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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Grandparents' Perspectives on Parent-Adult Child Relationships During the Transition to Grandparenthood

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### Abstract:

#### Objective:

The aim of this study on the transition to grandparenthood is to capture grandparents' perspectives on their relationship and communication with their adult children when their adult children was expecting their first child or became new parents within the past year. More specifically, the study aimed to uncover 1) Intergenerational issues identified by grandparents during the transition to grandparenthood and 2) Factors influencing grandparents' communication and relationships with their adult children during this time of family transition.

#### Method:

Participants were 19 grandparents in the U.S., 15 grandmothers and 4 grandfathers who were about to welcome the first child of one of their children ( $N = 8$ ), who had welcomed the first child of one of their children in the past year ( $N = 10$ ), or who had both a child who was expecting and a child who had welcomed their first child within the past year ( $N = 1$ ). Qualitative data analysis was conducted on transcripts from the grandparent interviews utilizing the constant comparative technique and thematic analysis to identify categories and emergent themes.

#### Results:

Grandparent participants shared their perspectives on the intergenerational transmission of parenting practices, reflected on changes in parental roles over time, and identified communication facilitator and barriers during this time of transition. These categories and emergent themes are explicated in the results section along with supporting excerpts from grandparent interviews.

#### Conclusion:

The transition to grandparenthood impacts communication and relationships between grandparents and their adult children by shaping the content, frequency, and medium of communication. Understanding grandparents' perspectives on this time of transition adds to existing research on families focused mainly on the adult child's perspective.

**Keywords:** Parent-child communication, Grandparent, Family communication, Parenting, Family studies, Qualitative.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Research on the transition to grandparenthood has increased in recent decades due, in part, to a combination of demographic factors. A range of reports including a large-scale phone survey conducted by the AARP (formerly the American Association of Retired Persons) report the average age of first-time grandparents is about 47 years of age [1]. According to a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the average life expectancy for individuals in the U.S. is 78.7 years of age [2]. The combination of those two demographic factors suggests that individuals who

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become grandparents are likely to fulfill the role of grandparent for several decades. Research on grandparenthood offers advice for new grandparents regarding how to manage their relationships as they welcome a baby into the family [3]. Some of the advice includes how to navigate grandparenting from a distance, how to navigate circumstances surrounding the birth, and how to handle visitation of grandchildren following a divorce.

The current study contributes to research on the transition to grandparenthood by highlighting emergent themes from interviews with grandparents as they were asked to reflect on their relationship and communication with their adult children during this time of transition. First, a rationale for the importance of research on the grandparent-adult child relationship is offered. After describing the sample and procedures, grandparents' experiences are explicated in the form of three overarching categories (*i.e.*, "intergenerational issues", "changes in parental roles," and "communication facilitators and barriers") and seven emergent themes.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research that focuses on the grandparent-adult child relationship has often been conducted from the adult child's perspective [4 - 6] with some notable exceptions [7, 8]. Dun [5] noted how communication during this time of transition can profoundly impact the grandparent-adult child relationship and the grandparent-grandchild relationship in the future. In one example of research from the adult child's perspective, Dun [5] identified turning points in the new parent-new grandparent relationship and acknowledged that adult children who reported communicative conflict as a turning point seemed to struggle with the differences separating generations. Grandparents are uniquely positioned to comment on possible differences separating generations given their life experience and position in the family and the current investigation is designed to capture grandparents' perspective on intergenerational issues.

In order to begin to comprehend the impact of grandparents on their adult children's parenting, it is essential to capture the grandparents' perspectives on the transition to grandparenthood. One study which focused on the grandparents' perspective examined first-time grandparents' thoughts on satisfaction in grandparenthood in a quantitative study which assessed families while the grandchild was in utero and again at 2 years post-partum [7]. Findings from Somary and Stricker [7] suggested greater satisfaction with grandparenthood for grandmothers and for maternal as opposed to paternal grandparents. Current research needs to address grandparents' current sentiments on their role and should highlight the grandparent-adult child relationship. More recent research conducted by Dun and Sears [8] explored grandparents' retrospective accounts of trajectories for grandparent-adult child relationships surrounding the birth of the new grandchild. Within the four identified relationship trajectories (*i.e.*, turbulent, dipped, progression, and stable), there were multiple pathways to explain how there was often an increase in relationship satisfaction but Dun and Sears [8] noted that future research needs to help explain the reported increase in relationship satisfaction over time. The current study helps start to address why grandparents may find satisfaction in their changing roles by asking grandparent participants to reflect on the intergenerational aspects of this time of transition.

