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Continuity and Change in Grandchildren's Closeness to Grandparents: Consequences of Changing Intergenerational Ties

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Abstract

Drawing on data from Waves 2 and 3 of the National Survey of Families and Households, this study examines whether grandchildren's ($N = 496$) previous patterns of closeness to grandparents is associated with their current closeness to grandparents and whether changes in parents' intergenerational ties make a difference in the development of grandchildren's closeness to grandparents when grandchildren experience young adulthood. The findings suggest that there is a possibility for both continuity and change in grandchildren's bond to grandparents. Grandchildren's closeness to grandparents was associated not only with their earlier patterns of closeness to grandparents and with parents' concurrent relations with the grandchild and grandparent generations, but also with changes in parents' intergenerational ties over time. Also, the grandchild gender moderated linkages between certain intergenerational ties in the family.

Keywords

gender; grandparent-grandchild relationship; intergenerational ties; longitudinal study; transition to adulthood

Longer life expectancy has increased the opportunity for grandparents to see their grandchildren reach adulthood (Uhlenberg, 2005). This trend raises new issues related to the development of the grandparent-grandchild relationship over the life course. For instance, there is a potential for both continuity and change in this relationship when grandchildren move through young adulthood. Earlier relationship patterns can influence the current bond between grandparents and grandchildren. On the other hand, young adulthood is the life course stage during which this relationship is likely to be renegotiated due to new priorities and competing responsibilities in grandchildren's lives (Hodgson, 1998).

In general, research indicates that the grandparent-adult grandchild relationship can have implications for the lives of both generations (Kemp, 2004). Grandparents and adult grandchildren provide each other with emotional and practical support (Ashton, 1996; Harwood & Lin, 2000; Langer, 1990). Adult grandchildren can even become caregivers for their grandparents (Dellman-Jenkins, Blankemeyer, & Pinkard, 2000; Fruhauf, Jarrott, & Allen, 2006; Piercy, 1998). However, exchanges of support between these two generations can be contingent on the dynamic nature of the grandparent-grandchild relationship over the

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life course. Also, grandparents' overall well-being can be affected by changes in relations with grandchildren (Kivnick, 1985; Forsyth, 1994). It is important, therefore, to examine factors that help maintain a stronger grandparent-grandchild bond when grandchildren become young adults.

A substantial body of research has shown that among other factors, parents' ties to their offspring, their parents, and their parents-in-law are associated with grandparent-adult grandchild relationships (e.g., Brown, 2003; Hodgson, 1992; Matthews & Sprey, 1985; Monserud, 2008; Thompson & Walker, 1987). It is possible, however, that because of their cross-sectional nature, previous studies simply reflect some unobserved aspects of close or distant families. Compared to longitudinal data, cross-sectional data are less able to illuminate possible causal linkages affecting these intergenerational ties or to investigate how the associations between these ties unfold over time. It is unclear, for example, to what extent possible changes in parents' relations with the grandparent and grandchild generations shape the development of the grandparent-grandchild relationship over time. In other words, are grandparent-adult grandchild relationships sensitive to the dynamic nature of parents' intergenerational ties, in spite of the fact that compared to their younger counterparts, young adults become less dependent on their parents and gain increasing control over their relationships with grandparents?

Drawing on data from Wave 2 (1992 – 94) and Wave 3 (2001 – 03) of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), the present study fills a gap in the literature by utilizing longitudinal data to examine whether grandchildren's earlier closeness to grandparents is associated with their current closeness to grandparents and whether changes in parents' ties with their offspring, their own parents, and their parents-in-law make a difference in the development of grandchildren's closeness to grandparents over time. Unlike the majority of previous studies, the present analysis reduces potential same-reporter bias by using multiple respondents. Grandchildren's reports ($N = 496$; ages 10–26 at Wave 2 and 18–34 at Wave 3) were used for relations with parents and grandparents, and parents' reports were used for their relations with the grandparent generation. By focusing on families with married biological parents, this study is able to investigate changes in these intergenerational relations within and across lineage. Thereby, this research contributes to a small but growing body of literature in this area that has considered kin position of grandparents (e.g., Brown, 2003; Matthews & Sprey, 1985; Monserud, 2008). This paper also examines whether the grandchild gender moderates the associations between intergenerational relations in the family. This topic has been almost entirely neglected in prior research.

Background

A social learning perspective (Whitbeck, Simons, & Conger, 1991) and a life-span developmental psychology (Baltes, 1987) are useful for addressing the issues of continuity and change within the grandparent-grandchild relationship across time. The social learning perspective maintains that patterns of family relationships show stability over time (Whitbeck et al.). That is, patterns of relations learned earlier in life have an impact on subsequent interactions between family members. Although prior research rarely considered the association between earlier and subsequent grandparent-grandchild relationships, available studies suggest that grandchildren's retrospective accounts of caregiving provided by grandparents or of interactions with grandparents when grandchildren were young are related to stronger relationships later in life (e.g., Brown, 2003; Hodgson, 1992; Matthews & Sprey, 1985). Hence, grandchildren's perceptions of their earlier closeness to grandparents can be associated with their current closeness to grandparents.

