

**THE GRANDPARENT-GRANDCHILD BOND: DO PARENTS RETAIN THE  
GATEKEEPER ROLE AS CHILDREN AGE?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Stephanie Blake: The Grandparent-Grandchild Bond: Do Parents Retain The Gatekeeper Role As Children Age?**

**(Under the direction of Peter Uhlenberg, PhD)**

This study examined the impact of the middle generation on the grandparent-grandchild bond. Specifically, I was interested in how the parent as gatekeeper mediates closeness and self-disclosure with a maternal grandmother at two different stages of the life course, ages 10-17 and 18-23. The younger focal children were twice as likely as the older focal children to confide in a grandmother they feel emotionally close to. For both age groups, the focal child-mother (G2-G3) relationship is positively associated with grandchild-grandmother (G1-G3) relationship. The mother-grandmother (G1-G2) relationship is significantly associated with grandchild-grandmother (G1-G3) closeness for both age groups, but this is especially true for the older focal children. For the younger focal children, mother-grandmother (G1-G2) closeness is related to G1-G3 self-disclosure. Among the older focal children, level of closeness between the mother and focal child is related to whether the older focal children will confide in their grandmother.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The role of the middle generation (G2) in mediating grandparent-grandchild closeness is widely recognized (Matthews & Sprey, 1985; Kennedy, 1992). The level of emotional closeness that the grandparent (G1) has had with their child (G2) over the life course, will predict emotional closeness between the grandparent (G1) and grandchild (G3) (Rossi & Rossi, 1990).

Grandparent literature has coined the term "gatekeeper" to describe the role of the parent in fostering grandparent-grandchild relations (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986). While research has confirmed the importance of the middle generation in the "gatekeeper" role, very little is known concerning mediation as grandchildren (G3) grow into young adults (Hodgson, 1998).

This study extends research on the impact of the mediator role on G1-G3 relations over the life course. Specifically, I ask how the parent as gatekeeper mediates closeness with a grandmother at different stages of the grandchild's life. In addition to G1-G3 closeness, this study also examines whether the parent mediates level of self-disclosure between the grandchild and grandparent (whether the grandchild will confide in their maternal grandmother). While grandchildren may readily admit to feelings of closeness, it will be interesting to examine whether "closeness" has any practical implications for the grandchildren at two different stages of the life course. While level of closeness is often used to measure the quality of G1-G3 relations, self-disclosure is rarely examined in this context.

Studies that target the grandparent-grandchild relationship have been overwhelmingly

conducted either on college students participating in family seminars, or on small-scale voluntary samples. This study offers an opportunity to use a nationally representative sample to examine grandparent-grandchild relations from the perspective of the grandchildren. I will compare and contrast the experiences of G1-G3 relations for grandchildren aged 10-17, with grandchildren in their early adult years. In addition, information will be gathered on G2-G3 relations from the perspective of the G2 “bridge” generation (Hodgson, 1998).

## **BACKGROUND**

A cultural shift in marriage norms has led to increased diversity in living arrangements for children (McLanahan, 2004). More children will experience divorce, non-marital childbearing, and parental cohabitation than at any other time in history (Heuveline, Timberlake & Furstenberg, 2003). Thus far, research indicates that children who grow up in a low-conflict household with both biological parents fare better than children who grow up in single-, step- or a cohabiting-parent household (Parke, 2003). While children may not have access to both biological parents as they have in the past, research indicates that grandparents have the potential to be an important resource in the lives of their grandchildren (Barranti 1985).

Most Americans will experience grandparenthood at some point in their life, typically during middle age (Falk & Falk, 2002). In addition, between 20 and 25 percent of grandparents are now step-grandparents due to divorce- their own or their children's (Falk & Falk, 2002).

Demographic trends indicate (Uhlenberg, 2005) that the percentage of 10 year olds with all four grandparents alive increased seven-fold between 1900 and 2000, and is projected to be 48% by 2020. In addition, the likelihood that a 30 year old will have at least one

grandparent alive tripled between 1900 and 2000, and will grow to 82 percent by 2020.

Grandchildren are more likely to enjoy a relationship with one or more grandparents well into adulthood.

### ***Importance of the parent-grandparent (G1-G2) relationship***

Multiple research studies have confirmed that the quality of relations between G1 grandparents with their G2 children will determine the extent to which grandparents will bond with their G3 grandchildren (Denham & Smith, 1989; King & Elder, 1995; Whitbeck, Hoyt & Huck, 1993; Uhlenberg & Hammill, 1998).

Rossi and Rossi's book, "Of Human Bonding," found that three factors contributed to greater intimacy between adult children and their parents. Adult children that had close relations with their parents experienced: 1) strong family cohesion (2) during the child's (G2) adolescence parents were affectionate and accessible, and 3) parents had a close relationship with their young children. The only exception was that mother-daughter closeness during adolescence did not predict their current relationship.

The authors suggest that experiences with a parent during a child's formative years will influence present-day interactions in two ways. First, the quality of emotional ties between parent and child are likely to persist as children become adults. If the child was emotionally distant from the parent as they were growing up, that behavior will continue into adulthood. Second, the authors suggest that there may be a cross-generational transmission of values. Parents model certain behaviors and sentiment, which the adult children replicate in their own family life.

It appears that present-day relations for both the G1-G2 and G2-G3 dyads reflect a lifetime of experiences. The quality of G1-G2 and G2-G3 relations during the early years will



impact the current level of emotional closeness. Rossi & Rossi's theoretical explanation sheds light on the historical context that lays the groundwork for current grandparent-grandchild relations.

### ***How G1-G2 relations influence G1-G3 closeness***

Many studies have emphasized the importance of the parent's role in mediating the relationship between grandparent and grandchild. A longitudinal study of white rural families in Iowa found that the grandparent's perceived supportiveness toward the parent was related to G1 relations with their teenage grandchildren (Elder & King 1995). For maternal grandmothers, negativity was inversely related to the quality of relations with grandchildren. In addition, demandingness influenced quality of relations with paternal grandparents.

Whitbeck, Hoyt & Huck (1993) found direct negative effects between "recalled nonoptimal childhood relationships" between the parent and grandparent, and the evaluations of adolescents' evaluations of their relationship with their grandparents. Grandparents who did not have close relationships with their G2 children in the past may continue the pattern of distant relations with the G3 grandchildren. The authors write, "Early family interaction processes may set in motion chains of events that affect family members' interaction styles and expectations of one another throughout their lives."

While multiple studies confirm the importance of the G2 parent in mediating the relationship between the grandparent and their adolescent grandchildren, the mediator role is much more ambiguous for adult grandchildren. Normative prescriptions for adult grandchild behavior are not very clear, especially when adult grandchildren no longer reside with their parents (Hodgson 1992). Several studies have attempted to address this issue, yet serious methodological limitations have provided conflicting conclusions and few definitive answers

(Hodgson 1998).

Matthews & Sprey first suggested that parental mediation may weaken as adolescents approach young adulthood (1982). They assert that from a family systems perspective, the grandparent-grandchild bond is continually renegotiated. However, with independence, grandchildren may establish new ties with their grandparents, bypassing parental mediation altogether. In a subsequent study of 132 college students at a liberal arts college, Matthews & Sprey (1985) found that perceptions of the G1-G2 relationship, influenced G3 feelings toward their grandparents. When the student perceived their parent as close to their grandmother, they were more likely to feel close to that grandmother. When the parent was not close to the grandmother, there was even greater likelihood of the participant not feeling close to that grandmother.

Hodgson (1992) conducted a national telephone survey of 208 men and women who were at least 18 years old. She found that when G3 respondents perceived the bonds between their parent and grandparent to be positive, they were more likely to perceive their bond with the grandparent as positive.

Based on the results of her study, Hodgson asserts that even when adult grandchildren are no longer living at home, parents still act as important mediators between the G1-G3 relationship. She provides two possible reasons why this may be true for adult grandchildren. Parents provide role models for their children. Hodgson says, "Spending time with the grandparental generation may establish family norms or strengthen linkages which are played out between the cross-generations." Second, Hodgson suggests that parents who interact with the grandparent "bring along" the youngest generation. Thus, grandchildren may simply participate in family rituals established by the parent.

While Hodgson's study does provide a clearer picture of G1 relations with adult

grandchildren, the sample is limited in scope to participants with at least one living grandparent. The majority of the sample (55%) had only one living grandparent. If only one grandparent was living, that grandparent automatically became the one the respondent is "closest" to. While this study provides a valuable insight into relationships between grandparents and their adult grandchildren, the results may be slightly skewed.

