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Affectionate Communication Is Associated With Emotional and Relational Resources in the Grandparent-Grandchild Relationship

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ABSTRACT

Grounded in affection exchange theory (AET; Floyd, 2006), this study examined the extent to which affection received from grandparents is associated with grandchildren's perceptions of their grandparents and their grandparent-grandchild relationship (in the form of emotional closeness, shared family identity, and perceived availability of social support). Young adult grandchildren ($N = 171$) completed several instruments in reference to their relationship with a specific grandparent. The results of multiple regression analyses generally supported the hypotheses that received affection is associated positively with grandchildren's perceptions of their grandparents and their grandparent-grandchild relationship. These findings support AET's utility in the grandparent-grandchild relationship and the notion that grandparents often influence their grandchildren's perceptions of their family.

KEYWORDS

Affection exchange theory; emotional closeness; grandchildren; grandparents; shared family identity; social support

For many young adults, most intergenerational interactions occur with their grandparents (Lin & Harwood, 2003). As in most family relationships, quality interaction is essential to maintaining emotionally close, satisfying, and enduring grandparent-grandchild (GP-GC) relationships (Lin & Harwood, 2003; Mansson, 2013e; Mansson, Myers, & Turner, 2010; Ruiz & Silverstein, 2007; Uhlenberg & Kirby, 1998). The GP-GC relationship and the emotional bond established between grandparents and grandchildren are of the utmost importance to grandchildren's development (Hartshorne & Manaster, 1982; Kornhaber, 1985). Throughout the GP-GC relational life-span, grandparents may influence their grandchildren's attitudes toward aging (Harwood, 2007), education (Brussoni & Boon, 1998), and love and marriage (O'Neil & Klein, 2008). Grandparents also influence their grandchildren's connection to other family members (Lin, Harwood, & Bonnesen, 2002; Soliz, 2007; Soliz & Harwood, 2006), and grandparents are often

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perceived as supportive (Soliz, 2007, 2008). Given the significant role of grandparents in the lives of grandchildren, it is surprising that this relationship is still relatively understudied compared to other family relationships (Soliz & Lin, 2013). Recent studies indicate that grandparents' communicative behaviors are salient predictors of grandchildren's perceptions of their grandparents, their quality of GP-GC relationships, and their connection to other family members (Lin & Harwood, 2003; Soliz, 2007; Soliz & Harwood, 2006). One aspect of grandparent communication that has received increased scholarly attention is the communication of affection (Mansson, 2013a, 2013b), given its role in establishing and maintaining satisfying relationships in familial and nonfamilial relationships and the GP-GC dyad (Silverstein, Giarrusso, & Bengtson, 1998).

Considering that the GP-GC relationship is often a close family dyad, it may be easy to assume that GP-GC affection is enacted in the same manner as in parent-child relationships. However, GP-GC relationships are unique from other family relationships primarily because GP-GC interactions are not immune from the intergenerational barriers and attitudes that exist in society (e.g., negative attitudes toward older adults and aging, age segregation). Given the age differences and, at times, negative age attitudes that pervade intergenerational relationships (including grandparent relationships), the relational implications of certain behaviors often differ from *intragenerational* interactions (Soliz & Lin, 2013). Self-disclosure, for instance, can be perceived as positive and serve as a communicative pathway toward intergenerational bonding as is often the case in many of our relationships. Yet, for younger adults, one of the behaviors most detrimental to positive intergenerational interactions is *excessive* self-disclosure (Barker, 2007); even more so in intergenerational interactions compared to those with peers.

In terms of affection, this behavior could be perceived as positive and relationally enhancing. However, there is also the possibility that aspects of affection could be associated with more negative-views of intergenerational interactions (e.g., overuse of terms of endearment, excessive affection to older grandchildren). Thus, as we continue to enhance our understanding of how affection functions in families, recognizing unique aspects of various family relational types necessitates inquiries into these relationships. It is with this in mind that we focus the current inquiry on the GP-GC relationship. This focus not only enhances our understanding of this specific behavior but also allows us to add to the growing but still underrepresented research on grandparent relationships (Soliz & Lin, 2013). In this inquiry, we examine the extent to which grandchildren's received affection from their grandparents is associated with three salient aspects of quality GP-GC relationships: grandchildren's emotional closeness to their grandparents, GP-GC shared family identity, and perceived availability of social support. The

study is framed within the theoretical perspective of affection exchange theory, described below.