Theoretical debates and empirical research in this area also suggest that it is important to examine the implications of *each* parent's intergenerational ties for the grandparent-grandchild relationship. The kin-keeping perspective states that unlike men, women are socialized to be actively involved in familial relationships with their own kin as well as with their husband's relatives (Di Leonardo, 1987; Hagestad, 1986; Rosenthal, 1985). That is, women are more likely than men to help strengthen kinship relationships both within and across lineage lines. Indeed, the mother's closer ties to her offspring and her parents have been found to be associated with young adults' stronger relationships with maternal grandparents (e.g., Brown, 2003; Matthews & Sprey, 1985; Monserud, 2008; Thompson & Walker, 1987). Yet, prior research indicates that, at least within lineage, fathers can also make a difference in the grandparent-grandchild bond. Previous studies that considered each parent's intergenerational ties revealed that young adults' closer relations with paternal grandparents were contingent on the father's stronger ties with his offspring and his parents (Brown; Matthews & Sprey; Monserud).

With respect to intergenerational relationships across lineage, available studies that took into account both parents' ties to their parents-in-law have yielded mixed results (e.g., Brown, 2003; Fingerman, 2004; Matthews & Sprey, 1985; Michalski & Shackelford, 2005; Monserud, 2008). Brown's research indicated that parents' ties to their in-laws were not associated with college students' perceptions of their relationships with grandparents. On the other hand, studies by Matthews and Sprey and by Monserud suggest that the mother's ties to her mother-in-law matter for college-age grandchildren's closeness to paternal grandmothers. Grandparents' reports in Michalski and Shackelford's research indicated that grandparents' emotional closeness with both children and children-in-law was positively related to emotional closeness with grandchildren. Moreover, grandparents in Fingerman's study reported that compared to their ties to their own children, their ties to their children-in-law were more consequential for their relations with grandchildren.

Accordingly, in order to examine continuity in the grandparent-grandchild relationship over time, the present study starts by investigating whether grandchildren's perceptions of their previous patterns of closeness to grandparents along with parents' current intergenerational ties are associated with grandchildren's current closeness to grandparents within and across lineage lines. Note that this study employs grandchildren's prospective reports which reflect actual rather than remembered characteristics of the grandparent-grandchild relationship. On the basis of the social learning perspective and prior research, I expect that grandchildren's earlier closeness to grandparents along with parents' current ties to the grandchild and grandparent generations will be associated with grandchildren's current closeness to grandparents.

In contrast, the life-span developmental psychology implies that in spite of the fact that learned patterns of relationships can continue to matter for later interactions, there is also a possibility for change in family relations at any life stage (Baltes, 1987). In other words, the past can influence but it does not determine the development of future intergenerational relationships. Relationships between family members can change in response to different circumstances over the life course. For instance, when grandchildren experience young adulthood, their relationships with grandparents can be affected by different factors such as their adult role transitions (Crosnoe & Elder, 2002; Mills, 1999; Monserud, 2010) or their concerns related to developing their own identities and retaining their autonomy and independence from their families of origin (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986). However, the dynamic nature of parents' intergenerational ties is likely influential among these factors because the grandparent-grandchild relationship occurs within a multigenerational context and parents act as mediators between the grandparent and grandchild generations (Robertson, 1975). Prior research demonstrated that parents' intergenerational ties

consistently matter for the grandparent-grandchild relationship even when grandchildren become adults (e.g., Brown, 2003; Hodgson, 1992; Matthews & Sprey, 1985; Monserud, 2008; Thompson & Walker, 1987). Yet, because they used cross-sectional data, previous studies were not able to elucidate whether grandchildren's relationships with grandparents are responsive to changes in both parents' intergenerational ties over time. The present study proceeds by investigating this issue within and across lineage lines. Following the life-span developmental psychology and prior research, I predict that improvements in parents' ties to the grandchild and grandparent generations will be associated with increases in grandchildren's closeness to grandparents. More specifically, changes in parent-child relationships and parents' relationships with their own parents will be linked to changes in grandchildren's closeness to grandparents within lineage, whereas changes in parents' ties to their parents-in-law will be predictive of changes in grandchildren's closeness to grandparents across lineage.

Granddaughters vs. Grandsons

The kin-keeping perspective suggests that the mother's ties to relatives can be more influential for her daughter's than for her son's relations to family members because the mother-daughter relationship occupies a special place in the family structure (Hagestad, 1986; Rosenthal, 1985; Rossi, 1995). The kin-keeping position is usually passed from mother to daughter and in general, there is greater continuity across female-linked generations in the family. However, the same-gender parent modeling perspective implies that parents' kin relations have a differential impact by the grandchild gender (Bussey & Bandura, 1984; Mischel, 1970). A same-gender parent is a stronger model for a child than an opposite-gender parent because children are more likely to imitate the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that are considered to be culturally appropriate for their gender. Thereby, the effects of parent's intergenerational ties can be stronger for the same-gender offspring.