### ***Importance of G2-G3 relations for G1-G3 closeness***

While research has highlighted the importance of G1-G2 relations in mediating the relationship with grandchildren, the closeness of the G2 parent with the G3 child may be equally critical for understanding G1-G3 relations. Elder & King's study of rural families in Iowa found that G2-G3 relations predicted quality of relations for G1-G3. Joint activities between mother-child enhanced relations between the child and maternal grandparents, while a father's warmth enhanced relations with paternal grandparents (Elder & King 1995).

Kennedy explored whether college students learn about their grandparents primarily through their parents (1992). The participants were asked, "How much of your communication with your grandparent was through one of your parents- that is, your grandparent learned of your activities and feelings primarily through your parent and you learned of your grandparents primarily through your parents?" According to this survey, 27 percent of the sample said "mostly true," 46 percent said "somewhat true," while only 27 percent said, "mostly not true." However, the study also found that the greater the amount of one-on-one contact grandchildren had with their grandparents, the less likely they were to agree with the above statement.

Rossi & Rossi's research found that affective closeness of the parent-child dyads, G1-G2 and G2-G3, were significantly related to affective closeness of G1 grandparents and their

G3 grandchildren (1990). The results were significant for all four grandparent types. The authors suggest that the middle generation's experience with their family of origin, and current relations (with their parents and children) buffer the amount and quality of relations for grandparents and their grandchildren.

Thompson & Walker surveyed female college students, their mothers, and grandmothers, regarding their feelings toward one another (1987). According to this study, G1-G3 closeness emerges from three sources: a direct G1-G3 relationship, feelings toward the mother that overflow onto the grandmother, and feelings mediated by the mother's feelings for the grandmother. The authors conclude that granddaughters mirror the feelings of the parent toward the grandparent, especially when contact with the grandmother is low.

### ***Additional Factors that Influence Close Emotional Bonds with Grandparents***

The current cultural script for contemporary grandparenting emphasizes affection and close emotional bonds between the generations (Uhlenberg, 2005), although historically this has not always been the case (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986). Research overwhelmingly indicates that grandchildren tend to have close emotional bonds with at least one grandparent (Kennedy, 1990).

The grandparent literature has identified several variables that may influence to what degree the parents influence G1-G3 relations. The variables that will be discussed in detail are: lineage, sex, geographic proximity, G2 marital status, race, and number of G2.

#### **Lineage**

The kin relationship between G1 and G2 is critical for understanding G1-G3 relations. Grandchildren tend to rate grandmothers higher than grandfathers, and to prefer maternal grandparents over paternal grandparents (Eisenberg, 1988; Kennedy 1990). Maternal

grandparents tend to have more frequent contact with sets of grandchildren as compared to paternal grandparents, while grandmothers have more frequent contact with grandchildren as compared to grandfathers (Uhlenberg & Hammill, 1998). Since grandfathers tend to have moderate to low levels of interaction with grandchildren as compared to grandmothers (Kivett, 1985), this study will focus specifically on the relationship between child, mother, and maternal grandmother.

### Sex

The sex of the grandchild may affect closeness and self-disclosure with a mother and grandmother. Scherman et al. found that when the sex of the grandparent and grandchild is the same, there is a higher frequency of talking about general things and providing emotional support during crisis (1988). Similarly, another study also found that young adult women expressed closer feelings of attachment toward maternal grandmothers than young men (Barranti, 1985). Nevertheless, research indicates that grandparent's kin position relative to the grandchild is a better predictor of emotional closeness than grandparent's sex (Hoffman, 1980; Matthews & Sprey, 1985).

Kivett found that both black and white grandmothers tend to associate more with granddaughters than with their grandsons (1993). She theorizes that older granddaughters may have more in common with their grandmothers, therefore there are more opportunities for association and helping. Similarly, she feels that young women may be sought after in a "socialization-to-role" process.

### Geographic proximity

Research indicates that proximity to grandparents can determine level of closeness between G1-G3 (grandparent-grandchild) relations (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Whitbeck, Hoyt & Huck, 1993; Kivett, 1985; Uhlenberg & Hammill, 1998).

One study found that participants saw their closest grandparent more often in person, spoke to them on the phone most frequently, and interacted with them in a broader array of activities (Boon & Brussoni, 1996). However, this study also found that respondents live no nearer to close grandparents than did participants that were not close to grandparents. Proximity alone may not be a good estimate of whether grandchildren will feel close to grandparents (Roberto, Allen & Blieszner, 2001).

Studies that address proximity and closeness have led to conflicting conclusions. King & Elder found that although contact with grandparent is mediated by proximity, proximity to grandparent had little direct effect on the quality of G1-G3 relations (1995). Gregory Kennedy's study of 400 midwestern college students found the opposite to be true (1991). He found that the majority of the participants had their most-close grandparent living in their hometown or within 50 miles. In addition, they were less likely to see a parent as a communication bridge.

While frequency of contact may only partially predict relationship quality with grandchildren, it is through visitation that grandparents build and maintain relationships (King & Elder, 1995). The relationship between parent and grandparent will dictate to what degree the child will come into contact with a grandparent, and what attitudes grandchildren will have towards their grandparents (King & Elder, 1995; Barranti, 1985).

### *G2 marital status*

The middle generation's (G2) marital status can have important implications for G1-G3 relations. Research that has found that compared to children from intact families, children from blended families and to a lesser extent, children from single-parent families, had a closer and more direct relationship with their grandparents (Kennedy, 1990; Kennedy, 1992). One study found that children from step-families were more likely to agree

that grandparents knew their feelings, hopes, and activities (Kennedy, 1990). In addition, grandchildren from stepfamilies were more likely to feel that their primary link to their grandparents was through a parent (Kennedy, 1990).

Rossi and Rossi (1990) found that G2 marital discord decreases affective closeness for all grandparent-grandchild relations, with the exception of the maternal grandmother-granddaughter relationship (p. 353). While the responses were from the G2 perspective, the authors argue that any projections on the part of the parent have serious implications for the G1-G3 relationship. From the perspective of the child, G2 marital discord had no impact on their relationship with the maternal grandmother, neither in adolescence, nor in current relations.

### Race

Cherlin & Furstenberg found that black grandparents tend to take more of a parent-like role with their grandchildren (1986). Over the previous year, 71% of black grandparents had disciplined their grandchildren, as compared to 38% of whites. Black grandparents were more likely to see themselves as protectors of their grandchildren.

Kivett's study of rural black and white grandmothers found that black grandmothers both gave and received higher levels of help from their grandchildren. Yet, she found no racial difference according to level of association with grandchildren, nor feelings of getting along and closeness (1993).

According to Hodgson, very little is known about racial and ethnic differences between grandparents and their adult grandchildren (1998). Studies that focus on adult grandchildren tend to rely on small, homogeneous samples of the Anglo population. In addition, research tends to focus on the conditions under which grandparents emerge as important resources for the family, rather than on factors such as relationship quality and

intergenerational solidarity (Hunter & Taylor 1998).

### *Number of Grandchild Sets*

Grandparenting literature indicates that number of grandchild sets can influence the amount of contact a grandparent may have with any one set of grandchildren. Uhlenberg and Hammill (1998) found that the greater the number of grandchild sets, the less likely the grandparent will have contact with any one set of grandchildren. A grandparent is unlikely to have ample opportunity to devote equal amounts of attention to each grandchild set. On the other hand, this study also found that as grandchild sets increase, the likelihood of the grandparents spending a lot of time with any one set also increases. Thus, grandparents that have multiple sets of grandchildren tend to have more contact with their grandchildren than grandparents that have only one set.

### ***The Importance of Self-Disclosure***

Confiding and self-disclosure have great significance in the social psychological literature (Dunn et al, 2001). Talking about emotions or personal problems can boost autonomic nervous system activity, immune function, and physical health (Pennebaker, 1995). In addition, self-disclosure between parents and children can have important consequences for child well-being. Satisfaction with communication and close emotional bonds can provide a protective effect from involvement in risk behaviors (Harris & Ryan, 2002).

To my knowledge, there is only one study that has specifically examined disclosure patterns among grandparents and grandchildren (Downs, 1988). The purpose of the study was to examine whether there was a significant linear relationship between self-reported intent, amount, depth, and honesty in self-disclosure and solidarity between grandparents and their grandchildren. The author found that for both grandparents and grandchildren, honesty and



depth of self-disclosure were significantly related to perceived solidarity. However, there were some interesting differences between grandparents and their grandchildren. For grandchildren, intent of self-disclosure was not significantly related to solidarity, although this was the case for grandparents. Frequency and amount of self-disclosure were significantly related to perceived solidarity for grandchildren, but not for their grandparents.

