This chapter aims to more fully develop the often-overlooked observation that the grandparent and grandchild relationship is a mutual one. As much as the grandparent is influential in shaping this relationship, so too, is the grandchild. To emphasize mutuality, we also recognize the salience of parents as facilitators of the grandparent–grandchild relationship. This view has been constructively put forth by those working from a life-course and *linked-lives* perspective (Barnett, Scaramella, Nepl, Ontai, & Conger, 2010). A major focus of this chapter is a conceptual model of the grandparent–grandchild relationships that we developed based on a *linked-lives* perspective, on our lived experience, our past research, and a careful review of the existing literature. In this model, we show that grandparent proactivity and grandchild–grandparent mutuality are essential features of a constructively interdependent relationship.

■ Organization of the Chapter

We start this chapter with Part 1, introducing a new mutuality model of grandparent–grandchild relationships. In Part 2 of our chapter, we provide a brief historical overview of the evolution of literature on grandparent–grandchild relationships. In Part 3 of this chapter, we report on major empirical studies that address relationships between young or adolescent grandchildren and their grandparents. In Part 4, we offer an experiential context and humanize our discussion by adding some personal reflections regarding grandparent–grandchild relationships and mutuality across multiple generations of the Kahana family.

THE MUTUALITY MODEL OF GRANDPARENT–GRANDCHILD RELATIONSHIPS

We refer to our model as the *mutuality model* of grandparent–grandchild relationships (see Figure 4.1). The mutuality designation is predicated on our understanding of a relationship that reflects motivations and interactions of both parties in the relationship. We emphasize potential grandchild as well as grandparent contributions to the relationship. The contribution of grandchildren to their grandparents remains a missing link in the extant literature (Even-Zohar & Sharlin, 2009). Mutuality has been recognized as an important equalizer in power relationships that is likely to facilitate authenticity and positive outcomes for both parties in the relationship (Jordan, 1986; Miller, 1986). On a societal level, recognition of mutuality is likely to facilitate rapprochement rather than conflict or competition between the generations. Outcomes and benefits of the relationship are considered for both grandparents and grandchildren.

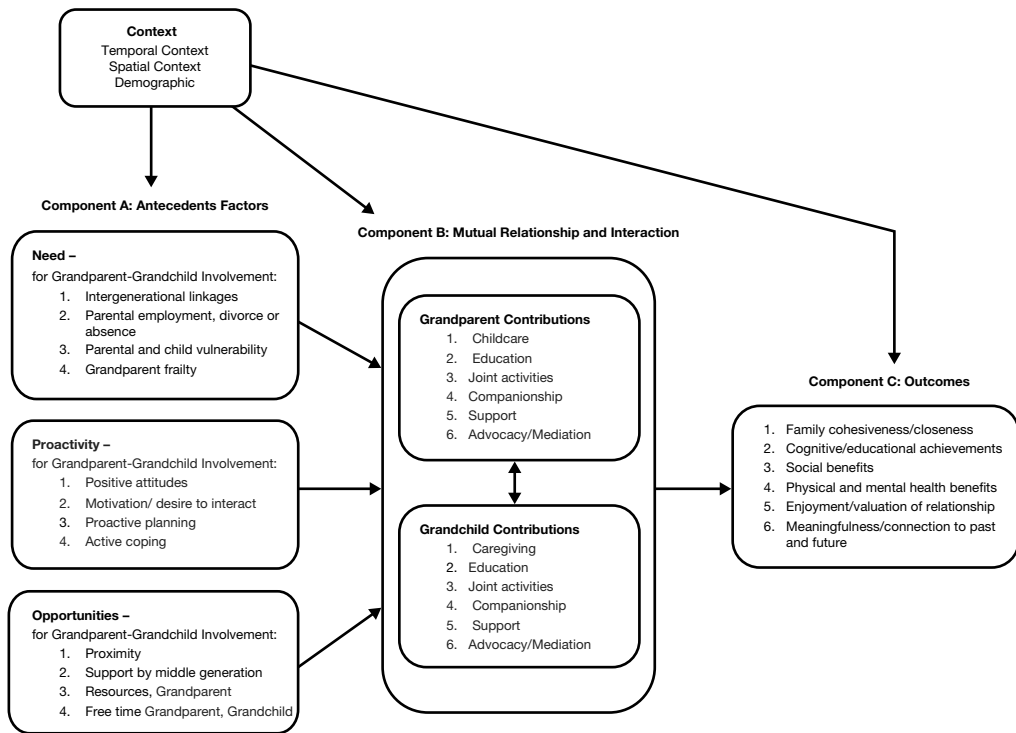


FIGURE 4.1 Mutuality Model of grandparent–grandchild relationships.

CONTEXT OF THE GRANDPARENT–GRANDCHILD RELATIONSHIP

Larger societal forces have a major influence on both needs for grandparent or grandchild involvement and opportunities that facilitate such involvement. *Temporal context* relates to cultural orientations of different cohorts toward grandparent–grandchild relations (e.g., King & Elder, 1995). Expectations of both grandparents and grandchildren in prior generational cohorts differed from social norms of today. For example, the increasing utilization of the Internet allows email communication between grandparents and grandchildren that was not possible for earlier generations. This opportunity can help in linking geographically distant family members (Harwood, 2000). Scholars working in the field of grandparent–grandchild relationships acknowledge that the life stage or age at which grandparenthood occurs greatly influences the enactment of the role (Sprey & Matthews, 1982).

