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*Journal of Family Issues* 2004; 25; 1026

DOI: 10.1177/0192513X04265941

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# The Role of Offspring and In-Laws in Grandparents' Ties to Their Grandchildren

KAREN L. FINGERMAN  
*Purdue University*

Prior research has considered the influence of the middle generation on ties between grandparents and grandchildren but has not differentiated between gender of parent and kinship to grandparent (e.g., daughter vs. daughter-in-law and son vs. son-in-law). Eighty-six grandparents provided information about the qualities of their relationships with their grandchildren ( $n = 239$ ) and their grandchildren's parents ( $n = 141$  mothers and 141 fathers). Two characteristics of the middle generation were considered: (a) gender of the parent (mother vs. father) and (b) kinship to grandparent—son or daughter (consanguine parent) or daughter-in-law or son-in-law (affinal parent). Relationships with children-in-law were more strongly associated with qualities of ties to grandchildren than relationships with grandparents' own children. Implications for future research addressing in-law relationships are discussed.

**Keywords:** *aging family; intergenerational relationships; daughter; son; grandparent; grandchild; in-law*

The relationship between a grandparent and a grandchild is a “contingent” one, dependent on a middle generation rather than a direct path between two parties (e.g., Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Hagestad, 1985; Thompson & Walker, 1987; Troll, 1985; Uhlenberg & Hammill, 1998). Indeed, grandparents' relationships with the grandchildren's parents serve as a lens through which ties are refracted. Yet studies addressing the middle

*Author's Note: Funding for this study was provided by a grant from the College of Health and Human Development, Pennsylvania State University, and from Grant AG17916-01A from the National Institute on Aging, “Problems between Parents and Offspring in Adulthood.” Portions of this article were presented in C. L. Johnson (chair), “Self-reported qualities of family relationships,” symposium presented at the annual meeting of the Gerontological Society of America, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Kira Birditt assisted with statistical analyses. Aline Sayer, Michael Rovine, Alexis Walker, and Ann Crouter provided invaluable assistance on drafts of this article. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Karen L. Fingerman, Berner Hanley University Scholar, Child Development and Family Studies, 1200 West State Street, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907-2055; e-mail: karenf@purdue.edu.*

JOURNAL OF FAMILY ISSUES, Vol. 25 No. 8, November 2004 1026-1049  
DOI: 10.1177/0192513X04265941  
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generation's role in relationships between grandparents and grandchildren have focused primarily on one parent, the grandparent's son or daughter. Clearly, grandparents' ties with grandchildren also involve another parent—a daughter-in-law or son-in-law, an ex-daughter-in-law or ex-son-in-law, or a never-married partner. Information about grandparents' perceptions of these ties might provide increased understanding of intergenerational relationships.

This study considers grandparents' perceptions of their relationships to each of their grandchildren and both of the grandchild's parents. Specifically, the study examines two characteristics of the parental generation that might be associated with grandparents' perceptions of ties to grandchildren: (a) parental gender and (b) parental kinship to the grandparent (affinal vs. consanguine). Using standard nomenclature, references to grandparents are abbreviated G1, references to the parent generation G2, and references to the grandchild generation G3.

None of the grandparents had primary care responsibilities for their grandchildren. Therefore, grandparents had ongoing ties to the middle generation. Parenting relationships examined in this study were further constrained to the grandparents' (G1) children (G2) and the children's spouses (G2); in other words, all of the grandchildren's parents (G2) were married. This approach loses information about potentially interesting ties. For example, stepchildren may intervene in distinct ways with regard to grandparents' ties to their grandchildren (e.g., Goodman & Silverstein, 2001). Furthermore, grandmothers may serve distinct functions for a divorced or never-married mother (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Johnson, 1998; Robertson, 1996). Yet scholars argue that examination of ties between grandparents and grandchildren whose parents are married provides clearer information about gender differences in the middle generation (Chan & Elder, 2000) and also about kinship patterns. Therefore, given the paucity of information about parents and grandchildren, this study focused on such families.

#### **GENDER AND LINEAGE PATTERN WITH THE MIDDLE GENERATION**

Although the role of the middle generation (G2) in ties between grandparents and grandchildren is widely recognized, grandparents' (G1) perceptions of the middle generation are surprisingly lacking in current literature (see Uhlenberg & Hammill, 1998, for an exception). Studies involving all three generations have examined grandchildren's (G3) perceptions of their parents' ties to grandparents (e.g., Chan & Elder,

2000; Hodgson, 1992, 1998; Holladay et al., 1998; Matthews & Sprey, 1985) and parents' (G2) perceptions of these ties (Henry, Ceglian, & Matthews, 1992). This emphasis on the grandchild's perceptions in the literature stems from theories that parents (G2) actively shape their children's (G3) ties to grandparents by modeling behaviors, by expressing their own attitudes about the grandparent to the grandchild, and by providing a means of contact between grandparents and grandchildren (Hodgson, 1998; Holladay et al., 1998; Robertson, 1975; Thompson & Walker, 1987). By considering grandparents' perceptions of these ties, however, we gain insight into factors that may directly affect grandparents' satisfaction with the relationship and their own well-being (Fingerman, 1998; Goodman & Silverstein, 2001).

In addition, most research examining the role of the middle generation has either ignored the child's partner (G2) or assumed that both parents influence ties between grandparents and grandchildren in a similar manner. Grandparents' ties to mothers and fathers may be associated with their ties to the grandchildren in different ways, however. Furthermore, children and children-in-law may play distinct roles in ties between grandparents and grandchildren.

