

ABSTRACT

Memorable Moments of Closeness in Grandfather-Granddaughter Relationships

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The purpose of this study is to explore critical moments that affect closeness in the grandfather-granddaughter relationship. While historically an understudied family relationship, research has repeatedly shown that grandparents can significantly influence their grandchildren. However, very little research has been done to explore the nuances of the cross-sex intergenerational relationship of grandfathers and granddaughters, specifically in terms of how they negotiate closeness. The goal of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the significant moments that either increase or decrease closeness within the grandfather-granddaughter dyad. Using critical incident analysis, 160 granddaughters participated in the study. Granddaughters reported 302 critical moments of closeness with their grandfathers, from which eight major categories emerged. The study concludes that grandfathers and granddaughters construct closeness in a unique way, combining traditional masculine and feminine forms of creating and maintaining closeness.

Memorable Moments of Closeness
in Grandfather-Granddaughter Relationships

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction/Literature Review	1
Chapter Two: Methods	8
Participants.....	8
Procedures.....	9
Measures	10
Analysis.....	10
Chapter Three: Results.....	13
Shared Activities (n=70)	14
Communication (n=59).....	15
Memories (n=51)	17
Displays of Affection (n=36).....	18
Proximity (n=35).....	19
Family Crisis (n=31).....	20
Travel (n=12)	22
Role Model (n=8).....	23
Chapter Four: Discussion, Limitations, Future Studies, and Conclusion	24
Discussion	24
Limitations	28
Future Studies	29
Conclusion	30
References.....	31

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Literature Review

Research has consistently shown that closeness has a host of significant and long-lasting effects on both individuals within a dyadic relationship. The most widely accepted theoretical argument about closeness is that it is rooted in and grows through individuals' shared interactions, or as Prager (2000) puts it, "Intimate relationships are built on intimate interactions" (p. 230). Some argue that these intimate interactions can include self-disclosure, emotional expressiveness, unyielding support, and affection (Monsour, 1992), while others believe closeness is grounded in feelings of being cared for, valued, and understood (Reis, 1998; Reis & Patrick, 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988). These definitions all support the notion that closeness is not a one-time, stagnant feeling, but a continually growing and changing experience based on social interactions. Therefore, the ways in which individuals interact with their family, friends, and romantic partners have a direct influence on the closeness they experience in their relationships. By analyzing these shared experiences or memorable, influential moments of closeness, scholars have gained insight into the types of experiences that cause closeness to grow or wither in these intimate relationships.

For example, within the field of family communication, experienced-based moments of closeness have been examined at several dyadic levels, including the father-son, father-daughter, mother-daughter, and mother-son relationships (Fisher, 2005; Floyd & Morman, 2003; Morman & Barrett, 2007; Morman & Whitely, 2012). Influential moments have also been analyzed within sibling relationships, including at the brother-

brother, brother-sister, and sister-sister levels (Herrick & Morman, 2008). Additional research has studied closeness in extended family relationships, like the aunt-niece, aunt-nephew, and uncle-nephew dyads (Milardo, 2014; Sotirin & Ellingson, 2014). Yet missing is the type of dyad specific inquiry found in other family research, particularly the grandfather-granddaughter relationship. This area warrants scholarly attention for a number of important reasons.

First, grandparents are living longer than any time in history (Harwood & Lin, 2000). Because of advanced medical treatments, life expectancy has risen from 66 to 75 years for men and 71 to 80 years for women over the last 50 years (Shrestha, 2006). This increase allows for the grandparent-grandchild relationship to last up to 30 or 40 years (Mares, 1995). In 2012, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that there were 187 million grandparents living in the United States. Of this group, 7.1 million lived with their grandchildren, and 2.7 million acted as the primary caregivers for one or more of their grandchildren under the age of 18. A separate study in 2013 reported that 10 percent of children, or 7.1 million, lived with at least one grandparent while 2.8 million lived with both their grandfather and grandmother (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Because grandparents are living longer, they have the opportunity to develop closer and longer-lasting relationships with their grandchildren (Mansson, Myers, & Turner, 2010; Ruiz & Silverstein, 2007).

Second, studies show that grandparents play a vital role in the lives of their grandchildren (Block, 2002; Brussoni & Boon, 1998; Findler, 2000; Harwood, 2000; Hayslip & Kaminski, 2008; King, Elder, & Conger, 2000; Kornhaber, 1985; Landry, 1999; Lumpkin, 2008; Soliz, 2008; Soliz, Lin, Anderson, & Harwood, 2006; Wiscott &

Kopera-Frye, 2000; Woodbridge, Buys, & Miller, 2011). Traditionally, grandparent-grandchild relationship research has been overshadowed by the parent-child relationship (Soliz et al., 2006). However, research suggests that the grandparent-grandchild relationship has the second strongest influence on a child's development, following only the parent-child relationship (Kornhaber, 1985; Soliz et al. 2006). Grandparents are usually their grandchildren's only source of contact with the elderly, which in effect shapes their attitudes about older individuals and intergenerational communication (Harwood, 2000). In addition, grandparents act in a symbolic role as they pass on family traditions, values, and beliefs, including cultural or ethnic identities and religious values (Brussoni & Boon, 1998; King et al., 2000; Wiscott & Kopera-Frye, 2000).

