Affiliation, Pride, Exchange, and Distance in Grandparents' Accounts of Relationships With Their College-Aged Grandchildren

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This paper examines grandparents' written accounts of conversations with their college-aged grandchildren. Using a thematic analysis, we describe 4 themes that indicate the place of the relationship in the grandparents' lives and their general orientation to their grandchildren. It is argued that expressions of affiliation, pride, exchange (primarily of advice and information), and feeling distance from their grandchildren are fundamental elements of the relationship from the grandparents' perspectives. These are discussed in terms of the grandchild's place in the grandparent's life and the complexities of negotiating this relationship during a period of grandchild transition away from the parental home.

Demographic changes in recent years have meant that more grandparents are getting to know their grandchildren and having longer relationships with them—increasingly these relationships are lasting into the grandchildren's adulthood (Hodgson, 1998; Uhlenberg & Kirby, 1998). For scholars in family communication and intergenerational communication, it is important to understand the ways in which this relationship is negotiated across time. However, we know little about the grandparent-grandchild (GP-GC) relationship and particularly about communication within that relationship. This is unfortunate because the GP-GC relationship offers an opportunity for frequent and intimate contact with another of a radically different age—contact that is relatively rare in other situations. The experience of interaction with grandparents is likely to influence grandchildren's impressions or stereotypes of older adults and, perhaps, their motivation to communicate with other older adults (Harwood, 2000; Kornhaber & Woodward, 1985; Matthews & Sprey, 1985; Pecchioni & Croghan, 2000; Silverstein & Parrott, 1997).

Interestingly, we know substantially more about what goes on in intergenerational communication between relative strangers. The past 15 years have brought forth

an explosion of interest in communication processes across the life span and particularly intergenerational communication. A number of lines of research have provided us with an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the relationships between communication and intergenerational attitudes, well-being, and the like (see Hummert, Wiemann, & Nussbaum, 1994; Nussbaum & Coupland, 1995; Nussbaum, Hummert, Williams, & Harwood, 1996; Williams & Nussbaum, 2000, for reviews). Theoretically, communication accommodation theory, the communication predicament of aging model, life-span attachment theory, and intergenerational solidarity theory all have incorporated a communication perspective. Placing communication at the center of this research has been useful in advancing the literature, in developing theory, and in understanding that realm of intergenerational contact. However, the majority of such research has proceeded in ways that either deliberately or incidentally ignore the relational context of such communication, and hence perhaps the most frequent and most significant intergenerational contact in people's lives (Williams & Giles, 1996; Williams & Nussbaum, 2000).

Research on the Grandparent-Grandchild Relationship
Research outside of the communication discipline has examined the GP-GC relationship from a number of perspectives (see Szinovacz, 1998a, for a review). It has been shown that the GP-GC relationship is important for both grandparents and grandchildren (Brussoni & Boon, 1998; Folwell & Grant, 1999; Kornhaber & Woodward, 1985), but that its intimacy and importance are mediated by various contextual and demographic variables. Particular foci of such research have included the role of gender and lineage in determining relational intimacy (Somary & Stricker, 1998) and the effects of an "off-time" transition to grandparenthood (Burton & Bengtson, 1985). Off-time transitions occur when the grandparent perceives that they are "too young" to be a grandparent and often can result in role stresses and intergenerational tensions. Research has examined cross-cultural variation in the relationship (Ikels, 1998). For example, Kamo (1998) found that descent systems (bilateral vs. unilineal descent) influence residence patterns. Such cultural differences obviously influence patterns of intergenerational communication within the family. Finally, considerable research attention has been devoted to developing typologies of GP-GC relationships, which in turn have been linked to criteria such as relational satisfaction. Cherlin and Furstenberg (1985), for example, distinguish between GP-GC relationships that are "active," "passive," and "detached."

As already noted, very little research has examined the nature of communication between grandparents and grandchildren. We argue that such investigation is central to a full understanding of the relationship. Communication, and cognition about communication, are fundamental to the experience of relationships (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Duck, 1992; Fitzpatrick, 1987; Gergen & Gergen, 1993; Giles & Coupland, 1991). Given this assumption, attempts to understand the GP-GC relationship from a position of ignorance about the content of communication within the relationship will be inherently limited.