Affection exchange theory and gp-gc affection

Affection exchange theory (AET: Floyd, 2006) conceives of affectionate communication as an adaptive behavior that contributes to humans' evolutionary motivations for viability and fertility. Assuming the Darwinian principle of selective fitness, AET argues that affectionate communication confers both relational and physiological benefits that increase an individual's relative likelihood of survival and procreation. Based on that premise, AET predicts that affection is associated with the positivity and success of close relationships. That prediction has particular gravity in familial relationships, given that families contribute substantially to individual survival and reproductive success.

Although AET has been tested primarily in romantic relationships and parent-child relationships, recent studies (Mansson, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2013d, 2013e, 2014; Mansson & Booth-Butterfield, 2011) indicate that AET provides an appropriate framework through which to examine the GP-GC relationship. However, the types of affection grandparents express for their grandchildren differ from the types of affection expressed in other close dyadic familial relationships. Specifically, grandparents express love and esteem (i.e., overt expressions of love, compliments, relationship importance, and recipient self-worth), caring (i.e., expressed concern and interest by asking questions about their grandchildren's lives and being good listeners), memories and humor (i.e., telling stories about their lives as well as the use of jokes and humor), and celebratory (i.e., acknowledging special occasions in their grandchildren's lives by sending birthday and holiday cards or giving their grandchildren money) affection for their grandchildren (Mansson, 2013e).

These types of grandparental affection enhance grandchildren's perceptions of their grandparents and their GP-GC relationship, such that they like and trust their grandparents and feel relationally satisfied, communicatively satisfied, and committed to them. Moreover, when grandchildren receive high levels of affection from their grandparents, they are both socially/ relationally and psychologically healthy. For instance, grandchildren who receive affection from their grandparents are generally socially active and comfortable with closeness (Mansson & Booth-Butterfield, 2011) and are simultaneously less likely to suffer from psychological problems such as stress, depression, and loneliness (Mansson, 2013b). However, scholars also have argued that emotional closeness, shared family identity, and perceived availability of social support are central factors in the quality of the GP-GC relationship (Lin & Harwood, 2003; Soliz, 2007; Soliz & Harwood, 2006),

which, according to AET should be associated positively with received affection. Moreover, these relationship dimensions are indicators of quality GP-GC relationships, which have important implications for the grandchildren's well-being. Specifically, these relationship dimensions foster more positive perceptions of older adults and, ultimately, more-positive aging (Soliz & Harwood, 2006; Soliz & Lin, 2013). Therefore, investigating the role of affectionate communication relevant to these relationship dimensions is a necessary step to further differentiate positive and negative GP-GC relationships.

Emotional closeness

Emotional closeness, which refers to a “sense of shared experiences, trust, concern, and enjoyment of the relationship” (Lee, Mancini, & Maxwell, 1990, p. 433) is a central component of GP-GC relational solidarity (Lin & Harwood, 2003). Although GP-GC emotional closeness remains fairly stable throughout the relational lifespan (Kam & Nussbaum, 2008), research indicates that grandchildren's emotional closeness with their grandparents is associated with both structural and communicative aspects of the GP-GC relationship. In terms of structural aspects, grandchildren develop close emotional bonds with grandparents who live near the grandchildren (Folwell & Grant, 2006) and with grandparents who are involved in their grandchildren's lives (Holladay et al., 1998), such as partaking in family gatherings and grandchildren's sporting events (Harwood, 2000; Lin & Harwood, 2003). Moreover, in accordance with kin selection theory (Hamilton, 1964), grandchildren also feel closer to their maternal grandparents than to their paternal grandparents, on average (Hartshorne & Manaster, 1982; Hoffman, 1980).