Grandparents can also play supportive roles during times of trial, such as divorce, by offering emotional and financial support (Block, 2002; Soliz, 2008). In addition, families who have children with mental and/or physical disabilities lean heavily on grandparents for extra help (Findler, 2000; Woodbridge et al., 2011). Increasingly, grandparents are taking on caregiver roles when challenges such as incarceration, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, or AIDS infections arise (Hayslip & Kaminski, 2008; Landry, 1999; Lumpkin, 2008). Lumpkin (2008) found that 11 percent of grandparents in the United States were raising their grandchildren. Of this group, 88 percent had responsibility for the grandchild for six months or more, and 38 percent continued care for five years or more.

Third, when the grandparent-grandchild relationship is close, both individuals benefit. Grandparents are more likely to be socially involved, have good mental health, and have a sense of pride in their grandchildren, while grandchildren are more likely to

spend time with their grandparents, accept the grandparents' values and beliefs, and develop a more positive view on aging and the elderly (Brussoni & Boon, 1998; Harwood & Lin, 2000; Soliz & Lin, 2014). For example, Pecchioni and Croghan (2002) found that the closer grandchildren were with their grandparents, the more positive their stereotypes of aging became.

Finally, grandfathers can have a dramatic influence on their granddaughters. To date, there has only been one study that has focused on this specific cross-sex dyad, which examined the influence of a grandfather's disease and death on the identity formation of his granddaughter. In this case study, the researcher found that the granddaughter's expressions of the impact her grandfather's disease had on her identity fell into four distinct categories, including shared interests, coping skills and adaptation, enlightenment, and influence (Sellers & Milton, 2007). While this is the only study that has specifically examined this intergenerational, cross-sex dyad, there have been several studies examining a similar family dyad, the father-daughter relationship. The findings of these studies could potentially inform the grandfather-granddaughter relationship. Social learning argues that individuals learn their actions from others, meaning the way a father treats his daughter stems from the ways in which his father treated him. This suggests that the effects of the father-daughter relationship could be extended to the grandfather-granddaughter relationship since the acts that define "fathering" would be the similar (Bandura, 1977). These finding could be especially true when the grandfather acts as the primary father figure to the daughter.

Historically, fathers have been framed as less competent or as the inferior parent when compared to mothers (Flanders, et al., 2010; Paquette, 2004; Paquette & Bigras,

2010), but research shows that fathers may influence their daughters in a host of ways. Punyanunt-Carter (2008) found that daughters who expressed dissatisfaction with their communication with their fathers were more likely to have bad relationships with their peers, poor dating experiences, and engage in more risky behavior than daughters who were satisfied with their communication with their fathers. The quality of the father-daughter relationship also influences a daughter's romantic relationships in terms of her choice in romantic partner, her ability to have a positive relationship with her partner, and her confidence on both a social and sexual level (Kieffer, 2004, 2008; Mackey & Coney, 2000; Scheffler & Naus, 1999). In addition to her romantic relationships, fathers can also affect the daughter's educational outcomes. For example, an increase in perceived closeness between fathers and daughters has been linked with higher grades (Hanson, 2007), and the quality of this relationship has also been associated with the daughter's academic involvement (Cooper, 2009). Poor father-daughter relationships have also been associated with an increase in depressive symptoms and eating disorders (Coley, 2003; Gutzwiller-Jurman, 2000).

As the above research suggests, closeness in the grandfather-granddaughter relationship has the potential to have a significant and lasting impact on the granddaughter. However, closeness is not a fixed emotion, but a fluid experience based on shared interactions. Therefore, understanding how grandfathers and granddaughters perceive changes in closeness becomes a vital part of understanding how closeness influences the relationship.

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how granddaughters experience changes in closeness with their grandfathers. Using an

inductive method of data collection, a rich, qualitative analysis of critical, transitional moments of perceptions of closeness within the grandfather-granddaughter relationship will be presented. By examining these specific moments of change, researchers will gain a better understanding of how these relationships are sustained and what might cause closeness to increase or decrease. To conduct this examination, an interpretive approach known as grounded theory will be utilized (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), allowing for the emergence of patterns and themes from the data itself (Charmaz, 2000, 2006). This explorative process will provide a glimpse into the moments that change and influence closeness in the grandfather-granddaughter relationship (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). A particularly effective methodology to perform this inductive, experience-based study is known as critical incident technique (CIT).

Psychologist J. C. Flanagan (1954) first developed this method as a way to understand how U.S. Air Force pilots were recruited, organized, and trained during World War II. Specifically, he wanted to know why pilots failed to learn how to fly. When the proceedings of pilot instructors failed to give him the rich data he desired, he created his new method. Using CIT, researchers can learn more about significant moments that the participants believe had some important effect on a future outcome. Overall, CIT seeks to discover the ways in which individuals make sense of how specific moments in their past contributed to their future behavior.