A few research programs have focused on communication issues in the GP-GC relationship. Nussbaum and Bettini (1994) tape-recorded conversations in which

grandparents were asked to tell their grandchildren a story that captured the "meaning of life." They found that grandmothers talked more than grandfathers and tended to focus on family issues, in particular, on family history. In contrast, grandfathers tended to talk about health issues and youth experiences. The vast majority of grandparents disclosed their age in the context of telling the story. Holladay et al. (1998) asked granddaughters to talk about turning points in their relationship with their maternal grandmothers. Among other turning points, they found that granddaughters' perceptions of negative communication behaviors by the grandmothers (e.g., lying, interfering) were seen in retrospect as having a negative impact on the GP-GC relationship.

Harwood (in press a) examined communication issues from a more quantitative perspective. He uncovered a number of predictors of communication satisfaction and GP-GC relational solidarity, including perceptions of kindness, grandparents' storytelling behaviors, and grandparents' perceptions of the grandchildren's involvement in and support of the relationship. In a similar vein, Downs (1988, 1989) has shown that levels of mutual self-disclosure and grandparent storytelling in the GP-GC relationship are positively related to solidarity. Webb (1985) examined the topics that predominated in GP-GC conversation from grandchildren's perspective. The finding showed that topics such as family, school, education, and health are most commonly discussed in GP-GC conversation and suggested that these topical categories may provide grandparent and grandchild opportunities for intimate conversations with each other. In a different vein, Harwood (in press b) investigated the relationship between communication media choice and GP-GC communication satisfaction, finding that with the consideration of geographical distance, telephone communication is the best predictor of relational satisfaction, when communication via other media is controlled. Finally, work focused on examining cross-cultural variation in intergenerational communication has begun recenty to consider differences between such communication within and outside the family (Cai, Giles, & Noels, 1998; Ng, Liu, Weatherall, & Loong, 1997).

This paper aims to understand more about grandparents' perspectives on established GP-GC relationships. To this end, we examine relationships between college students and their grandparents, relationships that are approaching a level of independence from the middle generation. Consequently, the grandchildren in this study are young adults, and the grandparents are all over age 60. Obviously this population is not representative of all grandparents. Our goal is to frame this work in terms of the broader literature on communication and older adulthood (e.g., Nussbaum & Coupland, 1995), and these older grandparents were an appropriate population for that.

Existing studies have focused largely upon grandchildren's perspectives on the relationship; therefore, this paper addresses grandparents' accounts of conversations with their grandchildren. The analysis of such accounts is a useful tool for exploring communication within the GP-GC relationship for a number of reasons. First, the accounts provide us with a "distillation" of the conversations. Although some detail of specific interactions is lost, the accounts provide us with indications of what older adults recall as the most salient elements of the conversations.

Second, previous research has demonstrated that descriptions of conversations can reveal broad underlying dimensions of such interactions. It has been suggested that older and younger adults enter intergenerational interactions with expectations that influence conversations. These expectations relate to levels of affection for the partner, approach-avoidance tendencies, topics of conversation, communicative behavior, physical appearance cues, and desire for future contact, to name a few (Harwood, McKee, & Lin, 2000). Such dimensions are useful in predicting whether relationships succeed or fail and the extent to which interactions are satisfying (Harwood, 1998). Open-ended descriptions of conversations such as those discussed herein give us an insight into salient evaluative dimensions and, hence, the structure of conversational expectations. Third, the focus on the grandparents' accounts is useful because the older population is the one that is traditionally considered more "at risk" compared with other age populations (e.g., suffering ill health, bereavement, cognitive decline; Kemper & Hummert, 1997; Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci, & Henwood, 1986). In other words, if there are positive or negative consequences of the GP-GC relationship, we might expect these to be more significant in the lives of the grandparents than the grandchildren. Again, this should be interpreted in the context of the specific population of older grandparents that we investigated. We posed the following research question:

> RQ: What are salient relational themes in grandparents' accounts of communication with their grandchildren?

A qualitative approach was considered appropriate in examining this research question. Rather than investigating relative frequencies with which particular themes occurred, we aimed to uncover variation in particular relational themes. Given the limited attention that has been paid to grandparents' perspectives on intergenerational communication, this approach allowed us to present their perspective in their own words, providing a richer understanding of this important relationship.