With respect to communication, grandchildren perceive the GP-GC emotional bond to be strong when their grandparents willingly talk about a variety of topics (Kam & Nussbaum, 2008), engage in honest and genuine self-disclosure (Downs, 1988), and accommodate their communication style appropriately (Folwell & Grant, 2006; Harwood, 2000). In a similar vein, grandchildren who receive affectionate communication from their grandparents are relationally satisfied and trust their grandparents (Mansson, 2013a, 2013e), both of which are components of emotional closeness (Lee et al., 1990). Thus, grandchildren are likely to feel emotionally close to affectionate grandparents. To test this idea, the following hypothesis is posited:

H1: Affection received from grandparents is associated positively with grandchildren's perceived emotional closeness with their grandparents.

Shared family identity

Shared family identity represents the perception of a common, collective identity with another family member (Soliz & Harwood, 2006). Families are typically perceived as homogenous entities and function as an important and influential *ingroup* for many. Yet, to understand the complexity of family dynamics, it is important to attend to diversity across individual family members, including salient and often divergent social identities (e.g., race-ethnicity, religion, political affiliation) or familial factions in stepfamilies or in-law relationships (Soliz & Rittenour, 2012). The notion of shared family identity is based on the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner et al., 2000), which stipulates that perceived differences between individuals can be transcended when the relationship is conceptualized as a common ingroup—in this case, family. For instance, shared family identity is negatively associated with recognition of racial-ethnic differences in multiracial-ethnic families (Soliz, Thorson, & Rittenour, 2009), thereby reflecting relational solidarity.

Shared family identity is especially significant in GP-FC relationships given the intergenerational context of this family dyad. We live in an age-segregated society (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005) that is still fraught with negative attitudes toward older adults (Kite, Stockdale, Whitley, & Johnson, 2005). Thus, many of the barriers that plague intergenerational relationships outside of the family (e.g., negative age stereotypes, discomfort in intergenerational interactions) also characterize certain intergenerational relationships *within* the family. Soliz and Harwood (2006) demonstrated that a distinguishing feature of positive or negative GP-GC relationships is the extent to which they perceive a shared family identity as opposed to relationships in which age differences and potential intergenerational barriers are salient in the interactions (i.e., age salience). Perceptions of shared family identity are constituted in the interactions and communication within the family relationship—for instance, communication that is more person centered, that recognizes and affirms the identity and experience of another, and that is devoid of destructive conflict characterizes relationships in which shared family identity is present (Beck & Ledbetter, 2013; Soliz & Harwood, 2006; Soliz et al., 2009). Given that affectionate communication is a person-centered behavior focusing on caring and esteem toward another, it likely minimizes perceptions of difference and amplifies perceptions of collective identity. Moreover, AET postulates that received affection may enhance people's perceptions of their relationships and relational partners. To test these ideas, the following hypothesis is posited:

H2: Affection received from grandparents is associated positively with grandchildren's perceived shared family identity with their grandparents.

Social support

Social support and supportive communication are integral aspects of enduring relationships, as person-centered, comforting messages are key to personal and relational well-being (MacGeorge, Feng, & Burleson, 2011). Early work on GP-GC relationships highlights the supportive role that grandparents play in the lives of grandchildren (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1992), and supportive communication has been linked to grandchild well-being, especially in times of familial disruption or stress such as illness and/or disability (Woodbridge, Buys, & Miller, 2011), caregiving (Hayslip & Kaminski, 2008), or following divorce of parents (Soliz, 2008). In fact, serving in a supportive capacity—both tangibly (e.g., financial) and intangibly (e.g., emotional)—may not be simply a common characteristic of GP-GC relationships but an *expectation* in the relationship (Falk & Falk, 2002). Thus, identifying what behaviors may differentiate perceptions of sufficient social support in a GP-GC relationship from those in which supportive expectations are not fulfilled is an important step in understanding the dynamics of solidarity in this intergenerational family relationship.

Although affectionate communication may not explicitly focus on emotional support or comforting, the presence of behaviors that demonstrate caring (which is one type of affection grandparents express for their grandchildren) and warmth likely engender a sense of social support and availability of social support in the GP-GC relationship. In fact, affectionate communication has been considered a type of social support (Floyd, 2006; Floyd & Morman, 1998; Goldsmith, 2004). Consequently grandchildren who receive affection from their grandparents may also consider their grandparents to be a source of social support. Thus, to test this idea, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H3: Affection received from grandparents is associated positively with grandchildren's perceived availability of social support from their grandparents.

