

DIVORCED GRANDPARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF
THE NATURE OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP
WITH GRANDCHILDREN

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The grandparent grandchild relationship has the potential to be one of life's most enduring and endearing relationships. Grandparents now have the opportunity to know their grandchildren as babies, teenagers, young adults, and middle aged adults because older adults are living longer, healthier, and are more educated than ever before in history (Silverstein & Long, 1998; Szinovacz, 1998). Grandparents can provide stability for grandchildren that parents often can not provide due to time constraints and a variety of lifestyles (Kornhaber, 1996). One question that has received little attention is what happens to the grandparent grandchild relationship if the grandparents are no longer married but divorced? Will grandparents still play a vital role in the lives of their grandchildren?

In the traditional, married grandparent family, grandparents often act as teachers, spiritual leaders, mentors, storytellers, and family historians (King, Elder, & Conger, 2000; Mueller & Elder, 2003). In some cases, grandparents become parents to their grandchildren when their adult children do not assume the role. Previous research has suggested that both grandparents and grandchildren benefit from a close relationship (Bengtson, 2001). Grandparents find this relationship with their grandchildren as a way to give meaning to life, to motivate them to remain young, and to provide great companionship. Grandparents also enjoy having someone to hear family stories of

lineage and history. Generational transmission, passing down information, is apparent in many areas including the expectations of marriage and divorce that are often passed down from grandparents to grandchildren (Amato & DeBoer, 2001).

Adkins (1999) discussed empirical studies that suggested grandparents play a very beneficial role in the lives of grandchildren. “Research suggests the unique acceptance that children find in their relationship with grandparents. Grandchildren benefit affectively and cognitively from having a close relationship with a grandparent. Grandparents are a major support during divorce and family breakdown” (Adkins, p. 13).

Background of the Problem

King (2003) reported that a grandparent divorce at any stage can have a negative impact on the grandparent grandchild relationship unless the relationship between the grandparent and the parent remains strong. Further, King stated, “A grandparent’s divorce is likely to have repercussions throughout the family system, affecting children, grandchildren, and other relatives, and prompting changes in family roles” (p. 170). Trends indicate an increase in divorce at all age levels (King). Citing this trend, Uhlenberg and Kirby (1998) note that the number of grandparents who have experienced divorce is growing as well. “About one third of all ever-married individuals in the cohort that reached age 65 in 2000 will experience a divorce at some point in their lifetimes; this is projected to increase to 50% for the cohorts reaching age 65 after 2010” (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000, as cited in King, p. 170).

Statement of the Problem Situation

Grandparents who have experienced divorce are a real concern for generations to come yet little research has been done examining the nature of the grandparent grandchild relationship when grandparents have divorced. Using rural families in Iowa, King (2003) addressed the implications of ever divorced grandparents, individuals who had experienced divorce at some time in their life, by studying grandparent grandchild relationships. Prior research in this area is very limited especially with metropolitan families. The present study examines the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren in families experiencing divorce in the grandparent generation.

Purpose of the Study/Research Questions

The purpose of the present study is to describe characteristics of the grandparent grandchild relationship with ever divorced grandparents and if there are differences to contrast those differences with those in families with never divorced grandparents.

Research Questions

Research questions that will be addressed in this study include:

1. Is the perceived saliency (importance) of the grandparent grandchild relationship, based on grandparent report, related to grandparental divorce?
2. Is the perceived closeness of the grandparent grandchild relationship, as measured by shared activities and frequency of contact, associated with grandparents' marital status?

3. Are grandmothers or grandfathers more likely to maintain a close relationship with grandchildren after divorce of the grandparents?
4. After grandparent's divorce, are the maternal or paternal grandparents more likely to maintain the grandparent grandchild relationship?
5. Do grandparents still act as mentors, spiritual guides, teachers, storytellers, and family historians after experiencing their own divorce?
6. Are there mediating factors that could help maintain perceptions of a close grandparent grandchild relationship even with grandparents divorcing?

Theoretical Orientation

Family developmental theory. Many of the studies involving grandparents and grandchildren draw on family developmental theory or life course perspective to explain this relationship (Bengston, 2001; King et. al., 2000; Silverstein & Long, 2000; Szinovacz, 1998). Family development is a theoretical framework that focuses on the changing social roles in a family and the pattern of stages that occur over time. The family development framework asserts that “developmental processes are inevitable and important in understanding families” (Klein & White, 1996, p. 123).

Major assumptions of this theory include:

1. Family members, their interactions, and their roles are constantly changing over time.
2. Family members' ages and family structure changes.
3. The family is a social group that is made up of sub-group relationships that maintain certain norms and family conventions.

4. The family is influenced by all levels of analysis including the norms of the larger society and social class.
5. The family is a semi closed or a semi permeable group. Boundaries are usually established by households but may be permeated by the larger social group or institution (Klein & White, 1996).

Key concepts of family development include norm, position, role, role behavior, and role sequence (Boss, Doherty, LaRossa, Schumm, & Steinmetz, 1993). A *norm* is the expectation of how individuals or families “should develop”. Norms or expectations develop through family interaction and the family’s interaction with society. A position represents a set of specific behaviors and expectations in the context of social relationships (Klein & White, 1996). Positions define the rights and responsibilities a person has within a social structure. For example within American families, *positions* frequently are identified as husband-father, wife-mother, son-brother, and daughter-sister. Individuals in families play many roles. Just as with position, an individual may have many roles in the American culture. *Roles* are prescribed expectations of the family and the individual. For example a woman, may be a grandmother, mother, wife, nurturer, breadwinner, and homemaker all at the same time. *Role behavior* is how the individual responds to the role expectations of the family and society. Individuals may perform roles in a variety of ways. *Role sequence* includes how an individual’s role changes over time due to individual, family, or social changes. Adaptation occurs in role behavior over time.

In the present study, family development theory will help to explain the relationship of grandparents and grandchildren. However, since this study will look specifically at the relationship that grandparents have with their grandchildren after they

have experienced divorce, the family stress theory will also add understanding for families, counselors, and educators working with this population.

Family stress theory. Stress is defined as our inability to cope with change (Boss, P.G., Doherty, W. J., LaRossa, R., Schumm, W.R., & Steinmetz, S. K., 1988).

Individuals suffer from stress but family units also experience stress when there is a disruption in the organization or process of the family. The resources of the family may help to explain the reorganization of the sub-units or units of the family after stress such as a divorce. “Although individuals ‘perceive’ and react to stresses, it may be the resources of the family that explain the successful management of stress. Furthermore, individuals’ perception of what is a stressor is guided by their understanding of timing and sequencing norms for family development” (Klein & White, 1996, p. 141). Family stress and individual stress can be examined at multiple levels. The family’s ability to utilize resources and coping skills help resolve the issues of stress.

Some stresses are defined as normative such as getting married, having a baby or graduating. Other stresses are defined as non-normative such as divorce. Although divorce is becoming normative in its existence, it is still considered a non-normative event (Ingoldsby, Smith, & Miller, 2004). The perception of what divorce is and how it affects each generation affects the way the family unit and individuals in the family respond to the stressor. Reorganization of the family depends on many factors.

Delineation of the Research Problem

Although there is limited research on grandparents who have divorced, there is a great deal more research on parents who have divorced and the effect on the parent-child

relationship. There is also a limited amount of research on the impact of the grandparent grandchild relationship after the parents divorce (Drew, 2002). The grandparent grandchild relationship can become much stronger or weaker depending on custody issues and parent-grandparent relationships. Frequently, a negative relationship is indicated after parents' divorce in the parent child relationship (Booth & Amato, 1994). This negative relationship is reported to affect fathers more than mothers (King, 2002; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Females are often identified as the kin keepers in families (Chan & Elder, 2000). Therefore, with this information the assumption might be made that grandparents' divorce will have a negative consequence for the grandparent grandchild relationship. Also, paternal grandparents may be more affected through divorce than maternal grandparents because sons usually do not play the role of the kin-keeper. Divorced grandfathers may have less contact and opportunity for a relationship with grandchildren as well.

Hypotheses

The relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is beneficial for both generations and needs to be maintained regardless of the marital status of the grandparents. Again, the present study is seeking to identify the nature of the grandparent grandchild relationship with grandparents who have been divorced. To examine possible characteristics of this relationship several hypotheses will be explored.

1. According to prior research (King, 2003) the saliency or importance of the grandparent grandchild relationship will be negatively influenced by grandparents experiencing divorce. In this hypothesis, marital status, ever married and never divorced

or ever divorced, will be the independent variable and the dependent variable will be the level of perceived saliency or importance of the grandparent grandchild relationship.

2. Ever divorced grandparents will have less shared activities and less contact with the grandchild than ever married and never divorced grandparents. The marital status (ever married or ever divorced) is the independent variable and the amount of shared activities and the frequency of contact are the dependent variables.

3. Prior research indicates that grandmothers remain closer to the grandchildren after a divorce than grandfathers (Aldous, 1995). Therefore it is hypothesized that after experiencing divorce, grandmothers will have greater relationship quality with grandchildren than grandfathers do. The gender of the grandparent is the independent variable and the amount of relationship quality is the dependent variable.

4. Maternal grandparents maintain closer relationships with grandchildren than do paternal grandparents (Chan & Elder, 2000). Therefore, ever divorced, maternal grandparents will have a higher relationship quality with their grandchildren than ever divorced, paternal grandparents following a divorce. The independent variable is the type of grandparent (maternal or paternal) and the dependent variable the amount of relationship quality.

5. Historically, grandparents have served as mentors, spiritual guides, teachers, storytellers, and family historians (King et al., 2000; Kornhaber, 1996; Tomlin, 1998). Therefore, grandparents who have experienced divorce spend less time in traditional grandparenting roles than ever-married and never divorced grandparents. Grandparent marital status (ever married, never divorced and ever divorced) is the independent variable and the time spent in traditional grandparenting roles is the dependent variable.

6. In some cases the grandparent grandchild bond can remain strong even when there has been a divorce between the grandparents. The quality of the grandparent grandchild relationship may influence the relationship between the grandparent and the grandchild after a divorce has occurred between the grandparents. Thus, it is hypothesized that among ever divorced grandparents, the grandchild grandparent relationship will be better when the grandparent parent bond is strong where the independent variable is the strength of the grandparent parent bond and the dependent variable is the quality of the grandparent grandchild relationship.

Importance of the Study

“The number of grandparents who have experienced a divorce is substantial and increasing rapidly” (Ulhenberg & Kirby, 1998, as cited in King, 2003, p. 170). Multiple dimensions of the grandparent grandchild relationship are examined in this study to more fully understand the challenges of divorce on the grandparent role (King). Past research in this area has mainly studied frequency of contact and closeness in the grandparent grandchild relationship. Few research studies have focused on the importance of the grandparent role, saliency of the relationship, and characteristics of the grandparent grandchild relationship; such as gender of grandparents and lineage of grandparents. Research is extremely limited in the area of grandparent’s divorce and their subsequent relationships with grandchildren. “The extent to which the negative effects of divorce are pervasive has important implications for the well-being of children and older adults” (King, 2003, p. 171).