There are numerous factors which have been shown to impact the grandparent-adult child relationship during the transition to grandparenthood. Factors shown to impact the grandparent-adult child relationship include the history of the relationship [6], the gender composition of the relationship [7], in-law status [9, 10] and the grandparenting style of the grandparent [11]. Grandparent-adult in-law relationships face particular challenges inherent in the out-group status associated with in-law relationships [10] whereas grandparent and adult child relationships in the current investigation which are not in-law relationships should benefit from their in-group status. Rittenour and Soliz [10] examined mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships and discovered that shared family identity (*e.g.*, pride in belonging to the family and considering the mother-in-law as part of the family) mediated the relationship between family of origin and communicative factors and relational intentions (*e.g.*, willingness to accept the mother-in-law in the home if she was ill). Despite these reported factors, less is known about grandparents' current perspectives on which factors may be impacting their relationship with their adult child as their child becomes a parent for the first time.

There are several compelling reasons supporting the importance of understanding the grandparent-adult child relationship. One reason to consider grandparent-adult child relationships during this time of transition is because grandparents' messages about how to parent may have profound impacts on the types of parents their adult children become [12]. The most readily available model new parents have for how to parent is the parenting they received from their family of origin [13]. Research in family communication supports the idea about the intergenerational transmission of a host of family communication patterns and communicative practices including familial values [12]. Families are complex systems and transitions can be especially impactful on parent-child relationships as evidenced by research on the transition to marriage finding an inverse association between children-in-law's relational uncertainty and

relationship satisfaction in both the in-law dyads and the marital dyads [14].

Another compelling reason to consider the grandparent-adult child relationship during this time of transition is because adult children help shape future bonds and relationships between grandparents and their grandchildren [15]. More specifically, problematic past grandparent-adult child relationships (*i.e.*, past relationships in which the adult children recalled their parent as having been less caring) have been found to negatively affect both the current grandparent-adult child relationship and contact and relationship quality for the grandparent-grandchild relationship [6]. Studying the grandparent-adult child relationship has important implications for that specific relationship and for possible spillover effects on other family relationships (*e.g.*, the grandparent-grandchild relationship).

Grandparents identify strongly with their role [16] and previous research has looked at the salience and impact of grandparent-grandchild relationships. For example, young adult grandchildren have been asked to reflect on reconciling competing pressures from managing multiple identities (*e.g.*, young-adult and grandchild) [17] and to report associations between grandchildren's communication satisfaction in the grandparent-grandchild relationship, perceived emotional support from grandparents, and relational maintenance behaviors utilized by the dyad [18]. Although researchers have examined the grandparent-grandchild relationship, much less research has been conducted focusing on the grandparent-adult child relationship.

Given the importance of the transition to grandparenthood and in capturing the grandparent's perspective on their relationship with their adult children, this study asks the following research questions:

RQ1: What intergenerational issues do grandparents identify during the transition to grandparenthood?

RQ2: What are some factors influencing grandparents' communication and relationships with their adult children?

### 3. METHODS

#### 3.1. Participants

Participants were 19 grandparents in the U.S., 15 grandmothers and 4 grandfathers who were about to welcome the first child of one of their children ( $N = 8$ ), who had welcomed the first child of one of their children in the past year ( $N = 10$ ), or who had both a child who was expecting and a child who had welcomed their first child within the past year ( $N = 1$ ). Of the 19 participants, 8 reported that they were first-time grandparents. The grandparents were discussing expectant or new parents who were daughters ( $N = 7$ ), sons ( $N = 10$ ), or both a daughter and a son ( $N = 2$ ). Participants ranged in age from 54 to 70 with a mean age of 60 and identified themselves as middle class ( $N = 17$ ) or upper middle class ( $N = 2$ ).

#### 3.2. Procedures

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited using convenience and snowball samples from an online grandparenting magazine, recruitment flyers, and the author's social networks. Through these means 19 grandparents agreed to take part in audio-recorded interviews either over the phone ( $N = 17$ ) or in person ( $N = 2$ ). The interviews ranged in length from 15 to 56 minutes and averaged 29 minutes. The interviews were then fully transcribed, pseudonyms were assigned, and any other identifying characteristics were changed. The transcription process yielded 272 double-spaced pages of transcription.