Spatial context. This includes the national and cultural context within which the grandparent–grandchild nexus is embedded. This larger arena is highly influential in explaining opportunities for extensive contact and positive relations. For example, European studies emphasize career commitment of mothers that necessitate greater childcare contributions by grandmothers (Arber & Timonen, 2012). The social construction of the grandparental role has also been found to differ across cultures (Buchanan, 2016). Greater familism in given cultures is likely to foster closer ties among different generations (Updegraff, McHale, Whiteman, Thayer, & Delgado, 2005). In terms of spatial context, urban–rural differences in grandparent–grandchild relationships have been explored (King & Elder, 1995).

Demographic context. Demographic characteristics of family members, in terms of age, race, and gender, also exert great influence on enacting family roles (Barnett et al., 2010; Thomas, 1986). Lineage related to paternal or maternal grandparents has received much attention in recent literature, based on evolutionary theories of grandparent–grandchild relationships (Coall & Hertwig, 2010; Perry & Daly, 2017).

Component A: Antecedents of the Grandparent–Grandchild Relationship

Need. Need is relevant to both traditional families and those with special challenges. Strong intergenerational linkages, both within the family and in society at large, represent foundational needs for constructive grandparent–grandchild interactions. Such interactions contribute to positive relationships between the young and old and counteract conflict of generations (Bengtson & Achenbaum, 1993). There is support for expectations that positive relationships with one’s grandparents pave the way for future interactions of older and younger generations and for the maintenance of positive orientations to aging (Even-Zohar & Sharlin, 2009; Kornadt & Rothermund, 2015).

Special family needs for grandparent involvement include maternal employment, divorce of parents, vulnerability, or unavailability of parents. These needs may reflect parental vulnerability due to drug or alcohol addiction, incarceration, and physical or mental health problems (Pruchno, 1999). Since our chapter focuses on intact three-generational families, we will not offer a detailed review of literature in the area of family- or child-associated need. Numerous reviews exist on custodial grandparents who step in to meet the needs for childcare in families facing problems (e.g., Musil, Warner, Zauszniewski, Jeanblanc, & Kercher, 2006). Additionally, families may encounter special needs due to vulnerability of a grandchild, such as autism (E. Kahana et al., 2015).

Given our interest in mutuality, it is important to note that there is very little literature on the needs of grandparents that provide occasions for grandchild support. Such involvement is particularly relevant to adolescent or adult grandchildren who have the ability to assist frail grandparents. One interesting study conducted in Europe (Viguer, Meléndez, Valencia, Cantero, & Navarro, 2010) provides data on school-age children assisting the grandparents with household chores and offering companionship even in the absence of debilitating illness. The actual and potential contributions of grandchildren to caring for grandparents with Alzheimer’s disease are beginning to be recognized (Hamill, 2012; Kavanaugh, Stamatopoulos, Cohen, & Zhang, 2016).

Proactivity. In order to take an active role in building relationships with members of another generation, both grandparents and grandchildren must hold positive attitudes and be motivated to foster the relationship. This is an active process involving agency and taking initiatives to develop and maintain a relationship. Grandparents cannot sit back passively and await visits from their grandchildren. Rather, they have to take a proactive role in interacting with each grandchild. Similarly, grandchildren must express active interest in interactions with grandparents.

In our prior work, we focused on proactive adaptations that can facilitate personal resilience and well-being in late life. We developed a conceptual framework for preventive and corrective proactivity (E. Kahana & Kahana, 1996, 2003; E. Kahana et al., 2015). Currently, there is an absence of research explicitly focusing on attitudinal, motivational, and agency-based aspects of grandparenthood. We found only one study (Reitzes & Mutran, 2004) that used a symbolic interactionist framework to consider the self-processes that are involved in grandparental desire to have frequent contact with grandchildren. These investigators considered identity meanings and self-esteem in relation to contact with grandchildren and in impacting grandparents’ role satisfaction. Self-variables were positively related to satisfaction with the grandparental role.

The willingness of many grandparents to get involved in childcare and invest both time and energy in contributing to their grandchildren's well-being attests to the important role that proactivity plays both in the fulfillment of and satisfaction with the grandparental role. Actions taken to offer help and support to members of another generation are most successful when they are carefully planned and utilize active coping skills (Roberto & Stroes, 1992). The notion of mutuality that defines our model also recognizes the value of proactive roles for grandchildren.

Communication involves initiative by both the parties. Grandchildren can find empowerment as they call or email grandparents or involve them in their activities on social media. Good communication and self-disclosure with grandparents also enhance relationships (Tam, Hewstone, Harwood, Voci, & Kenworthy, 2006). Adolescent and young adult grandchildren can also make meaningful contributions to driving, cooking, or running errands for grandparents (Viguer et al., 2010). They can also teach grandparents new skills, particularly in the realm of technology (Mori & Harada, 2010).