Definition of Terms

In this study, primary terms are defined as follows:

1. Ever divorced *grandparent* is one that has experienced divorce at some time. The divorce could have occurred even before becoming a grandparent.
2. *Ever married and never divorced* labels grandparents that have not experienced divorce at anytime in their marital history.
3. *Saliency in the grandparent grandchild relationship* explores the importance of the relationship between the grandparent and the grandchild and what the grandparent perceives this relationship to be.
4. *Shared activities* between grandparent and grandchild is being together sharing activities in the community such as attending church together, working on projects (crafts, yard work, or cooking), or attending child's events (school programs, or sporting activities).
5. *Frequency of contact* for this study is based on face-to-face contact between the grandparent and the target grandchild as reported by the grandparent.
6. *Relationship quality* between grandparent and grandchild refers to the grandparent's perception of closeness, appreciation, loving feelings, and being cared about by the grandchild.
7. *Time spent in traditional grandparenting roles* includes activities such as mentoring; giving advice; being a source of wisdom and experience; sharing traditions, stories, and history; teaching skills; and planning for the future.
8. The *bond between the grandparent and adult child* is based on the grandparent's perception of being emotionally close to the adult child.

9. The *bond between the grandparent and grandchild* is again the perception of the grandparent that the bond is close.

Assumptions

1. The sample used in this study was not a random sample therefore the findings are not generalizable to the population. However, the Older American's Act Nutrition Program congregate sites where the data were collected have 43 % of their population living below the poverty level and 57% living above the poverty level (Quigley & Hermann, 2005). The program is a non-needs based program. The sample had a good representation of ethnic backgrounds, educational levels, and genders (grandfathers and grandmothers).

2. Participants identified strongly with the research topic and the researcher believes were thus motivated to truthfully answer the questions in the survey. According to Edmonds (1967), people are more likely to rate themselves or their family highly on relationship questions. The issue of social desirability is believed not to be a major concern in this study.

3. The participants were believed to understand the content of the questions.

4. The family development theory and family stress theory provides a strong background for this research project.

Scope and Delimitations

The present study addressed the nature of the grandparent grandchild relationship from the perspective of the grandparent. Grandparents responded to a short survey about their relationship with their target grandchild. At a later date the researcher plans to study

the relationship from the perspective of the grandchild/grandchildren and the adult child to lend more depth and breadth to the project.

Content Overview of Subsequent Chapters

Chapter II provides a brief profile of grandparents today, an overview of the importance of the grandparent grandchild relationship as indicated in prior research, functions of grandparents in today's world, information about studies concerning marital status of grandparents, and factors that influence the grandparent grandchild relationship in traditional families. Chapter III includes a discussion of the research design for this study; sampling techniques used; research methods including instrumentation and measurement procedures; and the evaluation of design. Limitations of the study and ethical considerations are discussed. Chapter IV reports the statistical findings, interpretation, and discussion of the results in relation to the operational hypotheses of the study. Chapter V provides a summary of prior chapters and the conclusions of the research. Recommendations are made for future research and practical suggestions are made for implementing the findings of the study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Profile of Grandparents Today

Grandparents today present a different picture than grandparents in the past. The former stereotype of a grandparent was someone who was physically frail and old-fashioned in their thoughts and lifestyle (Reynolds, Wright, & Beal, 2003). The average grandparent becomes a grandparent at an earlier age than in the past, has longer mortality, is healthier, financially stable, and has a living spouse (Aldous, 1995). Grandparents are also projected to have fewer grandchildren compared to years past due to more women in the work force, later age at first marriage and excellent birth control methods (Kemp, 2003). Approximately 50% of grandparents are working (Heywood, 1999) Grandparents that are not married are generally female (Landry, 1999). Longino and Earle (1996) estimated that baby boomers would constitute one-third of American grandparents in the year 2000. These grandparents may serve as traditional grandparents or surrogate parents while at the same time being a part of the sandwich generation and caring for their aging parents (Dressel, 1996). Although grandparents today have many roles to fulfill, many see their role as grandparent as one of the most rewarding.

Importance of the Grandparent Grandchild Relationship

The importance of the grandparent grandchild relationship has been found repeatedly in prior research (Lussier & Deater-Deckard, 2002; Mueller & Edler, 2003; Silverstein & Long, 1998). However, there are few guidelines for the grandparent grandchild relationship (Bee & Bjorklund, 2004). Many researchers suggest that the content of the role of grandparent is a personal choice (Ganong & Coleman, 1999; Matthews & Sprey, 1984). Parents of grandchildren often mediate if there is a relationship between the grandparents and grandchildren especially when the children are young. In most cases if the parent-grandparent relationship is strong the grandchild-grandparent relationship will be strong as well. Consequently, if the parent-grandparent relationship is conflicted then the grandchild-grandparent relationship will be compromised (Bee & Bjorklund). As children become older and have more independence, the grandparent grandchild relationship is less affected by the impact of the parents (Pearlin & Skaff, 1998). “The functions that grandparents serve, therefore, are negotiated within the context of intergenerational relationships” (Ganong & Coleman, p. 63). Grandparents serve in a variety of capacities in the family including storytellers, mentors, friends, babysitters, and in some cases surrogate parents (King, et al., 2000; Tomlin, 1998). In a study conducted by Weber and Absher (2003) grandparents concluded that they want their grandchildren to know the importance of love in the family and also about family morals such as honesty and trust. In today’s world of working parents and changing family configurations, grandparents often provide the stability and consistency that frequently are missing in some families (Schutter, Sherman & Carroll, 1997; Ingersoll-Dayton & Neal, 1991). The stability provided by grandparents

is extremely important to families in times of crisis such as death or divorce (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Hagestad, 2001; and Johnson, 1988). Not only is the relationship between grandparent and grandchild important for the grandchild but it is also vital for the well being of grandparents (Tomlin, 1998). Grandparents find biological renewal (mental stimulation and physical renewal), emotional fulfillment, opportunities to teach and mentor, and satisfaction in vicariously experiencing achievement through their grandchildren (Fay & Cline, 1994).

Grandparents and Divorce

When grandparents experience divorce, the repercussions of this decision may impact generations including children, grandchildren, and other family members. Roles within the family system will be forced to change in most families at least temporarily (King, 2003). With divorce rates increasing for all age groups, it is not surprising to see an increase of marital disruption in the grandparent generation (Uhlenberg & Kirby, 1998). Research has been very limited in the area of grandparent and grandchild relationships after grandparents experience divorce. Cherlin & Furstenberg (1986) studied grandparent grandchild contact and relationship quality, controlling for the marital status of the grandparents and found no significant differences. This study was followed by research conducted by Silverstein and Marengo (2001) that identified several differences in the grandparenting role of unmarried grandparents. Unmarried grandparents were less likely to attend family gatherings, provide childcare, share activities, and found less meaning in the grandparent role. In the previous study, grandparents were only identified as unmarried with both divorced and widowed

grandparents grouped together. Therefore, more study needs to be conducted to determine the differences between these groups.

Amato and Cheadle (2005) examined the consequences of divorce across three generations. The researchers utilized data from the study of Marital Instability Over the Life Course to study correlations between divorce in the grandparent generation and the impact of the divorce on the grandchild generation. Amato and Cheadle first looked at outcomes for the second generation when parents divorce and found that in comparison with ever married families; children receive less education, have less income, experience troubled marriages, suffer from more psychological problems, and do not share a close relationship with their parents. Not all children who experience marital disruption have these challenges but there is a strong risk for negative outcomes. The Amato and Cheadle study is one of the first to look beyond two generations to study the impact of divorce on the third generation. Prior research by Amato and Booth (1996) has suggested that marital discord weakens children's relationships with both their parents regardless if the marriage ends in divorce.

If divorce occurs, the family environment changes to a stressful system. Common circumstances include economic instability, change of neighborhood, and fewer interactions between the children and their custodial parent typically the mother. Mothers, after divorce occurs, tend to be more harsh disciplinarians, show less warmth and affection, and monitor their children less than mothers who are continuously married (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). With the noncustodial parent, typically the father, visitation guidelines make it difficult to maintain a close relationship with the children. As a consequence, many fathers disengage themselves from their child or children's lives

(Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Lamb, 1999). “Research has consistently suggested that marital discord and divorce are transmitted across generations” (Amato & Cheadle, p. 192). Children learn by observing, according to social learning theory, thus perpetuating behaviors that they have modeled from their parents (O’Leary & Cascardi, 1998). Children who grow up in an environment that does not present positive behaviors that develop long term relationships with others tend to perpetuate these behaviors with their own children. “Linkages across generations occur because the effects of divorce and other family problems in one generation become the causes of similar problems in the next generation.... Because the same causal processes are at work, family problems may be ‘handed down’ from generation to generation” (Amato & Cheadle, p. 193).

In never divorced families, the quality of the relationship between grandparent and grandchild is believed to be strong (Silverstein & Long; 1998, Uhlenberg & Hamill, 1998). King (2003) examined the saliency of the grandparent grandchild relationship by asking questions such as “As a grandparent, it’s important to me that my opinions influence other people in the family” and “My grandchildren are important because they are the ones who will carry on the family line” (King, p. 174). These statements helped to identify the intergenerational relationship. The present study will try to discern the quality of the grandparent grandchild relationship after grandparents are divorced.

Grandparents have long provided assistance to grandchildren through direct or indirect interactions in times of family stress (Ganong & Coleman, 1999). Grandmothers and grandfathers in some families give directly to their grandchildren through time, energy, and/or money. Through these events the bond between grandparent and grandchild is enhanced. In some families, grandparents support grandchildren indirectly

by aiding the adult children with emotional and financial support. This indirect help allows the middle generation to function more effectively (Ganong & Coleman). When grandparents divorce, does this level of interaction still occur between generations? King (2003) did not directly address this issue in her study concerning divorced grandparents.

When the middle generation divorces, the grandparent role varies by lineage relationship (Johnson, 1992). Grandparents of the custodial parent, typically the mother, play a very important role in the family reorganization (Ehrenberg & Smith, 2003). Maternal grandparents have been cited as providing unconditional love, safety, and also teachers of values (Harris, 1996). “When the parents of the grandchildren divorce, paternal grandparents are more likely to lose contact with the grandchildren and when the grandparents divorce, the grandfather usually has the most difficult time keeping in contact with the family” (Reynolds, Wright & Beal, 2003, p. 319). When contact with divorced parents or grandparents changes, stress tends to increase in all members of the family. Typically, grandparents assist in the psychological adjustment of the grandchildren and are positive influences on the lives of the grandchildren (Emery, 1994; Hilton & Macari, 1997). Historically, children have faced marital disruption and family reorganization but the cause was due to death rather than divorce (Hagestad, 2001). When the cause is divorce, “childrens’ webs of family relationships become highly complex and characterized by a great deal of ambiguity.....Many of them also have difficulties defining and delineating their ‘families’” (Hagestad, p. 408). Grandparents and children are impacted when divorce affects patterns of kin contact (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986). On the “custodial” side, grandparents’ bonds with grandchildren often intensify when parents divorce. Typically, the grandparent grandchild bond

weakens with the grandparents on the “non-custodial” side. Because the maternal side is considered to be the kin-keepers and the middle generation mediate visitation with grandparents, if mothers have custody, then the paternal grandparents experience some disruption in this family relationship (Hagestad, Smyer, & Stierman, 1984; Kruk & Hall, 1995). Grandparents can provide stability and continuity in the family regardless of the generation in which the divorce occurs.

Relationship Factors between Grandparent and Grandchild

The relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is often affected by the frequency of contact (Aldous, 1995; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986). Geographical proximity often is an indicator of frequency of contact and also shared activities between grandparent and grandchild (Drew & Smith, 1999; Hilton & Macari, 1997; & Myers, 1993). When grandparents have a close relationship with their children, they may live closer to them thus providing more opportunities to interact with the grandchildren through time spent and shared activities (Boon & Brussoni, 1996).