Data were gathered using a semi-structured interview protocol [19] that focused on the relationship between grandparents and their adult children during this time of transition. Participants were asked to reflect on how their experience with their adult child was similar to or different from their recalled experience with their own parents or in-laws when they welcomed their first child (*i.e.*, "Thinking back, how does your experience of your communication with your adult child compare to the communication between you and your parent(s) when you had your first child?"). Participants were also asked to reflect on their communication with their adult children pre- and post-partum (as applicable) and to comment on the content, quality, frequency, and mediums of communication. Participants were asked whether or not they were asked for or offered advice and were asked if they were asked for or offered instrumental support.

Data were analyzed using the constant comparative technique [20] and thematic analysis [21]. First, the author and a second coder engaged in open coding of the data to capture preliminary themes. Utilizing the online qualitative methods software Dedoose, the coders engaged in the creation of individual and collaborative memos to determine common themes across participants. Thereafter, the coders engaged in axial coding to detect and link overarching categories [19].

Saturation was reached after 15 interviews and then 4 additional interviews were conducted to confirm the saturation. Given some limitations of axial coding [22] and to ensure the findings were grounded in the data, the categories were further refined utilizing Charmaz's [22] focused coding procedures to condense and sharpen the emergent themes. The overarching categories which are the focus of this manuscript are "intergenerational issues", "changes in parental roles", and "communication facilitators and barriers." The coders re(read) participants' interview transcripts and focused on the linguistic choices and meaning being conveyed in selected excerpts.

During face-to-face meetings and via email the coders unpacked the overarching categories using Owen's [21] thematic analysis and examined data for recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness to generate major themes in response to the research questions. Throughout this iterative process the coders noted similarities in semantic messages within and across interviews. Any thematic disagreements between coders were resolved during face-to-face meetings and excerpt examples within each theme were included only if there was agreement about the example by both coders. Across excerpts in the 272 double-spaced transcription pages, there were only 2 excerpts for which a consensus could not be reached about the thematic content of that excerpt. Unpacking the overarching category "intergenerational issues" produced three themes, "grandparents' influence on their children as new parents", "lessons learned from grandparents' own transition to parenthood," and "history and culture". The second overarching category "changes in parental roles" produced two themes "changes in grandparents', parental roles over time" and "new challenges facing adult children as parents". The third overarching category "communication facilitators and barriers" yielded two themes, "proximity" and "technology". In the results section below, each of the overarching categories and themes are presented and defined with examples from grandparent interviews.

## **4. RESULTS**

### **4.1. Intergenerational Issues**

Intergenerational issues as an overarching category refers to the grandparent participants' perceptions of how they have shaped their adult children as new parents, what they've learned from experiences with their own parents, and some explanation of why grandparents are enacting their roles in a particular manner. The three emergent themes encompassed by the overarching category of "intergenerational issues" were "grandparents' influence on their children as new parents", "lessons learned from grandparents' own transition to parenthood," and "history and culture." Each of these themes addressed the intergenerational transmission of parenting practices and an appreciation for why grandparents are enacting their roles in a particular way.

### **4.2. Grandparents' Influence on Their Children as New Parents**

For participants whose adult children had already become parents ( $N = 11$ ), through the course of the interviews they reflected on how their adult children became the kind of parents they were. Chelsea believed her son respected Chelsea's knowledge as a parent and her parenting skills. She went on to state the ways in which her son was "really loving with the baby" and "couldn't wait to give the baby a bath", Chelsea's account recognized the intergenerational transmission of parenting practices she enacted with her son while raising him.

Pam attributed her adult son's choice to focus on pediatrics within medicine to a combination of her "mothering" and the way her son feels about children. These grandparents' experiences resonate with previous research by Heisler & Ellis [12] who confirmed the existence of the intergenerational transmission of familial values in their study examining the construction of the "Mommy Identity" and the ways in which face negotiation impacted a woman's behaviors and expectations for motherhood. Although both Chelsea and Pam were discussing experiences with sons, the intergenerational transmission of familial values is apparent in both examples. One example of intergenerational issues was found in the grandparents' reflections on their influence on the type of parents their child became.