#### **MOTHERS' AND FATHERS' TIES TO GRANDPARENTS**

Research and theory regarding grandparent/grandchild ties consistently suggest the matrilineal lineage is favored over the patrilineal lineage (Chan & Elder, 2000; Matthews & Sprey, 1985; Uhlenberg & Hammill, 1998). Explanations for this preference are varied but tend to focus on the idea that women are facilitators of intergenerational ties (Walker, Thompson, & Morgan, 1987). Women traditionally have stronger ties to their family of origin than do men; bonds between aging mothers and adult daughters are closer than are ties involving fathers or sons (Fingerman, 2000; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). As a result, grandchildren presumably have stronger ties to their maternal grandmothers than to their paternal grandparents (Chan & Elder, 2000; Hagestad, 1985; Johnson, 1983).

Conclusions with regard to gender of parent may be biased, however; most studies have examined only ties between grandparents and a daughter (e.g., Clingempeel, Colyar, Brand, & Hetherington, 1992; Spitze & Ward, 1998; Thompson & Walker, 1984). Studies that have actually assessed sons' roles in the grandparent/grandchild tie suggest men may influence ties between grandchildren and grandparents in specific contexts.

For example, traditions surrounding inheritance of farmland are associated with stronger ties to paternal grandparents in rural America (King & Elder, 1995).

Nonetheless, aging parents of both genders tend to perceive ties to daughters as stronger and closer than ties to sons (Fingerman, 2001a; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Troll, 1985). These findings suggest that gender of offspring may be an important factor in grandparents' perceptions of ties to grandchildren and that ties to daughters may matter more than ties to sons.

#### CONSANGUINE VERSUS AFFINAL PARENTS

This study also examined differences in the association between qualities of relationships with consanguine and affinal parents (G2) and grandparents' perceptions of ties to grandchildren (G3). Consanguine ties involve relationships defined by blood, such as the link between parent and offspring. Here, the term consanguine also includes adopted offspring (G2) whom grandparents (G1) have raised since early childhood. Grandparents' relationships with the partners of their offspring constitute affinal ties, relationships based on affiliation rather than biological links. Typically, these ties began after the affinal parent (G2) enters adulthood.

Therefore, grandparents' feelings about their own children are likely to differ from their feelings about those children's partners. Theorists argue that the investment of rearing a child generates a stake in that child that endures long after the child is grown (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971; Fingerman, 1995). Indeed, middle-aged and older parents may view their offspring as an extension of themselves and cast these ties in a favorable light. As a result, across studies, parents consistently rate ties to offspring highly (Fingerman, 2001b; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Ryff, Lee, Essex, & Schmutte, 1994).

Grandparents may be less invested in children-in-law than in their own children, however (Duvall, 1954). They did not raise their children-in-law, and the ties could disband. For example, researchers find women tend to consider ties to their daughters stronger than ties to their daughters-in-law, even when they get along well with their daughters-in-law (Kivett, 1989; Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 1987). Adults also report less positive ties with their in-laws than with their own parents (Willson, Shuey, & Elder, 2003), which may evoke reciprocal feelings from those in-laws. Indeed, fathers seem to favor their daughters over their sons-in-law. Nydegger (1986) found that fathers' chief complaints about their grown daughters

centered on the daughters' marriages (and, by implication, their sons-in-law).

The question arises: How are grandparents' feelings for their own child and the child-in-law associated with feelings for the grandchild? Grandparents' ratings of ties to grandchildren may reflect dynamics of ties to both the consanguine and affinal parent. For example, Fischer (1983a) suggested that mothers and sons grow more distant and their ties are characterized by increased negative emotions when sons become parents. She attributed this change in the mother-son relationship to difficulties between the mother and the daughter-in-law. In another study, Fischer (1983b) reported that when women have children, their ties to their own mothers become stronger, whereas their ties to their mothers-in-law become more conflict ridden. Of particular note is that ties between grandparents (G1) and parents (G2) appear to be complex, involving both positive and negative qualities.

Yet prior research has focused on the consanguine parent's influence on positive qualities of ties between grandparents and grandchildren. Grandparents who get along well with a grown child tend to report favorable relationships with that child's child (Barranti, 1985; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Hagestad, 1985). Grandchildren's parents may contribute to negative features of grandparent/grandchild ties as well. For example, grandparents reported irritation with a grandchild when they believed the parents were not raising the child properly (Fingerman, 1998). This study considered grandparents' perceptions of both positive and negative aspects of relationships with grandchildren. Drawing on prior studies (Fischer, 1983a, 1983b), grandparents with better ties to daughters were expected to report better ties to grandchildren, whereas grandparents with worse ties to daughters-in-law were expected to find grandchildren more tiring and demanding. There is insufficient literature to speculate about patterns with regard to sons and sons-in-law (G2), but this study explored this issue.

#### **GENDER OF GRANDPARENT**

Grandmothers and grandfathers may also differ in their feelings about their grandchildren and their grandchildren's parents. The literature suggests that grandmothers are more involved in these ties than are grandfathers (Henwood, 1993; Johnson, 1983; Troll, 1985). Yet Spitze and Ward (1998) pointed out that a disproportionate number of studies of "grand-

parents" focus solely on women, distorting conclusions about gender and grandparenting.