Method

Young adults (N =180) were recruited from an introductory communication class at a large, Midwestern U.S. public university. The class fulfills a campus-wide requirement and includes a diverse array of majors. In groups of 8–20 people, these participants were asked to provide a mailing address for a living grandparent with whom they had spoken in the previous 12 months. Individuals who had more than one grandparent meeting the criteria were asked to select any one grandparent. The students then completed a survey about their relationship and communication with that grandparent (not analyzed as part of the current paper). The researchers then mailed a similar questionnaire to the grandparent, accompanied by a postage-paid envelope addressed to the university. Grandparents and grandchildren were clearly informed that their responses were confidential and

that their grandchild or grandparent would not see their responses. A total of 147 responses were received from the grandparents (response rate = 82%), of which a final sample of 131 was usable.[1]

In this final sample, the grandparents were 81% grandmothers (54% maternal, 46% paternal) and 19% grandfathers (55% maternal, 45% paternal). The grandparents' average age was 74.55 years (*SD* = 5.80; range = 60–98). Before mailing, the addresses of the total pool of grandparents were coded for location. Kansas residents constituted 44% of the grandparents. The remainders were from other central states (37%), the eastern U.S. (13%), and the western U.S. (6%). The grandparents were 91% White (4% Black, 2% Asian, 3% other or not specified).

The questionnaire asked the grandparent to think about conversations with the grandchild who had sent the questionnaire. The first page of the questionnaire instructed them to write a paragraph describing such conversations:

> Describe how you feel during the conversations and after they have finished, what you imagine your grandchild thinks of the conversations, how he or she feels in the conversations, ways in which either person talks in the conversations, any characteristics of your grandchild that are important to the conversation, or anything else that sticks out in your mind about the conversations.

The descriptions provided by the grandparents ranged from single sentences to almost two single-spaced typewritten pages. The grandparent proceeded to respond to a number of closed-ended quantitative items concerning conversations with the grandchild. These closed-ended responses are not analyzed herein.

One half of the responses to the first question were examined in depth. Themes that emerged repeatedly and that pertained to the GP-GC relationship were noted. Categories were created to account for such themes. The responses were then reread in an attempt to uncover references to the relationship that were not covered by the category system, and the category system was adjusted until it appeared to account for all relationship-relevant statements in the responses. The final category system was then applied to the remaining half of the data. The category system stood up well to the new data, although a couple of minor modifications were made. The goal of the analysis was not to account for the responses as a whole. There are statements within the responses (e.g., concerning the grandparent's occupation, their relationship to their children) that were not par-

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[1] Five questionnaires were excluded because they were not from a biological grandparent-grandchild relationship (e.g., they involved step-grandparents). An additional 11 respondents did not provide any response to the open-ended question that is the focus of the current analysis. Responses of the grandchildren whose grandparents responded and those whose grandparents did not respond were compared on quantitative measures of the relationship. The majority of the analyses revealed no significant differences. However, statistically significant relationships ($p < .05$) indicated that responses were received from grandparents who were viewed as slightly more "kind" by the grandchildren, with whom the grandchildren felt more positive while conversing and whom the grandchildren evaluated as having a less negative attitude toward their grandchildren. In other words, we were more likely to receive responses from grandparents when their grandchildren had a more positive orientation to their relationship. To that extent, this sample probably excludes extremely negative or distant GP-GC relationships.

ticularly pertinent to the current analysis. The goal was to examine statements that pertained directly to the GP-GC relationship and that appeared repeatedly. Idiosyncratic statements were disregarded.

Results

Four relational themes—affiliation, pride, exchange, and distance—were identified in the data, each with a number of subthemes. These themes and subthemes are presented in Table 1, along with extracts illustrating each. The sections below outline each theme, noting contextual issues not apparent from the brief extracts in the table.[2] At times we make some broad statements about the frequency of various themes based on our subjective impressions of the data. We reserve such statements for situations in which we are confident that particular themes were either very rare or particularly pervasive. As noted earlier, description of relative frequencies is not a significant goal of the current study. Indeed, we acknowledge that there may be very important issues in the GP-GC relationship that are never mentioned at all, perhaps due to the demands of the task. Our analysis is restricted to issues that grandparents felt comfortable mentioning in the context of describing communication with their grandchildren.