### **4.3. Lessons Learned from Grandparents' Own Transition to Parenthood**

Within this theme, grandparents expressed a dialectical tension between replicating their own parents' behaviors and intentionally deviating from their parents behaviors. When asked to reflect on how their experience compared to the communication between participants and their parents when they had their first child, 12 participants expressed a desire to replicate some of the behaviors and practices of their parents. These participants reflected on the ways in which their parents' behaviors during the time of transition supported them in fulfilling their new role as parent and their ongoing role as partner. One new grandmother, Chelsea, recalled appreciating her mother's approach to grandparenthood and

noted her mom “was a very cool mom, and she would come once a week and encourage me to go out, you know, go take a painting class, go do pottery, go do flower arranging, and it really was lovely to have that”, Chelsea expressed how she replicates this behavior by offering to watch her grandchild, giving the new parents personal time to focus on their relationship. Similarly, Sara described providing instrumental support for her daughter in a way that matched the support she had received from her mother:

My mother hovered over to me to make sure I had everything I needed, including sleep. She helped with household chores. I was the same with my daughter; spent several days with her after the birth of baby, which seemed to be appreciated.

Chelsea and Sara's examples exemplified grandparents who appreciated their parents help with their own transition to parenthood and consciously decided to enact similar behaviors with their children.

Although 12 participants acknowledged helpful behaviors and communicative efforts their own parents had made, 5 participants expressed a desire to deviate from the practices of their own parents. Families are complex systems and within a given family, parents may choose to adopt some communicative practices and behaviors while consciously avoiding others. In one such example, Eva expressed both the ways in which she attempted to differ from her mother and “bite her tongue” and the practices which she intended to replicate:

My mother was an elementary schoolteacher and then an elementary principal, and she was very strict and structured. I could remember when I was expecting, she said, “Now, our baby is not going to wear those disposable diapers. Our baby is going to wear cloth diapers”, And, you know, that lasted about a week after the baby came, and I did not want to mess with those cloth diapers. And so I have tried not to be quite so didactic, I guess, you know, and not say “our baby”, because it is indeed not our baby, you know, it is just our grandbaby. So, again, I try to bite my tongue.

When asked if there was anything she would replicate from her mother's behavior, Eva said if her daughter asked her to come stay at their house, she would follow what her mother had done for her and “do the cooking and cleaning” and let her daughter “take care of the baby”, Eva believed those grandparenting behaviors were helpful because she recalled feeling pretty overwhelmed when she was a new parent. She noted “I had a master's degree, I was an educated person, but, you know when it comes to taking care of a helpless little person, you're really not ever prepared (laugh)”. Eva's statements reflected a dialectical tension of deviation or replication and highlighted the complexity of distinguishing between what are known as the modeling or compensation hypotheses.

The modeling and compensation hypotheses have been tested in a number of parent-child relationships including father-son relationships [23]. The modeling hypothesis suggests individuals will enact behaviors which they experienced from their parents as a child when they become parents themselves. The compensation hypothesis describes how individuals can transcend less than desirable upbringings and act in ways which differ from the parenting practices they experienced as a child. Eva's examples illustrated how in everyday lived experiences, elements of both modeling and compensation (*i.e.*, replication and deviation) are evident and these two categories are not mutually exclusive from one another. Rather, like other dialectical tensions, the replication-deviation tension must be managed in family relationships.

The following two intentional deviations from great-grandparents' practices reflected participants' desires to maintain more positive interactions with their adult children and to increase parental involvement. First, Allen expressed intentional deviation from his parents' practices and recalls “my parents were very—they were just those kind of people: very judgmental and competitive and demanding” before going on to state how he and his wife are not that way and refused to let differences over parenting practices become a source of tension. Finally, Carl expresses consciously attempting to be more involved than his father was and notes how his son and son-in-law have taken that cue from him in their own transition to parenthood.