Prior research on whether the grandchild gender moderates the associations between parents' intergenerational ties and the grandparent-grandchild bond is practically non-existent. However, at least one available cross-sectional study found that the effect of the father-child relationship on young adults' closeness to paternal grandparents was stronger for grandsons than for granddaughters (Monserud, 2008). The present study examines whether the grandchild gender moderates the linkages between intergenerational ties and changes in these ties in the family. In accord with the kin-keeping framework and the same-gender parent modeling effect, I anticipate that the associations between the mother's intergenerational ties and grandchildren's closeness to grandparents will be stronger for granddaughters than for grandsons. The same-gender parent modeling perspective also suggests that the associations between the father's intergenerational ties and grandchildren's closeness to grandparents will be stronger for grandsons than for granddaughters.

Method

Sample

Data are taken from Waves 2 (1992 – 94) and 3 (2001 – 03) of the NSFH (Sweet & Bumpass, 1996, 2002). The NSFH is a U.S. national multistage area probability sample originally consisting of 13,007 primary respondents, including an oversample of some racial/ethnic groups and family types (Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988). At Wave 1 (1987 – 88), primary respondents who had any biological, adopted, step (including partner's), or foster children under the age of 18 living in the household were asked a series of questions about one of these children – the “focal child” ($N = 3,808$; ages 5 – 18; Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988). This child was selected if his/her name came first on the alphabetical list of all the children in the household.

Wave 2 included telephone interviews with 2,505 (66%) original focal children from Wave 1. At Wave 3, interviews were conducted with focal children who were age 18 and older at that time ($N = 1,952$), regardless of whether or not they participated in Wave 2. Those focal children ($N = 429$) at Wave 3 who had not completed interviews at Wave 2 were not included in the present analysis because information was not available on their past relationships with grandparents and on their parents' past intergenerational ties.

I placed additional restrictions on the analysis sample because the availability of measures for intergenerational relationships varied across focal children. In particular, this study draws on reports of focal children's parents (i.e., NSFH primary respondents and their current spouses) on their relationships with their own parents and their parents-in-law. However, the information on these relationships is available in the NSFH only for focal children's biological parents who were married to each other at the time of the interviews. In order to ensure that a parent's parent or parent-in-law and the focal child's grandparent are the same person, I restricted the sample to those focal children who were biological children of primary respondents and whose biological parents were still married to each other at Wave 3. Also, 168 (11%) focal children whose parents did not participate in Wave 3 were excluded from the analysis because they lacked information on the marital status of their parents and on parents' intergenerational ties. Further, I included in the final sample only those focal children who had at least one living grandparent at Wave 3 ($N = 496$). Focal children in the final sample were ages 10–26 at Wave 2 and 18–34 at Wave 3. In comparison to other focal children who participated in Waves 2 and 3, the subjects of this study were more likely to be White and to feel less close to their maternal grandmothers, but did not differ on other study measures. This study refers to focal children as grandchildren.

Measures

Dependent Variables

Closeness to grandparents: The analyses used measures of closeness to grandparents at Wave 3 and of changes in closeness to grandparents between Waves 2 and 3. Closeness to each grandparent at Wave 3 reflects grandchildren's responses to the question, "How would you describe your relationship with this grandparent?" (0 = *not at all close*, 10 = *extremely close*). At Wave 2, grandchildren's closeness to each grandparent was measured by the same question. Change scores were created to measure changes in grandchildren's closeness to each available grandparent between Waves 2 and 3 by subtracting Wave 3 values from Wave 2 values. Because grandchildren rated their relations with one to four grandparents, depending on the number who were still alive, closeness to each grandparent was considered in turn.

Independent Variables

Closeness to grandparents at Wave 2: Measures of closeness to each grandparent at Wave 2 were included as independent variables to examine whether earlier relationship quality matters for closeness to grandparents at Wave 3.

Parent-child relationships: At Waves 2 and 3, grandchildren were asked to describe their relationship with each parent on a scale ranging from 0 = *really bad* to 10 = *absolutely perfect*. Grandchildren's reports at Wave 3 were used as measures of their current relationships with each parent. Change scores were constructed to measure changes between waves in offspring's relationship quality with each parent by subtracting Wave 3 values from Wave 2 values.

Parents' relationships with the grandparent generation: At each wave, the primary respondents and their current spouses (i.e., grandchildren's parents) ranked their relationship

with each of their own parents and parents-in-law on a scale from 0 = *really bad* to 10 = *absolutely perfect*. Parents' reports at Wave 3 were used as measures of their current relationships with the grandparent generation. Measures of changes between waves in each parent's ties to a specific grandparent were created by subtracting Wave 3 values from Wave 2 values. Because of sample size limitations, models predicting grandchildren's closeness to each grandparent included only measures of the parent's relationship with the relevant grandparent. To include measures of parent's ties to other grandparents in modeling grandchildren's relationship to a specific grandparent would have required all four grandparents to be alive.