There is some evidence that in recent years, grandchildren are more likely to turn to grandparent for emotional comfort (Kennedy, 1990; Dellman-Jenkins et al., 1987). Gregory Kennedy replicated a study conducted in 1976, assessing the expectations that college student have for the grandparent role (1990). The majority of the students from the more recent study were more likely than respondents in 1976 to agree that "grandparents are people to whom grandchildren can turn for advice," and that "grandchildren should share with grandparents information about the grandchildren's activities." In addition, the college students from the more recent study were more likely than those from the earlier study to agree that parents influence how grandparents and grandchildren get along.

Grandparents may be especially important emotional resources following parental separation. One study queried children as to who they confided in during the first few weeks that their parents had separated. The children most frequently mentioned grandparents/other relatives" for "intimate confiding" (although it was only 14 percent of the sample) (Dunn et al, 2001).

Indeed, emotional closeness and self-disclosure may be linked. A study of approximately 400 midwestern college students found that participants attributed feeling close to a grandparent to reasons such as: "We can talk together easily," and "My grandparent listens and understands me and treats me as an individual." When comparing the responses of students from different family backgrounds, students from stepfamilies were most likely to

attribute closeness to being able to talk easily with a grandparent (mean of 4.1 on scale from 1=not characteristic to 5=very characteristic). Students from single-parent households and intact families were equally likely to attribute closeness to being able to talk easily with one another.

Studies have yet to address whether the parent (G2) mediates G1-G3 self-disclosure. Intuitively, one can assume that if parental mediation affects emotional "closeness," the same may be true for self-disclosure patterns. This study assesses to what extent grandchildren use G1 as confidants, and whether the parent mediates this practical component of G1-G3 closeness for both teenagers and young adults.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. Does mother-child (G2-G3) closeness influence grandmother-grandchild (G1-G3) closeness? Does mother-child closeness predict grandmother-grandchild closeness more for respondents age 10-17 than for respondents age 18-23?
2. Does mother-grandmother (G2-G1) closeness influence grandmother-grandchild (G1-G3) closeness? Do mother-grandmother relations predict grandmother-grandchild closeness more for respondents age 10-17 than for those age 18-23?
3. Does mother-child (G2-G3) closeness influence whether the child confides in their grandmother? Is this true more for respondents age 10-17 than for respondents age 18-23?
4. Does mother-grandmother (G2-G1) closeness influence whether the child confides in their grandmother? How does it differ by age group?

## **DATA AND METHODS**

Hagestad emphasized that in order to understand the grandparent-grandchild relationship, one must examine three relationships: parent-grandparent (G1-G2), child-parent (G2-G3), and child-grandparent (G1-G3) (1985). This study will examine carefully the relationship between maternal grandmother, female parent, and grandchild. Restricting the sample to the maternal line will allow me to carefully address factors that play a role in emotional closeness and confiding in a grandparent.

This study will utilize OLS regression to examine how the G2-G3 relationship influences emotional closeness in G1-G3 relationships for grandchildren age 10-17 (n=632), and those age 18-26 (n=423) (see Table 1). Information on the G1-G3 relationship will be gathered from the perspective of the grandchild. Data that pertains to the G1-G2 relationship will be gathered from the perspective of the G2 generation. In addition, I will use binomial logistic regression to examine how the G1-G2 and G2-G3 relationships influence whether grandchildren will confide in their maternal grandmothers.

The data collected for the present study is taken from wave 2 (1992-1994) of the National Survey of Families and Households. Telephone interviews were conducted with focal children who were originally ages 5-12 and 10-17 at wave 1 (1987-1988). The NSFH is a probability sample of 13,017 respondents, designed to capture the variability in family patterns in the United States. In an effort to make the population representative of all groups, a double sample was taken of blacks, Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, single-parent families, families with step-children, cohabiting couples, and recently married persons (Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988). A final weight will be allocated to each respondent to compensate for this design.

This study will examine the relationships in five different models with the two

dependent variables- closeness to maternal grandmother and whether the grandchild will confide in a grandparent. The first model will include demographic information on both the mother (G2) and the grandmother (G1). The independent variables are: G2 age, G2 marital status, number of G2 siblings, G2 education, and G2 household income. In addition, information has been collected on G1 physical health, and geographic distance between G1 and G2.

The second model will include the variables from model 1, and add the following demographic information on the focal children: race, age, sex, and whether G2 is currently married to their biological father.

The third model will examine the relationship between the focal child (G3) and their mother (G2) (this model will include the variables from model 1 and 2). The information is gathered from the perspective of the child. Data will include whether the child confides in their mother, and their overall assessment of their relationship with their mother.

The fourth model assesses the relationship between the mother (G2) and the grandmother (G1) (this model includes the independent variables from models 1-3). The data will be taken from the perspective of the middle generation (G2). Questions will examine the quality of their relationship, and how much contact they have. In addition, G3-G1 contact will be added to this model.

A fifth model will include all of the variables from models 1-4, but will add one more variable, grandmother-grandchild emotional closeness. This variable will only be used to assess the relationship between G3-G1 closeness and G3-G1 self-disclosure. It is quite possible that emotional closeness is endogenous to self-disclosure. This model will examine the impact of emotional closeness on the other estimates.

### ***Descriptive Statistics for Dependent Variables (See Table 1):***

#### *Closeness*

In order to measure closeness to maternal grandparent, focal children were queried, "On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all close and 10 is extremely close, how would you describe your relationship with this grandmother?"

When asked how close they felt to a grandparent on a scale from 1 (not at all close) to 10 (extremely close), the younger focal children responded with a mean of 8.1, and a standard deviation of 2.0. The median was 7.0. Clearly the younger grandchildren feel very close to their maternal grandmothers. The older grandchildren also felt very close to their grandmothers with a mean response of 6.9, on a scale of 1 to 10, with a standard deviation of 2.7. The median was 7.0.

#### *Self-Disclosure*

The measure of whether grandchildren confide in any grandparent is, "If you had a major decision to make or if you felt depressed or unhappy, how likely would you be to talk about it with (any of your grandparents/your grandparent)? Responses included 1-Definitely wouldn't, 2-Probably wouldn't, 3- 50-50 chance, 4-Probably would, or 5-Definitely would. While this question does not query the grandchildren on the likelihood of confiding in their *maternal* grandmother, a follow-up question asked, "If you were to confide in a grandparent, which one would it be?"

In order to isolate the responses referring to maternal grandmothers only, two new variables were created. The first variable, "grandm" was constructed using questions that asked, "Which of your grandparents would you be likely to talk about it with?" This question was followed by three questions that asked, "Any others?" The new variable, grandm, was

coded 4 if the respondents would confide in their maternal grandparent as a first choice among the grandparents, or if they would choose all grandparents equally. The variable, grandm, was coded 3 if respondents chose a maternal grandparent as a second choice. The variable was coded 2 if the maternal grandparent was a third choice, 1 if the maternal grandparent was chosen last, and 0 if the respondent would not confide in a maternal grandparent at all. The variable grandm indicates the likelihood of the maternal grandparent being chosen as a confidant.

A second variable, confide, was created to determine the likelihood that the respondent would confide in a grandparent, and that the maternal grandparent would be chosen as that confidant. In other words, this new variable combines the responses from the original variable, and the new variable, grandm. The variable, confide, has two categories. The responses were coded 0 if the respondents would not confide in their maternal grandmother. The responses were coded 1 if the respondents were very likely to confide in their maternal grandmother.

A simple crosstab between emotional closeness and self-disclosure was conducted for both sets of focal children. If the respondent indicated 0-5 on emotional closeness, they were designated "not close" to the maternal grandmother. Respondents that indicated 6-10, were considered "close." Among the younger focal children, 42.4% felt close to their grandmother, and would confide in her. However, among the older focal children, only 23.4% of the respondents that felt close to a grandmother would confide in her. Among the younger focal children, 46.5% of the younger focal children felt close to the grandmother, but would not confide in her. While 50.2% of the older focal children felt close to their grandmother, but would not confide in her. Among the younger sample, 10.1% did not feel close, and would not confide in their grandmother. For older focal children, it was 25.5% of the sample that

did not feel close, and would not confide. Finally, a very small percentage of focal children did not feel close to their grandmother, but would confide in her anyway (1.1% of the younger sample, 0.4% of the older sample).

