

# Grandparent-Grandchild Relationship From two Perspectives

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A child needs a grandparent,  
anybody's grandparent, to grow a little  
more securely into an unfamiliar world.

—Charles and Ann Morse

**Abstract:** The role of grandparent-grandchild relationship is discussed from both the grandchild and the grandparent perspective. The grandchild perspective examines the effect on adolescent development, gender effects, influences on values, and popular images of grandparents. The grandparent perspective examines the expectations of grandparenthood, self-factors, and a sense of age-related identity.

## Grandchild Perspective

### Adolescent Development (Attar-Schwartz, Tan & Buchanan, 2009)

This study examined the adolescent perspective on the relationship with grandparents including emotional closeness, importance of grandparents, and respect for grandparent values and how they relate to their own values. The researchers used 1478 students from the ages 11-16 who were selected randomly from 103 schools. The following characteristics of the grandparents were considered most important by adolescent grandchildren: the grandparent was around the age of 60, they were in good health, unemployed or retired, had four or more grandchildren, was the maternal grandparent, and they were very involved and in frequent contact. Furthermore, 35.4% of the participants said that the grandparent was the most important person outside of the immediate family. These relationships continue to be close and important to adolescence as they grow and develop.

### Does gender matter when choosing favorite? (Eisenberg, 1988)

This study focused on the effect gender has on the grandparent-grandchild relationship. A total of 120 undergraduate students ages 18 to 23 participated. They knew at least one of their grandparents at the time they were at least 8 years old. The students participated in a questionnaire that asked about geographical distance, frequency of contact, rated closeness of relationship, and how much they liked each of the grandparents. Students then chose their favorite grandparent and explained the reasons of their preference. It was found that there was a higher frequency in contact with the maternal grandparents. Many subjects picked their maternal grandmothers as their favorite for the following reasons: time spent with them, their personality, and their ability to communicate. Half of the participants answered that grandparents had helped in emergencies, acted as substitutes for parents, gave advice, financial assistance and taught them religion. Sex does play a role when grandchildren are choosing their favorite grandparent. Grandmothers on average are shown to have more contact with their grandchildren because they seem to be warmer and more expressive.

### Influence on Values (Taylor & Wise, 2004)

This study aimed to close the gap of understanding intergenerational relationships. The study used 90 undergraduate students who had at least one living grandparent. Participants completed a questionnaire about their perception of their grandparents' influence on their values. Researchers sent a similar questionnaire to the participants' grandparents. Grandchildren and grandparents agree that grandparents have an influence on their values about family, religion and education. Grandmothers contributed the religious, family and sexual values, while grandfathers contribute a values of a strong work ethic.

### Popular Images of Grandparents (Boon & Brussoni, 1998)

The study focused on young adults' views on the popular stereotypes about grandparents, and if their grandparents, as well as others' grandparents, fit these stereotypes. A total of 171 participants from a university in Canada completed a questionnaire. Results showed that 73.1% of the participants felt close to their grandparents. Grandchildren who feel emotionally close to their closest grandparent gave higher praise about their grandparent than those who were not emotionally close. Among favorable traits of grandparents it was mentioned: a loving, nurturing grandparent who was attached and devoted to their grandchild, valuable source for family history, a good listener, and could tell them anything.

## Gender Differences

### Kin Keepers vs. Kin Selectors (Dubas, 2001)

This study looked at the relationship between gender of the grandchild and of the grandparent and its effects on closeness, importance and satisfaction with the closest grandparent. The hypotheses were based on the theories of kin-keeper and kin-selector. The **kin-keeper theory** argues that women are more involved in relationships with the family than men. Women are said to have the responsibility of holding the family together. The **kin-selector theory** is based on a sociobiological perspective. The research looked at inclusive fitness as the number of copies of genes passed to surviving offspring. Because men are able to produce offspring throughout the majority of their lives unlike women, grandfathers often invest less in their offspring because they can always produce more. 206 participants were used for this research starting when they were in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. In 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade participants were interviewed and completed questionnaires twice a year. In 12<sup>th</sup> grade and when they turned 21 they were interviewed and answered a questionnaire. Gender is related to closeness and importance of the relationship with the favorite grandparent. There were no gender effects on satisfaction with the relationship. Paternal grandparents on average are closer to their grandsons than their granddaughters. Grandmothers are viewed as closer and more important to granddaughters as the same with grandfathers and grandsons. The theory of grandfathers being kin selectors have faded with modern understanding between the grandfather and grandchild.