Nonetheless, extant literature suggests that women are more active in family ties throughout adulthood than are men (Rossi, 1993; Troll, 1988) and that grandmothers have more contact with grandchildren than do grandfathers (Uhlenberg & Hammill, 1998). Furthermore, prior research describes matrilineal links as key in intergenerational chains (Clingempeel et al., 1992; Matthews & Sprey, 1985; Walker et al., 1987). Given these patterns, grandmothers' ties to their grandchildren were expected to be stronger than were grandfathers' ties to grandchildren.

#### **OTHER FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE GRANDPARENTS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH GRANDCHILDREN**

Additional factors that influence this tie were also considered. For example, frequency of contact between grandparents and grandchildren may have an impact on qualities of their relationships and the influence of the middle generation on this tie (Hodgson, 1992, 1998; Matthews & Sprey, 1985; Robertson, 1975; Thompson & Walker, 1987). The middle generation may have less influence on grandparents who get together with grandchildren more frequently.

Age of grandchild also appears to play a central role in ties to grandparents. Grandparents report closer relationships with younger grandchildren (e.g., Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Creasey & Kaliher, 1994; Kahana & Kahana, 1970; Kivett, 1991), and they also find younger grandchildren more tiring and irritating than older grandchildren (Fingerman, 1998). Furthermore, adult grandchildren's ties to their grandparents may be less dependent on the middle generation (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Hodgson, 1998; Thompson & Walker, 1984).

Finally, family configuration may play a role in the relationship between a given grandparent and a given grandchild. Grandparents with many children and grandchildren tend to be less invested in any given progeny (Fingerman, 2001a; Uhlenberg & Hammill, 1998).

In summary, this study considered variation in grandparents' perceptions of ties to grandchildren as a function of ties to daughters, sons-in-laws, sons, and daughters-in-laws. Grandparents were expected to report closer links to their daughters' children than to their sons' children. Furthermore, I expected positive qualities of ties with grandchildren to be associated with ties to daughters but negative qualities to be associated with ties to daughters-in-law.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

The data are from a larger study of 91 grandparents who completed in-depth interviews about the grandparenting experience and each of their children and grandchildren. Five individuals (2 grandfathers aged 55 and 74, and 3 grandmothers aged 57, 58, and 77) were excluded due to missing data because they did not provide information about each grandchild and parent. These grandparents did not differ from other grandparents on indicators of health, education, or meaning of the grandparenting role. Individuals with missing data had an average of 5.60 grandchildren ( $SD = 2.88$ ). Grandparents included in this study had an average of 3.65 grandchildren ( $SD = 2.42$ ), close to the projected national average of four grandchildren per grandparent in the early 21st century (Uhlenberg & Kirby, 1998).

The remaining sample consisted of 43 grandmothers (mean age = 65.19,  $SD = 12.74$ ) and 43 grandfathers (mean age = 65.89,  $SD = 9.90$ ), ranging in age from 46 to 95 years. Consistent with studies of later life, nearly all grandfathers were married (83%) or remarried (7%) and only 7% were widowed, whereas only 47% of grandmothers were married, 7% remarried, and 30% were widowed. The rest of the grandparents were divorced. No participant was related to any other. Age of grandparent and age of grandchild were highly correlated, Pearson's  $r = .75$ , and thus only age of grandchild was considered in analyses.

Most grandparents had more than a high school education,  $M = 4.91$ ,  $SD = 1.55$  (1 = *grade school*, 2 = *some high school*, 3 = *high school*, 4 = *technical school*, 5 = *some college*, 6 = *bachelor's degree*, 7 = *advanced degree*). All grandparents were European American. Given that intergenerational relationship patterns may vary by social class, grandparent education level was treated as a control variable in analyses.

Grandparents described themselves as being in good health. On a 5-point scale (1 = *poor*, 5 = *excellent*), grandmothers ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = .83$ ) and grandfathers ( $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = .89$ ) rated their health in a similar manner. To assure that variation in grandparental health did not account for the patterns described here, grandparents' self-ratings of health were also considered as control variables in analyses.

Although the sample is one of convenience, efforts were made to recruit participants from a variety of community settings using several recruitment techniques, including direct contact, word of mouth, newsletter advertisements, flyers in grocery stores in various neighborhoods, public

service television, church gatherings, and leisure activity groups ranging from hiking clubs to bridge groups. In the end, the sample was representative of the county in which the study was conducted (Pennsylvania State Data Center, 1998), but elevated education levels and lack of ethnic diversity preclude generalization to the population of grandparents in the United States (see Szinovacz, 1998). This localized approach allows for in-depth study of grandparents' ties to each of their grandchildren and their parents, however.

#### PROCEDURE

Grandparents were interviewed individually in their homes or at the study location. Interviews focused on the grandparent's background and well-being and attitudes toward the grandparenting role as well as toward the grandparent's grandchildren and their parents. Interviews lasted 1.5 to 3 hours, depending on family size.

#### MEASURES

##### **Background Information**

At the start of the interview, grandparents answered questions about their own background. Grandparents provided their education level, employment history, marital history, age, and religion, along with ratings of health and leisure time.

##### **Relationships With Parents and Grandchildren**

Grandparents then answered questions about their families. Questions were as follows.