### ***Descriptive Statistics for Independent Variables:***

#### *G2-G3 Relationship Quality*

The respondents were queried on their relationship with their mother. They were asked, "Taking all things together, on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is really bad and 10 is absolutely perfect, how would you describe your relationship with your mother? On a scale from 1 to 10, the mean response for the younger focal children was 8.3, with a standard deviation of 1.7. The median is 9.0. The older focal children rated their relationship an average of 8.3, and a standard deviation of 1.7. The median is 7.0.

#### *G2-G3 Self-Disclosure*

The level of self-disclosure between the focal child and their mother was measured through two separate variables. The first variable asked how likely the focal children would confide in their mother if they felt depressed or unhappy. This variable is coded, 0-Definitely wouldn't, 1-Probably wouldn't, 2-About a 50-50 chance, 3-Probably would, and 4-Definitely Would. The second variable asked whether the focal children would confide in their mother if they had a major decision to make. The response categories are the same. A new variable was created which combines the responses for both self-disclosure variables.

If the older focal children were depressed or unhappy, they were likely to talk to their mother (on a scale from 0(definitely wouldn't) to 4 (definitely would), they had a mean of 3.0 (which corresponds to the response "probably would,") and a standard deviation of 0.9. The

median is 2.5. The younger children had a mean of 2.8, and a standard deviation of 0.9. The median is 2.5.

#### *G1-G2 Relationship Quality*

The G2 respondents were queried on their level of closeness with their mothers (G1). The original variable ranged from 0 (not at all close) to 10 (extremely close). The younger sample had a mean of 7.9, and a standard deviation of 2.3. The median is 7.0. The older focal children had a mean of 7.9, and a standard deviation of 2.1 (on scale of 1 to 10). The median is 8.0.

### **G3 (Focal Child) Descriptive Statistics**

#### *Sex*

The variable for sex was recoded 0-Male, 1-Female. Among the younger focal children, 48.2 percent of the sample is male, and 51.8 percent of the sample is female. The older focal child sample is 50.8 percent male, 49.2 percent female.

#### *Race*

The variable, race, is coded 0-other, 1-White. This variable indicates that 78.1 percent of the sample of younger focal children are White, 21.9 percent belong to other racial groups. Among the older focal children, 83.5 percent are White, and 16.5 percent of the sample belongs to other racial groups.

Specifically, among the younger sample of grandchildren, 78.1 percent of the sample was White, 11.3 percent was Black, 8.1 percent was Hispanic, 2.0 percent Asian, and 0.4 percent American Indian.

Among the older focal children, 83.5 percent of the sample is White, 8.2 percent of the sample is Black, 7.6 percent of the sample is Hispanic, and 0.7 percent of the sample is Asian.



### *Age*

The younger focal children are between the ages of 10 and 17. The mean age is 13.0 years of age, with a standard deviation of 2.3. The median is 12.0.

The older focal children are between the ages of 18 and 26. The mean age is 20.5, with a standard deviation of 1.9. The median is 19.0.

### *Biological Father Currently Married to Mother*

This variable indicates whether the focal child is a biological child of the primary respondent's current spouse. The variable is coded 0-No, 1-Yes. Among the younger children, 38.4 percent of the sample is not a biological child of their mother's current spouse, while 61.6 percent of the sample is. Among the older focal children, 40.2 percent of the sample is not a biological child of the primary respondent's current spouse, while 59.8 percent of the sample is.

### *Frequency of Contact with GI*

There were two variables that measure contact between the focal children and their grandparents. The first variable measures how often the focal children talked on the phone, or received a letter from their grandmother during the past year. The variable is coded is 0-Not at all, 1-About once a year, 2-Several times a year, 3- 1-3 times a month, 4-About once a week, and 5- Several times a week. The second contact variable measures how often focal child actually saw their maternal grandmother in the past year. The responses are the same. These variables were recoded such that categories 1 and 2 were combined and recoded as category 1. The final variable ranges from 0 to 4. This variable was recoded in order to make it directly comparable with the contact variable for older focal children. A third contact variable was created that combines the responses for both of the contact variables.

On average, the younger grandchildren spoke on the phone, wrote a letter, or saw their maternal grandmother, 1-3 times a month (corresponds to a mean of 2.0, and a standard deviation of 1.1). The median is 1.5.

The contact variable for the older focal children is coded differently than the contact variable used for the younger sample. It is coded: 0-Not at all, 1-Less than once a month, 2- 1 to 3 times a month, 3-About once a week, and 4-More than once a week. Among the older focal children, the average amount of contact with their grandmother in the past year was also "1-3 times a month" (mean of 2.0, with a standard deviation of 1.1). The median is 1.0.

## **G2 (Primary Respondent) Descriptive Statistics**

### *Age*

The younger focal children's mothers (G2) ranged in age from 25-57. The average age was 38.7, with a standard deviation of 5.5. The median is 38.0.

The older focal children's mothers (G2) ranged in age from 33 to 64. The average age is 45.6, with a standard deviation of 5.2. The median is 44.0.

### *Marital Status*

The mothers of the focal children (G2) were asked about their current marital status. The variable was originally coded, 1- married, 2- separated because of marital problems, 3- divorced, 4- widowed, and 5- never married. A new variable, married, was coded married-1, non-married-0.

Of the G2 respondents for the older sample, 73.8 percent were married, while 26.2 percent were not. Among the younger sample, 77.3 percent were married, and 22.7 percent were not.

### *Number of Siblings*

Among the younger sample, the G2 respondents have 3.8 siblings, with a standard deviation of 2.5. The median is 2.0. The mothers of the older focal children have on average, 3.6 siblings, with a standard deviation of 2.3. The median is 2.0.

### *Household Income*

The primary respondents were asked about their total household income. The G2 respondents for the older sample had an average household income of 71,200, the median income is 50,000. The G2 respondents from the younger sample had a household income of 49,800. The median is 44,000.

### *Completed Education*

The primary respondents (G2) were asked about their completed level of education. The categories ranged from, 0-"No formal education" to 20-"Professional or doctorate degree." The average level of education for the older sample is 12.9 years of schooling (high school diploma), with a standard deviation of 2.5. The median is 11.0 years of education.

The average level of education for the younger sample is 13.1 years (some college), and a standard deviation of 2.3. The median is 12.0 years of education.

### *Frequency of Contact with G1*

There were two variables that measure contact between the G2 respondents and their mothers (G1). The first variable, mf28r, measures how often the primary respondents talked on the phone, or received a letter from their mother during the past year. The variable is coded is 0-Not at all, 1-About once a year, 2-Several times a year, 3- 1-3 times a month, 4-About once a week, and 5- Several times a week. The second contact variable, mf26r, measures how often the primary respondent saw their mother in the past year. The responses

are the same. A third contact variable was created that combines the responses for both of the contact variables.

When combining the responses for both contact variables, the younger sample have a mean of 3.6, and a standard deviation of 1.2 (which falls between "1-3 times a month" and "about once a week"). The median is 3.5. The older sample had a mean of 3.4, and a standard deviation of 1.2. The median is 3.0.

### **G1 (Grandmother) Descriptive Statistics**

#### *Age*

The primary respondents were asked about their mother's (G1) age. The grandmothers (G1) of the older focal children, were on average, 70.1 years of age, with a standard deviation of 7.1. The median is 70.0. The younger G1 generation was, on average, 64.4 years of age, with a standard deviation of 8.6. The median is 64.0.

#### *Health Status*

The primary respondents (G2) were asked to describe their mother's (G1) health. This variable was coded, 1-very poor, 2- poor, 3- fair, 4- good, 5-excellent.” A new variable, health, was created which is coded as recoded 0- very poor to fair health, and 1-good to excellent health.

Among the G1 respondents for the older sample, 49.7 percent of the sample was in very poor to fair health. While 50.3 percent were in good to excellent health. Similarly, 46.4 percent of the younger G1 respondents were in very poor to fair health, while 53.6 percent were in good to excellent health.

## RESULTS

Three variables were insignificant in every model. I tested household income, grandmother's age, and number of focal child siblings. In order to make the models more parsimonious, the final results did not include these variables. It appears that G2 education is more important than household income in influencing G1-G3 closeness and self-disclosure. G1 physical health is theoretically more important for determining G1-G3 closeness than G1 age. In addition, focal child siblings may not be significantly related to G1-G3 closeness due to the fact that there is little variation in average number of siblings for both samples. I will discuss the implications of removing these variables from the models.