Affiliation
Grandparents described affiliation with their grandchildren as a result of behaviors by their grandchild or as a mutual part of the relationship. When the grandchild initiated the communication this was at times associated with feeling particularly loved (e.g., when the grandchild called or stopped by unexpectedly). Also, when the grandchild shared some relatively intimate aspect of his or her personal life, this also made the grandparent feel cherished. At times, the grandparent described feeling "privileged," "grateful," or "blessed" that the grandchild had engaged in this behavior. In such instances, the grandchildren were characterized as exceedingly busy, and the grandparents reported feeling honored that they had received some attention (see final example in this section of Table 1).

In addition, a number of the descriptions told of a state of mutual affection within the relationship. Linguistically, these accounts were marked by the use of an inclusive "we." The extent to which grandparents inferred their grandchildren's love for them was notable in the descriptions. The grandparents frequently portrayed their communication with their grandchildren as mutually enjoyable and their love for one another as mutually felt and expressed. On a few occasions the grandparents noted that this shared affection was associated with a shared understanding that transcended the age difference. For instance, in one of the examples the grandparent described being on "the same wavelength" and, indeed, even feeling "of the same generation" with their grandchild (see Table 1). This latter point relates to Williams and Giles's (1996) descriptions of younger adults' satisfying conversations with older adults. In some instances they describe a scenario

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[2] Names and other identifying information have been changed throughout the manuscript.

Table 1: Themes in Grandparents' Accounts of Relationships With Their Grandchildren

Theme	Exemplars
a. Affiliation	
Grandchild-induced	"When I take the phone off the hook and hear 'Hi, grandma' my heart melts because I know she called because she wanted to" "I love it when Jill calls me, it's not too often, I usually call her" "I love to hear from him, it makes me feel loved and important" "She loves to discuss her sorority comings and goings with us and that makes me feel so loved and her grandfather too" "I was happy that she shared these things with me" "I treasure these letters and that she takes time for me from her busy schedule"
Mutual	"It is very enjoyable for both of us" "We truly enjoy each other's company" "I think Joe enjoys the conversations as much as I do" "We love each other very much" "We have a deep love for each other" "We are on the same wavelength. Although I am 62 years her senior, we feel we are of the same generation"
b. Pride	
Grandchild's past accomplishments	"While in grammar school at age 13 he was voted Mayor for a Day of Harbor Falls, MI. He was very popular in high school also, in his Junior and Senior year he was voted Best Male Athlete by the coaches" "He had a job after school all 4 years of high school. Paper boy for 2 years. Last 2 years worked at a parts store" "I try to express my pride in her accomplishments"
Grandchild's traits	"Great young lady" "Wise young woman" "Loving young man" "Proud of her high morals and the friends she chooses" "I do know that he has always been a good boy and a good young man, I am very proud of him" "Laurie never was disrespectful" "Does not smoke or use drugs"
Grandchild's orientation to future	"She has a good sense of what she wants to accomplish in life" "In talking with Susie, it is evident that she knows what she wants from life, and how to proceed to obtain her goals. . . . I believe she will surely reach whatever goal she sets for herself" "I feel very confident that with her ambition and her spirit of independence, she will be able to cope with life"
c. Exchange	
Giving advice	"My grandchild . . . respects her elders and takes their advice. She listens and thinks before making a decision" "I try to talk to him about life experience and to keep his focus on why he is in school" "I always try to guide her as I see it" "Wisdom comes from her grandparents (Uh huh!)" "I try to challenge, provoke, and encourage her in the process of living in an open democratic society"
Learning from grandchild	"She makes us feel more in tune with today's world . . . talking with her makes us feel a little younger" "Again, I've learned from her—as I would hope she has learned from me"

