

# *Variations in Grandparenting*

MARGARET M. MUELLER

*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

BRENDA WILHELM

*Mesa State College, Colorado*

GLEN H. ELDER, JR.

*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

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Grandparents are increasingly playing a significant role in the lives of their grandchildren, though surprisingly little is known about what actually happens within a grandparent-grandchild relationship. Researchers have often employed variable-centered approaches to predict levels of contact or quality in grandparent-grandchild relationships, masking variations in patterns of experience. We use a person-centered clustering methodology to identify patterns in the attributes and behaviors of older Americans who describe their relationship with an adolescent grandchild. Data are drawn from the Iowa Youth and Families Project and the Iowa Single Parent Project. These data include indicators of face-to-face contact, authority and discipline, instrumental assistance, interpersonal support, intimacy, and shared activities. Five distinct clusters of grandparents emerge from the analysis, who we have identified as influential, supportive, passive, authority-oriented, and detached. These five types are differentiated by relevant social factors and have implications for the quality and closeness of the grandparent-grandchild relationship.

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*Though grandparenting has recently become* a flourishing domain of family research, we have limited knowledge of the actual content of grandparent-grandchild relations. This is especially the case once grandchildren reach adolescence and no longer need caretaking like younger children do. Hagestad (1985) and others suggested that it may not be until the grandchild reaches adulthood that direct inter-

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action and exchange occurs with grandparents without mediation by the middle generation. High levels of affection, obligation, and help have been reported on surveys of adult grandchildren, who appear to be increasingly turning toward their grandparents for advice and support (Cherlin and Furstenberg 1986; Elder and Conger 2000; Robertson 1975).

However, little is known about the vital connections to grandparents among adolescents and young adults (Matthews and Sprey 1985; Robertson 1995). Much of the existing research on intergenerational relationships in adolescence focuses on grandparents serving as surrogate parents and raising their adolescent grandchildren (Giarrusso, Silverstein, and Bengtson 1996; Minkler, Roe, and Price 1992; Roe, Minkler, and Saunders 1995; Szinovacz 1998b; Shore and Hayslip 1994; Mills 1999).

This study is designed to advance understanding of the content of adolescent grandchild-grandparent relations beyond childhood and custodial or caretaking situations. What we do know about noncoresidential grandparents is somewhat limited for two reasons. First, many studies of grandparenting are based on small convenience samples, often college students, who are asked about their closest grandparent (e.g., Brussoni and Boon 1998; Creasey and Koblewski 1991; Holladay et al. 1998; Hyde and Gibbs 1993; Kennedy 1992; Kornhaber and Woodward 1981; Matthews and Sprey 1985; Roberto and Stoes 1992). Second, larger studies have mostly used measures of contact frequency and/or relationship closeness (Cherlin and Furstenberg 1986; Uhlenberg and Hammill 1998) rather than specific measures of grandparent-grandchild interactions. Notable exceptions include Cherlin and Furstenberg's (1985, 1986) study of the grandparents of a national random sample of adolescents and work by Merrill Silverstein and his associates (Silverstein, Marengo, and Rice 1999; Silverstein and Marengo 1999).

### *Grandparenting Styles*

Probably the best known study of grandparenting styles is Cherlin and Furstenberg's (1985, 1986) work on the grandparents of a national sample of 13- to 17-year olds.<sup>1</sup> Using factor analysis, they identify five basic types of grandparents based on scales of instrumental exchange,

parent-like exchange, and contact. Not only do the individual grandparents in their study have different styles, but they find that grandparent-grandchild relations are influenced by social factors as well. Another program of research, which includes our own work here, uses a contemporary sample of rural Iowa adolescents and their grandparents (the Iowa Youth and Families Project [IYFP] and the Iowa Single Parent Project [ISPP]). In these studies, grandparenting is defined more broadly—including measures of contact, relationship quality, activities, mentoring, friendship, knowing each other well, instrumental assistance, and discussing problems and the grandchild's future (King and Elder 1997, 1998, 1999). Our goal is to more deeply examine the content of relationships between grandparents and their grandchildren, as well as the implications of various forms of interaction for the quality of relationships and the bonds formed between the generations.