Method

Participants

The participants in the current study were young adult grandchildren ($N = 171$: 67 men, 104 women; $M_{\text{age}} = 19.41$, $SD = 1.63$; range 18–29 years) enrolled in introductory communication, psychology, and sociology courses at a small public university in the northeastern United States. Of the participants, 73 were first-year students, 85 were sophomores, 8 were juniors, and 5 were seniors. The racial-ethnic background of the participants was fairly representative of national statistics as the participants self-identified as African

American (21.3%), Asian American (5.3%), Caucasian (61.3%), Hispanic (11.3%), and Native American (.7%), respectively.

Procedures and instruments

The participants were asked to complete a questionnaire during regular class time. After completing some basic demographic items, they were asked to “think about the grandparent whose birthday is closest to your own and then complete the following questions about that specific grandparent. If you do not know your grandparents’ birthdays, think about the grandparent with whom you most recently communicated and then complete the following questions about that specific grandparent.” This approach to selecting grandparents was followed to allow for diversity of GP-GC relationships as opposed to more-traditional methods in which participants are asked to consider a *favorite* grandparent or the grandparent with whom they had the *most* contact. Next, the participants were asked to complete a few basic demographic questions about their target grandparent. The grandparents ($M_{\text{age}} = 74.13$, $SD = 9.39$; range = 56–98 years) on whom participants reported were maternal grandmothers (49.1%), maternal grandfathers (15.4%), paternal grandfathers (8.3%), and paternal grandmothers (27.2%). The grandchildren reported that, on average, they interact with their grandparents 16 times per academic semester ($M = 16.32$, $SD = 22.27$, range = 0–120). Finally, the participants completed a series of established instruments, which were the Grandchildren’s Received Affection Scale (Mansson, 2013e), the Closeness Measure (Harwood, 2000), the Shared Family Identity Scale (Soliz & Harwood, 2006), and an abbreviated version of the Quality of Relationships Inventory (Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1991).

Grandchildren’s received affection scale

This 17-item instrument measures the extent to which grandchildren receive four types of affection from their grandparents: love and esteem, caring, memories and humor, and celebratory. Sample items are, “My grandparent tells me s/he loves me” and “My grandparent asks me about my life.” Responses were elicited on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). This scale has been used successfully in prior GP-GC research. Mansson (2013e) reported reliability coefficients ranging from .73 to .91 for the four factors of this scale. In the present study, the reliability coefficients were .91 ($M = 29.05$, $SD = 6.57$) for the love and esteem factor; .92 ($M = 31.32$, $SD = 5.81$) for the caring factor; .93 ($M = 22.08$, $SD = 6.27$) for the memories and humor factor; and .84 ($M = 16.66$, $SD = 4.99$) for the celebratory factor.

Closeness measure

This is a one-item instrument that measures the extent to which the grandchildren feel emotionally close to their grandparents. Although single-item

measures are often criticized, Harwood (2000) argued that the clarity of this item (“How emotionally close do you feel to this grandparent?”) is sufficient to adequately assess emotional closeness. Likewise, it was important to use a closeness measure that did not incorporate aspects of affection, collective identity, and support. The responses were elicited on a 5-point semantic differential scale ranging from 1 (*very distant*) to 5 (*very close*). This one-item measure has been used successfully in prior GP-GC research.

Shared family identity scale

This six-item instrument measures the extent to which grandchildren feel that they and their grandparents belong to a common ingroup. Sample items are “I am proud to be in the same family as this grandparent” and “This grandparent is an important part of my family.” Responses were elicited on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). This scale has been used successfully in prior GP-GC research. Soliz (2007) reported a reliability coefficient of .95 for this scale. In the present study, the reliability coefficient was .86 ($M = 37.64$, $SD = 6.13$).

Quality of relationships inventory

This 25-item instrument measures three dimensions of dyadic relationships: social support, relationship depth, and conflicts. In this study, the participants completed only the six-item social support subscale. The items were revised slightly to reflect the GP-GC relationship. Sample items are “I can turn to my grandparent for advice about problems” and “I can count on my grandparent for help if I have a problem.” Responses were solicited on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). This scale has been used successfully in prior GP-GC research. Soliz (2007) reported a reliability coefficient of .97 for this scale. In the present study, the reliability coefficient was .93 ($M = 33.84$, $SD = 8.12$).