Table 1 Continued

	"Because he is bright, organized and ambitious he is a great adversary: He makes me think about what I say" "He has given me many lessons on my computer and he still comes by to help me if I have a PC problem"
d. Distance	
Geographical	"I am not able to have as many conversations with my grandson as I would like because we are so many miles from each other" "I only wish we lived closer so that we could have more frequent conversations" "We live approximately 100 miles from his town, so you see we don't get to see much of him"
Circumstantial	"Our conversations are limited to birthdays and holidays" "When we get together it's always at holidays or graduation, or some family doings" "I do not feel that we are as close as I would like for us to be—due to the fact that we see each other far too infrequently" "I've always regretted we weren't together any more than we were when he was growing up. . . . I wish at times I could see him oftener"
Generational	"The generation gap prevents understanding on some issues" "I have no idea about fraternity life and feel anything I say may sound dumb" "I find that because of the age difference (77-21) . . . our conversations are not very spontaneous"
Grandparent	"I'm not a talkative person" "I wish I were more available"
Grandchild	"A fast-moving Kelly results in time-restricted interchanges. The words we exchange are few" "She doesn't volunteer lengthy responses . . . mostly pleasantries" "I usually feel slightly frustrated . . . that he doesn't want to get into a deep conversation with me . . . he may think that I wouldn't agree or approve of his thought and ideas, and so keeps the conversation light" "Laura is not likely to have any meaningful dialogue with her grandparents until she becomes much less spoiled"
Unexplained	"I am, on occasion, sorry I do not feel our relationship is such that I can feel free to tell her when she worries me with certain acts and behaviors" "I love him dearly but we do not have a close relationship" "Family distention (sic) on some subjects (not she and I) keep us from being completely open with our thoughts"

whereby "age doesn't matter" to the participants ("astereotyping"). This example suggests that this may also be the case for some grandparents: Removing age from the equation is a positive thing!

Pride

Second, a theme of pride emerged; indeed, the word was used explicitly in multiple descriptions. Three particular ways in which pride was expressed are described here. First, the accounts included mention of specific past achievements

or accomplishments of the grandchildren. These ranged from successes with high school sports teams to local community involvement. These were not requested as part of the responses (we merely asked about typical conversations), but appeared to serve the function of the grandparents displaying pride in their grandchildren's accomplishments. In some instances, they were associated with explicit positive evaluations of the grandchild (e.g., responsible, talented), but they also stood alone at times.

Pride was also reflected in the grandparents' frequent trait-based descriptions of their grandchildren. These were largely positive and very frequently took the form "[positive adjective] young man/woman" (see Table 1). Whereas the positive trait descriptions reflected the grandparents' pride, the use of "young" in the descriptions draws attention to the salience of the age difference—this was one of the rare themes in which mention of age difference was relatively common. These somewhat formulaic constructions may be serving a function related to stereotyping processes. Work by Hummert and her colleagues (e.g., Hummert, Garstka, Shaner, & Strahm, 1994) has demonstrated that we hold multiple stereotypes of age groups, some positive and some negative. Associating age labels with positive adjectives in descriptions of their grandchildren may be a way in which grandparents frame their grandchildren as representatives of positive subgroups of young people (i.e., positive stereotypes).

Third, the grandchildren's orientation to the future was sometimes described, again with a sense of pride. The grandparents noted that their grandchildren were focused on their goals, had a good sense of where they wanted to go in life, and had solid career plans. These accounts generally contained the word "life," as can be seen from the examples in Table 1. The word suggests the broad perspective with which the grandparents viewed their grandchildren—a life-span perspective! It is possible that the combination of a substantial age difference and a family connection makes this a relationship in which issues of life-span development and change are more salient (and perhaps more commonly discussed) than in other relationships. Future examination of this would be interesting. A related theme was found in Williams and Giles's (1996) study. They described younger adults' enjoyment in talking about school and future career plans. William and Giles suggest that older people might perceive extensive accounts on these topics as underaccommodative. The current data suggest that grandparents may not perceive it that way and may enjoy learning about their grandchildren's achievements or future plans. Naturally, the dynamics of such narratives would be quite different (and perhaps more similar to that suggested by Williams & Giles) if the older and younger person did not share a close family relationship.

Exchange

A theme of exchange emerged from the accounts. The exchange was primarily in the form of the grandparents providing information and advice to the grandchildren (which the grandchildren were most frequently described as enjoying or appreciating). Grandparents sometimes noted the patience of the grandchildren in listening to their advice and confidently stated that they knew that the grandchildren considered the advice in making decisions (see Table 1). This theme

corresponds to Williams and Giles's (1996) discussion, wherein the younger respondents expressed interest in older adults' support and advice. The current accounts suggest that grandparents also enjoy these exchanges. That said, a number of the comments in this category involved the grandparent "trying" to advise. These grandparents acknowledged that their attempts might have met with varied levels of success.