#### 4.4. History and Culture

As grandparents reflected on intergenerational issues during this time of transition the grandparents contextualized their experiences by offering historical and cultural explanations. Grandparents' (9 of 19) referenced how they believed the grandparent role was embedded in history. This theme emerged during interviews when participants shared how the ways in which grandparents are expected to enact their role is shaped by the historical events and norms of that

particular point in history. For example, Brenda explains how being born during WWII may have shaped the role her mother and grandmother assumed during that time. Brenda viewed herself as a link to her father who was in the war and recalled her mother and grandmother “hovered a lot” over her. Brenda explained the historical context as potentially contributing toward a psychological difference in how grandparents enacted their role to maintain closeness with their adult children. In Brenda’s case, WWII impacted her transition to parenthood and her relationship with her mother.

An example of how historical and societal norms may shape the grandparent role comes from Pam who discussed how parents 35 years ago “didn’t talk about sex...dating, things like that.” Pam went on to reflect on how taboo topics constrained the conversations between parents and their adult children about pregnancy and child birth. Next, Pam explained that her relationship with her son and their willingness to discuss a range of topics surrounding childbirth and childrearing with one another were likely a reflection of present-day communication norms in the grandparent-adult child relationship. Wendy was very clear about differences in topics of discussion between Wendy’s experience with her own mother and Wendy’s experience with her adult daughters:

My mother worked afternoons when growing up and I felt I had to take care of the house and my two younger siblings. She didn’t attend school functions or even share meals with us much. Conversations with any substance were few and far between. People didn’t talk about pregnancy or bodies, or relationships then. With my own daughters, I drove them to school activities every day. We lived 45 minutes from the school so I had a captive audience in the car. I got them talking about things that they never probably wanted to talk about. When pregnant, I and the girls talked about every little thing about being pregnant, giving birth, etc. I couldn’t ask my mother about any of it...for all I know we were delivered by the stork.

Pam and Wendy’s discussions of a range of topics may be a reflection of present-day communication norms (as Pam suggests) and it may also be a reflection of their families’ conversation orientation since one of the indicators of a conversation orientation family communication pattern is the willingness to have all members of the family communicate about a wide range of topics [24]. Utilizing Koerner & Fitzpatrick’s [24] family communication patterns, Schrodtt [25] demonstrated how young adult children’s perceptions of expressiveness within families was positively associated with family strength and satisfaction.

Participants (6 of 19) also noted cultural influences on how grandparenting roles were enacted and closeness was promoted or maintained within the grandparent-adult child relationship. Allen described his parents as being “more like movie grandparents”, being from “the Old World”, and being “really different”. Carl attributed his father’s distant parenting to “old Italian parenting” and differentiated that kind of parenting from the role he is enacting with his adult children:

I never talked to my father, and he never talked to me and he never gave me advice, and that was the kind of old Italian parenting, you know. So I feel like-and look, I mean, this could be delusional, too, right? But I feel like my kids aren’t afraid to talk to me about anything, and I’m not afraid to say anything to them, you know, even though I’ve kind of qualified that by saying I’m not one to give advice unless asked. We also happen to have good conversations. I never had those kinda conversations with my father-never.

Throughout participants’ accounts of the importance of history and culture, they acknowledged ways in which the closeness between them and their adult children and their experiences as grandparents were shaped by these factors. Previous research examining intergenerational support during the transition to parenthood noted how continuities and discontinuities of cultures and traditions impacted the nature and perception of support such that adult children wanted to be supported in their ability to carry on some family traditions and abandon others [26].

#### **4.5. Parental Role Changes**

Parental role changes as an overarching theme refers to grandparents’ insights about changes in their own parental roles over time paired with an appreciation for challenges their adult children are facing as new parents. The two emergent themes encompassed by the overarching category of “parental role changes” were “changes in grandparents’

parental roles over time" and "new challenges facing adult children as parents". Both of these themes identify developmental and societal influences on how parenting roles are enacted by both grandparents themselves and by their adult children as new parents.

#### 4.6. Changes in Grandparents' Parental Roles Over Time

Questions about communication patterns with their adult children yielded responses indicating an awareness of different stages of parenting. The theme regarding changes in grandparents' parental roles over time described how the grandparents adapted to changing parental roles as their adult children aged and accepted new roles and responsibilities themselves. Participants like Allen voiced an awareness of how he and his child were both enacting new roles. Allen stated "I am not a parent the same way to him at 30 as I was to him at 3 or 13 or even 23." Echoing Allen's sentiments, Cooney and Uhlenberg<sup>4</sup> examined ways in which parents supported their adult children from young adulthood through middle age and discovered that although there tends to be a decline in all forms of support after age 30, there are certain events such as the birth of a child which increase parents' support of their adult children. Research and theorizing on social support within communication highlights the essential role it plays in maintaining healthy family relationships [27] and several grandparents acknowledged changes in how they supported their children over time.