Critical incidents are defined as independent events that allow for inferences or predictions to be made about the individual engaging in the event, and they are particularly useful for examining specific moments that have a special meaning to the individual in a particular context (Flanagan, 1954). This method is not restricted by a

finite set of rules and steps, but has the ability to adapt for each individual study, allowing it to be utilized in an assortment of disciplines, including business, counseling, education, medicine, military, and management (Chell, 1999; Kain, 2004).

While CIT has been used in a variety of contexts, there have been very few studies that have utilized this unique methodology in family communication. However, two studies have used CIT to examine development in father-son relationships (Pellegrini & Sarbin, 2002) and closeness in mother-son relationships (Morman & Whitely, 2012). This method is appropriate for the current study because it seeks to examine critical moments that influence closeness between grandfathers and granddaughters. By asking participants to reflect on these memorable moments of closeness, the data has the potential to reveal significant patterns or themes of how granddaughters experience closeness with their grandfathers. Therefore, this study will be directed by the following research question:

RQ: What critical incidents do granddaughters perceive to have influenced closeness in their relationship with their grandfathers?

CHAPTER TWO

Method

Participants

For this study, 160 college-aged women at a mid-sized, southern, private university were surveyed in the fall of 2014. The age of the participants ranged from 17 to 50 with an average age of 19.57 ($SD = 2.88$). A majority of the participants (75 percent) identified themselves as white, while 7.5 percent were Hispanic/Latino, 6 percent were Black/African American, and 11 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander. One participant indicated she was Native American/American Indian, and one individual selected “Other.”

Participants were also asked to indicate the highest degree or level of education they had completed. Of this group, 6 percent of participants held a bachelor’s degree, 2 percent had achieved associates degrees, 67 percent had earned some college credit, and 25 percent were enrolled in college but hadn’t earned college credit yet. All of the participants had graduated from high school or earned a GED.

For religious affiliation, 3 percent indicated they were Atheist, Agnostic or did not believe in any religion, 19 percent identified as Roman Catholic, 10 percent were “other Non-Christian,” and 67 percent identified as Protestant/Other non-Catholic Christian. There was also one participant who identified as Mormon/Latter-Day Saints, and one participant who chose not to answer.

Almost all of the participants were single at 97 percent. However, there was one engaged participant, two married participants, one divorced participant, and one participant who did not answer.

The survey also asked the participants if their grandfathers were still living. On the paternal side of the family, 52.5 percent of grandfathers were still living while 47 percent had passed away. There was also one participant who did not respond. On the maternal side of the family, 61 percent were alive, and 39 percent were deceased.

Procedures

To collect the data, the researcher visited two introductory speech courses after gaining approval from the professor. Subjects were presented with a short personal introduction and the basic premise of the study was explained. Then, a short survey was passed out to each participant, including an informed consent form and the questionnaire. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of the data and the members' right to withdrawal from the study at any time. After signing the informed consent form, the participants were told to remove the form from the survey packet and return it to the researcher. Then, they were allowed to move forward with the questionnaire. Participants were given approximately 10 minutes to fill out the survey. Surveys were then immediately collected as participants completed their questionnaires. Participants were also given extra credit for completing the survey. Names were taken from the informed consent forms and reported back to the professor. However, there was no identifying information on the detached surveys, ensuring the participants' confidentiality.

Measures

The questionnaire contained three parts. The first section asked simple demographic questions. The second part of the survey utilized Aron, Aron, and Smollan's (1992) Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale. This scale is a single-item, pictorial measure consisting of seven Venn diagrams with changing degrees of overlap. In the instructions, participants were asked to mark which set of circles best represented their perceptions of closeness in their relationship with their grandfather. The assumption of the scale is that those with greater degrees of self-other overlap will choose circles with greater intersection. The scale begins with two non-overlapping separate circles and ends with two nearly completely overlapping circles. For this study, the participants filled out this scale twice, once for the paternal grandfather and once for the maternal grandfather.

The third part of the survey was an open-ended question that solicited a critical incident regarding feelings of closeness within the grandfather-granddaughter relationship. If the granddaughter has or had relationships with both, they were asked to select the grandfather with whom they felt the closest based on the Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). More specifically, the instructions stated:

Take a moment to think of a memorable time or event that you and your grandfather shared which changed the level of closeness in your relationship. Perhaps you and your grandfather became closer after the event, resulting in a stronger relationship. Or maybe you and your grandfather became more distant after the event and your relationship was weakened. In the space below, please describe the event and its influence on the level of closeness shared between you and your grandfather.