Grandmothers and maternal grandparents are reported to have stronger ties with their grandchildren than grandfathers and paternal grandparents (Chan & Elder, 2000). Females are known as the kin-keepers promoting relationships from generation to generation (Hagestad, 1986). “To the extent that mothers are more active in promoting ties to their own parents, maternal grandparents will enjoy stronger ties to their grandchildren, and research demonstrates a clear matrilineal advantage in grandparent grandchild relations” (Chan & Elder, 2000, as cited in King, 2003 p. 173). Grandmothers have a different relationship with grandchildren than grandfathers. Grandmothers discuss

topics that concern emotions and relationships. Grandfathers are more likely to discuss practical topics like school and money management. Usually, the father-child relationship is weakened through divorce if the mothers are the custodial parents. Therefore, it seems probable that the grandfather grandchild relationship would also be weakened. In a study by Uhlenberg and Hammil (1998), divorced grandfathers did have less frequent contact with the grandchildren than did divorced grandmothers.

In a study by Ehrenberg and Smith (2003), after an adult daughter's divorce, grandmothers reported more face-to-face contact with their grandchildren. Gladstone (1988) reported that in interviews with 80 grandmothers whose adult children had divorced that if the custodial parent lived in close geographical proximity, they had a closer relationship with the grandchildren. When geographic proximity was controlled the gender of the custodial parent did not seem to matter in relationship to frequency of post-divorce contacts between grandparents and grandchildren, the grandparents visited more regularly with the children of the custodial parent.

Typical Roles of Grandparents

Grandparents' roles are different today than in years past because they have greater longevity and better health (Heywood, 1999; Reynolds, Wright, & Beal, 2003). No longer is grandparenting synonymous with being elderly. In fact, the grandparent median age is between 53-57 years of age (Giarrusso & Silverstien, 1996; Jones & Kennedy, 1996). Defining the role of grandparent is very challenging because grandparenting roles are highly variable depending on the grandparent's choice of involvement; the ages of the grandparents and the ages of the grandchildren; and

geographic proximity of the family (Jaskowski, 1993; Myers & Perrin, 1993).

Grandparents are also faced with possibly having a different role in the lives of their grandchildren. “Grandparent roles are multidimensional in nature and have no clearly identified normative expectations” (Myers & Perrin, p. 65). Some grandparents are taking on the role of surrogate parent (Reynolds et. al). However in this study, we are not specifically addressing that population.

African-American grandparents view their role as more primary to the family than do white grandparents. African-American grandparents believe that grandparenting is a responsibility and part of that responsibility is to provide cohesion and security for the grandchildren. Parents and grandchildren see grandparents as having high status and thus give them more authority with the grandchildren (Bee & Bjorklund, 2004). Hispanic grandparents frequently have larger families and have more generations living close together thus experiencing strong familial bonds (Bee & Bjorklund).

Kivnick (1982) reported five dimensions of grandparenting based on both qualitative and quantitative data. The five dimensions included: “*Centrality* (having high personal salience), *Valued Elder* (being admired and sought out for advice and help by a grandchild), *Immortality Through Clan* (being able to live on through a grandchild), *Reinvolvement with Personal Past* (being able to relive earlier experiences), and *Indulgence* (being able to spoil and to be lenient with a grandchild)” (Kivnick as cited in Hayslip, Henderson, & Shore, 2003, p. 1). Kornhaber (1996) discussed the roles of grandparents as being mentors, spiritual guides, teachers, storytellers, and family historians. In his book, *Contemporary Grandparenting*, Kornhaber discussed the advantages of each of these roles for the grandparent, parent, and grandchild. However,

Kornhaber's work did not discuss whether these roles are exhibited within families where the grandparents have experienced divorce. Grandparents often function as the family "watch dog" (Kivett, 1991, p. 274) or the safety system when families experience stress. Grandparents consistently serve as an important source of advice, help, and support for adult children and grandchildren especially when the adult children divorce (Ferguson, 2004; Weston, 1992). From a study by Neil Ferguson (2004), it was determined that grandparents play such an important role in the lives of grandchildren that recommendations were made that grandparents be included in mediation and family counseling activities following parental divorce when it is in the best interest of the child. Uhlenberg and Kirby (1998) have suggested that because of historical and demographic changes that the role of grandparents becomes even more crucial and in some cases must be redefined. Many grandparents are assuming more prominent roles in the lives of their grandchildren.

Finally, will any factor act as a mediating or moderating variable in keeping the grandparent grandchild relationship strong even through the grandparent's divorce? "The relationship between grandparents and their grandchildren is not a direct generational tie, as is true with the relationship between parents and children, but rather is intergenerational (i.e., skips one or more generations) and is mediated through the children's parents. Thus, the nature and quality of the relationship between grandparents and their adult children is a primary factor affecting grandparent grandchild bonding" (Myers & Perrin, 1993, p. 64). Therefore, adult children often carry power in determining family relationships. According to the King (2003) study conducted with rural families, if the grandparent-parent bond remained strong the grandparent grandchild bond would also

remain strong. Little or no research has explored this question with metropolitan families. The present study will examine grandparents living in a metropolitan area who have experienced divorce.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview and Description of Research Methodology

As stated previously, goals of this study are to 1) determine if the relationship between divorced grandparents and their grandchildren is different than the relationship between never divorced grandparents and their grandchildren and if so, 2) describe these issues. Since previous research, (King, 2003) has examined this topic in using a rural area; the present study was conducted in a metropolitan area. Given the nature of the study, a non-experimental design was used. Permission was received to conduct the research from the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A). Individual grandparents were utilized as the unit of observation and analysis in a self-report measure. The data were collected during one time period, utilizing a cross-section of grandparents from different socioeconomic levels, educational backgrounds, and ethnic groups.

In this descriptive study, grandparents both ever divorced and ever married, never divorced were compared. One of the main purposes of the present study was to gather information about the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren especially divorced grandparents. The present study identified topics that need to be examined in future research.

Research Design

The hypotheses designed for testing in this study were as follows:

1. King (2003) reported that the saliency or importance of grandparent grandchild relationships is influenced by the divorce of the grandparent. In an attempt to corroborate King's findings the researcher hypothesized that the perceived saliency of the grandparent grandchild relationship will be negatively related to whether or not the grandparent has ever experienced a divorce. In this hypothesis, marital status, ever married, never divorced or ever divorced, will be the independent variable and the dependent variable will be the level of perceived saliency or importance of the grandparent grandchild relationship.
2. Divorced grandparents will have less shared activities and less contact with their grandchild than ever married, never divorced grandparents (King). The marital status (ever married and ever divorced) is the independent variable and the amount of shared activities and the frequency of contact are the dependent variables.
3. Prior research indicates that grandmothers remain closer to the grandchildren after a divorce than grandfathers (Aldous, 1995). Therefore it is hypothesized that grandmothers will have greater relationship quality with grandchildren after experiencing divorce than grandfathers. The gender of the grandparent is the independent variable and the level of relationship quality is the dependent variable.
4. Maternal grandparents maintain closer relationships with grandchildren than do paternal grandparents (Chan & Elder, 2000). Therefore, divorced, maternal grandparents will have a higher relationship quality with their grandchildren than divorced, paternal grandparents following a divorce. The independent variable is the type of grandparent

(maternal or paternal) and the dependent variable the amount of relationship quality. The divorce of the grandparents serves as a control variable.

5. Historically, grandparents have served as mentors, spiritual guides, teachers, storytellers, and family historians (King et al., 2000; Kornhaber, 1996; Tomlin, 1998). Therefore, grandparents who have experienced divorce spend less time in traditional grandparenting roles than ever-married, never divorced grandparents. Grandparent marital status (ever married or ever divorced) is the independent variable and the time spent in traditional grandparenting roles is the dependent variable.

6. In some cases the grandparent grandchild bond can remain strong even when there has been a divorce between the grandparents (Amato, 2005; King, 2003). The quality of the grandparent parent relationship may influence the relationship between the grandparent and the grandchild after a divorce has occurred between the grandparents. Thus, it was hypothesized that among ever divorced grandparents, the grandchild-grandparent relationship will be better when the grandparent-parent bond is strong where the independent variable is the strength of the grandparent-parent bond and the dependent variable is the grandparent grandchild relationship quality.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with 10 grandparents to determine if the questionnaire was appropriate to the target group. A panel of three gerontology educators assessed the questions for face and content validity. The purpose of the pilot study was to test the efficiency of the questionnaire and to explore any potential problems in administering the instrument. Two changes were made in the questions as a result of the pilot. A question was added that asked if the grandchildren were biological or step

grandchildren. Also, three lines were added for listing the ages of the grandchildren. The pilot questionnaire had six lines and it was revised to have nine lines to list the ages of the grandchildren. These minor changes were the only ones made to the instrument. Pilot participants did not have any difficulty in taking the questionnaire nor did they have any concerns or complaints about the time required to complete the survey. Most of the pilot participants completed the survey in 10 to 20 minutes.

Sampling

Grandparents, both male and female, with a grandchild ranging in age from twelve to eighteen comprised the study population. Given the key concept of this study was relationship quality, the researcher wanted to ensure that the grandparent grandchild relationship had sufficient time to develop. Convenience sampling was utilized. In the convenience sample, grandparents who attended Older American's Act Nutrition Program (OAANP) congregate sites in one county in central Oklahoma were sampled. Metropolitan sites were visited; from these six sites grandparents who met the study criteria were solicited for participation. The sampling frame included participants at the OAANP congregate sites. Demographic questions identified if the grandparents met the criteria for the study; the adults who were not grandparents and who did not have a grandchild between the ages of twelve and eighteen years of age were eliminated from the study. An overall sample of fifty ever-married, never divorced grandparents and fifty ever divorced grandparents was desired. However, only forty ever divorced grandparents were located. Sixty-one ever-married, never divorced grandparents were also identified. Since this project used non-random sampling methods one limitation was that the

resulting sample may not have been representative of the population. However, the OAANP congregate sites were selected that were believed to have a cross-section of socioeconomic levels and diversity of racial backgrounds.

Research Methods

Data Collection and Recording

Participants in this study were asked to complete a 26 question self-administered questionnaire with 17 demographic items and 9 grandparent items that had multiple questions under one number. The questionnaire took most participants approximately ten to twenty minutes to complete.

At each of the OAANP congregate sites, in an informal, oral solicitation, the researcher introduced herself, stated the purpose of the study, stated the criteria of the study (participants need to be grandparents and have a grandchild in the range of twelve to eighteen years of age), discussed that if they chose to participate that was informed consent, and finished the instructions by giving directions to complete the questionnaires (see Appendix B for complete script). If they met the study criteria, participants were asked to complete the questionnaires and the researcher collected the questionnaires as respondents finished them. However, clearly marked collection boxes were provided at the exit of the congregate feeding site so those participants had the option to complete the surveys at their convenience. The OAANP site directors were given a mailing address and phone number of the researcher for those participants who wanted to spend more time completing the survey. Eight surveys were received through the mail.