*Grandchildren.* Grandparents provided the following information about each of their grandchildren ( $n = 239$ ): age, distance of residence, frequency of contact by phone, and frequency of visits. Grandparents also provided single-item ratings of positive and negative features of their relationships with each grandchild. Unitary ratings are not ideal, but given the desire to obtain information about each member of a grandparent's lineage, time limitations precluded use of multiple items to assess positive and negative aspects of relationships with every parent and grandchild. Furthermore, unitary ratings of relationship quality have been used suc-

cessfully in other studies of intergenerational ties (Sweet, Bumpass, & Vaughn, 1988; Umberson, 1992; Umberson & Gove, 1989; Webster & Herzog, 1995).

Grandparents indicated how tiring they find time spent with each grandchild, how demanding they find each grandchild, and how much they enjoy time with each grandchild using 7-point, Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*very little/not at all*) to 7 (*a great deal*). They also rated the quality of their relationship with each grandchild. Prior research revealed a ceiling effect in adults' ratings of intergenerational ties, with means between upper scale points (4 = *very good* and 5 = *excellent*) (Aldous, 1987; Bengtson & Schrader, 1982). To obtain greater variation in ratings, anchors allowed participants to differentiate degree of positivity for the tie (1 = *poor*, 2 = *fair*, 3 = *good*, 4 = *very good*, 5 = *excellent*, 6 = *superior*, 7 = *outstanding*).

*Grandparents' relationships with grandchild's parents.* Grandparents provided the first names of each grandchild's parents and these parents' current kinship to the grandparent (e.g., daughter, daughter-in-law, ex-daughter-in-law, never-married partner, etc.). Grandparents also rated the quality of their relationship with each of the grandchild's parents using the 7-point scale described previously.

As mentioned, only currently married sons/daughters-in-law (G2) and daughters/sons-in-law (G2) and their children were included in the present study. The following parents and grandchildren were excluded: 12 ex-sons-in-law (19 grandchildren), 6 ex-daughters-in-law (11 grandchildren), 7 never-married partners (8 grandchildren), 5 stepdaughters (13 grandchildren), 4 stepsons (8 grandchildren), and an additional 8 grandchildren labeled as stepgrandchildren due to parental remarriage (grandchildren excluded,  $n = 67$ ; grandchildren included,  $n = 239$ ). All of the grandchildren's parents involved male and female partnerships; there were no gay couples in the parental generation in this sample. Table 1 illustrates relationships between grandparents (G1), parents (G2), and grandchildren in this study.

*Family-level variables.* Elsewhere, scholars have found grandparents' ties to any given child or grandchild may vary as a function of family size (Fingerman, 2001a; Uhlenberg & Hammill, 1998). Therefore, grandparents' total number of grandchildren and the number of grandchild "sets" were considered as controls here. A grandchild set involves an aggregation of grandchildren (G3) by parents (G2). Uhlenberg and Hammill (1998) defined grandchild sets from the National Survey of Families and

**TABLE 1**  
**Grandparents' Kinship to Grandchildren**  
**by Parents' Gender and Kinship**

<i>Parent Kinship</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Grandchild Kinship</i>	<i>n</i>
Grandmothers			
Daughter/son-in-law	33	Granddaughter	29
		Grandson	33
Son/daughter-in-law	33	Granddaughter	20
		Grandson	44
Grandfathers			
Daughter/son-in-law	35	Granddaughter	31
		Grandson	31
Son/daughter-in-law	31	Granddaughter	28
		Grandson	23

Households as grandchildren (G3) residing in the grandparents' (G1) offspring's (G2) household. In this study, grandchild sets include all children (G3) of a given pair of parents (G2), taking into account older grandchildren who no longer live in their parents' homes. For example, if a grandfather has two daughters, June and Laura, and June has children with one partner, and Laura has children with two men, then this grandfather has three grandchild sets. In this manner, grandchildren excluded from this study were still considered in these family-level variables; grandparents' ties to grandchildren of stepchildren or ex-partners might have an impact on ties to grandchildren considered here. On average, grandparents of both genders had 2.0 grandchild sets ( $SD = 1.08$ , range = 1 to 6).

## RESULTS

### ANALYSIS STRATEGY

First, grandparents' ratings of relationships with their grandchildren's parents are presented. Then, associations between grandparents' perceptions of the middle generation and grandparents' ratings of each grandchild are considered. Because grandparents rated each grandchild and each parent of each grandchild, grandparents with multiple children and grandchildren are represented repeatedly in the data set. Each relationship with a parent or grandchild (depending on the analysis) is treated as a separate case, with redundant identification numbers for each parent and for

each grandparent. To account for lack of independence across ratings, multilevel modeling was used in analyses. Multilevel modeling is appropriate when there are unequal numbers of lower-level units nested within upper-level units (i.e., unequal number of grandchildren and parents nested within grandparents; Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). Analyses were estimated using PROC Mixed function in SAS statistical package. This approach enters upper- and lower-level variables in one equation, controlling for error associated with grandparents providing multiple ratings (Singer, 1998).

In these analyses, grandparent variables are the upper-level variables; grandparents have only one of each type of these variables. The upper-level independent variable was grandparent gender (grandmother vs. grandfather). Upper-level controls included grandparents' education, self-rated health, total number of grandchildren, and grandchildren sets. Variables associated with the parents or grandchildren are the lower-level variables. Additional details concerning analyses are provided below.