Analysis

To examine the data, a grounded theory approach was used to identify moments of closeness within the grandfather-granddaughter relationship (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Initially, all responses from the questionnaire were assigned a survey number. Then, the primary researcher selected every third survey to be used as a random sample for the first round of independent open coding. Once half of the surveys had been chosen for the random sample, the researcher scanned the open-ended data and sent it to the other member of the research team. To examine this section of the questionnaire, the coding process utilized constant comparison methodology (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Individually, both coders used open coding to analyze the random sample of responses from the questionnaire. Response categories were then created based on thematic similarity and topic saliency, recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness (Owen, 1984; Sieger & Stamp, 1994). These categories were constructed in a linear pattern, meaning that the researchers only added new categories when the current categories failed to fully encompass a specific response narrative.

Once the independent coding schemes were constructed, both of the coders met and finalized one comprehensive coding scheme. Axial coding was used to examine the characteristics of similar codes, which were then used to define a new code for the comprehensive coding scheme. Similar categories identified by both coders were combined while codes found by only one coder were examined and discussed until agreement was reached on the usefulness and necessity of the code.

After the comprehensive coding scheme was confirmed, the remaining questionnaires were scanned and sent to the secondary coder. Then, all of the questionnaires were independently analyzed using the new scheme. After this secondary coding process, the researchers came back together to reexamine the coding scheme. The

categories were constantly compared, contrasted, and adjusted to encompass all narratives within the data set (Creswell, 1998). This process resulted in the researchers adding one final code to the comprehensive coding scheme. The data was then coded one final time using the established scheme. In the end, the analysis revealed eight distinct ways in which granddaughters perceived closeness with their grandfathers.

CHAPTER THREE

Results

A total of 160 granddaughters participated in this study, which sought to understand how granddaughters perceive closeness with their grandfathers. Within the study, granddaughters were asked to indicate their level of closeness with their grandfathers, both maternal and paternal, using Aron, Aron, and Smollan's (1992) Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale. A one-sample t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the mean of paternal closeness ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.54$) and the mean of maternal closeness ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.98$). Granddaughters in this study felt significantly closer to their maternal grandfathers $t(158) = 23.71$, $p < .001$, than their paternal grandfathers, $t(157) = 22.71$, $p < .001$.

For the open-ended section of the survey, granddaughters were asked to write about memorable moments of closeness with their grandfather. While the granddaughters were asked to only write about the grandfather with whom they felt the closest, 21 of the granddaughters wrote about both of their grandfathers. Therefore, 181 grandfathers were described. Of this group, 108 were maternal grandfathers, and 68 were paternal grandfathers. There was also one granddaughter who described her maternal step-grandfather, and four granddaughters who failed to specify which grandfather they were referencing in their written responses. While some participants wrote only one line, others filled the page with multiple paragraphs. These responses resulted in 302 memorable moments of closeness. From these moments, eight primary categories

emerged, including shared activities, communication, memories, displays of affection, proximity, family crisis, travel, and role model.

Shared Activities (n=70)

The most prominent way in which granddaughters felt close to their grandfathers was through activity, where granddaughters described engaging in a specific activity or sharing a similar interest with their grandfather. These responses varied greatly and include activities such as fishing, hunting, driving classic cars, playing card games, building bird houses, watching movies or television shows, gardening, playing sports, going on walks, having tea parties, and even going to a donut shop. For example, one granddaughter wrote about a game that became a tradition with her grandfather and gave her a greater sense of closeness. She wrote:

One thing my grandpa and I always did when we were together was play checkers. He was an avid checkers player, and I was a kid who loved any game. So checkers was always what we did together. Sometimes we would talk while playing. Sometimes we would just play in silence. It never really mattered. It was just something special we did.

In several responses, a shared activity was coupled with a teaching moment. In these moments, it wasn't the skill that was being taught that the granddaughter valued, but rather it was the meaning behind the action. For example, one granddaughter described a moment where her grandfather taught her how to waterski. She wrote, "His patience and willingness to make sure I succeeded and felt accomplished was inspiring and really helped me further understand how wonderful he is." In the same way, another granddaughter wrote, "I helped him in his garden. It made me feel special that he let me help him."

Sometimes, granddaughters couldn't think of one specific activity in which they felt close with their grandfathers, so they wrote more of general quality time. For example, one granddaughter wrote, "He would take me fishing and do crafts with me in his backyard. Spending this quality time together at a young age brought us closer together, as it made me feel like he truly cared about me."

Communication (n=59)

After shared activities, acts of verbal communication surfaced as the second most significant way in which granddaughters experienced closeness with their grandfathers. Within this category, there were four main themes: family stories, verbal statements, giving advice, and frequent communication.

Several of the respondents enjoyed hearing stories about their grandparents' and parents' pasts as it made them feel more in touch with their family. Some of these stories focused on wild escapades from the grandfathers' past, while some were more serious in nature. For example, one granddaughter remembers when her grandfather told her about his most exciting and frightening experiences in the Vietnam War. She wrote, "I felt closer to him because he opened up to me a part of his life that might not have been the most joyous time in his life." Stories were also used as a way to connect during times of grief, especially when the grandmother passed away. Telling stories of her helped the granddaughter and grandfather connect and support each other during this period of grief.