In addition to giving advice, there were instances in which the older adults described gaining something from the grandchildren. At times, this was described in terms of a "youthful feeling" obtained from interacting with the grandchild, or keeping up with today's world through the grandchild. In these descriptions, the grandparents seemed willing and happy to classify themselves as old and even a little "out of touch" in order to frame contact with their grandchildren as having some concrete purpose for themselves. For instance, in one of the extracts, a grandparent noted feeling "in tune with today's world" during contact with the grandchild—as if they would be out of tune without the grandchild! Whether this was an accurate characterization of the relationship or a resort to culturally grounded discursive archetypes of GP-GC contact is a matter for further research. However, it did appear to be a way in which the GP-GC age difference is framed in a positive manner by the grandparents. A similar theme emerged in Harwood et al.'s (2000) discussion of nongrandparental intergenerational contact.

At other times, the grandparents described learning more concrete things from their grandchildren, although this was often expressed as a more mutual experience (e.g., they offer advice to the grandchildren, who provide information in return). For example, the grandparents reported learning about life in other parts of the country and computers.

Distance
The final theme refers to the grandparents' feeling of emotional or communicative distance because of geography, age differences, different life experiences and values, or communicative styles. This somewhat negative theme contrasts with the above themes (which can all be broadly characterized as positive). However, it was not mutually exclusive with the more positive themes; indeed, at times it served as a frame for them, as is illustrated in Table 1 and described below. Seven subthemes of the distance category are outlined.

The first three subthemes deal with an interrelated set of problems—geographical distance, infrequent contact, and contact restricted to special occasions (when many people are around and one-on-one communication is difficult). For many grandparents, these coincided with one another, with geographical distance precipitating the other two. It should be noted that on occasion the relationship was described as strong "in spite of" the geographical distance between the two parties (e.g., "we are very close, even being over 1200 miles away"). In other words, the geographical distance served to frame and perhaps even accentuate the emotional closeness of the relationship. That said, this was clearly an issue of concern to the grandparents, who very commonly expressed "regret" at not being closer or mentioned "wishing" or "longing" for more frequent contact.

On some occasions the "generation gap" was noted as the cause of a lack of

intimacy between the grandparent and grandchild. However, this was not as common as might be anticipated based on the cultural currency of the generation gap concept. Despite the salience of relative age in the (positive) trait-based descriptions mentioned earlier, it was not explicitly mentioned as a barrier to intimacy particularly often. Again, we see links to Williams and Giles's (1996) astereotyping theme described earlier.

A limited number of accounts placed responsibility for the distance on one or other of the relational participants (see Table 1 for examples). Some grandparents blamed themselves for being insufficiently talkative. Others blamed their grandchildren, although this was more commonly in terms of the grandchildren's lifestyle (e.g., being "busy") than inherent traits (e.g., being "spoiled"). In one interesting response, the grandparent acknowledged that both parties shared responsibility ("Jennifer and I have one thing in common: We are both very poor listeners"). The response clearly established a distance between the two, with little evidence of emotional closeness. At the same time, perhaps, the shared negative trait symbolized the individuals' shared lineage and hence their inherent connection (and perhaps the grandchild's literal inheritance).

Finally, in some descriptions, emotional distance was mentioned in ways that did not fit any of the themes above. As can be seen from the examples in Table 1, at times no explanation was given for the lack of closeness. On other occasions, it was attributed to idiosyncratic issues such as a broader family conflict.

Discussion

The themes that emerged in this study tell us a good deal about the relationship between older adults and their college-aged grandchildren, from the grandparents' perspective. In doing so, they inform us about the role of this relationship in the lives of grandparents. Naturally, we have no intention of generalizing these findings to all grandparents, and we are particularly keen to emphasize that this is a group of relatively old grandparents. The experience of younger grandparents would be qualitatively very different and is worthy of separate examination.