Instrumentation and Measurement

Instrumentation in this study consisted of a two-part self-administered questionnaire in booklet format (see Appendix C). These questions were adapted from studies by King (2003) and Kivnick (1982). King had reported strong reliability coefficients for the questions ranging from $\alpha = .69$ to $.82$ for the various subscales. Participants received a printed copy of the questionnaire which contained two sections: demographic questions and questions about the grandparents' involvement with their target grandchild. The demographic questions identified persons who qualified for the study. If a person was not a grandparent or did not have a grandchild between the ages of 12 and 18, the questionnaire instructed them to stop and they were thanked for their time. The other demographic questions asked (a) current marital status (married, separated, divorced, widowed, or never married); (b) if ever divorced (yes or no); (c) how long at current marital status; (d) gender; age; race; highest level of education completed; hours per week worked outside the home; (e) age and gender of your target grandchild; (f) miles lived from target grandchild; and (g) if the target grandchild is their son's or daughter's child. The section on grandparent grandchild relationships asked the grandparents to choose one grandchild between the ages of 12 and 18 years to be the target grandchild for ease in answering the questions. The following variables were assessed.

- The *grandparent grandchild relationship quality* was examined by addressing five questions pertaining to the target grandchild. (a) "How close do you feel to your grandchild?" Response options were 1 = not at all, 2 = not very close, 3 = somewhat close, 4 = pretty close, and 5 = very close. (b) "How would you describe your current

relationship quality with your grandchild?” (1 = poor, 2 = fair, 3 = good, 4 = excellent). (c) “How often are you a companion and friend to the target grandchild?” Response options were 1 = never, 2 = sometimes or 3 = often. (d) “In general how much conflict, tension, or disagreement do you feel between you and the target grandchild?” (1 = none at all, 2 = a little, 3 = some, or 4 = a lot). The final question in this section was (e) “How much does the target grandchild make you feel appreciated, loved, and cared for?” Responses treated as interval level included 1 = not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = some or 4 = a lot (see Table 1).

- *Grandparent’s marital status* was assessed by using three questions on the questionnaire. (a) Current marital status (married, separated, divorced, widowed, or other); (b) “How long have you been at your current marital status?” and (c) “Have you ever been divorced” (yes or no). Grandparents were classified as married if the respondent answered “married” to marital status and “no” to ever being divorced. Grandparents were classified as divorced if current marital status was divorced or if current marital status was married but they have ever been divorced. This was considered a nominal level of measurement.
- *The level of saliency in the grandparent grandchild relationship* was assessed by a series of six questions adapted from Kivnick (1985) as used in the King (2003) study. Grandparent saliency is used as a term to explore what it means to be a grandparent and what the grandparent thinks about the experience. Grandparents were asked if they 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree or 4 = strongly agree with the following six questions. (a) As a grandparent, it’s important to me that my opinions influence other people in the family, (b) My grandchildren are important because they are the ones who

will carry on the family line, (c) One way I think of grandchildren is to think that a part of me will keep living after I, myself, have died, (d) To me, a valuable part of grandparenthood is that my grandchildren be involved in my life and the things I do, (e) As a grandparent, it is important to feel needed and helpful, and (f) I feel that my grandchildren belong to me as well as to their parents. The level of measurement for each item was nominal; the level of measurement for the index was interval for the purposes of analysis.

- To measure *shared activities*, the grandparents responded to three questions (a) discussing attendance at focal grandchild's events (school programs and sporting events), (b) doing community activities with the grandchild such as attending church, and (c) doing projects together (crafts, yard work, or others). Likert scaling was used with five response options (1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = frequently, 4 = almost always, and 5 = always). Both the individual items and the index are treated as interval levels of measurement.
- *Frequency of shared activities* was measured by participants responding to one question. During the past six months, how often have you seen the target grandchild face-to-face, either in your home or somewhere else? Participants were to select from the following responses: not at all, less than once a month, one to three times a month, about once a week, several times a week, or daily. This was treated as an interval level of measurement.
- *Gender of grandparent, maternal or paternal variables*, was identified by demographic questions. Respondents were asked to mark their gender as 1 = male or 2 = female. Participants were also asked to mark if the target grandchild was 1 = my son's

child or 2 = my daughter's child to indicate if they were a maternal or paternal grandparent. Both questions are nominal measures.

- *Time spent in traditional grandparenting roles* were analyzed by seven questions. The questions discussed (a) plans for the grandchild's future; (b) sharing about the grandparent's childhood, and (c) the grandchild's personal problems. Response options ranged from 1 = never to 4 = 4 or more times on a Likert scale. Both the items and index are treated as interval measures. The remaining questions concerning grandparenting roles had three response options: never, sometimes, or often. The questions discussed (d) grandparents giving advice; (e) sharing skills; (f) being a voice of wisdom and experience; and (g) passing on family traditions, stories and history (see appendix B).
- *The grandparent-adult child (parent) bond* was addressed by one question: "How would you describe your current relationship with the target grandchild's parent (your son or daughter)?" Response options ranged from (1 = poor to 4 = excellent). This is an interval measure.

The following table (Table 1) is a summary of the hypotheses for the study, the independent variables, dependent variables, and the questions asked to address the hypotheses. The analyses used for each hypothesis is listed as well.

Table 1

Summary of Hypotheses, Independent Variables, Dependent Variables, Analyses, and Questions Asked

Hypotheses	IV	DV	Analyses
1. The saliency or the importance of the grandparent grandchild relationship will be negatively influenced by the grandparents experiencing divorce.	Marital status (ever-married, ever divorced) 1 item Question 7 Have you ever been divorced?	Level of perceived saliency Composite measure (6 items) 26. a) As a grandparent it's important to me that my opinion influences other people in the family. b) My grandchildren are important because they are the ones who will carry on the family line. c) One way I think of grandchildren is to think that a part of me will keep living after I, myself, have died. d) To me a valuable part of grandparenthood is that my grandchildren are involved in my life and in the things I do. e) As a grandparent, it is important to feel needed and helpful. f) I feel that my grandchildren belong to me as well as to their parents.	One-way ANOVA

Table 1 Continued

Summary of Hypotheses, Independent Variables, Dependent Variables, Analyses, and Questions Asked

Hypotheses	IV	DV	Analyses
2. Ever divorced grandparents will have less shared activities and less contact with the grandchild than ever married and never divorced grandparents	Marital status (ever-married and never divorced or ever divorced) 1 item 7. Have you ever been divorced?	Amount of shared activities and the frequency of contact Composite measure (4 items) 18) During the past six months, how often have you seen the target grandchild face-to-face, either in your home or somewhere else? 21. b) Attend an event in which the target grandchild was involved, such as a play, sports competition, or musical event? c) Do activities together in the community, such as going to a museum, sports events or shopping? f) Work on projects together such as crafts, repairs, or things around the house?	One-way ANOVA
3. It is hypothesized that after experiencing divorce grandmothers will have greater relationship quality with grandchildren than grandfathers.	Gender of the grandparent 1 item Are you: male or female?	Amount of relationship quality Composite measure (5 items) 19) How would you describe your current relationship with the target grandchild? 20) How close do you feel to the target grandchild? 22. c) Are you a companion and friend to the target grandchild? 23) How much does the target grandchild make you feel appreciated, loved, or cared for? 24) In general, how much conflict, tension, or disagreement do you feel there is between you and the target grandchild?	One-way ANOVA

Table 1 Continued

Summary of Hypotheses, Independent Variables, Dependent Variables, Analyses, and Questions Asked

Hypotheses	IV	DV	Analyses
4. Ever divorced, maternal grandparents will have a higher relationship quality with their grandchildren than ever divorced, paternal grandparents.	Type of grandparent 1 item Is the target grandchild your son's child or your daughter's child?	Amount of relationship quality Composite measure (5 items) 19) How would you describe your current relationship with the target grandchild? 20) How close do you feel to the target grandchild? 22. c) Are you a companion and friend to the target grandchild? 23) How much does the target grandchild make you feel appreciated, loved, or cared for? 24) In general, how much conflict, tension, or disagreement do you feel there is between you and the target grandchild?	One-way ANOVA
5. Grandparents who have experienced divorce spend less time in traditional grandparenting roles than ever-married grandparents.	Grandparent marital status (ever married or ever divorced) 1 item Have you ever been divorced?	Time spent in traditional grandparenting roles Composite measure (7 items) 21. a) Discuss the grandchild's plans for the future. 21. d) Talk about your childhood. 21. e) Discuss his/her personal problems. 22. a) Give advice to the target grandchild 22. b) How often does the target grandchild have the chance to learn skills from you? 22. d) Are you a voice of wisdom and experience for the grandchild? 22.e) Do you serve as a source of family traditions, stories, and history?	One-way ANOVA
6. It was hypothesized that among ever divorced grandparents, the grandparent grandchild relationship will be stronger when the grandparent-parent bond is strong.	Strength of grandparent-parent 1 item 25. How would you describe your current relationship with the target grandchild's parent?	Amount of relationship quality Composite measure (5 items) 19) How would you describe your current relationship with the target grandchild? 20) How close do you feel to the target grandchild? 22. c) Are you a companion and friend to the target grandchild? 23) How much does the target grandchild make you feel appreciated, loved, or care 24) In general, how much conflict, tension, or disagreement do you feel there is between you and the target grandchild?	T-test

Data Processing and Analyses

Descriptive statistics were included on each level of the demographic variables, gender, marital status, divorce history, and work status, as well as grandparent type (maternal or paternal) and gender of the focal grandchild. Demographic information included the average and range of participants' age, length of participants' marital status, number of grandchildren, number of hours worked per week, as well as the average age and range of the target grandchild and the distance from grandchild..

One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) were conducted for each of the categorical variables (ethnicity, gender, marital status, divorce history, work status, grandparent type, and gender of target grandchild) on the dependent measures of grandparent grandchild relationship quality, relationship saliency, shared activities, frequency of shared activities, traditional time role, and parent-assessed bond to see if any differences occurred within levels of the categorical variables. Hypotheses one through five were examined using one-way ANOVA. A *t*-test was used to compare the means between the ever divorced grandparents that had a high relationship quality with their adult child and those who had a low relationship quality with their adult child and the impact this had on the grandparent grandchild relationship quality in hypothesis six. An alpha level of $p < .05$ was used for statistical scale tests in this study.

Additional analyses were conducted to test for other possible effects on the dependent variables. Multiple regression techniques were used to predict each of the dependent variables (grandparent grandchild relationship quality, relationship saliency, shared activities, frequency of shared activities, and traditional time role) from the continuous variables including participants' age, length of participants' marital status,

number of grandchildren, number of hours worked per week, age of the target grandchild, and the distance lived from grandchild.

Evaluation of Design

This study utilized a cross-section of grandparents from six sites in the central Oklahoma metropolitan area adding diversity to the sample. This provided subjects of different socioeconomic levels, educational levels, race, and age thus protecting external validity. The strength of this study is that the divorced grandparents are from the metropolitan area which has not been studied before in relationship with their grandchildren which can be compared with the King (2003) study that only identified rural grandparents.

Limitations

A limitation of the present study is that the timing of the grandparent's divorce was not identified in relationship to the birth or age of the target grandchild. However, prior research has reported that a divorce at any time could weaken generational bonds (Uhlenberg & Hammill, 1998). Another limitation is that the study is done only from the grandparent's perspective not the grandchild's or parent's perspective. Future research might also identify if both the parent and grandparent generation have experienced divorce, which could possibly indicate that poor relationship skills are passed down from generation to generation.