Data analyses

Preliminary Pearson correlational analyses (see Table 1) were conducted among all the variables. Three separate multiple regression analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses. The four types of grandchildren’s received affection (i.e., love and esteem, caring, memories and humor, and celebratory) were entered simultaneously as independent variables, whereas emotional closeness, shared family identity, and social support served as criterion variables. Because the four factors of the GRAS were found to be interrelated in the preliminary correlational analyses, the tolerance statistics (TOL) and the variance inflation factor (VIF) were assessed in all three multiple regression analyses to ensure that multicollinearity did not exist among the independent variables. The lowest TOL was .41 and the highest VIF was 2.44.

Table 1. Pearson correlations among study variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Love and esteem	–						
2. Caring	.68	–					
3. Memories and humor	.35	.50	–				
4. Celebratory	.31	.49	.42	–			
5. Emotional closeness	.58	.57	.43	.42	–		
6. Shared family identity	.53	.66	.45	.41	.59	–	
7. Social support	.64	.72	.58	.45	.64	.61	–

Notes. All correlations are significant at $p < .001$.

Following the recommendations offered by Myers (1990) and Mertler and Vannatta (2002) that $TOL \leq .10$ and $VIF \geq 10$ be interpreted as indicative of multicollinearity, it was determined that multicollinearity was not a concern in this study.

Results

The multiple regression results are presented in Table 2. The first hypothesis posited that affection received from grandparents would be associated positively with grandchildren’s perceived emotional closeness with their grandparents. The results of a multiple regression analysis revealed a significant model, $R^2 = .43$, adjusted $R^2 = .41$, $F(4, 155) = 28.83$, $p < .001$. Grandchildren’s reports of received love and esteem ($\beta = .34$, $t = 3.96$, $p < .001$, $pr^2 = .30$), caring ($\beta = .18$, $t = 1.91$, $p < .05$, $pr^2 = .15$), memories and humor ($\beta = .14$, $t = 2.00$, $p < .05$, $pr^2 = .16$), and celebratory ($\beta = .16$, $t = 2.21$, $p < .05$, $pr^2 = .18$) affection were associated positively with grandchildren’s perceived emotional closeness with their grandparents. Thus, full support was found for this hypothesis.

The second hypothesis posited that affection received from grandparents would be associated positively with grandchildren’s perceived shared family identity with their grandparents. The results of a multiple regression analysis revealed a significant model, $R^2 = .47$, adjusted $R^2 = .45$, $F(4, 163) = 35.77$, $p < .001$. Grandchildren’s reports of received love and esteem ($\beta = .15$, $t = 1.89$, $p < .05$, $pr^2 = .15$), caring ($\beta = .45$, $t = 5.09$, $p < .001$, $pr^2 = .37$), and memories and humor ($\beta = .14$, $t = 2.05$, $p < .05$, $pr^2 = .16$) affection were

Table 2. Results summary of multiple regression analyses.

	EC			SFI			SS		
	<i>t</i>	β	pr^2	<i>t</i>	β	pr^2	<i>t</i>	β	pr^2
1. Love and esteem	3.96	.34***	.30	1.89	.15*	.15	3.90	.25**	.29
2. Caring	1.91	.18*	.15	5.09	.45***	.37	5.00	.37***	.36
3. Memories and humor	2.00	.14*	.16	2.05	.14*	.16	4.01	.28***	.36
4. Celebratory	2.21	.16*	.18	1.22	.10	.07	1.40	.13	.07

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

Notes. EC = emotional closeness, SFI = shared family identity, SS = social support.

associated positively with grandchildren's shared family identity with their grandparents. However, a statistically significant positive association was not found between celebratory affection and shared family identity ($\beta = .10$, $t = 1.22$, $p = .23$, $pr^2 = .07$). Thus, partial support was found for this hypothesis.