Control Variables—Additionally, I included several control variables, which may influence grandchildren's closeness to grandparents. *Granddaughter* measures the grandchild gender at Wave 3 (0 = *no*; 1 = *yes*). *Grandchild's age* was taken from Wave 3 and is measured in years. As no item regarding race or ethnicity was asked of the grandchildren or their parents at Waves 2 and 3, race/ethnicity of the parent was taken from the interviews with the primary respondents (i.e., a parent) at Wave 1 and used as a proxy measure of the grandchild's race. *White* was coded 0 = *no* and 1 = *yes*. It was not feasible to distinguish among the racial/ethnic backgrounds of non-Whites in the sample. The sample was 91% White, with the remaining 9% split over a number of groups leaving no sizable sample in any one minority group, particularly because models for closeness to grandparents were conducted for each available grandparent. *Grandchild's education* reflects years of education completed. *Mother's education* and *father's education* represent years of education completed by each parent. The measures of education came from Wave 3. *Residential independence* measured whether grandchildren were living separately from their parents at Wave 3 (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*). *Grandparents' age* (in years) and *health* (1 = *poor*, 5 = *excellent*) were taken from interviews with grandchildren's parents at Wave 3. Finally, *both maternal grandparents alive* and *both paternal grandparents alive* were constructed on the basis of grandchildren's reports at Wave 3 to capture whether both grandparents of a given lineage were still living (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*).

Missing values on independent and control variables were handled using the Stata command *ice* for multiple imputation (Acock 2005). The proportion of missing values across study variables ranged from no missing data to 6%. The variable requiring the most imputed values was the measure of the father-child relationship. To ensure that imputed values did not bias results, other methods of accounting for missing values such as mean substitution and listwise deletion were conducted as well. The latter methods produced similar results.

Analysis

Bivariate analyses by means of zero-order correlations (not shown) confirmed that none of the correlations among the independent variables and control variables considered in the same regression model exceeded .60. To examine whether grandchildren's previous patterns of closeness to grandparents at Wave 2 along with parents' current intergenerational ties at Wave 3 are associated with contemporary closeness to grandparents at Wave 3, I employed Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models. To investigate whether changes in both parent's relationships with their offspring, their own parents, and their parents-in-law are associated with changes in grandchildren's closeness to their grandparents between Wave 2 and 3, I used the change score method. Change scores are more appropriate than the lagged dependent variable technique when using two waves of panel data to investigate the effects of transitions on outcomes (Johnson 2005). The change score models control for unobserved heterogeneity and produce estimates unbiased by measurement error in the dependent variable. OLS regression models predicting changes in closeness to each living grandparent were estimated separately. The sample size in the OLS models varied reflecting the number

of respondents with each type of grandparent still living. To assess whether these associations varied for grandsons and granddaughters, I included interaction terms between each parent's intergenerational relationships with the grandchild and grandparent generations and the grandchild gender in the OLS models (only statistically significant results are presented in Tables 3 and 4). All analyses were weighted utilizing weights created by NSFH researchers to adjust for the unequal probabilities of selection into the survey.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

As shown in Table 1, there were slightly more granddaughters (53%) in the sample. The mean age of grandchildren at Wave 3 was 25 and the majority of them were White (90.9%). At Wave 3, grandchildren rated closeness to 348 maternal grandmothers (70% of the study sample), 213 maternal grandfathers (43%), 307 paternal grandmothers (62%), and 169 paternal grandfathers (34%). There was a large change between Waves 2 and 3 in grandchildren's closeness to grandparents as well as in parents' ties to the grandchild and grandparent generations (Table 2). Grandchildren perceived that their relations with grandparents were more likely to deteriorate than improve between waves. The same was true for grandchildren's relationship quality with their parents. However, parents' reports indicated that excepting the mother-maternal grandmother bond, their ties to the grandparent generation were more likely to improve than deteriorate over time.

Regression Results

Closeness to grandparents at Wave 3—The present analysis starts by examining whether grandchildren's earlier closeness to grandparents at Wave 2 along with parents' current intergenerational ties at Wave 3 are associated with current closeness to grandparents at Wave 3 (Table 3). Grandchildren's reports of closeness to a grandparent at Wave 2 were consistently positively associated with their perceptions of closeness to this particular grandparent at Wave 3. Further, stronger mother-child relationships were related to grandchildren's closer relationships only with maternal grandmothers and paternal grandfathers. Tests of interactions terms indicated that a stronger father-child relationship was predictive of greater closeness to paternal grandmothers only for granddaughters.

A stronger mother-maternal grandmother relationship was predictive of greater closeness to maternal grandmothers only for granddaughters. However, the mother's relationship with her father was positively associated with closeness to maternal grandfathers for grandchildren of both genders. The father's relationship with his mother did not predict grandchildren's closeness to paternal grandmothers. At the same time, the father's relationship with his father was positively associated with closeness to paternal grandfathers only for granddaughters. Each parent's relationships with a parent-in-law at Wave 3 were consistently positively related to grandchildren's closeness to this particular grandparent at Wave 3. However, interactions terms indicated that the father's relationship with his father-in-law was predictive of closeness to maternal grandfathers only for grandsons.

Changes in closeness to grandparents between Waves 2 and 3—Results of the change-score models investigating whether changes in parent's intergenerational ties between Waves 2 and 3 are associated with changes in grandchildren's closeness to maternal and paternal grandparents between waves are shown in Table 4. Tests of interaction terms indicated that improvements in the mother-child relationship predicted positive changes in closeness to maternal grandmothers between waves only for granddaughters. Positive changes in the mother-child relationship were also related to increased closeness to maternal

as well as paternal grandfathers over time for grandchildren of both genders. Changes in the mother-child relationship did not have implications for changes in closeness to paternal grandmothers, however. Improvements in the father-child relationship were related to increased closeness to maternal grandfathers for grandchildren of both genders and to increased closeness to paternal grandmothers only for granddaughters.