Summary

This non-experimental study involved quantitative measures. In self-report surveys data were gathered from grandparents concerning their relationship with their grandchild. A short survey was developed to identify issues that could affect the quality of the grandparent grandchild relationship when grandparents are divorced. The data was analyzed and findings summarized. Results are reported in Chapter IV and discussed in Chapter V.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, the sample used for this study will be described in detail. Each hypothesis will be discussed and the findings from the hypotheses will be described. Additional analyses and their purpose will also be explored. Several grandparents wrote statements about their grandparenting experiences in their survey booklets. Their comments will be shared and discussed at the conclusion of this chapter.

Descriptive Data

The grandparenting survey was designed to identify characteristics that describe the grandparent participants. Nine of the twenty-six questions, several with multiple parts, focused on identifying characteristics of the grandparents. One hundred and one grandparents were surveyed while in attendance at six Older American's Act Nutrition Program (OAANP) congregate sites. The OAANP congregate sites are non-needs based programs that provide hot meals for people 55 and older. The meals are provided Monday through Friday, participants are charged one dollar and fifty cents per meal. Six sites were visited to collect data in the Central Oklahoma metropolitan area. Attendance varied from 24 at the smallest site to 68 at the largest site. Activities are also provided at

the sites before and after lunch including dancing, quilting, movies, cards, board games, pool, tai chi, and field trips.

All of the participants were grandparents who had grandchildren between the ages of 12 and 18. This age range was believed to allow time for the grandparent grandchild relationship to develop. Twenty-nine males and 72 female grandparents answered the survey. Forty-eight of the grandparents were between the ages of 65 to 74 years of age. Four of the grandparents were under the age of 54 and were employees at the sites and wanted to participate in the study by completing a questionnaire. Only four of the grandparents were 85 years of age or older. For a complete breakdown of ages see Table 2. Eighty-three grandparents marked white/Caucasian on the survey and 13 marked black/African American. Two grandparents were American Indian or Alaskan Native and two were of mixed descent, partially Native American. Forty-three of the grandparents had some college education but did not complete a degree, five had less than a 9th grade education, and 10 grandparents had completed a graduate or professional degree (see Table 2)

Sixty-two of the 101 grandparents did not work outside the home (see Table 2). Grandparents were asked if they had ever been divorced and 40 responded with a “yes” response. Sixty-one respondents had never divorced. This information was critical since this was one of the primary emphases of the research study. Fifty-six of the grandparents are currently married. Eleven of the grandparents were divorced at the time they responded to the survey. However, prior research indicates that a divorce at any time affects the grandparent grandchild relationship (King, 2003). Thirty participants were

presently widowed (see Table 2 for complete details). Length of current marital status varied from 1 year to 65 years.

Twenty-two grandparents selected their 12-year-old grandchild as their target grandchild. The survey question asked them to select the grandchild between the ages of 12 and 18 who had had the most recent birthday. The second highest age selected was 16, by 17 of the grandparents. Fifty-eight grandsons were chosen as the target grandchild and 42 granddaughters were selected as the target grandchild, one grandparent did not respond. In response to “Is the target grandchild your son’s child or your daughter’s child”, 50 were a son’s child and 51 a daughter’s child. Grandparents were asked “How many grandchildren do you have?” The numbers ranged from 1 to 24 grandchildren with the mean number of grandchildren being 6.78 (see Table 2). Grandparents left this question blank on the survey more than any other question. Some of the older grandparents and also some of the grandparents who had many grandchildren were not sure of the exact ages of the grandchildren. Therefore they asked the researcher if they could just leave that question blank because they did not want to be inaccurate. Four target grandchildren lived “0” miles from their grandparents and the most distant grandchild lived 2300 miles away with a variety of distances in-between (see Table 2). Out of the 101 grandparents surveyed, eight reported that their target grandchild was a step-grandchild whereas 92 reported that their target grandchild was of biological descent (one participant left this question blank). This descriptive data gives the reader some background information about the grandparents participating in the study and an indication of what prior research has stated about these factors.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of the Grandparent Sample

Characteristics	Frequency	%
Grandparent Gender		
Males	29	28.7
Females	72	71.3
Total	101	100.0
Grandparent Age		
54 and under	4	4.0
55-64	19	18.8
65-74	48	47.5
75-84	26	25.7
85 and older	4	4.0
Total	101	100.0
Level of Education		
Less than 9 th grade	5	5.0
9 th -12 th grade, no diploma	10	10.0
High School graduate (includes equivalency)	18	18.0
Some college no degree	43	43.0
Associate degree	6	6.0
Bachelor's degree	8	8.0
Graduate or professional degree	10	10.0
Missing	1	
Total	101	100.0
Ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	83	83.8
Black/African American	13	13.2
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2	2.0
Other race	1	1.0
Missing	2	
Total	101	100.0

Table 2 Continued

Demographic Characteristics of the Grandparent Sample

Characteristics	Frequency	%
Work Hours per Week		
0-10	70	72.8
11-20	6	6.2
21-30	5	5.2
31-40	13	13.4
41-50	2	2.0
Missing	5	
Total	101	100.0
Divorce History		
Ever Divorced	40	39.0
Ever Married	61	60.0
Total	101	100.0
Current Marital Status		
Married	56	55.4
Separated	3	3.0
Divorced	11	10.9
Widowed	30	29.7
Never Been Married	1	1.0
Total	101	100.0
Number of Grandchildren		
1-5	47	46.5
6-10	38	37.5
11-15	13	13.0
16-20	2	2.0
21-25	1	1.0
Total	101	100.0

Table 2 Continued

Demographic Characteristics of the Grandparent Sample

Characteristics	Frequency	%
Miles from Grandchild		
0-100	68	68.0
101-200	11	11.0
201-300	1	1.0
301-400	2	2.0
401-500	2	2.0
501-600	2	2.0
601-700	0	0.0
701-800	0	0.0
801-900	5	5.0
901-1000	0	0.0
1000 or more	12	12.0
Total	101	100.0

Results

The SPSS Base 13.0 statistical package (2004) was used to analyze all data. Frequencies were run on all of the descriptive data and frequencies were also used to check the accuracy of data entry. For hypotheses one through five, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine these data. Hypothesis six was analyzed by running a *t*-test compare the means between the variables. Additional analyses were conducted by multiple regression.

The saliency of the grandparent grandchild relationship was proposed to be negatively associated with the grandparents experiencing divorce in hypothesis one. However in this study of 101 grandparents, 40 ever divorced and 61 ever-married, never divorced the mean level of saliency was not significantly different in the between groups

mean and within groups mean. The average level of saliency for ever divorced was 18.80 while the average level of saliency for ever married and never divorced grandparents was 19.32. The average level of saliency was not significantly different by marital status, $F(1, 90) = 0.338, p = .562, NS$. Several questions were asked to identify the level of saliency and were combined in to one composite variable with a range of 0-24. When examining the responses made by the grandparents, 72 out of the 92 who responded to this group of questions marked “agree” or “strongly agree” to most of the questions. Six questions addressed saliency (see Table 1 for a complete listing of the questions).

Hypothesis two stated that ever divorced grandparents will have less shared activities and less contact with their grandchild than ever married and never divorced grandparents with marital status serving as the independent variable and the amount of shared activities and the frequency of contact as the dependent variables. Three questions were used to assess the amount of shared activities and one question to address the frequency of contact (see Table 1). Again questions were grouped to form one composite measure. Statistical significance was not found, $F(1, 97) = .028, p = .867, NS$). The ever divorced grandparents scored a mean of 7.03 in amount of time spent in shared activities and frequency of contact and the ever married grandparents mean was 6.92 (range = 3 to 12). The responses for these questions varied from “never” doing activities such as attending events or working on projects together with their grandchild to “four or more times” per 12 months with their target grandchild. Nineteen of the grandparents responded with “never” able to attend events or do activities together. Approximately 27 grandparents had participated in activities and events once in the past 12 months. Twenty-one grandparents had shared activities and events three times in the past 12

months. The question that addressed frequency of contact was based on face-to-face contact in the past six months and again responses were varied for both the ever-married, never divorced and ever divorced grandparents concerning their target grandchild. Both ever married, never divorced and ever divorced grandparents reported spending one to three times per month in face to face contact with their target grandchild in the past six months.

Hypothesis three indicated that grandmothers will have greater relationship quality with grandchildren after experiencing divorce than grandfathers. First grandparents who had experienced divorce at some point in their lives were selected for this question which resulted in nine grandfathers and 31 grandmothers for a total of 40 cases used in this question. The gender of the grandparent was the independent variable and the series of questions concerning relationship quality functioned as the dependent variable. Again, the five questions that addressed relationship quality were combined to form a composite variable. Frequencies were run to check the consistency of the composite variable. Statistical significance was found for hypothesis three. Grandmothers ($M = 15.70$) reported a closer relationship quality with their target grandchild than the grandfathers reported ($M = 13.22$), $F(1, 37) = 6.72, p = .014$. Next, in the interest of comparison, ever married, never divorced grandparents were selected and the same analysis was completed. No significant difference was found with this group of 60 grandparents (19 grandfathers and 41 grandmothers) The mean for grandfathers was 15.16 and the mean for grandmothers was 14.88 with an $F(1, 58) = .115, p = .735$. In the first question addressing relationship quality, the grandparent was asked to describe their current relationship with the target grandchild Response options included “poor”, “fair”,

“good”, and “excellent”. The other questions for this hypothesis were concerned with closeness with the target grandchild (five point scale from “not at all close” to “very close”), being a companion and friend (four point scale from “never” to “4 or more times”), does the grandchild make the grandparent feel loved and appreciated (four point scale from “none at all” to “a lot”), and is there conflict in this relationship (same as last question). Ever divorced grandmothers, as suggested in the hypothesis, maintained a higher level of relationship quality with their target grandchild than ever divorced grandfathers.

Hypothesis four indicated that ever divorced, maternal grandparents would have a higher relationship quality with their grandchildren, than ever divorced paternal grandparents. As in hypotheses three, only ever divorced grandparents were selected for this computation; with the sample of 40 ever divorced grandparents between group mean differences were not found. Paternal grandparents had a mean of 15.06 and maternal grandparents had a mean of 15.17. Statistical significance was not found, $F(1, 37) = .016$, $p = .901$, *NS*. Sixteen paternal grandparents and 24 maternal grandparents were identified. To avoid confusion for the respondents the question stated “Is the target grandchild your son’s child or your daughter’s child?” None of the grandparents asked the researcher for clarification on this question. The grandparents were able to apparently understand this question although the terms “maternal” and “paternal” grandparent might have been confusing to some. The same five questions that were used in hypothesis three concerning relationship quality were used to assess relationship quality between ever divorced maternal and paternal grandparents.

Hypothesis five proposed that grandparents who have ever experienced divorce spend less time in traditional grandparenting roles than ever-married grandparents. Marital status was used as the independent variable. A series of questions were used to create a dependent composite variable measuring the amount of time spent in traditional grandparenting roles. Of the 96 grandparents responding to these questions, 37 ever divorced with a mean of 14.51 and 59 ever married with a mean of 14.39, statistical significance was not found, $F(1, 94) = .057, p = .811, NS$. Questions for the composite variable concerning time spent in traditional grandparenting roles addressed discussing plans for the future for the grandchild, giving advice, grandparents sharing about their childhood, discussing the grandchild's personal problems, grandchild learning skills from grandparent, grandparent as a voice of wisdom and experience, and the grandparent serving as a source of family traditions, stories, and history. Responses range from "never" to "4 or more times" on a four point scale for the first three questions and from "never" to "often" on a three point scale for the last three questions. Both ever divorced and ever married and never divorced grandparents see themselves participating actively in traditional grandparenting roles.

