Beyond Nuclear: Relationship Quality, Generativity, and Grandparent Involvement

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Introduction

The growing aging population has increased opportunities for grandparenthood and grandparents' presence in the lives of families (U.S. Census, 2018). However, grandparent involvement and its implications for family wellbeing varies, presenting a need to examine processes that promote grandparent involvement with grandchildren (Danielsbacka et al., 2022; Saddrudin et al., 2019).

- Intergenerational (parent-grandparent) relationship quality has been associated with increased grandparent involvement with grandchildren (Barnett et al., 2010). Grandparents' perceived relationship quality with their grandchild, an indicator of family context, could also inform grandparent involvement.
- Grandparent generativity (i.e., concern for and contributions to future generations) is a motivator for engaging with grandchildren, leading to beneficial outcomes for all individuals in the multigenerational family (Villar, 2014).
- The current study draws from Erikson's (1950) theory of psychosocial development, supporting the idea that generativity motivates grandparent involvement and is guided by a family systems perspective (Cox & Paley, 2007), which poses that subsystems are interconnected and influence and are influenced by characteristics (e.g., generativity) of individual family members.

STUDY AIM AND HYPOTHESIS

To understand how intergenerational relationship quality and grandparent generativity are jointly related to grandparent involvement

- We hypothesize that when grandparents report high levels of generativity, grandparent-grandchild (G1-G3) relationship satisfaction will positively predict high grandparent involvement.

Methods

PROCEDURES AND PARTICIPANTS

- The data came from a larger online study of grandparents who self-identified as providing regular care for their grandchildren (N=536) in the United States.
- Grandparents: co-residing and non-residing (N=311)
  - M_{age}= 61, *SD* = 7.59
  - 79% white, 21% non-white
  - 86% female, 14% male
  - Grandchild: M_{age}= 7, *SD* = 4.98

MEASURES

- **G1-G3 Relationship satisfaction:** 1-item measuring satisfaction on a 7-point Likert scale.
- **Generativity** (Kivnick, 1983): 29-items rated on a 5-point scale from the Grandparent Meaning Scale. Ex: "It is important to carry on family tradition with my grandchild" (α= .91).
- **Grandparent Involvement (**Barnett et al., 2013): 18 items rated on a 4-point scale. Ex: "How often do you listen when your grandchild has a problem"; "How often do you teach your grandchild a skill"; "How often do you babysit your grandchild" (α= .88).

At average and low levels of **generativity,** there was a positive association between **grandparent-grandchild relationship satisfaction** and **grandparent involvement.**

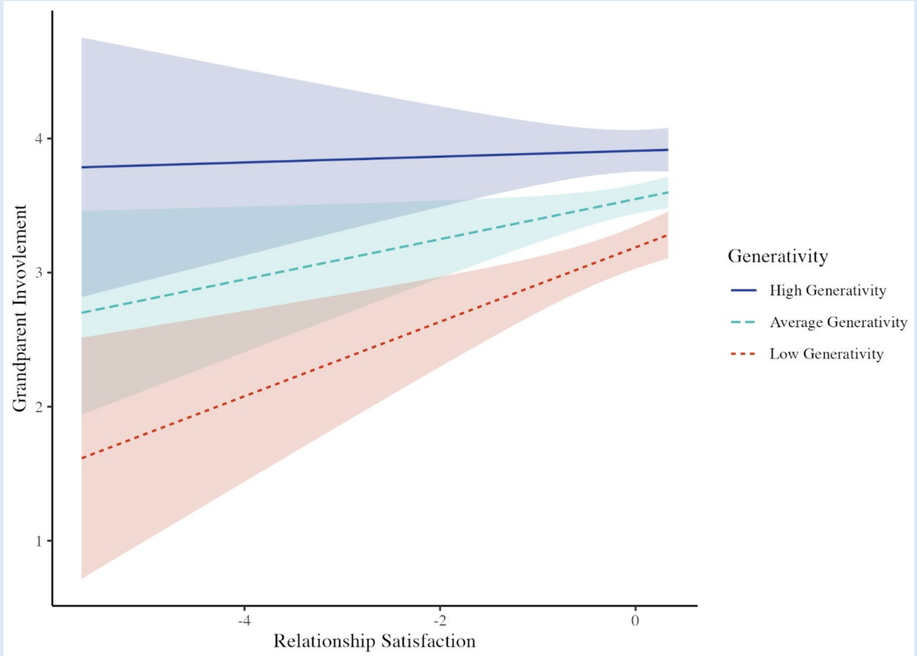

Table 1.
Summary of Regression Results Predicting Grandparent Involvement from Parent-Child Relationship Satisfaction moderated by Generativity

	Grandparent Involvement	
Variable	*β*	*SE*
Intercept	3.45***	.70
Grandparent Sex (1=Male, 2=Female)	.28	.17
Grandchild Sex (1=Male, 2=Female)	.05	.11
Grandparent Age	-.02	.01
Grandchild Age	.03*	.01
Grandparent Race	.28	.14
Grandparent Education	.01	.05
Grandparent Physical Health	.02**	.01
Co-residing	.18	.18
Non-residing	-.32	.18
G1-G2 Relationship Quality	-.05	.04
G1-G3 Relationship Satisfaction	.15*	.07
Generativity	.75***	.12
Grandparent Involvement X Generativity	-.27**	.10
R^2	.23	
F	8.13***	

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001. G1=grandparent. G2=child's parent. G3=grandchild.

Results

Ordinary Least Squares regression analysis was performed in RStudio 1.4.1717 to test the moderating role of generativity in the association between G1-G3 relationship quality and grandparent involvement. G1-G3 relationship quality was centered and then multiplied with generativity to create the interaction term.

- At average levels of generativity, a significant positive association emerged between G1-G3 relationship satisfaction and grandparent involvement, b = .15, SE = .07, p < .05.
- At high levels of generativity, no association emerged between G1-G3 relationship satisfaction and grandparent involvement, b = .001, SE = .09, p = .99.
- At low levels of generativity, a significant positive association between G1-G3 relationship quality and grandparent involvement emerged, b = .18, SE = 0.07, p < .05.

Conclusions & Implications

- Despite low generativity beliefs, grandparents will still be highly involved with their grandchildren if they are satisfied with that relationship.
- Results highlight the influence of positive relationships beyond positive individual characteristics and support interventions targeting intergenerational relationship satisfaction outside the nuclear family.
- Limitations:
  - Findings only generalize to highly involved grandparents who report generally very satisfied relationships with grandchildren.
  - Grandparents' self-report only, sample of mostly grandmothers who identified as White
- Future research should include grandparent-parent relationship variables.

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