Opportunity represents an important situational factor that shapes the grandparent–grandchild relationship. Opportunity involves family proximity and frequency of contact, along with support from the middle generation for grandparent–grandchild interactions (Bengtson & Harootyan, 1994). There is also recognition in prior work that cultural factors, social influences, and family dynamics influence opportunity (Roberto & Stroes, 1992; Silverstein & Marengo, 2001). Grandparental resources include health, means, and free time that are likely to facilitate their active involvement in the lives of grandchildren (Quisumbing, 1997; Uhlenberg, 2009). Shared activities preferred by older grandchildren require physical resources. Helping grandchildren with school work presupposes cognitive resources. Offering financial support is predicated on stable financial situation of grandparents.

Even in the presence of perceived need and availability of resources, it requires active steps to engage with one's grandchildren. We thus anticipate a positive influence of each component of opportunity in promoting closeness and good relationships between grandparents and grandchildren. Positive attitudes and desire for interaction by both grandparents and grandchildren also shape opportunities. Thus, observations of Kornhaber and Woodward (1985) about increasing distance among the generations are likely to be a function of decreasing opportunities for strong intergenerational ties.

Component B: Mutual Relationship and Interaction

In the mutuality model, the central column (labeled column B) is comprised of interactions that define the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. This component contains some of the elements of associational solidarity, based on the frequency of contact as noted by Bengtson and Harootyan (1994). We offer greater specificity regarding the nature of contact and the behaviors that occur during interactions. An important assumption in our model is that interactions are the major building blocks of relationships.

We note that the likelihood and appropriateness of engaging in different behaviors changes with both the age of the child and the life stage of the grandparent. We consider both actors in the relationship, as they desire different types of contributions and may have different abilities to perform desired behaviors. Thus, we list separately the potential contributions of grandparents and of grandchildren to the interactions shaping the relationship. Grandparents of young children may devote major efforts to childcare and education. Valuable aspects of the educational role of grandparents include imparting family and cultural history and the unique interests and skills of the grandparent (Ferguson & Ready, 2011). While grandparents' contributions to grandchild-

dren's education are widely acknowledged, there has been little attention to contributions that grandchildren can make to teaching their grandparents technological skills and know-how about navigating social media (Harwood, 2000).

Some of the most useful interactions between grandparents and grandchildren occur in the context of shared activities. Such interactions are particularly valued by older grandchildren (B. Kahana & Kahana, 1970). Grandparents can also enhance their relationship with their grandchildren by providing gifts, social support, companionship, and understanding (Frey & Röthlisberger, 1996). Activities of grandchildren are depicted in the model as largely parallel to the activities of grandparents. Accordingly, grandchildren can also offer companionship, understanding and social support to their grandparents. Furthermore, grandchildren can provide instrumental support by offering help with household chores or technology use to their grandparents (Ashton, 1996). One fundamental difference between grandparent and grandchild contributions relates to *caregiving* being substituted for childcare in depicting grandchild contributions. Caregiving is generally predicated on the frailty of grandparents and thus reflects a response to special needs. This is somewhat akin to grandparental involvement in childcare that is much more frequent when the family faces special needs based on parental work, parental or child vulnerability. Grandparents can also serve as advocates for the child in school or in mediating conflicts with parents (Werner, Buchbinder, Lowenstein, & Livni, 2005).

Component C: Outcomes: Benefits of Close Grandparent–Grandchild Relationships

Our third column in Figure 4.1 relates to positive outcomes of grandparent–grandchild relationships for each generational group within the family. Positive relationships are expected to increase family cohesiveness, result in educational and social benefits, and enhance physical and mental health of both grandparents and grandchildren. Additionally, there are positive outcomes based on the meaningfulness and connection of each generation to both their past and their future. Given our focus on mutuality, we combine presentation of outcomes for both generations.

Positive grandparent–grandchild relationships can contribute to family cohesion, satisfaction, and meaningfulness. These positive outcomes have been emphasized since the early days of grandparent research, particularly as gains for the older generation (B. Kahana & Kahana, 1970). The mental health benefits of close grandparent–grandchild relationships were explored in a program of research by Kivnick (1983), who attributed them to providing meaning in the lives of older adults. Kivnick (1988) also noted the symbolic meaning of grandparenthood as helping older adults accomplish a successful life review. Empirical research has confirmed that greater contact with grandchildren was associated with less depressive symptomatology among grandparents over time. Depressive symptoms were found to increase more steeply for grandparents who lost contact with their grandchildren due to negative family life events, including separation and divorce (Drew & Silverstein, 2007). Greater grandparent–grandchild contact has also been found to be associated with the greater life satisfaction among grandparents (Boon & Brussoni, 1998; Peterson, 1999).

There is also evidence that positive communication and interactions with grandparents provide benefits to grandchildren (Barranti, 1985; Ruiz & Silverstein, 2007). Cognitive benefits to grandchildren, based on close relationships with grandparents, have been noted. Grandparental investments in grandchildren have been found to result in better educational outcomes for grandchildren (Deindl & Tieben, 2017). These researchers working with data from Europe and

Israel also found that the grandparental investments can compensate for lack of parental resources. Tyszkowa (1991) remarked that grandchildren recognize grandparents' participation in providing support and care, serving as role models, and being a source of ideas about and reflection on human life. Children also benefit from their grandparents' contributions as historians—passing on family traditions, teaching values, and instilling ethnic heritage.