In the last hypothesis for this study it was suggested that among ever divorced grandparents, the grandparent grandchild relationship would be stronger when the grandparent-parent bond was strong. A *t*-test was used to compare these two means while selecting only those ever experiencing divorce in the grandparent generation. The responses of "poor", "fair", and "good" were grouped together primarily because of small sample size in the above mentioned categories. The above group mean was used to compare with those who responded with the "excellent" option. Sixteen of the ever

divorced grandparents responded in the lower levels of relationship quality (“poor”, “fair”, or “good”) with the parent of the target grandchild with a mean of 15.50. Twenty-two ever divorced grandparents who had an “excellent” relationship with the parent of the target grandchild had a group mean of 18.95. Statistical significance was found in hypothesis six in the expected direction, $t(1, 38) = -3.317, p = .004$. In this study, ever divorced grandparents that perceive themselves as having an excellent relationship with their adult child also have high relationship quality with their target grandchild. See Table 3 for a summary of findings for the hypotheses.

Table 3

Summary of Hypotheses, Independent Variables, Dependent Variables, and Results

Hypotheses	IV	DV	Results
1. The saliency or the importance of the grandparent grandchild relationship will be negatively influenced by the grandparents experiencing divorce.	Marital status (ever-married and never divorced or ever divorced)	Level of perceived saliency Composite measure (6 items)	Non-significant
2. Ever divorced grandparents will have less shared activities and less contact with the grandchild than ever married and never divorced grandparents	Marital status (ever-married and never divorced or ever divorced)	Amount of shared activities and the frequency of contact Composite measure (4 items)	Non-significant
3. It is hypothesized that after experiencing divorce grandmothers will have greater relationship quality with grandchildren than grandfathers.	Gender of the grandparent	Amount of relationship quality Composite measure (5 items)	Significant

Table 3 Continued

Summary of Hypotheses, Independent Variables, Dependent Variables, and Results

Hypotheses	IV	DV	Results
4. Ever divorced, maternal grandparents will have a higher relationship quality with their grandchildren than ever divorced, paternal grandparents.	Type of grandparent (maternal or paternal)	Amount of relationship quality Composite measure (5 items)	Non-significant
5. Grandparents who have experienced divorce spend less time in traditional grandparenting roles than ever-married grandparents' roles than ever-married grandparents.	Grandparent marital status (ever married or ever divorced)	Time spent in traditional grandparenting roles Composite measure (7 items)	Non-significant
6. It was hypothesized that among ever divorced grandparents, the grandparent grandchild relationship will be stronger when the grandparent-parent bond is strong.	Strength of grandparent-parent bond	Amount of relationship quality Composite measure (5 items)	Significant

Additional Analyses

Additional statistical tests were utilized to discern if any of the demographic factors would be positively related to the dependent variables. Multiple regression was used to predict each of the dependent variables: relationship saliency, amount of shared activities and frequency of shared activities, grandparent grandchild relationship quality, and time spent in traditional grandparenting roles from the continuous variables including participants' age, length of participants' marital status, number of grandchildren, number of hours worked per week, age of the target grandchild, and the distance lived from the grandchild.

All of the continuous independent variables were regressed on the summary measure of relationship saliency. The total amount of variance explained was slightly under nine per cent ($R^2 = .088$). The ANOVA summary table showed no statistical significance, $F(6, 81) = 1.296, p = .269$. Individually none of the continuous variables reached significance on the grandparents' perceptions of the saliency of the grandparent grandchild relationship.

In the overall summary of the independent variables on the dependent variable of shared activities and frequency of contact statistical significance was indicated with $R^2 = .212, F(6, 87) = 3.904, p = .002$. About 21% of the variability in shared activities and frequency of contact was accounted for by the demographic factors of years at current marital status, age of target grandchild, miles from grandchild, age of grandparent, number of grandchildren, and hours of work per week. Statistical significance was found with the number of miles lived from the grandparent ($p = .000, \beta = -.360$). The more distance between grandparent and the target grandchild the less activities are shared and

the less time is spent in face to face contact in a six-month period of time. As the continuous variables were regressed on the composite of relationship quality the R-square indicates 14.1% of the variance was explained by these factors. These data suggested statistical significance from the demographic factors regressed on the composite measure of relationship quality $F(6, 87) = 2.390, p = .035$. Statistical significance was again found with distance from the target grandchild and relationship quality between the grandparent and grandchild ($p = .004, \beta = -.297$). The more distance a grandparent lives from the grandchild the less relationship quality perceived by the grandparent.

When the independent variables were regressed on time spent in traditional grandparenting roles, 16% of the variance in time spent in traditional grandparenting roles could be accounted for by the continuous variables indicated. These data from the ANOVA summary table suggested statistical significance, $F(6, 84) = 2.683, p = .020$. Results of this study suggest that the amount of miles lived from the grandchild statistically had the most impact ($p = .021$). on time spent in traditional grandparenting roles and time spent in face to face contact. In summary, the continuous variable that suggested the most impact on each of the dependent variables used in the additional analyses was distance from the grandchild.

At the back of the grandparent questionnaire booklet, a space was provided for the grandparents to share any experiences as a grandparent or comments that they would like to make. Of the 101 grandparents, 22 grandparents chose to write in a comment or experience. The comments seem to focus on three main themes: the joys of grandparenting, the challenges of grandparenting from a distance, and being a role model

for the grandchildren. Some of the comments made by the participants concerning the joys of grandparenting were as follows:

My work as a clinical social worker (now retired) doing therapy with children has proved invaluable. But nothing could have prepared me for the JOY my grandchildren have brought me or the sense of responsibility for the influence I have on them, all four are my step grandchildren, but our relationship could not be closer if they were biological.

Best thing that ever came along!

My closest relationship is with my 4-year-old granddaughter who is with us 3-4 days a week. The target child is my daughter's husband's daughter; she was 5 when they married, she is smart, funny, and affectionate.

Children and grandchildren are the joy of our lives (My husband and me). They also keep you young.

Three of my grandchildren have always been very close.

Grandchildren are treasures!

My children and grandchildren are my most precious gift that God gave me.

Being a grandparent is wonderful. Three live 3 miles from me and two live 1,000 miles away. 4 are biological and 1 is adopted from another country. All are very important and all are my grandchildren.

I love them all as they are each one special in their own way.

The following statements are concerned with the challenges of grandparenting.

I do not get to see my grandchildren as much as I would like to as I choose to live in a small town and my grandchildren are all in larger towns.

We email the grandchildren that live far away.

My situation as a grandparent is not what I would call normal, my relationship with my children has been changed since my divorce.

The following statements illustrate traditional grandparenting roles:

I am proud to say, I've had a big thing in getting all my grandchildren in church and Bible Study.

It's more important to me that my grandchildren feel loved and encouraged to be the best they can be and happy because they find God's purpose and plan for their lives- not what I think or want for them!

We have great traditions which began with their great-grandparents and have continued thru the years of special Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving and family reunion get togethers. All of my grandchildren have granny make their birthday cakes even though some are married.

I had a busy active life with my grandchildren. One is in ROTC, two are in sports, one dances and one is slightly lazy but very interesting.

The grandparents obviously wanted to share their feelings about grandparenting because the write-in section was definitely optional. It was interesting to read how closely their statements matched the literature as will be discussed in Chapter V.

Summary

The sample used for this study consisted of 101 grandparents, 40 who had experienced divorce at some point in their lives and 61 who had been married and never divorced. Grandparents were required to have a grandchild between the ages of 12 and 18 to participate in the project. The entire study group was from the metropolitan area of central Oklahoma. Data were collected from participants at six OAANP congregate sites. The researcher designed the study to compare with the King study (2003) that was conducted with only rural Iowa families to see if residence would make a difference. Grandparents ranged in age from 45 to 85 or older. Twenty-nine grandfathers and 72 grandmothers completed the survey. The sample included some ethnic diversity and a wide range of educational diversity.

The saliency of the grandparent grandchild relationship was not related to divorce in the grandparent generation in this study. Likewise divorced grandparents were not

found to have less shared activities or less contact with their target grandchild in this study of central Oklahoma grandparents. Divorced grandmothers were found to have greater relationship quality with grandchildren than divorced grandfathers as was predicted by hypothesis three. Ever divorced maternal grandparents were not found to have higher relationship quality with their grandchild than did ever divorced paternal grandparents. Also, ever divorced grandparents were not found to spend less time in traditional grandparenting roles than did ever married grandparents. Lastly, statistical significance was found in hypothesis six suggesting that if the grandparent parent bond remains strong the grandparent grandchild will have higher relationship quality. One way ANOVA was used to assess hypotheses one-through five and a *t*-test was conducted to assess hypothesis six.

Additional analyses were conducted to determine if the demographic factors played a role in the grandparent grandchild relationship. The continuous variables of participant's age, length of participant's marital status, number of grandchildren, number of hours worked per week, age of the target grandchild, and the distance lived from the grandchild were all regressed on the composite variables of relationship saliency, shared activities and frequency of contact, relationship quality, and time spent in traditional grandparenting roles. The only continuous variable that seemed to have significance was that of miles lived from target grandchild. The more distance that separated the grandparent and the grandchild the more the grandparent perceived that they had less contact, less shared activities, less relationship quality, and less time spent in traditional roles. Grandparents were also given an opportunity to write in comments. Twenty-two grandparents chose to do so and entered statements about the joys of grandparenting, the

challenges of living a distance from the grandchild, and the importance of traditional grandparenting roles which reinforced the survey responses.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Grandparents and grandchildren both benefit from a close relationship in many ways (Bengston, 2001; King, 2003). The purpose of this research was to examine if the grandparent grandchild relationship is related to grandparents having experienced divorce at any time in their lives. This research project was influenced by the family developmental theory or life course perspective since this perspective is concerned with changing social roles in a family (Klein & White, 1996). Positions are also discussed in this theory; they are the rights and responsibilities that a certain social role maintains (Klein & White). Family stress theory also guided this research concerning the grandparent and grandchild relationship. Stress is often a challenge that families deal with when divorce occurs at any level in the family structure. The family's ability to react and reorganize to stress factors plays an important role in the well-being of the family unit (Klein & White). This chapter will discuss the findings, conclusions from data, implications for practitioners, recommendations for future research, and a summary of the project.

Discussion of Findings

Saliency of relationship. The first hypothesis stated that the grandparents experiencing divorce would negatively influence the saliency or importance of the grandparent grandchild relationship. In this study, this was not found to be statistically significant. King (2003) in her longitudinal study of Iowa farm families found that the ever divorced grandparents were less likely to agree with the following statements than were ever married, never divorced grandparents. The saliency questions in both King's and this study included "that because they have grandchildren a part of themselves will keep living after they have died; that a valuable part of grandparenthood is having grandchildren involved in their lives; and that grandchildren belong to them as well as to their parents" (King, p. 175). The sample size of King's study was much larger than the size of the sample in this study and the participants in this study lived in a metropolitan area of Oklahoma whereas King's study was conducted in rural Iowa. Location or size of the sample could have influenced the findings. In this study the researcher found that grandparents whether ever divorced or ever married, never divorced still want to be very much involved in grandchildren's lives and feel this is important.