Similar to Allen's statements, Pam expresses how parents go through different stages with their children. Pam recalled changes in her parent-child relationship when she stated:

"My relationship with him became different when he hit the stage of marriage, it became different when he graduated from medical school, and now it's going to become different now that he's going to be a parent. And all of these changes that we've gone through, these different stages in our lives, have only gotten better as each one came along, so I can only imagine the next one will be even better."

Fortunately for Pam, she envisioned the transition to grandparenthood would have a positive impact on her relationship with her son. Another participant, Sara, voiced bittersweet sentiments about the shifting roles by noting that "children change when they become spouses and parents. They have their own life. We parents become smaller parts of their lives and that, while a normal course of life, is a sad thing for parents". Through these reflections, participants (15 out of 19) noted that the transition to grandparenthood represented a significant shift in their role as parents to their adult children and compared this transition to other times of transition throughout their parent-child relationships.

#### 4.7. New Challenges Facing Adult Children as Parents

Within the second emergent theme in the "changes in parental roles" category, grandparents acknowledged new challenges their adult children are facing as their adult children become parents. Grandparent participants noted how these challenges became frequent topics of conversation with their adult children. Grandparents identified pregnancy rules and an apparent influx of baby gear as two challenges which impacted their adult children's transition to parenthood and their own transition to grandparenthood. Carl recalled having "a lot of laughs" about the different rules surrounding diet and behavior for expectant mothers and jokingly commented that "it's amazing any one of us is alive" despite not following the same prenatal recommendations. While joking about dietary restrictions and prenatal guidelines, Carl highlighted one challenge facing grandparents' adult children and described how the challenge became a topic of conversation between him and his son and daughter-in-law.

The "baby stuff" often became the source of topics of conversation. Hannah noted "We also discussed the baby registry and what should be included there. We have talked about supplies that will be needed for the baby including furniture and other equipment". Hannah's description of the content of some of her parent-child exchanges identified the abundance of choices in baby paraphernalia as a challenge both adult children and grandparents faced. In fact, several participants commented on the volume of present-day baby paraphernalia which did not exist when they were raising their children. Sasha recalled the transition from carriages to strollers while Carl described his own children's car seat as "the top of a carriage with a net on top" and noticed how children of similar ages are currently "strapped in like NASCAR drivers". Accompanying those comments about challenges and choices participants' adult children faced was an appreciation that in some ways the pregnancy regulations and the abundance of options for baby gear overwhelmed their adult children and increased their adult children's anxiety about making good choices.

Lastly, participants noted some nuanced differences in the nature of parenting related to changes in sources of

anxiety for new parents over time. Carl equated his parents' fears of him developing polio with his adult children's possible fears of their children being autistic and notes the ways in which children are both "a source of wonder and joy" and "a source of terror". Through this example Carl expressed how parental worry transcended generations but that the specific diseases and disorders parents worry about changed over time. The next section contains a discussion of the third overarching category and discusses emergent themes surrounding communication facilitators and barriers in grandparents-adult-child relationships during this time of transition.

#### **4.8. Grandparent and Adult-Child Communication Facilitators or Barriers**

Across interviews, grandparent participants identified facilitators and barriers to their communication with their adult children. Collectively, the facilitators and barriers impacted the frequency, nature, and mediums of communication between grandparents and their adult children. The two emergent themes were "proximity" and "technology".

#### **4.9. Proximity**

Grandparents identified geographic proximity as one important communication facilitator or barrier. Grandparents (17 of 19) discussed proximity as a factor which shaped their closeness with their adult child. Proximity here is defined as the geographic distance between grandparents and their adult children. Unlike intentional replication or deviation, participants expressed how the physical distances between parents and children constrained or enabled certain communicative practices and behaviors. Three examples of grandparents' reflections on the impact of geographic proximity on closeness are now offered.

