Abstract: The role of grandparent-grandchild relationship is discussed from both the grandparent and the grandchild's perspectives. The grandparent perspective examines the effects 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. The study compared two groups of adolescents based on developmental stage of 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 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 in and 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.

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. Grandparents and grandchildren agreed that grandparents have an influence on their values about family, religion, and education. Grandparents contributed the religious, family, and sexual values, while grandchildren 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 factors that grandparents were mentioned for were 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 6th grade. In 6th, 7th, and 8th grade participants were interviewed and completed questionnaires twice a year. In 12th 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 has faded with modern understanding between the grandparent and grandchild.

Grandmothers
Grandmothers view their role as a grandparent very important and also 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 wanted to become grandfathers 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 grandparent 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 fatherring is the grandparent who is defined as playful and being informal. Reservoir of family wisdom grandfathering is when the grandparent is seen as the one who teaches resources and skills. Finally surrogate parent grandfathering is when direct caretaking of the grandchild is involved.

References


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 the 30-minute phone interviews, they were asked questions about their satisfaction with being a grandparent and the frequency of contact. It was found that the majority of grandparents “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 linked to the amount of 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 grandparent 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 grandparent role. Grandfathers feel more satisfied in the actual experience of grand-parenting than they expected before the grandchild’s birth.

Changing American Grandparent (Neugarten & Weinistein, 1964)
In this study, 70 sets of middle-class grandparents were interviewed about their grandparent-grandchild relationships. A grandparent is a person who has been affected 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.

“By many years, 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

A child needs a grandparent, anybody’s grandparent, to grow a little more securely into an unfamiliar world. —Charles and Ann Morse

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