Recently, there has also been a focus in the literature on grandchildren's positive contributions to grandparental skill development, particularly in the area of technology (Moffatt, David, & Becker, 2013). The very presence of mutual social interactions can offer benefits to both grandparents and grandchildren, as manifested in close relationships and trust (Szinovacz, 1998). Having outlined and presented the rationale for the mutuality model of grandparent–grandchild relationships, we now turn to a general overview of the evolution of ideas related to those relationships.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH ON GRANDPARENT AND GRANDCHILD RELATIONSHIPS

In this section, we provide a brief chronological overview of research and conceptual formulations relevant to the study of grandparent–grandchild relationships and offer a road map for new directions yet to be charted.

THE DISCOVERY OF GRANDPARENTHOOD: EARLY WORK PRIOR TO THE 1980s

The period of 1960 to 1980 witnessed considerable interest in the experiences of the older generation in the new role of the grandparent. Starting in the 1960s with the classic work of Neugarten and Weinstein (1964), a plethora of papers described the joys of involved grandparenting, on the one hand, and the losses of uninvolved grandparents on the other. Grandparenthood was viewed as an opportunity for close and warm relationships between grandparents and grandchildren that contrasted with the more authoritarian roles accorded to the parent generation. Given the *roleless* expectations of old age, lamented by Rosow (1974), becoming a grandparent held special promise for late life meaning and fulfillment. Nevertheless, expectations were that grandparents do not interfere in parents' child-rearing responsibilities.

Early studies during the decade of the 1970s placed a strong emphasis on theoretical foundations and also used both observational and survey methodologies. Grandparenthood was generally studied in three-generational families and considered using normative frameworks. Alternative typologies for approaching the grandparental role were presented (Troll, Miller, & Atchley, 1979). Studies found that both gender and lineage played important roles in shaping the significance of grandparenthood (B. Kahana & Kahana, 1970). Specifically, it was found that maternal grandparents and particularly grandmothers portrayed the closest relationship with their grandchildren. Researchers also confirmed the observation that residential proximity and frequent contact facilitate the development of close grandparent–grandchild relationships.

In many ways, grandparenthood was celebrated during this period. The role was seen as benefiting grandparents by providing them with meaningful family responsibilities (Troll et al., 1979). It was also recognized that parents can benefit from the support provided by grandparents and grandchildren can also look to grandparents as mediators when family conflicts arise (Robertson, 1975). Grandparents were viewed as benevolent influences who can counterbalance parental demands and discipline. Their useful roles as family-based educators were

also acknowledged (Mead, 1974). During this early phase, little research directly focused on the quality of relationships or the specific interactions that shaped the grandparent–grandchild relationship.

Focus on Family Systems and Grandparental Roles: The 1980s

A family-systems approach to the study of grandparenting was advocated during the 1980s (Sprey & Matthews, 1982). Researchers focused on the initial transition to the role of becoming a grandparent. They also commented on the limited guidelines for a socially defined grandparental role. Individual determinants were seen as shaping the ways the grandparental role was enacted. Role definitions of grandparenthood also took center stage during the 1980s. Grandparents were described as fulfilling important functions as mentors, as models for aging, as historians, and as nurturers (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Kornhaber & Woodward, 1985). Research also pointed to role ambiguity faced by grandparents (Bengtson & Harootyan, 1994). Such ambiguity was further underscored by lack of clarity in the legal rights and obligations of grandparents.

Concerned with social problems in the 1980s, sociologists were increasingly turning their attention to troubles impacting the American family (Burton & Bengtson, 1985; Tinsley & Parke, 1984). Divorce was becoming increasingly common and grandparents were called upon to help take care of their grandchildren and they generally rose to the occasion (Troll, 1983). Parallel to some grandparents assuming major responsibilities for rearing and supporting their grandchildren, there was growing recognition that many grandparents were choosing an alternative pathway of leisure-oriented lifestyles in Sunbelt communities and abandoning their grandchildren (Kornhaber & Woodward, 1985). Other researchers emphasized continuing supportive roles of grandparents and meaningful contacts between grandparents and grandchildren (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986). There was renewed interest in grandparents as family resources with the shift from the nuclear to the modified extended family (Barranti, 1985). Researchers noted the increasing life expectancy of grandparents, the longer duration of the grandparent–grandchild relationship, and the emergence of great-grandparenthood (Doka & Mertz, 1988).

Researching Grandparent–Grandchild Relationships: The 1990s

Bengtson and Harootyan (1994) offered a useful and widely used classification system for understanding grandparent–grandchild relationships based on intergenerational solidarity. Research on grandparent–grandchild relationships in the 1990s was dominated by a focus on grandparents raising grandchildren (Burton, 1992). The roles of grandparents and particularly of grandmothers were documented in helping families who faced divorce (Myers & Perrin, 1993) and drug addiction (Roe, Minkler, & Fludd Saunders, 1995). Funding priorities that supported research to help deal with social problems shaped the orientation of new studies. With the AIDS crisis, urban poverty, and drug addiction demanding the attention of social scientists, researchers began applying for grants to study custodial grandparents (Pruchno, 1999).