The overwhelming positivity of the responses is notable. Even the "distance" markers often serve to frame a largely positive response. For instance, a grandparent might describe a very positive type of interaction, but express regret that the interactions did not occur more frequently. The fact that the vast majority of the distance markers were invoked as external attributions (e.g., geographical distance, busy schedules) rather than internal (e.g., negative traits of the grandchild), reinforces the broad positivity ascribed to the relationship.

At the same time, the various barriers to heightened intimacy in the relationship are very frequently mentioned, albeit that the grandchild is not "blamed" for those barriers. Indeed, the framing of the barriers often makes both parties appear rather powerless in the situation: They are victims of the geographical distance that separates them and the circumstances or infrequency of their contact. Frequently, when it does occur, face-to-face contact is described as occurring during family gatherings of one sort or another—family vacations, Thanksgiving, birthdays, and

the like. This clearly has positive elements because such events are often associated with broadly positive emotions. However, the concentration of GP-GC contact in such social events often restricts the contact. One-on-one conversations are less common as the group tends to subsume the dyad. The general lack of intimate contact is often treated with a tone of regret or "wishing" for more contact. As with other themes emerging from this analysis, we have no way of knowing whether these expressions are genuine or are scripted ways of talking about family relationships. We suspect that they are genuine in at least some of the cases.

The pervasiveness of distance markers in the accounts may point to a fundamental tension in the GP-GC relationship. It operates in the periphery of the family—as families have become more nuclear, the grandparent role has become less central (King, Russell, & Elder, 1998). In addition, grandchildren of this age are in a period of moving away from their nuclear family and perhaps toward establishing a (nuclear) family of their own. As such, contact with grandparents might be seen as a relatively low priority and perhaps even as a threat to their incipient independence. In this context, it is perhaps worth noting one analysis of the quantitative responses that were gathered as part of this project. We asked grandparents and grandchildren how much contact they had with their grandchild or grandparent relative to the level of contact they desired. Ratings were made on a scale ranging from 1 *(much less often than you'd like)* to 5 *(much more often than you'd like)*. Although both grandparents and grandchildren reported having less contact than desired, the grandparents rated this feeling significantly more strongly ($M = 1.69$, $SD = .71$) than the grandchildren ($M = 1.97$, $SD = .77$), $t(133) = 3.59$, $p < .001$, $r^2 = .09$.

The "intergenerational stake" hypothesis suggests that parents and children have differential investment in the relationships (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971; Giarrusso, Stallings, & Bengtson, 1995). Older generations tend to be more committed to imbue future generations with the values they hold, whereas younger generations are more committed to establishing autonomy from their parents than investing in strengthening parent-child relationships. Similar patterns have been found when extending this intergenerational stake to GP-GC relationships (Harwood, 1999; also see data in previous paragraph). Grandparents appear to be more invested in their GP-GC relationships than their grandchildren. Consequently, grandparents may feel gratitude when their investment in the relationship is reciprocated by their grandchildren (e.g., the grandchildren initiate contact or engage in relationship cultivation).

So, how do grandparents negotiate this relational role? First, the data indicate that the relationship is not perceived to be particularly negotiable from many grandparents' perspectives. It is a meaningful and valuable relationship, but one that grandparents "take as it comes," with few attempts to direct or change it. Kivnick (1985) has argued that at times grandparents' notion of grandparenthood is not matched by the reality and that this harms their sense of control and potentially leads to states such as depression. The current data suggest some support for Kivnick's (1985) contention—at least in terms of grandparents being dissatisfied and frustrated with the quantity of contact with their grandchildren. Future work should examine in more detail the ways in which grandparents feel control or lack

of control over this relationship and the extent to which they may attempt to achieve increased control (see Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995, for a more general discussion of the importance of control for older adults).

Second, the data indicate the embedding of the relationship in the broader family context. Hence, although studies of the GP-GC relationship are important in their own right, future research may need to adopt a more trigenerational perspective, examining more closely the mediating role of the middle generation (King et al., 1998). Among these grandparents of college students, most of the contact occurs in the presence of the middle generation. Family social events pull the extreme generations together in ways that occur infrequently in other contexts. This point is bolstered by the notion that grandparents are particularly touched and moved when their grandchildren take the initiative to call or visit on their own.