In several responses, the granddaughters remembered specific verbal statements that increased closeness with their grandfathers. These statements sometimes focused on sweet nicknames or compliments. For example, one granddaughter remembered that her grandfather would tell her she was the "prettiest girl in Texas." However, many

granddaughters were able to pinpoint exact moments when their grandfathers said something memorable to them. One granddaughter discussed seeing her grandfather at her high school graduation. She wrote, “After the ceremony, he gave me a hug and told me ‘I love you’ with tears in his eyes. In that moment, I knew he was proud of me and that really hit home.” Another granddaughter had a similar moment when her grandfather talked to her about car safety. She wrote:

At Christmas, he started to cry and asked all the teenagers to be careful while they were driving. He said please don’t get distracted because cars are powerful and could kill you. You could tell how much he loved us in that moment, so from then on I felt closer to him.

Giving advice was another prominent communication theme. In this study, the grandfather’s advice was received with welcome arms and allowed the granddaughters to better understand their grandfathers. One granddaughter wrote about a period when she talked with and received advice from her grandfather on a regular basis. She wrote:

We both had the same knee surgery a few years ago. We would call and check up on each other, and we could relate to what the other was going through. During this time, I realized how great of advice my grandpa gave and how much he’s been through and experienced.

Lastly, granddaughters felt closer to their grandfather when they communicated with them on a regular basis. For some, these conversations were long, deep conversations about religion and politics. However, others simply enjoyed communicating with their grandfather regularly. For instance, one granddaughter noted, “My grandpa texts all of us grandkids on a normal basis which is cute and makes me feel closer to him.” For these granddaughters, frequent communication allowed them to feel closer to their grandfathers.

Memories (n=51)

The third largest category to emerge from the data included responses where the granddaughter used previous memories to construct a sense of closeness with her grandfather. Some granddaughters never had the opportunity to meet their grandfathers due to death or estrangement. In these cases, their perceived closeness with their grandfather was built on the memories of others. For example, one granddaughter shared how she felt close to her grandfather through her mother. She wrote, “My mother’s dad died before my birth. I never met him. However, I saw my grandfather’s photos, and I feel so warm when my mother talks about him.”

Other times, the respondents only had one or two memories with their grandfathers, which became representative of the relationship. One granddaughter described meeting her grandfather in South Korea when she was a child. She wrote:

I only clearly remember seeing my paternal grandpa once. All I remember was going to his house and him hugging me and being so happy to see me. I felt so much closer to him after that, but I still did not know him well.

In some cases, the grandfather died when the granddaughter was young and left her with vague memories about their relationship. One granddaughter wrote, “My mom’s father died when I was very young. I do remember him making up songs and singing often with my brother and me. He was always very fun to be around.” If the granddaughter was older when her grandfather died, she retained more detailed memories about the relationship. For example, one participant described the euphoria that came with seeing her grandfather. She wrote:

He died when I was in third grade but this doesn’t mean I have forgotten the joy that he brought to my life when I was a child. Every time I would go to his house, I would run up to the door, into the house, and into his old man muscly arms.

Although these granddaughters could not build relationships with their grandfathers, they have used their memories or the memories of others to maintain a sense of relational closeness.

Display of Affection (n=36)

Displays of affection emerged as the fourth major category and included responses in which the grandfather displayed his affection or love for his granddaughter in a positive way. One of the main manifestations of the grandfathers' affection was through support. For some, this support was financial, where the grandfather would pay for college. However, for others, this support was emotional and simply the grandfather's presence made the granddaughter feel loved. For instance, one participant discussed feeling supported by her grandfather before her wedding. She wrote:

My mom's dad and I became closer after he waited in the car with me right before I walked down the aisle. We talked some, but really we just waited together. I was so nervous. I don't really remember what we said, but I remember feeling supported and loved by him.

Other granddaughters experienced their grandfathers' love through significant gifts. One granddaughter shared how her grandfather supported her dreams by buying her a show horse. She wrote:

When I was in the third grade, I got really into riding horses. I needed a show horse, but my family couldn't afford it. My grandfather took it upon himself to buy me my dream horse. It wasn't about the money to him. It was about being able to see me happy and succeed in whatever I put my mind to. We really bonded and connected through this.

In this situation, it wasn't the gift that drew her closer to her grandfather, but it was the affection behind the gift that seemed to matter the most.

Granddaughters also remembered specific actions that showed their grandfathers' affection for them. For example, one granddaughter wrote about her grandfather's sacrifice after she said she missed him. She wrote:

My grandpa owned a marina. At one point, he was gone more, so I told him that I was sad that I didn't get to see him as much. A few days later, he sold his marina and told me it was because of what I said.

Through his action, the grandfather showed his granddaughter that she was more important to him than his marina.

Proximity (n=35)

The fifth category encompassed any references towards physical proximity. Some granddaughters lived with their grandfathers while others lived on opposite coastlines. The varying degree of geographic proximity emerged as a significant indicator of closeness.