Custodial grandparents played parental roles in the lives of their grandchildren, not by choice but based on their altruism and willingness to come to the rescue of the family (Hayslip, Shore, Henderson, & Lambert, 1998). The relative absence of studies concerned with typical

three-generational families must be contextualized in the larger framework of shifting focus by researchers to families facing daunting problems.

■ New Directions in the New Millennium

Even while new topics related to custodial grandparents came to the foreground, there remained an interest in enduring themes that are maintained in current research. These include a focus on family lineage and explorations of the frequency and type of interactions between grandparents and grandchildren. Interest has also been sustained in the role of parents as mediators in grandparent–grandchild interactions (Werner et al., 2005). Emerging themes include interest in the role of technology in facilitating grandparent–grandchild interactions and communication (Stelle, Fruhauf, Orel, & Landry-Meyer, 2010).

The number of studies focusing on college students and young adult grandchildren increased after the turn of the century. This may be due to the ease of obtaining data from college students. There is also a new interest in previously understudied groups of grandparents including older men as grandfathers (Thomas, 1994) and the relationships of LGBT grandparents and their grandchildren (Orel & Fruhauf, 2013; Stelle et al., 2010). Finally, there has been a large upsurge of evolutionary themes and biological linkages focused on the study of grandparental investment in their grandchildren (Perry & Daly, 2017). Grandmothers are viewed as *mother savers* who support daughters' participation in the labor market (Arber & Timonen, 2012).

Not only have researchers focused on grandparent–grandchild relations in troubled families, but they have also identified troubled relationships among the three generations. Fingerman (1998, 2004) calls attention to the emotional complexities and potentially problematic aspects of intergenerational relationships within American families. Interest has also been sustained in the role of parents as mediators in grandparent–grandchild interactions (Werner et al., 2005). The norm of noninterference has been contrasted with a competing norm of obligation for grandparents to assist adult children in need. On closer scrutiny, these apparently countervailing norms can coexist as grandparents would offer material and emotional support to the middle generation, while at the same time limiting advice about child-rearing. For some scholars, the coexistence of these norms attests to the ambivalence of grandparents (Arber & Timonen, 2012).

■ Future Directions for Research

A useful review of the limitations in the literature on grandparent–grandchild relationships is provided by Aldous (1995). Methodological as well as conceptual problems in the literature still persist today. Many of the studies in this field have been based on small and unrepresentative samples, limiting the generalizability of findings. There is typically an absence of comparison groups of individuals who are not grandparents. Studies are largely limited to descriptive designs focused on interactional dynamics between grandparents and grandchildren. The literature could benefit from stronger links between empirical studies and theory (Thiele & Whelan, 2006). We could thus learn more about motivations of grandparents for investing in relationships with their grandchildren. Although mention is made of social role and life-course theory, most studies are not designed to test theoretical formulations. For example, formulations of Erikson and Erikson (1998) could be utilized in a life-course context to explore the role of generativity in

motivating grandparents to invest in relationships with grandchildren. While early publications in the area grandparenthood offered interesting theoretical insights, more recent studies that gained in empirical sophistication appear to pay less attention to theorizing. Notably, few of the studies in this field acknowledge external funding sources, confirming limited grant support for studies of grandparenthood. It also may explain why so many recent publications are based on grandchildren who are college students, disregarding the strong influence of social class on family (Putnam, 2015). In contrast, studies of grandparents are increasingly focused on lower class and minority custodial grandparents.

The study of communication represents a positive area for further research, particularly among distant families. This would also afford opportunities to focus on grandchild contributions to relationships with grandparents. Caregiving and other potential supportive roles of grandchildren need study (Nichols, Martindale-Adams, Burns, Graney, & Zuber, 2011). With increasing numbers of grandparents suffering from Alzheimer's disease, there is a great potential for grandchildren to offer social support. We must understand both intergenerational alliances and intergenerational conflicts as they characterize grandparent–grandchild relationships. Longitudinal studies must be conducted that follow family members through transitions in order to better understand the evolving nature of family ties through the life course.

Further, much of the research that has been published in this field is quantitative in nature. There is relatively little attention to the lived experience of grandchildren, parents, or grandparents related to their intergenerational relationships. A few qualitative studies, such as the work of Kemp (2005, 2007), develop a more textured understanding of the factors that lend meaning to experiences of grandparents. Similarly, there is a need to gain further insights about children's or parents' perspectives about the meaning and significance of relationships with grandparents in their lives. The field could also benefit from a closer understanding of historical, cultural, and societal contexts that influence intergenerational processes.

An important challenge in presenting this chapter has been the emergence of a large literature on grandparenthood around the world. We found that much of the recent research that focused on intact families has been conducted outside the United States. This may be due to more familistic cultures in these countries. Since studies of grandparenting in intact three-generational families have flourished abroad, we include relevant articles from the international literature in Part 3 of this chapter.