#### **GRANDPARENTS' RATINGS OF TIES TO PARENTS AND GRANDCHILDREN**

##### **Grandparents' Ties to Parents**

Table 2 shows grandparents' ratings of the quality of ties to their daughters, sons, daughters-in-law, and sons-in-law. In general, grandmothers' and grandfathers' ties to daughters were strongest, followed by sons, sons-in-law, and daughters-in-law.

Initial analyses then focused on understanding grandparents' ratings of the parents as a function of kinship and gender. PROC Mixed functions were estimated examining quality of relationship with parent (1 = *poor*, 7 = *excellent*) as the outcome variable. Parental kinship (1 = consanguine, 0 = affinal) and parental gender (1 = father, 0 = mother) served as lower-level independent variables. Because parents come "paired," an indicator of parental marital set (1 = daughter and son-in-law, 0 = son and daughter-in-law) was included. This indicator assesses whether grandparents favor one parental set over the other set (e.g., the daughter and son-in-law over the son and daughter-in-law). Grandparental and familial characteristics (e.g., health, education, number of grandchild sets) served as upper-level control variables.

Findings from these analyses are presented in Table 3. Grandparents rated ties to their own children higher than ties to their children's partners.

**TABLE 2**  
**Grandparents' Ratings of Quality of**  
**Relationship With Their Grandchildren's Parents**

<i>Consanguine Parent</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Affinal Parent</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Grandmothers' ratings			
Daughter	5.97 (1.05)	Son-in-law	4.79 (1.24)
Son	5.52 (1.44)	Daughter-in-law	4.49 (1.44)
Grandfathers' ratings			
Daughter	5.77 (0.97)	Son-in-law	4.94 (1.28)
Son	5.55 (1.31)	Daughter-in-law	4.77 (1.56)

NOTE: Standard deviations shown in parentheses.

Furthermore, grandparents rated daughters and sons-in-law somewhat higher than sons and daughters-in-law. Consistent with prior studies, grandparents with fewer sets of grandchildren rated the quality of ties to parents of those grandchildren higher (Uhlenberg & Hammill, 1998).

In addition, Proc Mixed analyses were estimated using a three-way interaction term for Parental Kinship  $\times$  Parent Gender  $\times$  Grandparent Gender to test whether grandmothers and their daughters have closer ties than other grandparent and parent combinations. The interaction term was not significant and therefore findings are not presented.

Finally, post-hoc correlations examined associations between grandparents' feelings for a child-in-law and child. These analyses do not take into account random error for grandparents. Grandfathers' feelings for their own offspring and the offspring's partners were associated, Pearson's  $r(66) = .59, p < .001$ , as were grandmothers' ratings,  $r(67) = .50, p < .001$ .

### Grandparents' Ties to Grandchildren

Analyses then focused on characteristics of the grandchildren. Grandfathers and grandmothers described ties to their grandchildren in a similar manner. On average, grandfathers and grandmothers reported residing between a half hour and a 6-hour drive from their grandchildren, seeing them once a month and speaking on the phone once a week or every other week. They generally rated the quality of their relationships favorably ( $M = 5.49, SD = 1.15, \text{range} = 2 \text{ to } 7$ ) and enjoyed time with grandchildren a great deal ( $M = 6.19, SD = 1.09, \text{range} = 2 \text{ to } 7$ ). Means for how tiring grandparents found grandchildren were low ( $M = 2.36, SD = 1.71, \text{range} = 1 \text{ to } 7$ ),

**TABLE 3**  
**Multilevel Models of Parental Gender**  
**and Kinship Predicting Grandparent's Ratings**  
**of Quality of Relationship With Parent**

	$\beta$	SE	t
Intercept	4.35	0.68	—
Parent kinship	0.96	0.13	7.63***
Parent gender	0.11	0.13	0.90
Marital set	0.35	0.16	2.16*
Grandparent gender	-0.01	0.25	0.04
Grandparent health	0.13	0.13	1.00
Grandparent education	0.11	0.08	1.34
Number of grandchild sets	-0.25	0.09	-2.74**
$\chi^2 = 36.13, p < .001$			

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

yet grandparents rated more than half of grandchildren as at least a bit tiring. The vast majority of grandparents (70%) reported few or no demands from grandchildren. Therefore, ratings of how demanding grandparents find grandchildren were not considered in analyses.

Pearson's correlations were estimated to look at associations between characteristics of grandchildren. The contact variables appeared to tap a single construct. Correlations for distance, frequency of visits, and frequency of phone contact ranged from  $r(113) = .46$  (for grandfathers' distance and frequency of speaking with grandchildren) to  $r(125) = .86$  (for grandmothers' distance and frequency of visiting with grandchildren). Given these associations, only frequency of visiting with grandchildren was considered in subsequent analyses.

### Patterns of Association Between Ratings of Parents and Grandchildren

Next, analyses focused on the central research question, namely, whether ratings of grandchildren varied as a function of gender, kinship, and quality of grandparent's relationship with parents. Three ratings of relationships with grandchildren (e.g., overall quality, enjoyment of time together, and how tiring grandchild is) served as criteria variables.

Given that parents (G2) were married, grandchildren's parents came prepackaged in dyads. A given grandchild had one of two sets of parents: (a) a son and daughter-in-law or (b) a daughter and son-in-law. Therefore, analyses treated these pairings as well.

### PARENTAL KINSHIP AND TIES TO GRANDCHILDREN

The first set of analyses focused on whether parental gender and kinship are associated with grandparents' ratings of ties to grandchildren. We expected grandparents to feel closer to their daughters' children than their sons' children, particularly grandmothers.