Third, the telephone appears to be a particularly important medium for the maintenance of this relationship. A large number of the references to communicating with the grandchild include references to speaking on the telephone, and these references also come up in other contexts (e.g., see grandchild-induced affiliation examples in Table 1). Research elsewhere has indicated that the telephone plays a number of important roles in the life of older adults (Holladay et al., 1997; Ryan, Anas, Hummert, & Laver-Ingram, 1998). Relationships with grandchildren appear to be one context in which this may be particularly crucial. As a side note, a couple of the grandparents' responses indicated a general discomfort with the telephone that hampered intimacy in the relationship (e.g., "Phone conversations are mostly chit-chat being perhaps an obligation, as I do not enjoy phone conversation"). Research should continue to examine the use of the telephone and other media in the grandparent-grandchild relationship (see Harwood, in press b).

Finally, the role of grandparent itself seems to emerge as a source of considerable pride for these older adults. A number of the responses indicate that this is a source of positive identity for these individuals. The sense of self-as-grandparent (i.e., a grandparent identity) emerged in the transcripts as a way in which grandparents understand themselves (Szinovacz, 1998b). In particular, the way in which characteristics and past accomplishments of the grandchildren were presented at length by some grandparents was significant. This speaks to the degree to which grandparents are invested in their grandchildren's existence and take personal pride in their positive accomplishments. Future research should attempt to measure the grandparenting identity and examine other features of the relationship that are associated with strong and weak grandparent identities. By this, we do not wish to suggest that these grandparents have nothing better to do with their time than dote on their grandchildren. Rather, we are simply suggesting that this relational identity is important to grandparents. Related work should undoubtedly examine grandchildren to understand whether there is any sense of self-as-grandchild among them.

Older adulthood is often, although certainly not always, a difficult time. Some older people encounter increased health problems, spousal bereavement, and role losses (e.g., through retirement; Wheaton, 1992). Simultaneously, they may find themselves the victims of age-associated prejudice and discrimination (Palmore,

1990). In this context, their relationships with their grandchildren may provide a source of affection, pride, positive identity, and renewed role challenges. Notably, they appear to be one place in which intergenerational communication is relatively satisfying (see also Harwood et al., 2000; Williams & Giles, 1996). Although the relationship may seem uncontrollable along some dimensions (e.g., frequency of contact), it is also a place in which Giddens's (1991) "reflexive project of the self" (p. 5) continues to be played out in dynamic ways. Becoming a grandparent offers all of the challenges and tensions that come with any new role. Transitions in the grandchildren's lives (e.g., moving to college) and the grandparents' lives (e.g., retirement) require continuous adaptation and development both individually and relationally. Hence, this is a location in which continuous relational challenges and rewards are available.

Finally, we feel it is imperative to place this discussion in the context of broader societal attitudes about aging. Such attitudes are often negative (Kite & Johnson, 1988; Palmore, 1990), and this negativity is frequently shared by older adults themselves (Celejewski & Dion, 1998). Older adults may even experience a denial of aging, a phenomenon in which older people dissociate themselves from their own disadvantaged group, perhaps due to the experience of identity threat (e.g., threats to the value of their social identity; Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999) or uncertainty concerning their position in society (Phillipson, 1998). Given the relatively positive evaluation of the role of being a grandparent found in the current data, it is suggested that grandparenting may be a somewhat unique location in which conforming to age norms and stereotypes is relatively comfortable for older adults. Older adults might conform via positive self-evaluations (e.g., wise advice provider), or negative ones (e.g., being forgetful or out of touch). Either way, by better conforming to age norms, grandparents conform better to one of the prototypical requirements of being a grandparent (i.e., being relatively old). Our cultural norms dictate that grandparents "should be" old, so claiming advanced age may be a way to claim the role more definitively and hence to be a "better" grandparent—a better exemplar of the category (see Rothbart & John, 1986, for further discussion of exemplar-category relations, and see Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994, for further discussion of the phenomenon of self-categorization). In turn, being a grandparent may add a positive element to the aging identity. We are not claiming that this is unproblematic—indeed, it certainly might have negative consequences for the older adult. However, it is clear from some of the responses we received that identification as a grandparent and identification as an older person are interrelated in interesting and complex ways. We hope that future research will further investigate these overlapping identities.

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