The third hypothesis posited that affection received from grandparents would be associated positively with grandchildren's perceived availability of social support from their grandparents. The results of a multiple regression analysis revealed a significant model, $R^2 = .62$, adjusted $R^2 = .61$, $F(4, 164) = 67.59$, $p < .001$. Grandchildren's reports of received love and esteem ($\beta = .25$, $t = 3.90$, $p < .001$, $pr^2 = .29$), caring ($\beta = .37$, $t = 5.00$, $p < .001$, $pr^2 = .36$), and memories and humor ($\beta = .28$, $t = 4.91$, $p < .001$, $pr^2 = .36$) affection were associated positively with grandchildren's perceived availability of social support from their grandparents. However, a statistically significant positive association was not found between celebratory affection and perceived availability of social support ($\beta = .13$, $t = 1.40$, $p = .16$, $pr^2 = .07$). Thus, partial support was found for this hypothesis.

Discussion

This study examined the receipt of affectionate communication from grandparents and its associations with emotional closeness, shared family identity, and perceived availability of social support for young adult grandchildren. Like parents, grandparents have the potential to contribute to an individual's survival—and therefore, to the individual's ability to procreate—because grandparents provide resources important for survival, such as material support, social support, and emotional support. On the basis of AET, we therefore hypothesized that affectionate communication would be associated positively with these relational resources. Affectionate communication was operationally defined to comprise four forms: love and esteem, caring, memories and humor, and celebratory affection.

The predictions received substantial support. Multiple regressions revealed that a combination of the four forms of affection was significantly associated with emotional closeness, whereas combinations of love and esteem, caring, and memories and humor were associated with shared family identity and social support. Thus, the communication of affection in grandparental relationships—particularly through sharing love and esteem, caring, and memories and humor—is associated with important emotional and relational resources for young adults. In line with current findings, previous studies (Mansson, 2013a, 2013e) have indicated that celebratory affection is the least influential type of grandparent affection. The lack of significant associations between grandchildren's received affection and their shared family identity and perceived availability of support may simply be due to the nature of the

celebratory affection. Unlike the love and esteem, caring, and memories and humor factors, the celebratory factor does not require grandparents and grandchildren to communicate directly. Instead, these behaviors involve sending congratulatory cards or money on special occasions.

Moreover, grandchildren often expect their grandparents to be generous (Kennedy, 1990), and it is therefore possible that celebratory behaviors are expected and consequently perceived as less affectionate than love and esteem, caring, and memories and humor. Additionally, for centuries, grandparents were essential to their grandchildren's survival, which Floyd (2006) argued is ensured, in part, through affectionate communication. However, the use of celebratory affection in the GP-GC relationship is a comparatively novel communicative behavior, which likely is influenced by the grandparents' socioeconomic status as it involves giving grandchildren gifts, money, and cards.

Notable in the current study, however, are the omnibus effect sizes, with adjusted R^2 values ranging from .41 to .61, indicating sizeable amounts of variance accounted for in emotional and relational resources by affectionate communication. Similar findings were obtained by Soliz et al. (2009), who found that grandparents' self-disclosure is associated positively with grandchildren's shared family identity and perceived availability of social support from their grandparents. In fact, the memories and humor items of the Grandchildren's Received Affection Scale used in this study reflect grandparents' self-disclosure (e.g., tells me stories about his/her life, tells me about fun memories from his/her past). As such, our findings both corroborate and extend extant GP-GC research.

These findings contribute to a growing literature documenting the importance of affection in the family. Whereas previous studies have identified positive correlates of affection in marital and cohabiting relationships (Floyd et al., 2009), parent-child relationships (Morman & Floyd, 2002), sibling relationships (Myers, Byrnes, Frisby, & Mansson, 2011), and sibling-in-law relationships (Floyd & Morr, 2003), the present findings demonstrate that the link between affection and other important resources extends also to the grandparental relationship. The logic underlying AET would predict that, in genetic relationships, affection becomes less vital as a resource the further removed people are from each other genetically. Thus, for instance, it should be more important to full biological siblings and to parents and children (who share, on average, 50% of their DNA) than to half siblings or grandparents and grandchildren (who share, on average, 25% of their DNA). Nevertheless, 25% shared DNA is considered the third-most-genetically-close relationship as only identical twin relationships (i.e., 100% shared DNA) and parent-child relationships (i.e., 50% shared DNA) are genetically closer than the GP-GC relationship (X23andMe, 2016). Thus, the close associations established between received affection from grandparents and