Changes in the mother's relationships with her mother were not predictive of changes in closeness to maternal grandmothers over time. On the other hand, improvements in the mother's relationships with her father were associated with increases in grandchildren's closeness to maternal grandfathers between waves. Positive changes in the father's relationships with his mother and father were predictive of increases in closeness to paternal grandmothers and grandfathers, respectively. Excepting the mother's relationships with her mother-in-law, improvements in each parents' ties to a parent-in-law predicted increased closeness to this grandparent over time. However, positive changes in the father's relationship with his father-in-law were associated with increases in closeness to maternal grandfathers only for grandsons.

Discussion

By employing longitudinal data, this study is able to investigate stability and change in grandchildren's closeness to grandparents when grandchildren experience young adulthood. Overall, this study suggests that there is a possibility for both continuity and change in the grandparent-grandchild relationship. In support of the social learning perspective (Whitbeck, Simons, & Conger, 1991), the findings demonstrate that when grandchildren move through young adult years, the history of their relationships with grandparents matters. Specifically, previous patterns of grandchildren's closeness to grandparents were found to be consistently related to their perceptions of current closeness to grandparents, in spite of the fact that parents' concurrent intergenerational ties also had implications for grandchildren's closeness to grandparents.

The findings demonstrate, however, that there is also an opportunity for change in grandchildren's relationships with grandparents when grandchildren move through young adult years. In general, this study indicates that the grandparent-grandchild bond and parents' ties to the grandparent and grandchild generations are not static: they vary across time. Grandchildren's reports demonstrated that their closeness to grandparents between waves was more likely to decrease than increase. Their parents, however, perceived that their ties to the grandparent generation were more likely to improve than deteriorate. These findings are in accord with Erikson's (1959; 1968) stages of psychosocial development across the life course. In adolescence and young adulthood, individuals are developing their own identity, exploring their independence, and establishing new interpersonal relationships. Their interests and concerns shift away from their family of origin towards relationships with peers, friends, and partners. In contrast, their middle-aged parents are in the generativity stage when stable family relationships and guidance of, and investments in, younger generations are of primary importance.

Supporting the life-span developmental psychology (Baltes, 1987), this paper demonstrates that grandchildren's closeness to grandparents seems to be responsive to changes in parents' intergenerational ties over time. These findings suggest that the parent generation remains an important link between the grandparent and grandchild generations even when grandchildren experience young adulthood and become more independent from their parents. Parents need to recognize that the dynamic nature of their relationships with their offspring, their own parents, and their parents-in-law can have implications for the development of the grandparent-grandchild relationship over time.

In addition, the findings support the kin-keeping concept and the contention that fathers as well as mothers make a difference in the grandparent-grandchild relationship at least in families where grandchildren's biological parents are married to each other. This study points to the importance of relationships that fathers have with offspring and grandparents. Just because men tend to have weaker intergenerational ties does not mean that the quality of their relationships does not matter for family solidarity. The findings demonstrate that each parent's ties to the offspring and changes in these ties can have consequences for grandchildren's closeness to grandparents within lineage lines. The results for the associations between concurrent parent-child relationships and grandchildren's closeness to grandparents are congruent with the results of prior research (Brown, 2003; Hodgson, 1992; Matthews & Sprey, 1985; Monserud, 2008; Thompson & Walker, 1987). Interestingly, although not hypothesized, this study indicates that each parent's ties to offspring can also be related to grandchildren's closeness to grandparents across lineage.

Similar to prior cross-sectional research in this area (Brown, 2003; Matthews & Sprey, 1985; Monserud, 2008), this study demonstrates that with few exceptions, each parents' ties to their own parents and changes in these ties are salient for grandchildren's relationships with grandparents within lineage lines. Except for changes in the mother's relationships with her mother-in-law, each parent's ties to a parent-in-law and improvements in these ties were consistently related to grandchildren's closer ties to this specific grandparent. These findings contradict the results of prior cross-sectional research that also examined grandchildren's perspective. In Brown's (2003) research, parents' ties to their parents-in-law did not matter, whereas in studies by Matthews and Sprey (1985) and by Monserud (2008), only the mother's relationship with her mother-in-law predicted grandchildren's closeness to paternal grandmothers. Previous studies have focused on college-age grandchildren, whereas the present study considered a wider age range (18 – 34 at Wave 3). Also, this study focused on families with married biological parents, while Brown's and Matthews and Sprey's studies included different types of families. Parents' relationships with their in-laws can be more influential in families with married biological parents and for older grandchildren who can be more aware of family processes than their younger counterparts. Interestingly, the findings of the present study are in line with those of prior research that investigated the grandparent's perspective and found that grandparents' relationship with their children-in-law can be equally important (Michalski & Shackelford, 2005) or even more important (Fingerman, 2004) than their ties to their children.