Shared activities and contact. Since divorce is becoming more of an option for older adults, this could possibly impact relationships at all levels of the family unit (Amato & Cheadle, 2005). Therefore, it was hypothesized that ever divorced grandparents will have less shared activities and less contact with their grandchild than ever married, never divorced grandparents. In this study, differences were not found between the two groups. The ever divorced and ever married, never divorced grandparents were approximately equal in spending time in activities with their target

grandchild and in face to face contact. In this study, the perceived closeness of the grandparent grandchild relationship as measured by shared activities and frequency of contact was not related to marital status. In Oklahoma where this study was conducted, extended family relationships are assumed to be highly valued. It appears from this study that grandparent grandchild relationships are very important to the grandparent regardless of marital status. In King's (2003) study, ever divorced grandparents reported sharing fewer activities and less time together than ever married, never divorced grandparents.

Grandparent gender and relationship quality. As hypothesized, grandmothers are more likely to maintain a close relationship with their grandchildren after experiencing divorce than are grandfathers. This is consistent with King's (2003) study as well as being consistent with prior research that women tend to be the family kin keepers (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Chan & Elder, 2000). In this role, grandmothers and daughters in many families work very hard to keep family ties close. The quality of the relationship as measured by a composite variable included questions about grandparent's current relationship with the grandchild, feelings of closeness, being a companion and friend, feeling loved and appreciated, and the amount of conflict in the relationship. To compare findings, an analysis was run to see if the outcome would be the same with the ever married grandparents. In this study, there was no statistical significance found between ever married, never divorced grandmothers and grandfathers and their relationship quality with the target grandchild. Ever married, never divorced couples are believed to experience less stress, anxiety, depression, and better general health than divorced people (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001) therefore they are possibly able to grandparent more easily, thus their perception of their relationship quality with their

grandchildren is very similar. Whereas, divorced grandparents may feel some competition with each other in maintaining a relationship with their grandchildren.

Lineage and the quality of the relationship. Typically, maternal grandparents are able to maintain a closer relationship with grandchildren than do paternal grandparents (Chan & Elder, 2000). Therefore, it was hypothesized that would be the case. However, in this study 40 grandparents had experienced divorce at some point and so the sample size was small by the time those cases were selected from the 101 grandparents surveyed. Statistical significance was not found. King (2003) did find differences with her larger study. Both maternal and paternal grandparents scored approximately the same on relationship qualities in this study.

Traditional grandparenting roles. The literature is rich with the roles of mentor, spiritual guide, teacher, story teller, and family historian that grandparents traditionally assume (Kornhaber, 1996; Tomlin, 1998). King (2003) found in her study that grandparents reported spending less time in traditional grandparenting roles if they had ever experienced divorce. Therefore, in the current study it was hypothesized that ever divorced grandparents would spend less time in traditional grandparenting roles. Grandparents responded to a series of questions addressing traditional grandparenting roles. In this research, both ever divorced and ever-married, never divorced grandparents responded similarly and no significance was found between the groups. It is known that family configurations are constantly changing. The grandparents in this study seem to have transcended to changes in family configurations by maintaining their traditional grandparenting roles whether they had experienced divorce or not.

Parents as the bridge in grandparent grandchild relationships. Grandparent grandchild relationships are strongly influenced by the parent generation (Boon & Brussoni, 1996; Mueller & Elder, 2003). Especially, for the first few years of the grandchild's life, the parents play a pivotal role in monitoring contact between the generations (Mathews & Sprey, 1985). Grandchildren under the age of 12 have little opportunity to cultivate a relationship with a grandparent unless their parent nurtures that relationship by arranging visits and frequent contact in some form (Myers & Perrin, 1993). Thus it was hypothesized that among ever divorced grandparents, the grandchild grandparent relationship will be stronger when the grandparent parent bond is strong. Both King's study (2003) and this study suggest that parents are the key to maintaining a close relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. The parents are truly the bridge to the relationship between grandparent and grandchild.

Additional analysis. The research literature indicates that demographic factors can play a major role in the grandparent grandchild relationship (Boon & Brussoni, 1996; King, 2003). As a result of this information, additional analyses were conducted using the participant's age, length of participant's marital status, number of grandchildren, number of hours worked per week, age of the target grandchild, and the distance lived from the grandchild. The factor that was significant in this analysis was geographical distance from the grandchild where it was apparent that living closer to the child was directly related to shared activities and frequency of contact; relationship quality, and time spent in traditional grandparenting roles. Grandparents usually need to spend time with grandchildren to develop a close relationship, for the transfer of knowledge of family stories, wisdom, and the teaching of skills. Again, face to face contact is needed.

In optional comments, grandparents shared their perspectives about the joy that grandparenting brings to their lives. The grandparents also discussed the challenges of not getting to know their grandchildren, as they would wish because the children live far away and they do not have the opportunity to interact with them frequently. Grandparents also commented on how important it was to them to teach and be a role model for their grandchildren. Examples were given of being the spiritual leader and teacher and also the importance of being the family kin keeper by celebrating family events at the grandparent's home. The comments made by the grandparents showed the depth of their feelings about the grandparent grandchild relationship. The grandparents' written words expressed strong feelings of joy, love, concern, and delight in the relationship. Their words also shared how much they appreciated and found meaning in being able to pass on a part of themselves through traditions, stories, and spirituality to their grandchildren. For the grandparents who did not have the opportunity to spend much time with their grandchild due to distance or lack of opportunity, their words expressed great sadness that the grandparent grandchild relationship was not what they had always hoped it would be.

Conclusions

With baby boomers becoming the older population, divorce is becoming more prevalent in that population (Uhlenberg, 1993). Some of the results from this study suggest that the grandparent's divorce and the effects thereof could have some negative consequences for future generations. However, in this study the grandparent grandchild relationship was seen as very important from the grandparents' perspective. The

grandparents were very interested in participating in the study and many requested that the researcher send them findings at the conclusion of the research project. In fact, the grandparents who were not able to participate because they did not have grandchildren in the 12-18 year old range were very disappointed that they could not help. A few great grandparents filled out the survey; however their responses were not included in this study. This study indicates that grandparents are interested in being an important part of their grandchildren's lives (saliency of the relationship), having close contact, doing activities together, and having a strong relationship with them. The main differences were between ever divorced grandmothers and ever divorced grandfathers, with grandmothers having higher relationship quality. This research strongly suggested that parents help facilitate the grandparent grandchild relationship by having a strong relationship with their parent (the child's grandparent). The additional analyses suggested that geographical distance is a major factor in limiting the grandparent grandchild relationship development. Further research would need to be conducted to determine if the differences between King's (2003) rural study and this study done in a metropolitan area were due to location or the difference in sample size.

Implications

Since grandparenting plays such a vital role for both the older adult and the grandchild, it is critical that family practitioners and educators address how divorce at the grandparent level could have negative consequences for the extended family.

Grandparents, adult children, and grandchildren could benefit from being involved in divorce education to help them deal with their situation and relationship issues (Ingersoll-

Dayton & Neal, 1991). Educators and practitioners could suggest the importance of communication for all generations and let families know that it is important to have strong relationships between parent and grandparent to have strong bonds between grandparent and grandchild. For families who must live far apart, using current and developing technologies could increase contact or closeness between generations. This research suggests that grandparents can play an influential role in their grandchild's life whether ever divorced or ever married if they make the effort to maintain strong relationships with their own adult children and also to contact and spend time with grandchildren of all ages.

The family developmental theory or life course perspective focuses on changes in families and sub-groups within families. The grandparent grandchild relationship is a sub-group that varies from family to family and actually from grandchild to grandchild. Norms are used to explain the usual expectations that families have of different roles in the family. Role sequence explains how roles change over time due to individuals or situations. Divorce at any level of the family provides serious challenges for family members.

The family stress theory is very helpful in explaining how families define events such as divorce and reorganize as a group to deal with the crisis. The family stress theory also is beneficial in helping families identify resources that will help them transition into new family compositions due to divorce at the grandparent or parent level. In this study, indications are that all three generations working together may reduce the challenges of divorce at the grandparent level. Family developmental theory and family stress theory

help to explain the family phenomenon of divorce and also provide frameworks for family practitioners to use to help families adjust and cope.

Recommendations

Future research may consider adding the timing of the grandparent's divorce as a variable and also focusing on how remarriage affects the grandparent grandchild relationship. Divorce is likely to have negative consequences for families at whatever stage it occurs. Future research should address families who have experienced divorce in two or more generations because this is believed to transmit problems from one generation to the next generation (Amato & Cheadle, 2005). Future research might also address this relationship from the perspective of the parent and the grandchild. This research did not ask respondents to identify their socioeconomic status although the OAANP provided their overall income statistics for the state. Socioeconomic status could be a factor in the grandparent grandchild relationship. Having limited finances could affect living situations, transportation, and opportunities to provide for the grandchildren through gifts and activities. A larger sample of divorced grandparents may give a clearer picture of the characteristics of the profile of grandparents today.

Summary

This research project was designed to learn more about the grandparent grandchild relationship specifically in those relationships where grandparents had experienced divorce at any time. With longevity increasing (Szinovacz, 1998) and divorce on the increase in the older population (King, 2003), researchers must learn more

about what makes the grandparent grandchild relationship work even when families experience divorce. Literature has addressed parental divorce and the role grandparents play for quite awhile (Ganong & Coleman, 1999) but little has been studied with divorce at the grandparent generation. Grandparents in this study were surveyed about the saliency of their relationship with their grandchild, the frequency of contact and shared activities, level of relationship quality, and time spent in traditional grandparenting roles with their target grandchild. In this research project, grandparents found geographical distance to be one of the largest challenges they had in developing a salient and close relationship with their grandchild. Grandparents also reported that time spent in traditional roles were also affected by distance. Ever divorced grandmothers were found to have a higher level of relationship quality with their grandchild than did ever divorced grandfathers. Ever divorced grandparents also perceived their relationship quality to be higher with their grandchild when they had a strong relationship with their adult child. The information discovered in this research builds upon and supports prior research (King, 2003) that understanding the significance of divorce in the grandparent generation is of critical importance for future generations. This study suggested that metropolitan grandparents were also able to maintain a closer relationship with grandchildren if parents and grandparents had a strong relationship just as King found in the rural study. This research also concurred that divorced grandmothers, mainly because of geographic distance, are able to maintain a higher relationship quality with grandchildren than ever divorced grandfathers (King). With more knowledge, educators and family practitioners can help families identify possible challenges of divorce and provide information to help them understand this family phenomenon.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Tuesday, February 22, 2005

IRB Application No HE0535

Proposal Title: Divorced Grandparent's Perceptions of the Nature of their Relationship With Grandchildren

Reviewed and
Processed as: Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Protocol Expires: 2/21/2006

Principal
Investigator(s):

Anita G Absher
2309 Greystone Ct.
Edmond, OK 73034

Beulah Hirschlien
244 HES
Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

The reviewer(s) had these comments:


If it is necessary to recruit subjects from churches, you will need to submit a modification to your IRB protocol requesting this and modifying the recruitment script.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, emct@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,


Sue C. Jacobs, Chair
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B
ORAL SOLICITATION

Oral Solicitation

Hello, my name is Glee Absher and I am a lecturer at the University of Central Oklahoma. Part of my assignment at UCO is to teach courses on aging. I'm also a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University involved in a research project. The purpose of my research study is to describe characteristics of the grandparent grandchild relationship. I'm trying to identify differences in grandparent/grandchild relationships in families where grandparents have and have not experienced divorce. I need your help in finding information about this topic. If you are a grandparent and have a grandchild between the ages of twelve and eighteen, your help in responding to a short questionnaire about your experience as a grandparent would be very helpful. The questionnaire will take approximately ten to twenty minutes of your time. Participation is purely voluntary. The return of your completed questionnaire constitutes your informed consent to act as a participant in this research.