The three criteria variables involved grandparents' ratings of grandchildren. Grandparent gender was an upper-level independent variable. Because a given grandchild rating was associated with two parents, parental marital set was the independent variable for parental kinship (1 = daughter and son-in-law, 0 = son and daughter-in-law), and an interaction term for Grandparent Gender  $\times$  Parental Marital Set was entered in the equation. Age of grandchild and frequency of contact with grandparent served as lower-level control variables. Grandparent and familial characteristics (e.g., health, education, number of grandchild sets, number of grandchildren) served as upper-level control variables.

Analyses were not significant for quality of relationship with the grandchild. Although analyses were significant for enjoying time spent with grandchildren and finding them tiring, the only significant predictor was grandchild's age, as reported elsewhere (e.g., Fingerman, 1998).

### Qualities of Ties to Parents and Ties to Grandchildren

Finally, analyses focused on whether grandparents' (G1) ratings of quality of ties to grandchildren's parents (G2) were associated with their ratings of ties to the grandchildren. Of specific interest was whether grandparents' ratings of qualities of ties to mothers versus fathers and their own child versus their child-in-law were more strongly associated with their feelings for their grandchildren. To test these questions, analyses were estimated in two ways. First, comparisons of the quality of ties to parents of each gender (ratings of mothers and fathers) were considered. Second, comparisons of the kinship of the parents were considered (e.g., own child vs. in-law). These analyses provide comparisons of grandparents' ratings of a particular set of parents (a mother vs. a father, a child vs. a child-in-law) with regard to the same grandchild.

*Comparisons to the same grandchild.* Criteria variables again involved three ratings of ties to grandchildren (e.g., relationship quality, how much grandparents enjoy them, and how tiring they find them). Age of grandchild and frequency of contact with grandparent served as lower-level control variables. Grandparent gender was an upper-level independent

variable. Grandparent and familial characteristics (e.g., health, education, number of grandchild sets, number of grandchildren) served as upper-level control variables. Given the number of analyses, estimated significance levels were set at .01.

Table 4 shows findings from significant analyses. With regard to gender of parent, as expected, grandparents' ratings of ties to grandchildren's mothers were associated with ratings of grandchildren. Grandparents who feel closer to the grandchildren's mothers also rated the quality of their ties to the grandchildren higher. In addition, grandparents' ratings of how enjoyable they find their grandchildren were associated with their ratings of the quality of the tie to the mother.

Findings also revealed that grandmothers report enjoying time with grandchildren more than do grandfathers. To pursue this matter, analyses were estimated with the interaction term for grandparent gender by quality of tie to the mother; this analysis tested whether grandmothers feel particularly close to grandchildren whose mothers they favor. The interaction term was not significant and therefore findings are not presented. Findings from analyses examining grandparents' ratings of how tiring they find their grandchildren are also not shown. The overall chi-square test was significant, but the only significant predictor in the equation was grandchild's age; grandparents rated younger grandchildren more tiring, regardless of ratings of qualities of ties to the grandchild's parents.

Analyses examining parental kinship revealed that qualities of grandparents' ties to children-in-law were significantly associated with the quality of the relationship with the grandchild as well as enjoyment of time spent with the grandchild. Ratings of the tie to the grandparents' own child were not significantly associated with their ratings of ties to the grandchild. Again, grandmothers rated their enjoyment of grandchildren higher than did grandfathers.

*Post-hoc examination of all four parental types.* Given these findings, post-hoc analyses focused on all four parents: daughters, sons, sons-in-law, and daughters-in-law. These analyses could not be estimated using grandparents' ratings of parents of a given grandchild (i.e., no grandchild could have both a son and a son-in-law as a father). Although mathematically, one could estimate interaction terms (e.g., Parent Gender  $\times$  Parental Kinship), these terms would still not represent independent contributions of parents. Instead, analyses were estimated separately—comparing grandparents' ratings of daughters and sons-in-law and comparing grandparents' ratings of sons and daughters-in-law. Significant effects could then be converted via *r* to *z* transformations for comparisons of daughters

**TABLE 4**  
**Multilevel Models of Grandparents' Ratings of**  
**Quality of Relationships With Parents and Grandchildren**

	<i>Quality of Tie to Grandchild</i>			<i>How Much Enjoy Grandchild</i>		
	$\beta$	SE	t	$\beta$	SE	t
Intercept	4.12	0.67	6.11***	5.80	0.65	8.90***
Quality of tie to mother	0.21	0.06	3.77***	0.15	0.05	2.84**
Quality of tie to father	0.13	0.06	2.03*	-0.02	0.06	-0.31
Grandparent gender	-0.02	0.21	-0.08	-0.43	0.20	-2.08*
Grandchild age	-0.02	0.01	-1.75	-0.02	0.01	-1.64
Contact with grandchild	-0.30	0.04	-0.72	0.01	0.04	-0.24
Grandparent health	0.02	0.11	0.17	-0.01	0.10	-0.10
Grandparent education	-0.04	0.07	-0.59	-0.03	0.07	-0.36
Number of grandchild sets	0.27	0.17	1.61	0.40	0.16	2.43*
Number of grandchildren	-0.13	0.07	-1.74	-0.24	0.07	-3.29**
	$\chi^2 = 21.80, p < .001$			$\chi^2 = 39.18, p < .001$		
Intercept	4.21	0.67	6.24***	5.88	0.65	9.06***
Quality of tie to own child	0.09	0.07	1.16	0.01	0.07	0.16
Quality of tie to in-law	0.25	0.07	3.61**	0.13	0.07	2.01*
Grandparent gender	0.00	0.21	0.02	-0.44	0.20	-2.16*
Grandchild age	-0.01	0.01	-1.77	-0.02	0.01	-1.64
Contact with grandchild	-0.03	0.04	-0.71	-0.01	0.04	-0.29
Grandparent health	0.01	0.11	0.09	-0.02	0.10	-0.22
Grandparent education	-0.03	0.07	-0.42	-0.02	0.07	-0.25
Number of grandchild sets	0.24	0.16	1.45	0.34	0.16	2.11*
Number of grandchildren	-0.12	0.07	-1.62	-0.22	0.08	-3.08***
	$\chi^2 = 21.24, p < .001$			$\chi^2 = 33.93, p < .001$		