Some support was found for the idea that the grandchild gender can moderate the associations between intergenerational ties in the family. Consistent with the kin-keeping perspective and the same-gender parent modeling perspective, the mother's relationship with her mother and changes in the mother-child relationship were predictive of closeness to maternal grandmothers only for granddaughters. Supporting the same-gender parent modeling effect, the father's relationship with his father-in-law and improvements in this relationship were related to closeness to maternal grandfathers only for grandsons. These findings provide evidence that intergenerational relationship may be more influential within same-gender dyad/triad. These trends can be explained by cultural norms on gender relations, gender role characteristics, and traditional views of male and female roles.

This study also suggests that not only mothers but also fathers can be positive role models for their daughters. The father-child relationship and improvements in this relationship were consequential only for granddaughters' closeness to paternal grandmothers. In addition, the father's relationship with his father was associated with closeness to paternal grandfathers only for granddaughters. It seems that fathers can facilitate their daughters' greater closeness to paternal grandparents. A special bond between fathers and daughters may provide granddaughters with better understandings of, and insights into, the lives of their paternal

grandparents. The latter findings contradict the same-gender parent modeling effect. However, in accord with the kin-keeping framework, these findings suggest that granddaughters in certain cases can be more interested in, and attuned to, kinship ties and family processes.

This study has some limitations. First, this paper did not explicitly test whether parents actively maintain and influence ties between grandchildren and grandparents, because relevant measures are not available in the NSFH. In the future, longitudinal research that includes measures of these mediating factors could provide more direct evidence of the mechanisms underlying the dynamic nature of these associations. Second, the analyses were limited to grandchildren whose biological parents were married to each other, because not all the measures of intergenerational ties are available for other groups of grandchildren in the NSFH. The associations between intergenerational ties can be different in other types of families. For example, compared to father's ties to his parents, changes in mother's ties to paternal grandparents can be more important in families in which the grandchild's biological parents are not married to each other. Also, the father's ties to his parents-in-law can matter less in the latter families. Finally, the limitations of the single-item measures of intergenerational ties in the family suggest the need for replication with alternative measures.

Despite its limitations, this study has certain strengths. Drawing on longitudinal data, this study was able to investigate a potential for stability and change in the grandparent-grandchild relationship when grandchildren experience young adulthood. The findings point to the centrality of the parent generation for mediating the dynamic nature of the grandchildren's bond to grandparents over the life course. In particular, unlike previous studies, this paper provides longitudinal evidence that intergenerational relations between family members move in concert and that we are not picking up solely on close or distant families when we find associations between these relations at one point in time. This paper also demonstrates that it is important to examine the development of the grandparent-grandchild relationship within a complete kinship network in order to better understand how dynamics within a larger family system can shape ties in a specific grandparent-grandchild dyad. The analyses presented here suggest that it is important for grandparents to maintain strong ties to grandchild's parents and for parents to maintain strong ties to their offspring over time so that when grandchildren move through young adulthood, they have high quality relationships with their grandparents. Additionally, the findings demonstrate the importance of counteracting the tendency to see women as the only kin-keepers at least in families where grandchild's biological parents are married to each other. Fathers can significantly contribute to intergenerational solidarity between family members. Finally, in the area of limited research, this study indicates that the grandchild gender can moderate the associations between changes in certain intergenerational ties in the family.

The findings of this study can be important for family educators, social workers, and family counselors by providing them with some insights about how intergenerational solidarity between grandparents and grandchildren develops over time. Because family relationships can be consequential for individuals' overall wellbeing and for access to different kinds of support within the family, it is important to educate people about the significance of family ties in their lives. Understanding of the dynamics of intergenerational relationships can help family members improve interpersonal relationships and cope with relevant issues in their own families.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used in the Analysis.

Variables	M	SD	Range	%	Unweighted
Dependent Variables					
Closeness to maternal grandmother W3	6.38	2.43	0 – 10		348
Closeness to maternal grandfather W3	6.14	2.53	0 – 10		213
Closeness to paternal grandmother W3	5.91	2.54	0 – 10		307
Closeness to paternal grandfather W3	5.74	2.78	0 – 10		169
Change in closeness to maternal grandmother	-1.39	2.34	-9 – 8		348
Change in closeness to maternal grandfather	-1.49	2.64	-10 – 8		213
Change in closeness to paternal grandmother	-1.40	2.53	-10 – 8		307
Change in closeness to paternal grandfather	-1.74	2.47	-9 – 4		169
Independent Variables					
Grandchild/Grandparent					
Closeness to maternal grandmother W2	7.77	2.06	0 – 10		348
Closeness to maternal grandfather W2	7.63	2.17	0 – 10		213
Closeness to paternal grandmother W2	7.31	2.50	0 – 10		307
Closeness to paternal grandfather W2	7.48	2.47	0 – 10		169
Grandchild/Parent					
Mother-child relationship W3	8.28	1.31	0 – 10		496
Father-child relationship W3	7.70	1.74	0 – 10		496
Change in mother-child relationship	-.13	1.30	-7.5 – 4		496
Change in father-child relationship	-.32	1.42	-5.5 – 5		496
Parent/Grandparent Within Lineage					
Mother-maternal grandmother relationship W3	7.96	2.10	0 – 10		348
Mother-maternal grandfather relationship W3	8.03	1.84	0 – 10		213
Change in mother-maternal grandmother relationship	-.09	1.68	-9 – 6		348
Change in mother-maternal grandfather relationship	.27	1.53	-5 – 5		213
Father-paternal grandmother relationship W3	8.16	1.89	0 – 10		307
Father-paternal grandfather relationship W3	7.69	2.07	0 – 10		169
Change in father-paternal grandmother relationship	.36	1.71	-8 – 5		307
Change in father-paternal grandfather relationship	.11	1.69	-6 – 6		169