### Grandmothers

Grandmothers view their role as a grandparent very important and almost as an extension of their parent role. Grandmothers may feel responsible for the success and failures of their grandchildren. No matter the type of caregiving, it is very important for them to be involved.

### Grandfathers

Grandfathers can attribute becoming grandparents to feeling young again and see a link into the future. Grandfathers see themselves as playing a role in instrumental areas of their grandchildren's life, getting an education, finding a job, managing money, etc. The article reflects that there are five main styles of grandfathering. Formal grandfathering is when the grandfather is involved and interacts with their grandchild but they do not do any parenting. Distant grandfathering is when interaction is very uncommon, and the only contact may only be during the holidays. The fun-seeker type of fathering is the grandfather who is defined as playful and being informal. Reservoir of family wisdom grandfathering is when the grandfather is seen as the one who teaches resources and skills. Finally surrogate parent grandfathering is when direct caretaking of the grandchild is involved.



**"For many men, becoming a grandfather represents a milestone. It means biological renewal and continuity. It allows for feelings of being assured of a future that is connected with their biological and psychological self."**

—Jeff Rothstein

## Grandparent Perspective

### Expectations of Grandparenthood (Reitzes & Mutran, 2004)

This study examined the three self-factors which include: grandparent identity meanings, grandparent centrality, and self-esteem. The study involved 826 grandparents in the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, North Carolina metro area. Each participant was interviewed at 6 month intervals for 5 years or until they retired. During two 30-minute phone interviews, they were asked questions about their satisfaction with being a grandparent and the frequency of contact. It was found that 53% responded "very satisfied" with their grandparent role, and 43% responded as "satisfied." One's desire to maintain a high self-esteem drives him/her to seek out role-satisfying behaviors. It is found that self-esteem is not related to the amount of contact with grandchildren but is positively correlated to grandparent role satisfaction. Those with positive identity meanings are more likely to succeed and find satisfaction from grandparenting.

### Self factors (Kaufman & Elder, 2003)

Grandparenting can be an extremely positive factor towards age-related identity. It keeps grandparents active with their grandchildren and gives them "something to live for." In this study, 666 grandparents from Iowa Single Parent Project participated in phone interviews and mailed questionnaires. Four dimensions of age identity were examined (in years): subjective age, desired age, perceived old age, and desired longevity. The results showed that age has a large influence on age identity. Those who enjoy grandparenting feel younger, perceive old age to begin later and hope to live longer. If adults become grandparenthood early, this may cause them to feel as though they are not ready for the role and may feel older. This has opposite effects if the timing is later. Those who have many grandchildren seem to feel older than those with fewer grandchildren.

### Age Identity (Somary, Stricker, 1998)

This study examined whether sex and lineage has an impact on the meaning that grandparents attach to their roles. 103 grandparents ranging from 40 to 73 years of age were interviewed in two phases. The first phase was before the grandchild was born. Phase two, after their grandchild was born, involved the same questions. The results showed that grandmothers are more likely than grandfathers to expect greater satisfaction from their grand-parenting role and that, overall, grandparents feel more satisfied in the actual experience of grand-parenting than they expected before the grandchild's birth.

### Changing American Grandparent (Neugarten & Weinstein, 1964)

In this study, 70 sets of middle-class grandparents were interviewed about their grandchildren significance and style of the role, and how being a grandparent had affected them. In comparison to the various grandparent roles, The Fun Seeker was most common. This is characterized by a relationship whose primary purpose is to have fun, and grandchildren are seen as a source of leisure. The Distant Figure was most common in grandparents over the age of 65, which is characterized by limited contact with the grandchildren, mostly for important holidays.

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