Several granddaughters felt closer to their grandfathers when they lived physically close to them. Often times, responses that mentioned physical closeness also mentioned other codes such as shared activities or communication, which could mean that the physical closeness served as a catalyst for other moments that would facilitate closeness. For example, one granddaughter wrote:

My grandfather lived with us for a few months. I feel that it made us closer because he was physically there to talk to. He knew about my school, friends, and current boyfriend. It was just easy to talk to him. Now that he isn't living with us, we don't talk as much.

Just as the above statement supports, closeness was typically hurt when grandfathers and granddaughters moved or lived far away from each other. One granddaughter wrote, "I felt more distant with him when he was in Michigan and I was in

Texas. Living so far apart made it hard to be able to have the relationship I wanted.”

Another participant expressed a similar sentiment when she wrote, “When I lived in Chicago, I would see my grandpa often. But since I moved to California, I have barely seen him. I might talk to him one or two times year.” While physical distance normally led to relational distance, the responses showed one main exception: going to college. In these instances, the relationship had the potential to grow closer due the grandfather’s support and pride. One granddaughter wrote, “My grandfather and I became closer after I went away to college. He viewed me more as an adult and was proud of me.”

Family Crisis (n=31)

Family crisis emerged as the sixth largest category in which granddaughters discussed incidents of health scares, divorce, death, and other family issues including alcoholism, drug abuse, mental health issues, and near death experiences. Several granddaughters wrote about how a decline in her grandfather’s health drew her closer to him. One granddaughter shared her emotions after her grandfather had a quadruple bypass surgery. She wrote, “After he woke up, we held hands and both of us started crying because we knew he could have died. Ever since we are inseparable.”

Another talked about her last few days with her grandfather and how he comforted her about his death. She wrote, “In my moment of sadness, he stopped me to give strength by stating he knew where he was going and would see me again soon. It was and will always be the strongest memory of his love for me.” Because of the fear of losing their grandfathers, many granddaughters made a conscious effort to go see their grandfathers in the hospital. This added effort on the part of the granddaughter allowed the relationship to grow during an emotionally difficult time.

While many of the instances focused on the grandfather's health, there were also times when the closeness was impacted because of the granddaughter's health. For example, one granddaughter grew closer to her grandfather after she was in a car crash. She wrote, "While I was in the hospital, he was there singing to me every day." Conversely, there were also moments when the granddaughter's health negatively impacted the relationship. One granddaughter wrote, "I was diagnosed with brain cancer. It brought us closer for a brief time. Then, he ignored the situation and never checked up on me." For these granddaughters, closeness was directly associated with concern during these health crises.

Another main theme that surfaced in this category was divorce where either the parents or the grandparents separated. In the parents' case, granddaughters reported growing closer to their grandfathers simply because they spent more time with them after the crisis. One granddaughter wrote, "We spent a lot more time together after my parents divorced and my dad moved away." Other times, divorce thrust a wedge in between the grandfather and the granddaughter. For example, one granddaughter described a family feud when her grandfather asked her family to choose sides. She wrote, "When my grandfather felt we leaned more towards the side of my grandmother, he essentially completely cut off communication with my family. After two years, he apologized for his behavior, but this definitely weakened our relationship."

Finally, granddaughters reported moments of death and grief that influenced closeness with their grandfathers, especially the death of the grandmother. One granddaughter discussed how her relationship grew closer after her grandmother's death when she wrote, "Our bond grew closer after my grandmother passed away. We kind of

latched on to each other to get through that hard time. We spent a lot of time target practicing and riding four-wheelers on his property.” Other times, death caused the grandfather to become reclusive which hurt the relationship. One granddaughter wrote, “When my grandma died, my grandpa kept busy, and I left for college. So, I haven’t seen him in a few months.”

Travel (n=12)

Travel was the seventh category to emerge from the data. In these responses, the granddaughter always mentioned a big trip she took with her grandfather that increased her level of closeness with him. Sometimes it was the simple act of traveling that increased closeness. One granddaughter wrote, “My mom’s father took me on numerous vacations growing up. From London to the Virgin Islands, we bonded through traveling. All these trips gave me a greater love and appreciation for my grandpa.”

Some granddaughters, however, referenced a specific trip that caused the granddaughter to feel closer to her grandfather. One granddaughter wrote about a trip to Europe with her family that caused her to connect with her grandfather. She wrote:

On one of our last nights, my grandpa was close to tears at dinner as we talked about the trip so far. He was just so grateful and blessed to be able to do these things with us...things he never imagined he could do before my mom and her sisters were born. We got a lot closer after this because I felt a real connection to him and my grandmother. We were and are so thankful to have each other.

On these trips, granddaughters were given the opportunity to spend ample time with their grandfathers, allowing them to build memories, share stories, and bond through activity.