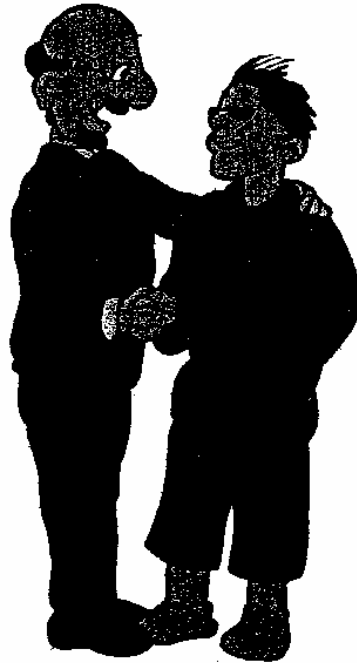
If you choose to participate, and I hope you will, you will find the questionnaire booklet at your place at the table. Please answer the questions in the booklet. Pencils are provided on your table. Please complete the questionnaire while you wait on lunch. I will pick them up from you as you complete them. If you do agree to participate, be assured that your participation will be completely anonymous. No names will be used. If you need more time to complete the questionnaire, I will collect them from you as you finish your meal and leave the room.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Dr. Sue Jacobs, Institutional Review Board Chair, at (405) 744-5700. You may also contact Dr. Beulah Hirschlein, my doctoral advisor at (405) 744- 8347. I have these names and phone numbers available for you if you want them.

Thank you so much for your help.

APPENDIX C
RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Grandparenting Survey



*Department of Human Development and Family Science
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
STILLWATER, OK 74078*

A Little Background Information about You

1. Do you have at least one grandchild?

- Yes
- No → *You do not need to complete the questionnaire. Thank you for your time.*

2. Do you have at least one grandchild that is between the ages of 12 and 18 years of age?

- Yes
- No → *You do not need to complete the questionnaire. Thank you for your time*

3. How many grandchildren do you currently have?

_____ Grandchildren

4. What is the current age(s) of your grandchild(ren) beginning with your oldest grandchild and ending with your youngest grandchild?

- _____ Age of grandchild-1
- _____ Age of grandchild-2
- _____ Age of grandchild-3
- _____ Age of grandchild-4
- _____ Age of grandchild-5
- _____ Age of grandchild-6
- _____ Age of grandchild-7
- _____ Age of grandchild-8
- _____ Age of grandchild-9

5. What is your current marital status?

- Married
- Separated
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Never been married

6. How long have you been at your current marital status?

_____ Years

7. Have you ever been divorced?

- Yes
- No

8. Are you:

- Male
- Female

9. What is your age?

- 54 years and under
- 55 to 64 years old
- 65-74 years old
- 75-84 years old
- 85 years and older

10. What is your race?

- White/Caucasian
- Black/African American
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Hispanic
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
- Some other race, specify: _____
- More than one race, specify: _____

11. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Less Than 9th Grade
- 9th to 12th grade, no diploma
- High school graduate (includes equivalency)
- Some college, no degree
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate or professional degree

12. How many hours per week do you work outside the home?

_____ Hours/week

Focusing on One Grandchild

For the next several questions, please select your grandchild between the ages of 12 and 18 who has had the most recent birthday. This grandchild will be referred to as the "target grandchild".

13. What is the age of your *target* grandchild?

_____ Years old

14. Is your *target* grandchild:

- Male
- Female

15. How many miles do you live from your *target* grandchild?

_____ Miles

16. Is the *target* grandchild your son's child or your daughter's child?

- My son's child
- My daughter's child

17. Is the *target* grandchild a biological grandchild or a step-grandchild?

- biological grandchild
- step-grandchild

Your Relationship with the Target Grandchild

18. During the past six months, how often have you seen the target grandchild face-to-face, either in your home or somewhere else? Was it...

- Not at all
- Less than once a month
- One to three times a month
- About once a week
- Several times a week
- Daily

19. How would you describe your current relationship with the target grandchild?

- Poor
- Fair
- Good
- Excellent

20. How close do you feel to the target grandchild? Do you feel...

- Not at all close
- Not very close
- Somewhat close
- Pretty close
- Very close

21. During the past 12 months how often did you and the target grandchild.... (Please check one answer for each.)

	Never ▼	Once ▼	2-3 times ▼	4 or more times ▼
Discuss the target grandchild's plans for the future?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attend an event in which the target grandchild was involved, such as a play, sports competition, or musical event?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do activities together in the community, such as going to a museum, sports events, or shopping?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talk about your childhood?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discuss his/her personal problems?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work on projects together, such as crafts, repairs, or things around the house?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

22. How often.... (Please check one answer for each.)

	Never ▼	Sometimes ▼	Often ▼
Do you give advice to the target grandchild?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the target grandchild have the chance to learn skills from you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you a companion and friend to the target grandchild?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you a voice of wisdom and experience for the target grandchild?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you serve as a source of family traditions, stories and history?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

23. How much does the target grandchild make you feel appreciated, loved, or cared for?

- Not at all
- A little
- Some
- A lot

24. In general, how much conflict, tension, or disagreement do you feel there is between you and the target grandchild?

- None at all
- A little
- Some
- A lot

Your Relationship with Your Son/Daughter

25. How would you describe your current relationship with the target grandchild's parent (your son/daughter)?

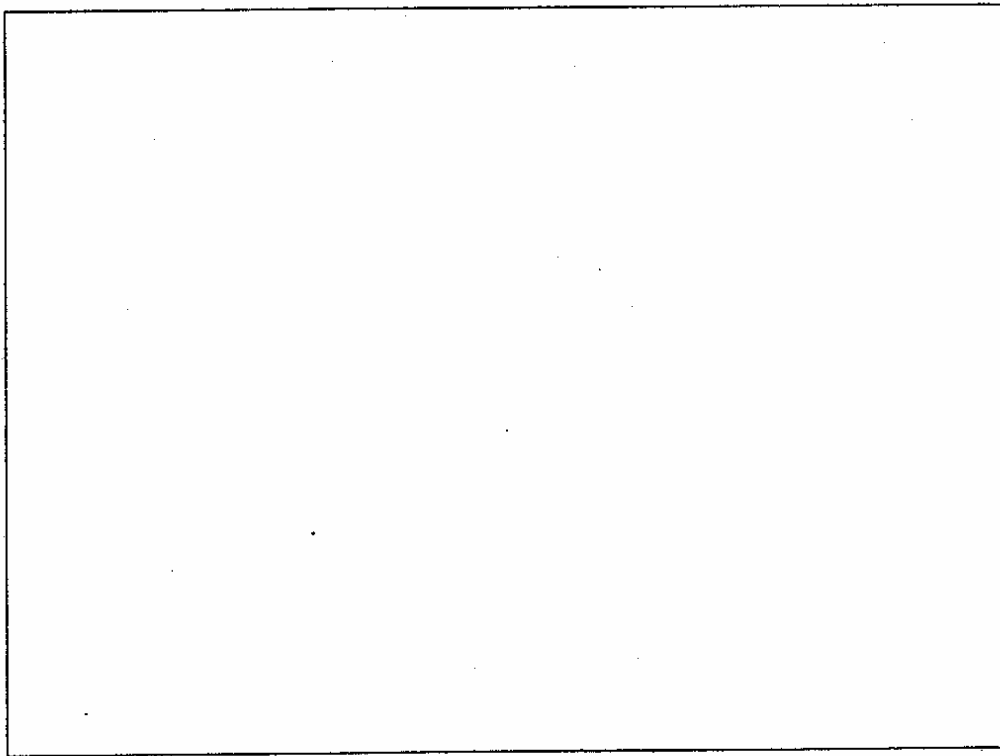
- Poor
- Fair
- Good
- Excellent

Grandparent Roles

26. For the last questions, please consider all of your grandchildren. Indicate if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement regarding grandparent roles. (Please check one answer for each.)

	Strongly Disagree ▼	Disagree ▼	Agree ▼	Strongly Agree ▼
As a grandparent it's important to me that my opinion influences other people in the family.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My grandchildren are important because they are the ones who will carry on the family line.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
One way I think of grandchildren is to think that a part of me will keep living after I, myself, have died.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To me a valuable part of grandparenthood is that my grandchildren are involved in my life and in the things I do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
As a grandparent, it is important to feel needed and helpful.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel that my grandchildren belong to me as well as to their parents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your assistance in providing this information is very much appreciated. If there is anything else you would like to tell us about this survey, or your experiences as a grandparent, please do so in the space provided below.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the respondent to provide additional comments or feedback regarding the survey or their experience as a grandparent.

Please be sure and return your survey to the researcher.

VITA

Anita Glee Absher

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

*Thesis: DIVORCED GRANDPARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE NATURE
OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH GRANDCHILDREN*

Major Field: Human Environmental Sciences

Area of Specialization: Human Development and Family Science

Biographical:

Education: Graduated from Canute High School, Canute, Oklahoma in May, 1974; received Bachelor of Science degree in Vocational Family and Consumer Science from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 1978; received a Master of Science degree from the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in May, 1983. Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree with a major in Human Development and Family Science (Gerontology Emphasis) at Oklahoma State University in July, 2005.

Experience: Adjunct Faculty in Family Life Education Department at the University of Central Oklahoma, 1983-2005; Nutrition Educator for Child Nutrition Services, Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1989-2005; Nutrition Educator for Dairy Max, 1983-88; Family and Consumer Science teacher at Nicoma Park Junior High, 1978-82.

Professional Memberships: Association for Gerontology in Higher Education, Sigma Phi Omega, National Council on Family Relations, Oklahoma on Family Relations, Campus Council on Family Relations.

Name: Anita Glee Absher

Date of Degree: July, 2005

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: DIVORCED GRANDPARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE NATURE OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH GRANDCHILDREN

Pages in Study: 94

Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Human Development and Family Science

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study was to determine if the relationship between ever divorced grandparents and their grandchildren was different than the relationship between never divorced grandparents and their grandchildren and if so to describe these characteristics. Participants in this study were 101 grandparents who had grandchildren in the 12-18 year old range. Forty of the grandparents were ever divorced and 61 grandparents were ever married and never divorced. Grandparents were given a 26 question survey to identify level of saliency, frequency of contact and shared activities, level of relationship quality, and time spent in traditional grandparenting roles. One way ANOVA and a t-test were used to assess the six hypotheses. Multiple regression was used as an additional analysis to determine the degree of relationship between demographic variables and dependent variables.

Findings and Conclusions: The saliency of the grandparent grandchild relationship, frequency of contact and shared activities, and time spent in traditional grandparenting roles did not significantly differ between ever divorced and ever-married grandparents. With level of relationship quality ever divorced grandmothers had significantly higher relationship quality with their grandchildren than did ever divorced grandfathers. Relationship quality was also impacted by the strength of the parent-grandparent bond which strengthened the grandparent grandchild relationship. Additional analyses of demographic factors suggested that geographic distance was negatively related to the relationship quality, frequency of contact and shared activities, and time spent in traditional grandparenting roles negatively. Families and educators need to address the issue of grandparents divorcing and the impact this will have on families.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Beulah Hirschlein

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By

Anita Glee Absher

July, 2005