### *Younger Focal Children: G1-G3 Closeness (See Table 2)*

Model 1 is composed of G2 and G1 demographic information. There were only two variables that were significantly related to grandmother-grandchild closeness: G2 age and G2 marital status. With increasing G2 age, grandmother-grandchild emotional closeness decreases by .08, controlling for other independent variables. When G1 age is included in the model as a control variable, G2 age is no longer significant.

The second variable that is significantly related to G1-G3 closeness is the mother's current (G2) marital status. This variable is coded 1- Married, 0- Not married (separated, widowed, divorced, nonmarried). The result indicate that being married is associated with a .50 increase in G3-G1 emotional closeness, controlling for the other demographic independent variables. G2 and G1 demographic variables explain 6.0% of the variation in G1-G3 closeness.

The second model added focal child demographics. There were only two significant variables: race and focal child age. Being white is associated with a .68 decrease in G1-G3

emotional closeness, holding all other independent variables constant. As the younger focal children age (ages 10-17), there is a .20 decrease in G1-G3 emotional closeness, controlling for the independent variables. Adding child demographic variables explains an additional 5% of the variation in G1-G3 closeness.

The third model included information on G2-G3 (focal child-mother) closeness and self-disclosure. The variables mentioned above all remain significant in model 3. In addition, G2-G3 closeness is highly significant. For every unit increase in level of emotional closeness between the focal child and their mother, the level of emotional closeness between the focal child and their grandmother increases by .38, all other variables constant. This finding confirms previous findings that the G2-G3 relationship is an important influence on G1-G3 relations for younger grandchildren (Elder & King, 1995). Adding G2 and G3 (mother-focal child) relationship variables explains an additional 8.0% of the variation in G1-G3 closeness (Adj.  $R^2 = .19$ ).

The final model adds G1-G2 (grandmother-mother) relationship variables. Once again, G2 age remains significant (once G1 age is removed from the model). G2 marital status is significant. When household income and the number of child siblings are removed from the final model, race remains significant. However, when these two variables are controlled for, race loses its significance. Focal child age remains significant. G2-G3 closeness remains highly significant.

Finally, three variables are significantly related to G1-G3 closeness: G1-G2 distance, G1-G2 closeness, and amount of G1-G3 contact. For every unit increase in geographic proximity between the mother and grandmother (G1-G2), G1-G3 closeness increased by 0.2, all other variables held constant. For every unit increase in amount of contact between the focal child and their grandmother, G1-G3 closeness increased by 0.4, controlling for the

independent variables. Clearly amount of contact is an important for component of G1-G3 closeness. Finally, for every unit increase in closeness between the mother and grandmother (G1-G2), emotional closeness between the focal child and their grandmother increased by 0.1, all other variables held constant. This finding confirms research that has found an association between G1-G2 closeness and G1-G3 closeness for younger focal children (Matthews & Sprey, 1985; Hodgson 1992). Adding G1-G2 relationship variables (in addition to G3-G1 contact), to the final model explains an additional 7.0% of the variation in G1-G3 closeness (Adj  $R^2 = .26$ ).

*Older Focal Children: G1-G3 Closeness (See Table 3)*

There were two significant variables in model 1 (G2 and G1 demographic info): G2 age and G2 education. As the mothers (G2) increase in age, G1-G3 closeness decreases by .08, all other variables held constant. For every year increase in education, G1-G3 closeness decreases by .12, controlling for the other independent variables. These variables only explain 3.0% of the variation in G1-G3 closeness.

Model 2 adds child demographic information. There only significant variable is race. Being white is associated with a .82 unit decrease in G1-G3 emotional closeness, all other variables held constant. The child demographic variables only increased the adjusted  $R^2$  by .2%

Model 3 adds G2-G3 (mother-focal child) relationship variables. Controlling for the G2-G3 relationship alters the significance of a few variables. The variable which indicates that the focal child's mother is currently married to the biological father, becomes significant (only when household income, grandmother's age, or number of child siblings is kept in the model). Focal children whose mothers are married to their biological father are associated

with a .64 unit decrease in G1-G3 closeness, controlling for other independent variables. This variable does not remain significant in model 4.

Mother-child closeness (G2-G3) is significantly related to G1-G3 closeness. For every unit increase in mother-child closeness, G1-G3 closeness increases by .55, all other variables held constant. This variable is highly significant. This is an important finding because it indicates there is indeed an association between G2-G3 closeness and the G1-G3 relationship for the older focal children, just as it exists for the younger sample. G2-G3 variables increase the variation in G1-G3 closeness by 8.0% (Adj  $R^2 = .11$ ).

The final model adds G1-G2 (mother-grandmother) relationship variables. The only variables that remain significant in the final model are: G2 age and G2-G3 closeness. In addition, two of the new variables, G1-G2 closeness and G1-G3 contact, are both highly significant. For every unit increase in G1-G2 closeness, G1-G3 closeness increases by .34, all other variables held constant. Thus, the mother-grandmother relationship is strongly associated with G1-G3 closeness for the older focal children. Similarly, for every unit increase in G1-G3 contact, G1-G3 closeness increases by .74, controlling for the other independent variables. There is an important relationship between amount of contact and emotional closeness. This is true for the younger focal children as well. The final model dramatically increases the variation in G1-G3 closeness by 23.0% (Adj  $R^2 = .34$ ).

In order to understand why the pseudo  $R^2$  jumps dramatically in the final model, I explored the effects of removing each of the final independent variables one at a time. Two variables were critical in influencing G1-G3 closeness. When G1-G2 closeness was removed from the model, the pseudo  $R^2$  dropped from .34 to .29. This variable alone accounted for a decrease of 5.5%. Thus, G1-G2 closeness (mother-grandmother) is very important for understanding G1-G3 closeness (focal child-grandmother). When the variable that measures



the amount of contact with a maternal grandmother was removed, the  $R^2$  dropped from .34 to .28. This variable alone accounts for 6.4% of the variation in  $R^2$ . It is apparent that G1-G2 closeness, and amount of contact with a grandmother are both important factors in influencing G1-G3 emotional closeness for the older focal children.

*Younger Focal Children: G3-G1 Self-Disclosure (See Table 4)*

Model 1 is composed of G2 and G1 demographic information. The only variable that is significant is G2 age. For every year increase in the mother's (G2) age, the odds of the focal child confiding in a maternal grandmother decrease by 6.0%, controlling for other variables in the model. The pseudo  $R^2 = .03$ .

Model 2 adds G3 demographic variables. Three of the child demographic variables are significant: race, G3 age, and G3 sex. Being white decreases the odds of confiding in a grandmother by 56%, controlling for other variables in the model. For every year increase in focal child age, the odds of confiding in a grandmother decrease by 9.0%, controlling for other variables in the model. Being female increases the odds of confiding in a grandmother by 43.0%, controlling for other variables in the model. The pseudo  $R^2 = .06$ .

Model 3 adds G2-G3 relationship variables. The only two variables that remain significant from model 2 are G2 age and race. In addition, G2-G3 self-disclosure is significant. For every unit increase in G2-G3 (mother-focal child) self-disclosure, the odds of confiding in a grandmother increase by 25.0%, controlling for other variables in the model. Thus, confiding in a mother is strongly associated with confiding in the maternal grandmother as well. It is interesting to note that mother-child (G2-G3) closeness is not significantly related to G1-G3 self-disclosure. The pseudo  $R^2 = .07$ .

Model 4 is the final model (when G1-G3 closeness is omitted). When G1-G2 relationship variables are added to the model, G2 marital status becomes significant. When

the mother (G2) is married, the odds of the focal child confiding in a grandmother increase by 81.0%, controlling for other variables in the model. The following variables remain significant: race, G3 age, and G2-G3 self-disclosure. In addition, G1-G2 closeness and G1-G3 contact are significant. For every unit increase in G1-G2 (mother-grandmother) closeness, the odds of confiding in a grandmother increase by 12.0%, controlling for other variables in the model. This finding is important because it indicates that the mother-grandmother (G1-G2) relationship is significantly related to whether the grandchild would choose the grandmother as a confidant. For every unit increase in G1-G3 contact, the odds of confiding in a grandmother increase by 46.0%, controlling for other variables in the model. Thus, the greater the contact between the younger focal children and their grandmother, the greater the likelihood that they will confide in her. The pseudo  $R^2 = .13$ .