Role Model (n=8)

The smallest theme of the study focused on how granddaughters view their grandfathers as role models. For these entries, granddaughters could not think of a single moment in which closeness changed with their grandfathers, usually because the grandfathers maintained a constant presence in the granddaughters' lives. Instead, they pictured their grandfathers as guiding figures in their lives and as additional parents. For example, one granddaughter wrote:

No specific event brought my grandfather and I together. However, he has always been like an extra parent to me. I talk to him often, and he supports me mentally and financially on occasion. He has always been there for my family and I no matter what.

Other granddaughters echoed this perspective writing, "He was always the best father figure in my life," and "He is protective over the boys I date and is truly a second father figure." This theme also revealed itself through the grandfather's actions. One granddaughter wrote, "My grandfather always invested his time to do silly things with me and poured into me. He showed me what it meant to be a Christian and love family unconditionally."

CHAPTER FOUR

Discussion, Limitations, Future Research, and Conclusion

Discussion

Within the field of family communication, a significant amount of research on the ways in which grandparents influence their grandchildren's lives has been recorded. However, the specific cross-sex, intergenerational grandfather-granddaughter relationship has been almost completely overlooked by family communication scholars. The goal of this explorative study was to gain a deeper understanding of how closeness is experienced, maintained, and negotiated within grandfather-granddaughter relationships. Using an inductive, qualitative methodology, eight primary categories emerged from the data and were identified by granddaughters as memorable moments that influenced their level of closeness with their grandfathers. Four key points regarding the findings of this study warrant consideration.

First, the largest category of memorable moments focused on shared activities, a traditionally masculine form of creating and sustaining closeness. In the responses, granddaughters felt closest to their grandfathers when engaging in some activity, such as playing checkers, driving classic cars, or building bird houses. Several scholars have argued that men construct and experience closeness in different ways than women (Floyd & Morman, 1997; Morman & Floyd, 1998; Swain, 1989; Wood & Inman, 1993). While women typically connect through more feminine forms of building closeness like talking and conversation, men bond through activities. Wood and Inman (1993) referred to this

activity-based form of intimacy as “closeness in the doing.” While this gendered form of masculine closeness would be more expected in the same-sex relationships of men (e.g., grandfather/grandson), its presence in this cross-sex relationship suggests that grandfathers construct and experience closeness with their granddaughters within a more masculine framework.

In addition, these findings align with other research on a similar family dyad, the father-daughter relationship. In Morman and Barrett’s (2007) study on turning points in father-daughter relationships, they found that the primary way fathers and daughters experienced closeness was by participating in activities together. The results of their research directly align with the findings of the present study on grandfather-granddaughter relationships suggesting that these opposite-sex relationships experience closeness in similar ways. Social learning theory argues that individuals learn how to behave by observing others around them, which suggests that the way a father interacts with his daughter stems from the ways in which his father interacted with him (Bandura, 1977). This current study and Morman and Barrett’s study (2007) support the idea that fathers learn how to construct closeness from their fathers because the grandfathers in this study and the fathers in Morman and Barrett’s (2007) study experienced closeness with their granddaughters/daughters in a similar way. Therefore, other literature about the father-daughter relationship may extend to the grandfather-granddaughter relationship as well.

Similarity stands as another prominent reason to study this dyad. As noted above, fathers can influence their daughters in a host of ways. By studying the grandfather-granddaughter relationship and comparing it to the current literature on the father-

daughter relationship, scholars may uncover other similarities in parenting or other parent/child interactions.

The second most prominent category in this study encompassed moments where verbal communication facilitated an increase in closeness within the grandfather-granddaughter relationship. In this study, granddaughters reported feeling closer to their grandfathers when they talked with them about their present lives, about their families' past, and about advice for the future. Communication, and specifically self-disclosure, have been associated with satisfaction, affection, and commitment and is essential in the development of intimate relationships (Hatfield & Rapson, 1993; Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). Traditionally, talking or disclosing has been viewed as a feminine form of building closeness, i.e., "closeness in the dialogue" (Wood & Inman, 1993). Some scholars argue that women place more emphasis on dialogue and on personal emotional disclosures than men and that they are socialized to build relationships through disclosure (Mansfield, McAllister, & Collard, 1992; Philaretou & Allen, 2001). The results of the current study support the idea that while grandfathers clearly pull their granddaughters toward a more masculine style of closeness, granddaughters also appear to pull their grandfathers toward a more feminine experience of closeness. This suggests that the grandfather-granddaughter relationship is mutually influential, with both parties shaping how closeness is created and sustained within the dyad.