Variables	M	SD	Range	%	Unweighted
Parent/Grandparent Across Lineage					
Mother-paternal grandmother relationship W3	7.36	2.28	0 – 10		307
Mother-paternal grandfather relationship W3	6.95	2.53	0 – 10		169
Change in mother-paternal grandmother relationship	.24	1.97	-8 – 8		307
Change in mother-paternal grandfather relationship	.04	2.43	-10 – 8		169
Father-maternal grandmother relationship W3	7.48	2.23	0 – 10		348
Father-maternal grandfather relationship W3	7.54	2.00	0 – 10		213
Change in father-maternal grandfather relationship	.03	1.91	-7 – 7		348
Change in father-maternal grandfather relationship	.05	1.58	-8 – 6		213
Control Variables					
Granddaughter [/]			0 – 1	52.5	496
Grandchild's age	24.72	4.31	18 – 34		496
White [/]			0 – 1	90.9	496
Grandchild's education	13.85	1.52	10 – 20		496
Mother's education	13.51	2.23	6 – 20		496
Father's education	14.09	2.51	5 – 20		496
Residential independence [/]			0 – 1	75.8	496
Maternal grandmother's age	76.17	7.46	57 – 93		348
Maternal grandfather's age	76.50	6.78	60 – 94		213
Paternal grandmother's age	76.34	7.41	57 – 95		307
Paternal grandfather's age	76.76	6.79	58 – 92		169
Maternal grandmother's health	3.24	1.11	0 – 5		348
Maternal grandfather's health	3.22	.93	0 – 5		213
Paternal grandmother's health	3.30	1.06	0 – 5		307
Paternal grandfather's health	3.21	1.00	0 – 5		169
Both maternal grandparents alive [/]			0 – 1	33.1	496
Both paternal grandparents alive [/]			0 – 1	25.7	496

Note: Weighted means, standard deviations, and percentages are shown.

[/] Variables are coded as 0 = *no* and 1 = *yes*.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics: Changes between Waves 2 and 3 in Grandparent-Grandchild Relationships and Parents' Intergenerational Ties.

Variables	Deterioration	No Change	Improvement	Unweighted N
Dependent Variables				
Change in closeness to maternal grandmother	61.6	23.1	15.4	348
Change in closeness to maternal grandfather	60.2	23.2	16.6	213
Change in closeness to paternal grandmother	67.6	11.8	20.6	307
Change in closeness to paternal grandfather	58.9	26.9	14.2	169
Independent Variables				
Grandchild/Parent				
Change in mother-child relationship	40.1	28.5	31.4	496
Change in father-child relationship	45.6	26.1	28.2	496
Parent/Grandparent Within Lineage				
Change in mother-maternal grandmother relationship	33.4	33.1	33.5	348
Change in mother-maternal grandfather relationship	29.2	31.3	39.5	213
Change in father-paternal grandmother relationship	27.1	27.7	45.1	307
Change in father-paternal grandfather relationship	31.4	28.6	40.0	169
Parent/Grandparent Across Lineage				
Change in mother-paternal grandmother relationship	27.7	29.7	42.6	307
Change in mother-paternal grandfather relationship	38.1	19.9	42.0	169
Change in father-maternal grandmother relationship	32.7	24.8	42.4	348
Change in father-maternal grandfather relationship	27.4	39.8	32.7	213

Note: Weighted percentages are shown.

Table 3
Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Young Adults' Closeness to Grandparents at Wave 3.

Variables	Maternal grandmother		Maternal grandfather		Paternal grandmother		Paternal grandfather	
	B(SE B)	β	B(SE B)	β	B(SE B)	β	B(SE B)	β
Closeness to grandparent W 2	.48(.05)	.41***	.28(.06)	.24***	.44(.05)	.44***	.47(.06)	.42***
Mother-child relationship W3	.26(.08)	.15**	.18(.11)	.10	-.05(.10)	-.03	.31(.12)	.15*
Father-child relationship W3	-.11(.07)	-.08	.12(.09)	.09	.03(.12)	.02	.10(.09)	.07
Mother-maternal grandmother relationship W3	-.09(.06)	-.08						
Mother-maternal grandfather relationship W3			.31(.08)	.23***				
Father-paternal grandmother relationship W3					.02(.07)	.02		
Father-paternal grandfather relationship W3							-.20(.12)	-.15
Mother-paternal grandmother relationship W3					.19(.06)	.17**		
Mother-paternal grandfather relationship W3							.31(.07)	.28***
Father-maternal grandmother relationship W3	.27(.05)	.25***						
Father-maternal grandfather relationship W3			.50(.10)	.39***				
Granddaughter ¹	-2.30(.74)	-.52**	2.75(1.02)	.54**	-2.31(1.05)	-.45*	-4.48(1.09)	-.81***
Grandchild's age	.01(.03)	.01	-.03(.04)	-.05	.06(.03)	.10	-.01(.05)	-.02
White ¹	-.72(.33)	-.09*	-.88(.49)	-.09	-.06(.39)	-.01	-.76(.55)	-.07
Grandchild's education	.15(.07)	.10*	.15(.11)	.08	.14(.09)	.08	-.05(.13)	-.03
Mother's education	.13(.05)	.12*	.20(.07)	.18**	.02(.06)	.02	.10(.08)	.08
Father's education	-.16(.06)	-.17**	-.28(.07)	-.28***	-.04(.06)	-.04	-.02(.07)	-.01
Residential independence ¹	-.14(.23)	-.02	.18(.31)	.03	-.51(.27)	-.09	-.39(.32)	-.07
Grandparent's age	-.01(.02)	-.05	-.02(.02)	-.07	-.01(.02)	-.04	-.02(.20)	-.05
Grandparent's health	.14(.09)	.07	.22(.14)	.08	.30(.11)	.11*	.42(.14)	.15**
Both maternal grandparents alive ¹	.02(.20)	.01	.24(.30)	.04				
Both paternal grandparents alive ¹					.04(.26)	.01	.26(.35)	.04
Father-child relationship * granddaughter					.28(.13)	.45*		
Mother-maternal grandmother relationship * granddaughter	.35(.09)	.62***						