Model 5 includes the same variables in model 4, in addition to one more variable, G1-G3 closeness. When G1-G3 closeness is controlled for, the following variables remain significant: race, G2-G3 self-disclosure, G1-G2 closeness, and G1-G3 contact. In addition, G1-G2 geographic proximity gains significance. For every unit increase in G1-G2 distance, the odds of confiding in a grandmother decrease by 12.0%, controlling for other variables in the model. Finally, G1-G3 closeness is significantly related to G1-G3 self-disclosure. For every unit increase in G1-G3 closeness, the odds of confiding in a grandmother increase by 44%, controlling for other variables in the model. The pseudo  $R^2 = .17$ .

#### *Older Focal Children: G3-G1 Self-Disclosure (See Table 5)*

Model 1 is composed of G2 and G1 demographic information. There were three significant variables: G2 age, G2 siblings, and G1 health status. For every unit increase in the mother's (G2) age, the odds of the focal child confiding in a maternal grandmother decrease by 11.0%, controlling for other variables in the model. For every unit increase in the number

of mother's (G2) siblings, the odds of the focal child confiding in a maternal grandmother decrease by 11.0%, controlling for other variables in the model. This finding may be related to previous research that indicates the greater the number of grandchild sets, the less likely the grandparent will have contact with any one set (Uhlenberg & Hammill, 1998). Good health is associated with an 88.0% increase in the odds of confiding in a grandmother, controlling for other variables in the model. The pseudo  $R^2 = .07$ .

Model 2 adds child demographic information. In addition to the variables significant in model 1, race and G3 sex also become significant. Being white is associated with a 60.0% decrease in the odds of self-disclosing, controlling for other variables in the model. Being female is associated with a 71.0% increase in the odds of self-disclosing, controlling for other variables in the model. The pseudo  $R^2 = .10$ .

Model 3 adds G2-G3 relationship variables. All of the independent variables that were significant in model 2 remain significant. In addition, G2-G3 closeness is significantly related to G3-G1 self-disclosure. For every unit increase in G2-G3 closeness, the odds of confiding in a maternal grandmother are increased by 25.0%, controlling for other variables in the model. Thus, a close relationship between the older focal child and their mother is related to confiding in the maternal grandmother. This was not the case with the younger focal children. It is also interesting to note that G2-G3 self-disclosure is not significantly related to G1-G3 self-disclosure for the older focal children, as it was with the younger focal children. The pseudo  $R^2 = .11$ .

Model 4 adds G1-G2 relationship variables. The variables that remain significant are: G2 age, G2 siblings, G1 health, G3 sex, and G2-G3 closeness. In addition, G1-G3 contact is significantly related to G1-G3 self-disclosure. For every unit increase in amount of G1-G3 contact, the odds of confiding in a grandmother increase by 65.0%, controlling for other

variables in the model. It is important to note that G2-G1 closeness is not significantly related to G1-G3 self-disclosure for the older focal children, as it was with the younger focal children. The pseudo  $R^2 = .17$ .

Finally, model 5 adds one variable, G1-G3 closeness. When G1-G3 closeness is controlled for, G2 age, G2 siblings, G1 health, and G3 sex remain significant. In addition, the variable which indicates that the focal child's biological father is currently married to their mother, becomes significant. When the focal child's biological father is married to their mother, the odds of their confiding in a maternal grandmother doubles, controlling for other variables in the model. G2 education also becomes significant. With every unit increase in education, the odds of confiding increase by 4.0%, controlling for other variables in the model. When G1-G3 closeness is controlled, none of the G2-G3 relationship variables, and G1-G2 relationship variables remain significant. However, G1-G3 closeness is significantly related to G1-G3 self-disclosure. For every unit increase in G1-G3 emotional closeness, the odds of G1-G3 self-disclosure are more than doubled, controlling for other variables in the model. In addition, the pseudo  $R^2$  jumps from .17 to .33 when G1-G3 closeness is added to the final model.

#### *Tests for Comparing Regression Coefficients between Groups*

In order to test whether there is a significant difference in the coefficients modeling G1-G3 closeness and self-disclosure between the two sets of focal children (ages 10-17 vs ages 18-23), the following test statistic was utilized:  $z = (b_y - b_o) / [s^2(b_y) + s^2(b_o)]^{1/2}$  (Clogg et al, 1995). According to this method, there is a significant difference between the two age groups in the effect of G1-G2 closeness on G1-G3 closeness. Among the younger focal children, for every unit increase in G1-G2 closeness, G1-G3 closeness increases by .12 units, controlling for the independent variables ( $p < .05$ ). In regards to the older focal children, for

every unit increase in G1-G2 closeness, G1-G3 closeness increases by .35 units, controlling for the independent variables ( $p < .01$ ). Thus, the G1-G2 (mother-grandmother) relationship has a stronger effect on closeness for the older focal children. This finding is supported by the regression analysis on G1-G3 closeness. Among the older focal children, G1-G2 closeness, alone, increased the  $R^2$  by 5%. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that the G1-G2 relationship is highly associated with G1-G3 closeness for both sets of children.

When assessing G1-G3 self-disclosure, the only effect that was significantly different was that of G1-G3 closeness. Among the younger focal children, for every unit increase in G1-G3 closeness, G1-G3 self-disclosure increases by .37 units, controlling for the independent variables ( $p < .01$ ). Among the older focal children, for every unit increase in G1-G3 closeness, G1-G3 self-disclosure increases by .75 units ( $p < .01$ ). Thus, closeness is a much better correlate of whether the older focal children will confide in their grandmother, than it is for the younger focal children. This finding was corroborated by the logistic regression analysis. When G1-G3 closeness was added to the fourth model, the pseudo  $R^2$  jumped from .18 in model 4 to .34 in model 5. The analysis of the younger focal did not yield the same results. When emotional closeness was added to model 4, the  $R^2$  increased from .13 to .17. Clearly, emotional closeness is critical for understanding G1-G3 self-disclosure for the older focal children, but not as critical for the younger focal children.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study offered a unique opportunity to examine the impact of the middle generation (G2) on the grandparent-grandchild bond using a large, nationally representative dataset. Specifically, I was interested in how the parent as gatekeeper mediates closeness and self-disclosure with a grandmother at two different stages of the life course, ages 10-17 and

18-23. Research on grandparenting is normally conducted using college students or small-scale voluntary samples.

The research questions that guided this study queried whether G2-G3 and G1-G2 emotional closeness is related to G1-G3 closeness and self-disclosure. In addition, this study explored whether this relationship differs according to the age of the grandchild. A simple crosstabulation indicated that 42.4% of the younger focal children who considered themselves close to their maternal grandmother, would choose her as a confidant. However, among the older focal children, only 23.4% of the respondents who are close to their grandmother would confide in her. Thus, a strange paradox emerges. Focal children report feeling emotionally close to a grandmother, yet choose not to confide in her when there is an important decision to be made or the respondent feels depressed or unhappy. Emotional closeness may have different implications for different types of relationships.

The first research question asked whether the focal child-mother (G2-G3) closeness influenced G1-G3 closeness, and whether there was a significant difference according to age group. For both age groups, the focal child-mother (G2-G3) relationship is positively associated with grandchild-grandmother (G1-G3) relationship. Thus, feeling emotionally close to the mother is strongly related to feeling emotionally close to the maternal grandmother (see table 10).

The second research question asked whether mother-grandmother (G1-G2) closeness influences grandchild-grandmother closeness (G1-G3), and whether there is a difference according to age. The mother-grandmother (G1-G2) relationship is significantly associated with grandchild-grandmother (G1-G3) closeness for both age groups. However, a multiple comparison test revealed that the influence of the G1-G2 relationship on G1-G3 closeness, was significantly different across the two focal child age groups. While there is a positive

relationship for both age groups, the relationship is much stronger for the older focal children. A strong mother-grandmother bond will have an even greater impact on G1-G3 closeness for older grandchildren, than it will on younger grandchildren. Since older grandchildren tend not to feel as emotionally close to the grandmother (as compared to younger grandchildren), a mother-grandmother relationship will emerge as a prominent predictor of close emotional ties between the grandmother and her adult grandchild. The closer the mother-grandmother bond, the greater the likelihood an adult grandchild will feel emotionally close to their maternal grandmother. It is also important to note that amount of G1-G3 contact was also a very important predictor of G1-G3 closeness for the older focal children.

The third research question asked whether focal child-mother (G2-G3) closeness influenced whether the child confides in their grandmother. The results were fairly different for the two age groups. For the younger focal children, focal child-mother closeness is not related to confiding in a grandmother. It is clear that feeling emotionally close to your mother is not related to whether you will confide in your grandmother. This is probably due to the fact that emotional closeness and self-disclosure are two very different constructs. Among the older focal children, level of closeness between the mother and focal child is related to whether the older focal children will confide in their grandmother. However, when level of closeness between the focal child and grandmother closeness is added to the final model, mother-grandmother (G2-G3) closeness loses significance.