Third, the findings revealed that geographic proximity between grandfathers and granddaughters was directly associated with their experience of closeness. When grandfathers lived geographically near their granddaughters, closeness often increased, and this was especially true when the grandfather lived in the same household as the

granddaughter. However, as physical distance increased, closeness in these relationships was generally weakened or damaged. These results stand in opposition to extant research on long-distance relationships. In Stafford and Merolla's (2007) article on romantic relationships, they found that an increase in geographical distance actually strengthened the couple's relationship and led to an increase in satisfaction. Because couples had limited time together, they didn't pay as much attention to their partner's annoying habits or personality traits. In effect, they actually enjoyed their time together more than if they were together all the time. Other studies on family dyads, including siblings, mother-child, and father-daughter, have echoed these findings and support the notion that physical distance can actually strengthen relationship quality (Golish, 2000; Herrick & Morman, 2008; Morman & Barrett, 2007). Instead, the current study suggests that in a relationship contingent on participating in activities together, physical distance may act as a wedge that separates the grandfather and granddaughter, preventing them from growing closer together.

This may be due to the parentally mediated nature of the relationship. Mueller, Wilhelm, and Elder (2002) suggest that parents act as gatekeepers, mediating the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. Based on the quality of their own relationship with their mother or father, parents can hinder, facilitate, or prevent contact between the grandparent and the grandchild. Technology may also be a hindrance to this relationship. Schmeeckle and Sprecher (2004) found that families often use technological advances such as cell phones, airplane travel, and computer-assisted communication such as email, Skype or Facebook to stay connected when they are geographically distant. However, these advances may not be an option for some grandparents. Airplane travel is

expensive and can be difficult when the grandparent has significant health problems. At the same time, grandparents may also feel uncomfortable or have no knowledge of how to use new computer advances, such as social media, which further limits their access to their grandchild.

Finally, these results are informed by Floyd's Affection Exchange Theory (2006), which argues affection is a resource that is shared with only a select few. Based in evolutionary psychology, the theory argues that showing affection to children, or in this case grandchildren, is beneficial, allowing them to grow into physically and mentally healthy individuals and increases their attractiveness as potential mates, thus ensuring the survival of the family's genetic material. While affection has traditionally been viewed from a verbal perspective, Floyd and Morman (1998) conceptualized the term to include instances of nonverbal and instrumental affection as well. In this family dyad, grandfathers have a continued stake in ensuring that their genes survive as granddaughters share 25 percent of their genetics. By showing their granddaughters affection through sincere support, significant gifts, and meaningful actions, grandfathers are investing in their granddaughters' physical, emotional, and social health, thereby increasing and ensuring the potential ability of the granddaughter to survive and thrive well into the future.

Limitations

As with any study, the present research faced three primary limitations. First, moments of closeness within the grandfather-granddaughter relationship were only studied from the granddaughter's perspective. No grandfathers were surveyed to learn how they experienced closeness with their granddaughters. Second, there was very little

variance in the age range of the participants. Most of the granddaughters fell between the ages of 19 and 21. Granddaughters from an older generation potentially may experience closeness with their grandfathers differently than those of this particular generation. Third, this sample consisted of college students from a private, Christian university. These granddaughters may have come from more affluent backgrounds than the typical American college student, which could have enabled them to spend more time with their grandparents engaging in special activities such as traveling together. These grandparents also may have been able to provide financial support or give their granddaughters significant gifts, which also influenced their level of closeness. Granddaughters from less affluent families may have experienced closeness in different ways.

Future Research

Future studies could survey grandfathers in order to gain a more complete picture of how closeness is constructed and maintained in the grandfather-granddaughter relationship. In addition, future studies could examine the other intergenerational family dyads at the grandparent-grandchild level, including the grandfather-grandson relationship, the grandmother-grandson relationship, and the grandmother-granddaughter relationship. By looking at critical moments in each of these dyads, scholars will be able to determine if there are similarities or differences between same-sex and cross-sex intergenerational dyads, which will give scholars a deeper understanding of how closeness is built and maintained through lived experiences.

Conclusion

This inductive analysis presents a detailed, qualitative assessment of critical incidents of closeness within the grandfather-granddaughter relationship. This study makes some significant contributions to the family communication literature. Not only does it examine a relational dyad that has been relatively ignored by communication researchers (c.f., Sellers & Milton, 2007), but it also gives scholars a deeper insight into how closeness is experienced within the grandfather-granddaughter relationships. In addition, this scholarship further supports the idea that closeness is not a stagnant feeling but is grounded in the shared experiences of both members of the relationship.

The specific relationship between grandfathers and granddaughters needs to become a greater priority for family communication scholars. Closeness is an essential part of every relationship, especially within the grandfather-granddaughter relationship. As grandparents live longer, they have the ability to play a larger role in their grandchildren's lives. In addition, the cross-sex dyad has the potential to leave lasting effects on the granddaughter, similar to that of the father-daughter relationship. Although the grandfather-granddaughter dyad may resemble the father-daughter relationship, it is still essential to study this unique dyad in its own right. In 2012, the U.S. Census Bureau found that 2.7 million grandparents were the primary caregivers for at least one of their grandchildren. In these families, the grandfather may take on the main paternal role in the granddaughters' lives. Therefore, understanding how granddaughters perceive changes in closeness with their grandfathers is imperative. Along with furthering communication scholarship, it also allows scholars to gain even deeper perspectives on the ways in which closeness functions as a lived experience based on intimate interactions

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