PERSPECTIVES ON RESEARCH ON GRANDPARENT–GRANDCHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Focus on Grandparent Relationships With Young Children

Focusing on grandparent interactions with infant grandchildren, Tinsley and Parke (1987) explored contributions of grandparents as social support agents for their adult children and socialization agents for their infant grandchildren. Interactions were observed between grandparents and infants and compared to those of parents and infants. Findings indicated supportive behavior displayed by both grandmothers and grandfathers. Parents were found to demonstrate greater competence and appeared more confident and relaxed in interacting with their infants than were grandparents. On the other hand, grandparents were judged to be gentler in their interactions with the infant. Grandparents, who reported greater ongoing family contact, had grandchildren who demonstrated greater cognitive abilities and responsiveness. Confirmation of positive infant

interactions with both mothers and grandmothers relative to their greater fear of strangers was demonstrated in a subsequent study by Myers, Jarvis, and Creasey (1987).

We found surprisingly little research that focused on grandchildren's perspectives regarding the grandparent–grandchild relationship. In fact, only a handful of cross-sectional studies in the United States have examined the meaning of the grandparent's role from the perspective of grandchildren. Kornhaber and Woodward (1985) conducted a large-scale study of grandparent–grandchild relationships in the United States. This study included over 300 children ranging in age from 5 to 18 years. The children were asked to draw pictures of their grandparents. The investigators found striking differences in the pictures drawn by children in these three groups. In the first group, having close contact and ready access to grandparents, children tended to draw pictures where the grandparent was a large active figure and many details were provided. In the second group of children with sporadic contact, the children portrayed their grandparents as “small, immobile, and lifeless” (p. 8). The third group of children who had no contact with their grandparents often utilized puppets, or cartoon characters to depict them. The authors conclude that actual time spent with the grandparent is critical for ensuring a strong grandparent image within the child. The authors lament the loss of *vital* connections between grandparents and grandchildren in U.S. society.

Research offers some evidence that the age of the child is influential in determining the nature of his or her relations with grandparents (Dellmann-Jenkins, Papalia, & Lopez, 1987). Cherlin and Furstenberg (1992) conducted a national survey of children ranging in age from 7 to 11. Separate follow-up interviews were also conducted with parents and grandparents. For young children, grandparents often provided direct childcare. Grandparents reported being less satisfied with the grandparent–grandchild relationship as the grandchild entered the teenage years (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1992). Furthermore, the researchers found no support for expectations that greater grandparental involvement results in special benefits for their grandchildren. They note that special grandparental involvement and support may be elicited by families when children exhibit problems.

In another important study by Furman and Burhmester (1992), children's perceptions of their grandparents were contextualized by comparing them with parents, teachers, and other key members of the child's social network. These largely middle-class children, from intact families, reported a decrease in support from grandparents from the fourth to 10th grades. The authors hypothesized that this is part of a natural developmental progression whereby children require less support from adult figures as they approach adolescence. The study also indicated that children reported diminished conflict involving grandparents as they moved from the fourth grade to the 10th grade. It is noteworthy that conflict with grandparents did not increase during adolescence, whereas conflict with teachers and parents did. Thus, age-related differences may reflect changing needs of children rather than distancing by grandparents. At the same time, this study confirms the conclusions of Cherlin and Furstenberg that the role of grandparents diminishes as the child reaches adolescence.

Focus on Adolescent Grandchild and Grandparent Relationships

Adolescence represents a critical developmental stage of transition between childhood and full-fledged adulthood. This stage, which culminates in the attainment of a strong adult identity, poses challenges for families. This is a time when grandparents can play a welcome role as confidants and sources of emotional support to the adolescent (Dunifon & Bajracharya, 2012; Fingerman, Hay, &

Birditt, 2004). Alternatively, in families characterized by conflict, grandparents could contribute to greater alienation among the adolescent grandchildren (Dellmann et al., 1987).

Residential proximity, along with face-to-face contact and good communication, consistently appear to be predictive of close and positive family ties between grandparents and their grandchildren (Harwood, Hewstone, Paolini, & Voci, 2005). Even in the absence of residential proximity and face-to-face contact positive relationships can be maintained by utilizing alternative communication mechanisms, including telephone and the Internet (Hurme, Westerback, & Quadrello, 2010). Such communication mechanisms can facilitate more mature and adult forms of interaction that may lead to friendship formation (Kemp, 2005). Expressions of affection remain important in order for grandparents to maintain close ties with the adolescent grandchildren.

It is noteworthy that parents recede more into the background as the mediators between grandchildren and grandparents during this developmental stage. If affectional ties are strong between grandchildren and grandparents, grandchildren may assume a mediating role in the parent–grandparent relationship. This becomes an important indicator of solidarity between grandparents and their young adult grandchildren (Silverstein & Long, 1998).

Davey, Savla, Janke, and Anderson (2009) conducted a large-scale study of grandparent and adolescent grandchild relationships based on 1,345 grandchildren with a mean age of 13.7. Extending data collection beyond a single designated grandparent such as the favorite grandparent, researchers could consider within-family sources of variability in grandparent–grandchild relationships. Findings indicated that grandchildren reported being closer to all grandparents with whom they had more frequent contact. Grandsons reported greater closeness than did granddaughters. Grandchildren's life satisfaction was found to be related to closeness to all of their grandparents. In contrast to several prior studies, this research indicates that grandsons are closer to grandparents than are granddaughters. Similar to prior research, in this study grandchildren reported less closeness to older grandparents.