Variables	Maternal grandmother		Maternal grandfather		Paternal grandmother		Paternal grandfather	
	<i>B(SE B)</i>	β	<i>B(SE B)</i>	β	<i>B(SE B)</i>	β	<i>B(SE B)</i>	β
Father-paternal grandfather relationship * granddaughter							.52(.14)	.77***
Father-maternal grandfather relationship * granddaughter			-.36(.13)	-.57**				
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.36***		.37***		.32***		.52***	
Unweighted <i>N</i>	348		213		307		169	

*
p ≤ .05.
**
p ≤ .01.

p ≤ .001.
I Variables are coded as 0 = *no* and 1 = *yes*.

Table 4

Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Changes in Young Adults' Closeness to Grandparents between Waves 2 and 3.

Variables	Maternal grandmother		Maternal grandfather		Paternal grandmother		Paternal grandfather	
	B(SE B)	β	B(SE B)	β	B(SE B)	β	B(SE B)	β
Change in mother-child relationship	.01(.11)	.01	.26(.11)	.16*	.03(.08)	.02	.23(.10)	.17*
Change in father-child relationship	.10(.06)	.08	.19(.09)	.15*	-.09(.12)	-.07	.10(.09)	.08
Change in mother-maternal grandmother relationship	.04(.06)	.03						
Change in mother-maternal grandfather relationship			.25(.10)	.14*				
Change in father-paternal grandmother relationship					.17(.08)	.12*		
Change in father-paternal grandfather relationship							.28(.10)	.19**
Change in father-maternal grandmother relationship	.23(.06)	.19***						
Change in father-maternal grandfather relationship			.47(.16)	.28**				
Change in mother-paternal grandmother relationship					.11(.07)	.09		
Change in mother-paternal grandfather relationship							.25(.07)	.24***
Change in mother-paternal grandfather relationship							-.55(.32)	-.11
Granddaughter ¹	.24(.21)	.05	.29(.31)	.06	.22(.26)	.04	.09(.05)	.14
Grandchild's age	.05(.03)	.09	.01(.05)	.02	.13(.04)	.22***		
White ¹	-.67(.37)	-.08	-.68(.58)	-.07	.19(.44)	.02	-.47(.64)	-.05
Grandchild's education	.21(.07)	.14**	.26(.13)	.13	.11(.10)	.06	-.01(.13)	-.01
Mother's education	.15(.06)	.14*	.13(.09)	.12	.09(.07)	.07	.02(.09)	.02
Father's education	-.14(.06)	-.15**	-.20(.08)	-.19*	-.02(.07)	-.02	-.02(.08)	-.02
Residential independence ¹	-.21(.26)	-.04	.27(.36)	.05	-.33(.31)	-.06	.01(.36)	.01
Grandparent's age	.01(.02)	.01	.01(.03)	.03	-.03(.02)	-.07	-.04(.03)	-.12
Grandparent's health	.23(.10)	.11*	.19(.16)	.07	.14(.12)	.06	.39(.16)	.16*
Both maternal grandparents alive ¹	.10(.22)	.02	.24(.24)	.04				
Both paternal grandparents alive ¹					-.03(.30)	-.05	.35(.39)	.06
Change in mother-child relationship * granddaughter	.30(.13)	.16*						
Change in father-child relationship * granddaughter					.37(.14)	.24**		

Variables	Maternal grandmother		Maternal grandfather		Paternal grandmother		Paternal grandfather	
	<i>B(SE B)</i>	β	<i>B(SE B)</i>	β	<i>B(SE B)</i>	β	<i>B(SE B)</i>	β
Change in father-maternal grandfather relationship * granddaughter			-.39(.20)	-.18*				
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.15***		.17***		.10***		.21***	
Unweighted <i>N</i>	348		213		307		169	

* $p \leq .05$.
** $p \leq .01$.
*** $p \leq .001$.
I Variables are coded as 0 = *no* and 1 = *yes*.