grandchildren's perceived grandparental emotional closeness, shared family identity, and availability of social support obtained in this study bolster AET's utility in the context of grandparental relationships. It should be noted, however, that this does not necessarily mean that genetically close relationships are more affectionate than genetically distant ones, only that affection is a more important resource for viability and fertility in genetically closer relationships (Floyd, 2006). Although Mansson and Booth-Butterfield (2011) reported that grandparents express more affection for their biological grandchildren than their nonbiological grandchildren, this hypothesis awaits further investigation needed to draw more definitive conclusions.

It is important to point out that although affectionate communication was significantly associated with emotional closeness, shared family identity, and social support in the current study, this was a cross-sectional study in which correlational analyses were used to test the hypotheses. A more suitable approach to study the GP-GC relationship may be to conduct longitudinal studies. Longitudinal studies would enable scholars to examine the extent to which grandchildren's received affection from their grandparents differs throughout the relational lifespan. Such studies may be of particular value as extant research is somewhat contradictory in that GP-GC relational closeness is believed to remain stable throughout the relational lifespan whereas GP-GC interaction frequency decreases as the grandchildren enter young adulthood (Bridges, Roe, Dunn, & O'Connor, 2007; Kam & Nussbaum, 2008). One possible explanation for the decreased interaction frequency may be that grandparents simply have fewer opportunities to interact with their young adult grandchildren as they move away to attend college. Another reason for the decreased interaction frequency may be that grandparents do not have the resources and ability to provide the type of support and affection young adults may desire, such as monetary support or attending important events in their grandchildren's lives. This suggests that older grandchildren may receive less affection from their grandparents compared to younger grandchildren.

Contrary to this line of reasoning, Mansson and Booth-Butterfield (2011) argued that GP-GC interaction frequency is not significantly associated with grandchildren's received affection from their grandparents. It also is possible that the factors contributing to grandchildren's emotional closeness with their grandparents evolve over time, which bolsters the need for longitudinal GP-GC studies. Moreover, it also stands to reason that grandchildren's emotional closeness, shared family identity, and perceived availability of social support influence grandchildren's communicative behaviors. Extant GP-GC relational maintenance research indicates that grandchildren actively sustain their GP-GC relationships with emotionally supportive grandparents and when they are communicatively satisfied with their grandparents (Mansson et al., 2010). As such, emotional closeness, shared family identity, and social support may mediate the relationship between received affection

and grandchildren's use of relational maintenance behaviors with their grandparents throughout the relational lifespan.

Affection received from their grandparents may influence not only how grandchildren communicate with their grandparents but also how they interact with others. Exploring this would contribute to the current studies linking GP-GC relationships to attitudes toward older adults and aging. Grounded in an intergroup contact paradigm (Pettigrew, 1998), these studies are premised on the idea that grandparents and grandchildren are, not only family members, they also represent two distinct social groups: younger adults and older adults. As such, the relational and communicative dynamics of grandparent relationships can improve or bolster negative attitudes toward older adults and aging (Harwood, Hewstone, Paolini, & Voci, 2005; Soliz & Harwood, 2006). As such, affectionate communication with a grandparent has the potential to ameliorate younger adults' negative attitudes toward older adults, as this person-centered behavior may facilitate the recognition that the age difference need not be a barrier in intergenerational relationships. There are also potential implications for relationships, in general. Research has shown, for instance, that men who receive high levels of affection from their mothers tend to be more affectionate toward their romantic partners (Davis & Haynes, 2012). These studies support AET's postulate that received affection contributes to individuals' likelihood of establishing significant human pair-bonds. Considering the close and affectionate nature of the GP-GC relationship, it also is possible that affection received from grandparents will influence how affectionate grandchildren are toward their own relational partners and ultimately toward their own children.