The final research question asked whether mother-grandmother (G1-G2) closeness influences whether the focal child confides in their grandmother. For the younger focal children, mother-grandmother (G1-G2) closeness is related to G1-G3 self-disclosure. A close mother-grandmother bond (G1-G2) will significantly increase the odds of a young focal child confiding in the grandmother. The relationship is not significant for the older focal children.

There is an interesting disparity for both age groups according to the relationship between grandchild-grandmother (G1-G3) closeness and confiding in a grandmother. Adding grandchild-grandmother (G1-G3) closeness to the final model increases the  $R^2$  for older focal children, much more than for the younger focal children. Further analysis uncovered a significant difference between the two age groups according to the influence of G1-G3 closeness on self-disclosure. G1-G3 closeness has a much stronger effect for the older focal children than it does for the younger focal children. Thus, emotional closeness is a much stronger correlate of self-disclosure for the adult grandchildren, than it is for the younger grandchildren.

It appears that G2-G3 and G1-G2 relationships both impact G1-G3 emotional closeness for the younger and older focal children. The parent seems to be an important mediating link between the maternal grandmother and their grandchildren. Thompson & Walker (1987) suggest that G1-G3 closeness emerges from three different sources: a direct G1-G3 relationship, feelings toward the mother that overflow onto the grandmother, and feelings mediated by the mother's feelings for the grandmother. This explanation may be useful for understanding how the mother (G2) influences the quality of G1-G3 relations.

Rossi & Rossi (1990) suggest that parents transmit certain values to children that are sustained in adulthood. The G2 generation models certain behaviors and sentiment, which the adult children replicate in adulthood. Perhaps when grandchildren observe close G1-G2 relations, they are more likely to emulate the behavior. The Rossi's also suggest that present-day relations for both the G1-G2 and G2-G3 dyads reflect a lifetime of experiences. The quality of G1-G2 and G2-G3 relations during the early years will impact the current level of emotional closeness. Thus, the quality of relations between grandparents and their grandchildren will be determined by the middle generation's early experiences with their



family of origin, and their current relations with their parents.

Hodgson provides two possible reasons why G2-G3 relations continue to mediate G1-G3 closeness for adult grandchildren. First, parents provide role models for their children, establishing family norms for emotional intimacy. Second, Hodgson suggests that the mother (G2) may simply bring along the youngest generation when she visits her own mother. Thus, the grandchildren may be participating in family rituals established by the middle generation.

While the middle generation (G2) is an important mediating link for G1-G3 closeness, her influence on G1-G3 self-disclosure is not as clear. For the younger focal children, G2-G3 (mother-focal child) relations do not influence self-disclosure, while G1-G2 (mother-grandmother) relations do have an impact. As for the older focal children, level of closeness between the mother and grandmother (G1-G2) is not related to self-disclosure. Focal child-mother (G2-G3) relations are related to whether the older focal children will confide in their grandmother, however when G1-G3 closeness is added to the model, the relationship becomes insignificant. It is important to note that G1-G3 closeness and amount of contact are important correlates of self-disclosure for the older focal children. Among the older focal children, mothers (G2) may mediate emotional closeness with the grandmother, which in turn influences whether or not the older grandchild will confide in the grandmother. The middle generation mediates G1-G3 self-disclosure indirectly.

An important issue to consider is that there is a potential two-way relationship between child well-being and self-disclosure. Jourard (1959) first discussed the relationship between self-disclosure and self-esteem. He suggested that a healthy personality enables an individual to self-disclose to others. At the same time, psychological health is contingent on the directness and intimacy of communication with others. A healthy personality allows for self-disclosure, and self-disclosure enhances one's mental and physical health.

A grandchild may profess a close relationship with a grandparent, yet that closeness may have fewer practical implications for the lives of older grandchildren than anticipated. Future studies should continue to explore the implications of emotional closeness. Today's cultural script is paving the way for a shift in G1-G3 relations. With fewer grandchildren competing for their attention, grandparents in the future will likely establish a dynamic relationship with grandchildren, one that enhances the physical and psychological well-being of future generations.

### **Table 1: Sample Construction**

#### **Sample Size- (NSFH- Wave 2)      Focal Children Age 10-17**

N= 10,005	Original sample of primary respondents from wave 2.
N= 9432	Fathers dropped from the sample.
N= 940	Grandchildren queried on closeness to maternal grandparent. Narrows sample to focal children age 10-17 that have a maternal grandmother who they can rate on closeness.
N= 748	Missing data related to closeness to maternal grandparent.
N= 704	Missing data related to whether grandchild confides in any grandparent.
N= 672	Missing data related to focal child's relationship with mother.
N= 632	Missing data related to primary respondent's relationship with mother.

**Final Sample Size = 632**

#### **Sample Size- (NSFH- Wave 2)      Focal Children Age 18-23**

N= 13,307	Original sample of primary respondents from wave 2.
N= 9432	Fathers dropped from the sample.
N= 487	Grandchildren queried on closeness to maternal grandparent. Narrows sample to focal children age 10-17 that have a maternal grandmother who they can rate on closeness. The primary respondent (parent of the focal child) is female.
N= 486	Missing data related to closeness to maternal grandparent.
N= 482	Missing data related to whether grandchild confides in any grandparent.
N= 466	Missing data related to focal child's relationship with mother.
N= 423	Missing data related to primary respondent's relationship with mother.

**Final Sample Size = 423**

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics**

Variables	Younger Focal Child				Older Focal Child			
	%	Mean	Std Dev	Median	%	Mean	Std Dev	Median
<b>G1-G3 Closeness (1-10)</b>	--	8.1	2.0	7.0	--	6.9	2.7	7.0
<b>G1-G3 Self-Disclosure (0-1)</b>								
<i>Yes</i>	43.5	--	--	--	24.3	--	--	--
<i>No</i>	56.5	--	--	--	75.7	--	--	--
<b>G2-G3 Closeness (1-10)</b>	--	8.3	1.7	9.0	--	8.3	1.7	7.0
<b>G2-G3 Self-Disclosure (0-4)</b>	--	2.8	0.9	2.5	--	3.0	1.0	2.5
<b>G1-G2 Closeness (1-10)</b>	--	7.9	2.3	7.0	--	7.9	2.1	8.0

**Table 3: Child Demographic Information**

<i>G3 (Child) Demographics</i>	Younger Focal Child				Older Focal Child			
	%	Mean	Std Dev	Median	%	Mean	Std Dev	Median
<b>Sex</b>								
<i>Male</i>	48.2	--	--	--	50.8	--	--	--
<i>Female</i>	51.8	--	--	--	49.2	--	--	--
<b>Race</b>								
<i>White</i>	78.1	--	--	--	83.5	--	--	--
<i>Black</i>	11.3	--	--	--	8.2	--	--	--
<i>Other</i>	10.6	--	--	--	8.3	--	--	--
<b>Age</b>	--	13.0	2.3	12.0	--	20.5	1.9	19.0
<b>Biological Dad Married to Mother</b>								
<i>Yes</i>	61.6	--	--	--	59.8	--	--	--
<i>No</i>	38.4	--	--	--	40.2	--	--	--
<b>Frequency of Contact G1-G3 (0-5)</b>		2.2	1.1	1.5		2	1.1	1.0

**Table 4: G2 (Parent) Demographic Information**

	Younger Focal Mom				Older Focal Mom			
	%	Mean	Std Dev	Median	%	Mean	Std Dev	Median
<b>Age</b>	--	38.7	5.5	38.0	--	45.6	5.2	44.0
<b>Marital Status</b>								
<i>Married</i>	77.3	--	--	--	73.8	--	--	--
<i>Unmarried</i>	22.7	--	--	--	26.2	--	--	--
<b>Number of Siblings</b>	--	3.8	2.5	2.0	--	3.6	2.3	2.0
<b>HH Income (Thousands)</b>	--	49.8	37.1	44.0	--	71.2	128.4	50.2
<b>Completed Educ (0-20Yrs)</b>	--	13.1	2.3	12.0	--	12.9	2.5	11.0
<b>G1-G2 Frequency of Contact (0-5)</b>	--	3.6	1.2	3.5	--	3.5	1.2	3.0