In another large-scale study, Withbeck, Hoyt, and Huck (1993) considered data from both parents and ninth-grade students to explore relationships with 1,138 grandparents. The expectation was that those parents who had negative experiences and emotional distance with their own parents when they were young, may discourage development of close of bonds between their children and the grandparents. Geographic proximity to grandparents was a strong predictor of grandparent–grandchild relationships. In those situations where the grandparent generation was considered to be uncaring by the parent generation, grandparents were found to be more distant and have a poor quality of relationship with both their grandchildren and the middle generation.

A study conducted in England by Attar-Schwartz, Tan, and Buchanan (2009) offers useful insights about predictors of adolescent grandchildren's perceived emotional closeness to their grandparents. This study used an ecological perspective to consider both the physical and social environment of the grandchild–grandparent relationships. The study was based on a nationally representative sample of 1,478 students aged 11 to 16. Emotional closeness to grandparents was expected to buffer the adverse effects of negative life events and promote resilience among grandchildren (Monserud, 2008; Wood & Liossis, 2007). A common stressor faced by adolescent grandchildren included difficulties in school performance. The authors hypothesized that close relationships with grandparents would be most important among those struggling in school (Elder & Conger, 2000). Grandparents' involvement and emotional closeness were positively linked to all the dependent variables. Parents' encouragement of grandchild–grandparent closeness was a significant predictor of grandchildren's report that they had respect for views of the closest

grandparent. A further notable finding in this study was the greater respect for grandparents by non-White grandchildren.

Contrasting with the generally positive evaluation of the importance of close grandparent–grandchild relationships in the lives of adolescents outlined above, more limited influence of grandparent–grandchild relationships on adolescent well-being was reported by Dunifon and Bajracharya (2012). Findings of this research confirm prior studies regarding the importance of grandchild’s proximity to grandparents and the relationship of the parent generation to both the grandparents and the grandchildren in shaping the quality of grandparent–adolescent–grandchild relationships. However, results of this study did not find evidence for benefits derived by adolescent grandchildren based on closeness to the grandparents. These findings are consistent with the conclusions of Cherlin and Furstenberg (1986) regarding grandparents in the United States playing only peripheral roles in the lives of their grandchildren.

Focus on Mutuality: Adolescent Grandchildren Contributing to Their Grandparents

While the literature on grandparent–grandchild relationships generally focuses on support and benefits flowing from grandparents to grandchildren, there is an important and thus far little-studied potential for grandchildren to serve as resources to their grandparents. Close relationships involve norms of reciprocity. Consequently, it should not be surprising that adolescent grandchildren might have a positive influence on their grandparents. Yet, it is striking that there has been little research focused on social support provided by adolescent grandchildren. Below we provide some examples of adolescent grandchildren offering social support to their grandparents.

An early example of this potential for grandchild support fulfilled is reflected in the work of Streltzer (1979). This study highlighted the desire of adolescent grandchildren to help and offer understanding to grandparents who were recently institutionalized. Adolescent grandchildren may assume nurturing roles toward their increasingly frail grandparents. Indeed, there has been some recent attention to adolescent’s willingness to serve as caregivers to grandparents experiencing declining health (Spira & Wall, 2006). Such caring goals can compensate for the limitations of the family in providing support to elderly members (Ward, 1978).

Most of the studies that focused on grandchildren’s contributions to the grandparents have been conducted outside the United States. Matos and Neves (2012) conducted an in-depth qualitative study of 34 adolescent grandchildren, ages 12 to 18, in the northern region of Portugal. They studied grandchild–grandparent dyads who live in close proximity and reported a close relationship. They found four typologies of grandchildren who provided support to their grandparents.

These are (a) *buddies*, characterized by strong friendship; (b) *companions*, who offered assistance based on the norms of obligation; (c) *carers*, who assisted grandparents when needed, based on genuine concern for the grandparents’ well-being; and (d) *playmates*, who engaged grandparents in social interactions. Buddies had the closest relationship with grandparents and offered both emotional and instrumental support. Children’s contributions in this study were limited to errands or assistance with household tasks.

An example of adolescent grandchildren contributing to the well-being of the grandparents in Hong Kong (Lou, 2010) is based on 215 grandparents who were utilizers of services for older adults. Recognizing the growing need for additional informal social supports under conditions of major social changes in China, this study explored the potential of adolescent grandchildren in contributing to the welfare and life satisfaction of their grandparents. Adolescent grandchildren

offered both emotional and instrumental support that enhanced well-being and life satisfaction of their elderly grandparents.

As grandparents live to older ages there is also encouraging evidence, based on qualitative research in Canada, that points to meaningful and close relationships between grandparents and adult grandchildren. This offers a strong basis for support offered by grandchildren (Kemp, 2005, 2007).