Amy's experience with her parents differed somewhat from her experience with her son because she lived 40 minutes away from her parents whereas her son lives on the opposite side of the country. She noted that her son communicated with her frequently despite the distance and that she spoke with her mother by phone every day. Amy's attempt to reconcile relationship differences based on lack of geographic proximity illustrated how she was young and needed a lot of reassurance whereas her son and daughter-in-law "don't need all that". Similarly, Brenda expressed how she was farther away from her daughter, Kim, than Brenda had been from her own mother and grandmother. Brenda differentiates between geographic and emotional closeness by saying "I'm very close to Kim, too, not geographically, but we're very close". Amy and Brenda's discussion of the role of proximity in shaping communication between them and their adult children situated proximity as a factor but not necessarily a barrier prohibiting communication.

Other grandparents expressed attempting to bridge gaps in geographic distance by the use of new technologies like Skype and Facetime and recognized those same technologies were not available to their parents when they started having children. Despite considerable geographic distance between Lynn and her daughter, Lynn expressed a desire to be supportive and to do as much as she could for her daughter in response to not having family support when she and her husband welcomed their first child. When asked how her experience with her daughter was similar to or different from Lynn's experience with her parents when she became a parent, Lynn responded:

When I had my first child, we didn't have any family around here, so, um . . . it was just my husband and I. So when my daughter had her baby, we tried to be very supportive and, you know, when she wanted us to come and be there, we tried to do as much as we could.

Similar to participants' intentional deviation from their own parents' parenting practices, Lynn learned from her own lived experience and wanted to increase the level of support for her daughter to promote closeness between Lynn and her daughter as her daughter became a mother.

#### **4.10. Technology**

Grandparents (12 of 19) noted how technology was influencing their experience of the transition to grandparenthood and their communication with their adult child during the transition. Several participants like Dan noted a reliance on new technologies like Skype to stay connected with adult children and grandchildren who lived far away. Wendy discussed changing communication patterns from when her daughters left for college until her daughters starting having children by saying "When babies came along, visits and phone calls, and Facetime became much more frequent. Facebook and notes by e-mail are quick and often". In these excerpts Dan and Wendy identified technology as a facilitator of communication between them and their adult children.



Grandparents' relational maintenance behaviors with their adult children may shape how they maintain relationships with their grandchildren over time. Grandparents were asked to predict possible changes in future communication patterns and several grandparents who were awaiting the birth of the grandchild expressed a desire to utilize computer-mediated technologies to combat sizeable geographical distances between them and their adult children. This desire to utilize computer-mediated technologies to combat geographical distances helps explain why advice to grandparents often includes a discussion of how to enact the role from a distance [3].

## 5. DISCUSSION

The first research question asked about intergenerational issues grandparents identified during the transition to grandparenthood. Through a series of semi-structured interview questions, participants identified several themes within intergenerational issues. Participants noted their influence on how their adult children were enacting the parental role. Participants also reflected on these intergenerational issues by discussing their own lived experiences with their parents. Participants offered up historical and cultural context on the intergenerational transmission of parenting practices.

More specifically, participants identified aspects of their relationship with their parents which informed the ways that they attempted to mold relationships with their adult children. Participants were able to articulate concrete ways in which they were attempting to either replicate their parents' approaches (*e.g.*, when Chelsea offered to babysit her grandchild so her children could have quality time with their spouses) or intentionality deviate from the nature of their relationship with their parents (*e.g.*, when Allen attempted to avoid the competitive nature of his relationship with his parents). Eva's approach of replicating some behaviors and deviating from others could be seen as the integration management strategy [28] wherein both polarities are satisfied simultaneously. The deliberate replication or deviation of parenting approaches by many participants suggests participants have reflected on the consequences of those differential parenting approaches and are committed to using that knowledge to shape current relationships with their adult children. The grandparents' parenting practices aligned with previous research suggesting "grandparents who flexibly respected their children's wishes for autonomy, while remaining available, provided the most support" [29].

Possible explanations for the (lack of) intergenerational transmission of parenting practices included changes in the cultural or historical family context. Building off of previous support for the importance of continuity and discontinuity of cultures and traditions [29], the current study's participants' reflections on these external factors suggest participants are aware of the complexity of intergenerational familial relationships and how their own attempts to enact the grandparent role may be enabled or constrained by history and culture. Historical and cultural considerations align with a recognition that there are both intergroup and in-group processes present in family functioning [30]. Broad cultural memberships, such as Carl's use of "old Italian parenting" help explain structural dynamics and accommodation or non-accommodation practices in families [30]. An explanation for whether or not there is an intergenerational transmission of parenting practices could be found by considering how much grandparents identify with the cultural groups of their parents.