**Table 5: G1 (Grandparent) Demographic Information**

	Younger Focal Grandmother				Older Focal Grandmother			
	%	Mean	Std Dev	Median	%	Mean	Std Dev	Median
<b>Age</b>	--	64.4	8.6	64.0		70.1	7.1	70
<b>Health Status</b>								
<i>Poor to fair</i>	46.4	--	--	--	49.7	--	--	--
<i>Good to Excellent</i>	53.6	--	--	--	50.3	--	--	--
<b>Geographical Distance from G2 (log)</b>	--	3.4	2.4	2.9	--	3.8	2.5	3.4

**Table 6: OLS Unstandardized Regression Coefficients for the Effects of Independent Variables on Perception of Emotional Closeness Between the Younger Focal Child and a Maternal Grandmother (N=632)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<b>G1 &amp; G2 Demographics</b>				
G2 Age	-.08(.02)***	-.04(.02)**	-.04(.02)**	-.04(.02)**
G2 Marital Status	.41(.22)*	.60(.28)**	.53(.27)**	.49(.26)*
G2 Siblings	.05(.04)	.005(.04)	-.002(.04)	.02(.04)
G2 Education	-.04(.04)	-.06(.04)	-.05(.04)	-.05(.04)
G1 Health	.19(.19)	.08(.18)	.07(.17)	-.11(.17)
<b>Child Demographics</b>				
Race		-.68(.24)**	-.56(.23)**	-.37(.22)*
G3 Age		-.20(.04)***	-.11(.04)**	-.12(.04)**
G3 Sex		.01(.18)	-.04(.17)	-.09(.17)
Biological Dad Married to Mother		-.11(.25)	-.11(.23)	-.05(.23)
<b>G2-G3 Relationship</b>				
G2-G3 Self-Disclosure			-.03(.11)	-.04(.11)
G2-G3 Closeness			.37(.06)***	.36(.06)***
<b>G1-G2 Relationship</b>				
G1-G2 Distance				.15(.05)**
G1-G2 Contact				.12(.11)
G1-G2 Closeness				.11(.04)**
G1-G3 Contact				.42(.10)***
<b>Adj R-squared</b>	0.06	0.11	0.19	0.26

Numbers in parenthesis are standard errors.

\*p<.10; \*\*p<.05; \*\*\*p<.01

**Table 7: OLS Regression Coefficients for the Effects of Independent Variables on Perception of Emotional Closeness Between an Older Focal Child and a Maternal Grandmother (N=423)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<b>G1 &amp; G2 Demographics</b>				
G2 Age	-.08(.03)**	-.08(.03)**	-.08(.03)*	-.05(.03)*
G2 Marital Status	-.23(.34)	.08(.42)	-.12(.41)	.006(.35)
G2 Siblings	-.02(.06)	-.05(.07)	-.07(.06)	-.01(.05)
G2 Education	-.12(.07)*	-.10(.07)	-.05(.06)	-.04(.06)
G1 Health	.42(.31)	.44(.31)	.29(.30)	.0007(.26)
<b>Child Demographics</b>				
Race		-.82(.45)*	-.77(.43)*	-.17(.38)
G3 Age		-.05(.09)	-.09(.08)	.03(.07)
G3 Sex		-.11(.30)	-.05(.30)	-.15(.25)
Biological Dad Married to Mother		-.39(.37)	-.51(.35)	-.25(.31)
<b>G2-G3 Relationship</b>				
G2-G3 Self-Disclosure			-.28(.18)	-.23(.16)
G2-G3 Closeness			.55(.10)***	.44(.09)***
<b>G1-G2 Relationship</b>				
G1-G2 Distance				-.04(.08)
G1-G2 Contact				.23(.17)
G1-G2 Closeness				.34(.07)***
G1-G3 Contact				.74(.14)***
<b>Adjusted R-squared</b>	0.0311	0.0333	0.1136	0.3471

Numbers in parenthesis are standard errors.

\*p<.10; \*\*p<.05; \*\*\*p<.01

**Table 8: Logistic Coefficients for Regressions of the Odds of a Younger Focal Child Self-Disclosing to a Maternal Grandmother (N=632)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5 (Closeness Added)
<b>G1 &amp; G2 Demographics</b>					
G2 Age	.94(.02)**	.96(.02)**	.96(.02)**	.98(.02)	.99(.02)
G2 Marital Status	1.39(.32)	1.58(.49)	1.60(.50)	1.81(.60)*	1.61(.55)
G2 Siblings	1.01(.04)	.96(.04)	.96(.04)	.97(.04)	.97(.05)
G2 Education	.96(.04)	.95(.04)	.96(.04)	.97(.04)	.98(.05)
G1 Health	1.15(.22)	1.13(.23)	1.14(.23)	1.01(.22)	1.02(.23)
<b>Child Demographics</b>					
Race		.44(.11)**	.44(.12)**	.48(.14)**	.55(.16)**
G3 Age		.91(.04)**	.94(.05)	.90(.05)**	.94(.05)
G3 Sex		1.43(.28)*	1.35(.27)	1.35(.28)	1.41(.30)
Biological Dad Married to Mother		1.02(.27)	1.00(.27)	.93(.27)	.95(.28)
<b>G2-G3 Relationship</b>					
G2-G3 Self- Disclosure			1.25(.17)*	1.28(.18)*	1.33(.19)*
G2-G3 Closeness			1.10(.08)	1.08(.08)	.96(.08)
<b>G1-G2 Relationship</b>					
G1-G2 Distance				.91(.06)	.88(.06)*
G1-G2 Contact				.94(.13)	.93(.14)
G1-G2 Closeness				1.12(.06)**	1.11(.06)*
G1-G3 Contact				1.46(.18)**	1.32(.17)**
G1-G3 Closeness					1.44(.10)***
<b>Adjusted R- squared</b>	0.03	0.05	0.07	0.12	0.17

Numbers in parenthesis are standard errors.

\*p<.10; \*\*p<.05; \*\*\*p<.01



**Table 9: Logistic Coefficients for Regressions of the Odds of an Older Focal Child Self-Disclosing to a Maternal Grandmother (N=423)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5 (Closeness Added)
<b>G1 &amp; G2 Demographics</b>					
G2 Age	.89(.03)***	.87(.03)***	.88(.03)***	.90(.03)**	.89(.03)**
G2 Marital Status	.94(.30)	.89(.35)	.81(.32)	.80(.34)	.60(.28)
G2 Siblings	.89(.05)*	.85(.06)**	.85(.06)**	.87(.06)**	.87(.07)*
G2 Education	.96(.06)	.97(.06)	.99(.06)	.99(.07)	1.04(.08)*
G1 Health	1.88(.53)**	2.04(.60)**	1.94(.57)**	1.78(.57)*	1.91(.69)*
<b>Child Demographics</b>					
Race		.40(.16)**	.41(.16)**	.54(.23)	.61(.29)
G3 Age		1.03(.08)	1.01(.08)	1.09(.10)	1.13(.11)
G3 Sex		1.71(.47)*	1.77(.51)**	1.65(.49)*	2.04(.69)**
Biolog Dad Married to Mother		1.15(.39)	1.11(.38)	1.43(.53)	2.002(.81)*
<b>G2-G3 Relationship</b>					
G2-G3 Self- Disclosure			.89(.16)	.91(.17)	1.01(.21)
G2-G3 Closeness			1.25(.14)**	1.21(.14)*	1.00(.14)
<b>G1-G2 Relationship</b>					
G1-G2 Distance				.98(.10)	.96(.11)
G1-G2 Contact				1.05(.22)	1.05(.24)
G1-G2 Closeness				1.17(.11)	.99(.11)
G1-G3 Contact				1.65(.26)**	1.30(.23)
G1-G3 Closeness					2.13(.27)***
<b>Adjusted R- squared</b>	0.07	0.10	0.11	0.18	0.33

Numbers in parenthesis are standard errors.

\*p<.10; \*\*p<.05; \*\*\*p<.01

**Table 10: Final Results**

<b>G1-G3 Closeness</b>		
<b>Age</b>	<b>Mother-Child Closeness (G2-G3)</b>	<b>Mother-Grandmother Closeness (G1-G2)</b>
<b>10-17</b>	+	+
<b>18-23</b>	+	+*

\*=Significantly different

<b>G1-G3 Self-Disclosure</b>			
<b>Age</b>	<b>Mother-Child Closeness (G2-G3)</b>	<b>Mother-Grandmother Closeness (G1-G2)</b>	<b>G1-G3 Closeness Added to the Model</b>
<b>10-17</b>	-	+	+
<b>18-23</b>	+**	-	+*

\*= Significantly different

\*\*=Becomes insignificant when G1-G3 closeness is added to the model

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