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON CLOSE GRANDPARENT–GRANDCHILD TIES AND MUTUALITY

While it is customary to provide scholarly perspectives on the subject of an article, primarily based on the review of prior literature, personal perspectives can offer a different and sometimes deeper level of understanding. For this reason, we conclude this chapter on a personal note by Eva about grandparent–grandchild relationships between her late mother and Jeffrey’s grandmother Shari and her grandsons. These comments illustrate that a grandparent’s love, creativity, and commitment can transcend limited resources and elicit great spontaneous reciprocity from grandchildren.

Jeffrey and Michael, two adult sons of Eva and Boaz, are both successful academics who now have their own families. Nevertheless, they both regularly talk about their grandmother, Shari Frost, even now, over 20 years after her passing. Jeffrey dedicated his first book to the memory of his grandmother. Michael, a father of five children, recently changed his picture on social media to a childhood photo. In the photo he is 6 years old and receiving a warm hug from his grandmother. This brief case history offers some unique insights into the development of close attachments and meaningful relationships between grandparents and grandchildren. It also brings to light an increasingly prevalent pattern in modern families where grandparents take care of grandchildren while their adult children are working (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2001). Further, it also calls attention to the potential of close grandchildren to offer social support and care to the grandparents who previously cared for them. Anecdotal evidence is useful because very little research currently exists on grandchildren as significant resources to their long-lived and often frail grandparents.

Jeffrey was born in 1967 and a few weeks after his arrival Eva’s father passed away after a short illness. His wife, Shari, was devastated after losing him. There were babysitters who initially cared for Jeffrey and his brother Michael while Eva and Boaz were at work. After the first, excellent sitter left to have her own child, we encountered a sitter with health problems and another one who liked babies and not toddlers. It was at this point that Shari decided to take early retirement at age 61 to take care of her grandchildren. Shari said that she wanted to make up for all the experiences she missed when she had to work during Eva’s childhood. Shari was a very energetic person and assumed her position as *grandma in chief* with great relish. She took full charge of running the household.

She prepared new recipes of delicious food and encouraged her grandsons to invite their friends to the house anytime. She took an interest in their homework and talked to them about her experiences of growing up in a large family of eight siblings. She suggested that they form alliances to help one another with their homework. When the boys came home from school, she regularly set the table with a white tablecloth and served them a freshly made meal. She took pride in the fact that they would not eat on paper plates; she explained that it is important to develop good table manners and you can only do so when the table is *respected*.

She encouraged her grandsons to think for themselves and not to be afraid to disagree with the teacher if they held opinions that differed. She would also take them on bus trips after school from our home in Detroit to Windsor, Ontario, Canada. She packed salami sandwiches for all of them and after eating in a park she treated them to pastries in a local coffee shop. Boaz and Eva pursued busy careers that included traveling to conferences and review committee meetings out of town. Sometimes grandma Shari would accompany the family to conferences and volunteered to take care both of her own grandchildren and some of the young children of our colleagues. The boys clearly thrived in their grandma's care and her opinions counted big time in our household.

We did not recognize that there was an exceptional attachment between the boys and their grandmother until much later, when grandma's health began to decline and her two teenage grandsons took great interest in caring for her. On one occasion Jeffrey and Michael took their now frail grandmother, an amputee, on a weekend car trip to Niagara Falls. Toward the end of Shari's life, after she had to enter a nursing home, each of her grandsons called her every day from their out-of-town locations, enhancing her status among the nursing home residents.

Shari did not see her grandsons marry and have families of their own. Boaz and I are now the grandparents and we feel very fond of our seven grandchildren. Because we work, we spend less quality time with our grandchildren, particularly as one of the families lives out of town. We have pictures of our grandchildren throughout our house and in our offices, but, to tell the truth, we do not know our grandchildren as intimately as my mother knew our sons. One of our grandsons, Zeke, has autism and we feel a particular emotional closeness to him. Even though communication is not his forte, he also holds great affection for us. Our lived experience confirms the literature that reveals a pattern of close grandparent–grandchild relationships in situations where grandparents spend extensive and frequent quality time with their grandchildren. This is not limited to families with vulnerable parents or vulnerable children. It can also happen after grandparents retire or lose a spouse and the relationship with their grandchildren offers a unique opportunity for a meaningful new social role as well as close emotional attachments.

As noted in our mutuality model, development of very close relationships between grandparents and grandchildren calls for proactivity by grandparents, based on positive attitudes, strong motivation, and active involvement in the life of the grandchild. Relationships forged through active interactions and shared activities with grandparents are also likely to result in closeness and enduring bonds where both grandchildren and grandparents can self-disclose their needs and offer social support to one another. Such relationships will reflect the type of mutuality outlined in our model.

Most literature reviews on grandparenthood note that with increasing life expectancy of the older generations, the social roles of grandparents and of grandchildren are likely to span longer time periods. Sometimes they suggest that these roles lend meaning to later life. Yet, there is little attention to the potentials of grandchildren as representing meaningful late life supports. It is not uncommon in nursing homes to have children from nearby schools perform in honor of Grandparents' Day. Yet, the actual grandchildren of elderly residents are nowhere to be seen. Developing closer relationships between grandparents and grandchildren offers a promising and largely unexplored avenue for improving the lives of older adults and building bridges between generations.

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