As participants reflected on their current role in their adult children's lives, they noted how their communicative and behavioral choices reflected their current stage of parenting. Participants were attuned to their adult children's needs for particular kinds of support during the transition and compared them with types of support their children needed at other points in their lives. Several participants' new grandparent status enabled them to discuss the intergenerational transmission of family values including parenting practices. Participants spoke with pride about how they felt their parenting practices contributed toward their children being good parents. Participants identified some challenges their adult children were facing and noted how those challenges (*e.g.*, figuring out "baby stuff") shaped topics of conversation during the transition.

The second research question asked about factors grandparents identified that influenced grandparents' communication and relationships with their adult children. Grandparents identified proximity and technology as communication facilitators and barriers influencing their relationship and their communicative practices with their adult children. Whitbeck and colleagues [6] established that geographical proximity is an important limiting factor in the frequency of contact between grandparents and grandchildren. Not surprisingly, geographic proximity also surfaced as an influential factor which shaped the nature of the grandparent-adult child relationship and the type of support grandparents were able to offer their children. For many grandparents, geographic distance was a barrier to communication as it limited the scope of the instrumental support they could provide to their adult children during this transition. Participants discussed the current or anticipated use of technology (*e.g.*, Skype) to help facilitate communication and foster connections between them and their children and grandchildren.

## CONCLUSION

Family communication scholars benefit from continuing to study transitions within the family since those transitions tend to highlight the complexity of family relationships. The current study extends prior research focused on the adult child's perspective on grandparent-adult child relationships [4 - 6] and helps shed some light on grandparents' perspectives on their relationship with their adult children during the transition to grandparenthood. One strength of the current study is that it includes a mix of grandparents with expectant adult children and grandparents with post-partum adult children. The experiences of these two groups of grandparents combine to provide a more thorough account of the transition.

In addition to contributions to the study of families and transitions, adult children would likely benefit from learning more about their parents' perspective on this transition. Adult children may benefit from noting how their parents reflect on their role as grandparents and the relationship and environmental factors which contribute toward how they enact that role. Dun [5] noted within the turning point labeled "conflict" that adult children (*i.e.*, new parents) struggled at times with intergenerational conflict. Adult children may benefit from learning about the ways in which participants in this study intentionally deviated from the communicative and parenting practices of their own parents to try to minimize conflict and promote positive relationships.

Given the relatively small sample size of grandparents in this study, the findings from this study are not intended to be indicative of the perspectives of all new or expectant grandparents. The sample was restricted to new or expectant grandparents who were about to welcome the first child or one of their adult children or who welcomed the first child of one of their adult children within the past year to narrow the focus of the investigation to that specific transition window. Other limitations include possible differences in the face-to-face versus in-person interview formats.

Future research will benefit from larger sample sizes with more comprehensive investigations of communication within the grandparent-adult child relationships and the transition to grandparenthood. More specifically, widening the participant pool beyond new or expectant grandparents and asking questions designed to capture family communication patterns, communication practices, and deep reflections on their evolving role as grandparents and parents over time will continue to contribute toward our understanding of this important family relationship. Despite these limitations, the perspectives of the grandparents in this study are valuable in that they highlight intergenerational dynamics and suggest multiple avenues for future longitudinal and larger scale investigations.

The experiences reported by this set of grandparents were overwhelmingly positive. Most grandparents reported elation at the news that their son or daughter was expecting a child. Future research needs to attempt to capture the lived experiences of a range of grandparents who may not always welcome the news that their child is expecting. One possible demographic to attempt to recruit would be participants with children who are teenage expectant or new parents. Although there is some prior research which highlights the unique experiences of adolescent parents and their parents [26], much more research is needed in this area. Conducting research with diverse participants will paint a more comprehensive picture of the potential importance of intergenerational dynamics in shaping grandparent-(young) adult child relationships during the transition to grandparenthood.

## ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Not applicable.

## HUMAN AND ANIMAL RIGHTS

No Animals/Humans were used for studies that are base of this research.

## CONSENT FOR PUBLICATION

Not applicable.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

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Declared None.

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