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

versus daughters-in-law and sons versus sons-in-law. Again, significance level was set at .01 to account for multiple analyses.

Significant findings are presented in Table 5. As can be seen, qualities of ties to daughters-in-law and sons-in-law were significantly associated with ratings of the quality of the tie to a given grandchild, but qualities of ties to sons and daughters were not. Furthermore, quality of tie to a daughter-in-law was associated with grandparents' enjoyment of the grandchild, but ratings of other parents (son, daughter, son-in-law) were not. Because the effects for daughters and sons were not significant,  $r$  to  $z$  transformations were not estimated.

Again, age of grandchild was the only significant predictor of grandparents' ratings of how tiring they find grandchildren, and these findings are not shown here. Analyses were also estimated using interaction effects

**TABLE 5**  
**Multilevel Models of Grandparents' Ratings of Quality**  
**of Relationships With Parents and Grandchildren**

	<i>Quality of Tie to Grandchild</i>			<i>How Much Enjoy Grandchild</i>		
	$\beta$	SE	t	$\beta$	SE	t
Intercept	4.47	0.96	4.68***	5.56	0.82	6.70***
Quality of tie to daughter-in-law	0.18	0.10	1.84*	0.19	0.09	2.09*
Quality of tie to son	0.07	0.11	0.61	-0.13	0.10	-1.29
Grandparent gender	-0.12	0.31	-0.38	-0.89	0.27	-3.26***
Grandchild age	-0.03	0.02	-1.81	-0.03	0.02	-2.04*
Contact with grandchild	0.05	0.07	-0.73	0.03	0.07	0.49
Grandparent health	0.06	0.17	0.35	0.04	0.15	0.27
Grandparent education	-0.04	0.10	-0.42	0.05	0.09	0.56
Number of grandchild sets	0.11	0.23	0.48	0.22	0.20	1.07
Number of grandchildren	0.01	0.12	0.06	-0.17	0.10	-1.74
	$\chi^2 = 7.80, p < .001$			$\chi^2 = 4.52, p < .001$		
Intercept	3.31	0.82	4.05***	0.55	0.82	6.70***
Quality of tie to daughter	0.20	0.12	1.38	0.20	0.12	1.72
Quality of tie to son-in-law	0.36	0.10	3.67***	0.09	0.10	0.94
Grandparent gender	0.12	0.23	0.50	-0.17	0.25	-0.71
Grandchild age	0.00	0.01	-0.15	-0.02	0.01	-1.19
Contact with grandchild	-0.07	0.06	-1.18	-0.03	0.05	-0.62
Grandparent health	0.05	0.12	0.39	-0.02	0.13	-0.15
Grandparent education	-0.05	0.09	-0.51	-0.07	0.09	-0.75
Number of grandchild sets	0.14	0.19	0.76	0.42	0.21	2.04*
Number of grandchildren	-0.14	0.07	-1.94	-0.22	0.08	-2.68**
	$\chi^2 = 17.06, p < .001$			$\chi^2 = 16.80, p < .001$		

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

for grandparent gender and rating of parents to test whether grandmothers' feelings about their grandchildren's parents might matter more than grandfathers' feelings about these parents. These effects were not significant, and analyses are not shown here.

## DISCUSSION

Prior research has considered the influence of the middle generation on ties between grandparents and grandchildren but has not differentiated between gender of parent and kinship to grandparent. Furthermore, few

studies have examined grandparents' perceptions of these ties. In this study, grandparents rated the qualities of ties to daughters, sons, sons-in-law, and daughters-in-law in distinct ways. Moreover, this study considered multiple aspects of grandparents' ties to their grandchildren including overall quality, enjoyment of time together, and feelings of fatigue. Grandparents' feelings about their daughters-in-law and, to some extent, their sons-in-laws were associated with their feelings about their grandchildren.

#### **GRANDPARENTS' TIES TO PARENTS OF THEIR GRANDCHILDREN**

Grandparents appear to possess a hierarchy in their feelings for grandchildren's parents based on kinship and gender. Grandparents' preferences centered on their daughters, with daughters rated higher than sons, and sons-in-law (e.g., partners of daughters) rated higher than daughters-in-law (e.g., partners of sons). These findings are consistent with another study of 150 grandparents, in which grandparents rated relationships with pregnant daughters higher than relationships with pregnant daughters-in-law (Sherlip & Stricker, 1998). In a society where matrilineal kinship appears to hold extended families together (Fingerman, 2001a), daughters-in-law are sometimes accused of drawing sons away from their parents, particularly once they have children of their own (Nydegger, 1986).