Although the current findings are correlational, their magnitude and consistency may call for efforts to craft and test behavioral interventions aimed at teaching and reinforcing prosocial communication skills within families. To the extent that family relationships—including those between grandparents and grandchildren—have significant adaptive benefits for individuals (as AET and, more generally, evolutionary psychology, both posit), even effecting small improvements in family communication skill can pay long-term dividends in terms of mental and physical wellness, psychosocial adjustment, and relational stability. Examples of such interventions could include efforts to increase the frequency and quality of GP-GC communication via electronically mediated means. Creating such interventions—and testing their feasibility and efficacy—could be a fruitful next step in this line of inquiry.

Another potential area of future research is to examine GP-GC affectionate communication from the grandparents' perspective. AET conceives of affectionate communication as beneficial not only to receivers but also to senders. Considering the inevitable decline in physiological health experienced by most people as they grow old, it may be of particular importance to

examine the association between grandparents' expressed affection and their own physiological well-being, such as their heart rate and blood pressure, which are both commonly problematic among older people (Izzo, Levy, & Black, 2000; Kuo et al., 1999).

Along with their declining physiological health, many older people lose their life partners and experience financial concerns, which make loneliness, stress, and general mental well-being prominent psychological health concerns among older people (Bosse, Aldwin, Levenson, & Workman-Daniels, 1989; Creecy, Berg, & Wright, 1985; Segal, Bogaards, Becker, & Chatman, 1999). However, these psychological health problems can, in part, be combatted through the use of expressed affection for their grandchildren as Mansson (2014) reported that highly affectionate grandparents are in good general mental health and they report low levels of stress and loneliness.

The limitations that surround this study are also indicative of future research needs. The first limitation is that the participants were not asked to report their grandparents' ethnicity. Soliz et al. (2009) argued that "there are family communication processes that are unique and important to relational solidarity in multiracial/ethnic families" (p. 829). This may be of particular importance when studying affectionate communication, as people's tendencies to convey affection toward others vary across cultures (Hofstede, 2001). Moreover, multigenerational households are more prominent in collectivistic cultures (e.g., Latin/South American cultures) than in individualistic cultures (e.g., the United States). As such, it is possible that Latin/Hispanic grandchildren develop closer and more affectionate relationships with their grandparents than Caucasian grandchildren do, which warrants future research attention. Relatedly, researchers may also consider exploring the extent to which expressed and received affection vary across cultures. Much of the intercultural research to date (e.g., Mansson et al., 2016) support Hofstede and McCrae's (2004) assertion that people's cultural backgrounds shape their traits, which in turn are closely associated with their communicative behaviors (McCroskey & Richmond, 2006).

A second potential limitation of this study is that the grandchildren's birth order, geographical distance from their grandparents, GP-GC lineage, the importance of parents (i.e., parents mediate the GP-GC relationship), and whether the grandchildren were raised by their grandparents or co-resided with their grandparents were not considered in this study. Prior GP-GC studies indicate that these factors are associated with grandchildren's feelings of GP-GC closeness (Folwell & Grant, 2006; Hartshorne & Manaster, 1982; Mansson & Booth-Butterfield, 2011). Therefore, these factors may also covary with grandchildren's received affectionate communication from grandparents and should consequently be included as control variables in subsequent investigations.

In sum, this study contributes to a continuously growing body of research on intergenerational affection. Although other family relationships (i.e., parent-child and sibling relationships) are important to young adults, the changing social and familial trends imply that the GP-GC relationship is becoming increasingly important. However, due to teen pregnancies, parental incarceration, substance abuse (Szinovacz, 1998), “diversifying families, increased life expectancy, growing numbers of dual-worker households, and higher rates of family breakdown, grandparents are now playing an increasing role in their grandchildren’s lives” (Griggs, Tan, Buchanan, Attar-Schwartz, & Flouri, 2010, p. 200). Many parents are therefore unable to stay home and raise their children; consequently, grandparents often fill the parental role by caring for their grandchildren. Moreover, life expectancy continues to rise, which enables grandparents and grandchildren to develop longer-lasting relationships (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000; Szinovacz, 1998). These continually changing social and familial trends bolster the need for continued examinations of the GP-GC relationship. Thus, we intend to further our knowledge of how grandparents’ communicative behaviors are associated with their grandchildren’s development and attitudes toward the establishment of other dyadic relationships in our future research endeavors.

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