Furthermore, ties to children-in-law and children were associated; grandparents rated their relationships with daughters-in-law more highly when they felt better about their sons, and the same was true for daughters and sons-in-law. In other words, grandparents' ties to children-in-law vary by the gender of the child (daughter vs. son) and their feelings for that child.

#### **GRANDPARENTS' TIES TO PARENTS AND TO GRANDCHILDREN**

Of key interest in this study was whether grandparents' ties to their grandchildren's parents were associated with their feelings about their grandchildren. In fact, relationships with parents did matter but in a manner that did not directly parallel grandparents' preferences for grandchildren's parents. Rather, grandparents' ratings of children-in-law seemed to matter more than ratings of children with regard to feelings about grandchildren.

Researchers have acknowledged gender differences in grandparents' perceptions of ties to their grandchildren's parents but have not considered kinship. In this study, relationships to affinal parents, daughters-in-law and sons-in-law, were more strongly associated with qualities of relationships with grandchildren than ties to grandparents' own offspring. These findings may stem in part from methodological issues. There was greater variability in grandparents' ratings of relationships with their children-in-law than in ratings of relationships with their children; most grandparents rated ties to their own son or daughter highly, but some grandparents admitted to weaker relationships with their children-in-law. Nonetheless, this study suggests that daughters-in-law and sons-in-law may influence intergenerational ties in ways that have not been widely recognized.

Of note is that scholars have established the important role mothers may play in relationships between grandmothers and grandchildren (e.g., Walker et al., 1987). The literature has also shown that grandparents feel particularly close to their daughters' children. This study did not find that grandparents feel closer to their daughters' or sons' children per se, but rather the quality of ties to the parents mattered. Although feelings about mothers were associated with feelings about the grandchildren, in this study, feelings about the son-in-law appeared to matter more than feelings about the daughter. This finding is consistent with what is known about ties to sons-in-law from other studies. For example, Nydegger (1986) found that grandparents (G1) who criticized their sons-in-law generally felt that the sons-in-law were neglecting their families. On the flip side, sons-in-law who are good parents may get high marks from grandparents, and grandparents may have better relationships with these grandchildren. Again, this pattern may reflect ceiling effects with regard to daughters; most grandparents may feel that their daughters are good mothers.

Furthermore, the quality of tie to a daughter-in-law was also associated with both the quality of the tie to the grandchild and enjoyment of the grandchild. In particular, given the potentially tenuous link grandparents may have to the children of their son, their ties to the daughter-in-law may influence relationships with these grandchildren. Literature suggests qualities of grandparents' ties to daughters-in-law are particularly important when parents divorce (see Johnson, 1998, for a review). Findings from this study suggest daughters-in-law are also important when parents (G2) are married.

### **OTHER ASPECTS OF GRANDPARENT/ GRANDCHILD RELATIONSHIPS**

Of course, grandparents' perceptions of ties to their grandchildren's parents were not the only factors associated with their perceptions of ties to the grandchildren. Age of grandchild was associated with feelings about grandchildren. Prior studies have suggested that younger grandchildren are closer to their grandparents (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Kahana & Kahana, 1970). Understandably, grandparents found younger grandchildren more tiring as well.

Consistent with other studies, this study found that grandmothers enjoyed their grandchildren more than do grandfathers. Furthermore, as in other studies, grandparents appeared to be less invested in a given grandchild when they had a large number of grandchildren overall (e.g., Uhlenberg & Hammill, 1998).

Negative features of grandparents' relationships to grandchildren are not easily understood. Elsewhere, in findings from the same study, many grandparents described personal worries and irritations with their grandchildren (Fingerman, 1998). Yet grandparents reported few demands from their grandchildren. Furthermore, in a separate sample of middle-aged and older adults, few grandparents named grandchildren when asked to list the people whom they found to be irritating or annoying in the past year (Fingerman & Birditt, 2003). Thus, negative emotions toward grandchildren may be limited to those grandchildren whose personal features or life context render them worrisome or irritating.

### **LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Of course, there are limitations to these data. A homogeneous, well-educated sample of grandparents precludes understanding grandparenting relationships across the United States. Grandparent/grandchild relationships may vary by culture or ethnic group. For example, researchers have reported that in-law relationships are more tension laden in Asian cultures, stemming from traditions in which daughters-in-law joined their husbands' families (Gallin, 1994). More tension-laden relationships with daughters-in-law might intensify the influence of these ties on negative aspects of relationships with grandchildren.

Finally, the grandparents in this study reside in an area where divorce rates are lower than in the general population (Pennsylvania State Data

Center, 1998). Even in this relatively conservative group, approximately one fifth of grandchildren were excluded because they were related to their grandparents through an unmarried or remarried parent or grandparent. Ideally, studies of grandparents, parents, and grandchildren would involve national data sets representing diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds (Aldous, 1995) and sufficient numbers of unmarried partners, stepchildren, and former partners of offspring to include in analyses. Thus, limitations of this study also reflect a general paucity of information about affinal parents of grandchildren. Efforts should be made to include such data in future studies.

In summary, this study suggests that children-in-law may contribute to grandparents' ties to their grandchildren in important ways. Indeed, ties to children-in-law may play a greater role in the fabric of adults' lives than has been thought, particularly when grandchildren are in the picture. These relationships and their meaning in family functioning warrant further investigation.

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