#### *Determinants of the Grandparent-Grandchild Relationship*

A number of factors are known to influence grandparent-grandchild relations. First, geographic proximity clearly influences grandparenting. Grandparents who live closer to their grandchildren have the opportunity to be more involved in their lives (Brussoni and Boon 1998; Cherlin and Furstenberg 1986; Elder and Conger 2000; Uhlenberg and Hammill 1998). While proximity may enable more frequent contact between the generations, it does not ensure that grandparents and grandchildren are meaningfully involved in each other's lives.

The parent generation often serves as gatekeepers for the grandparent-grandchild relationship, either facilitating or hindering interaction between the two. The key factor here is the quality and nature of the parent's relationship with the grandparent (Elder and Conger 2000; King and Elder 1995; Robertson 1975; Tinsley and Parke 1984; Uhlenberg and Hammill 1998), which reflects the parents' perceptions of both how supportive their own parents were when they were younger and their continuing help and support (Cherlin and Furstenberg 1986; Hodgson 1998; Johnson 1985; King and Elder

1995; Matthews and Sprey 1985; Rossi and Rossi 1990; Thompson and Walker 1987).

We also know that intergenerational relations tend to have a “matrifocal tilt” (Chan and Elder 1996; Hagestad 1986). First, ties through the maternal line of the family tend to be the strongest (Chan and Elder 2000; Cherlin and Furstenberg 1986; Hagestad 1986; Tinsley and Parke 1984; Uhlenberg and Hammill 1998). Likewise, grandmothers tend to be closer to their grandchildren than grandfathers are (Eisenberg 1988; Kivett 1985).

Age of both the grandparent and the grandchild can also influence the relationship (Burton and Bengtson 1985; King, Russell, and Elder 1998; Hagestad 1985; Silverstein and Marenco 1999; Tinsley and Parke 1984). Grandparent-grandchild relationships likely change as grandchildren grow older, need less care, and develop their own interests outside the family. Health status is often related to the age of the grandparent; younger grandparents tend to be healthier and more active with their grandchildren (Crimmins, Hayward, and Saito 1994; Riley 1990; Verbrugge 1984).

The number of grandchildren a grandparent has also limits how involved he or she can be in each grandchild's life (Elder and Conger 2000). Marital status of the parent generation is important, as divorce tends to increase the involvement of maternal grandparents (Clingempeel et al. 1992; Uhlenberg and Hammill 1998). In addition, financial support from the grandparent to the parent generation, which often occurs with single-mother families following a divorce, increases involvement (McLanahan and Booth 1989; Tinsley and Parke 1984). Other factors that may positively influence grandparental involvement include the existence of family rituals (Cherlin and Furstenberg 1986), grandparents' experiences with their own grandparents (King and Elder 1997), religion (King and Elder 1999; Elder and Conger 2000), and rural residence (Elder and Conger 2000).

### *A Person-Centered Approach*

While we know that a number of factors matter for various aspects of grandparent-grandchild relationships, variable-centered analyses look only at the correlates of one aspect of grandparenting or a specific

behavior. However, many aspects of grandparenting, such as shared activities or discipline, are not performed in isolation from other behaviors. Therefore, we develop a typology of grandparental styles that examines the configurations of role-enactment within groups of grandparents, as opposed to searching for variables that predict other variables. This approach is holistic, or person oriented, in the sense that it treats individuals as indivisible wholes and examines how larger patterns of factors form an entirety that better captures individual functioning and behavior (Magnusson and Cairns 1996). For example, perhaps there are grandparents who see their grandchildren frequently but do not have a very active relationship with them. Or there may be grandparents who see their grandchildren infrequently but still manage to develop a high level of intimacy. There may also be grandparents who provide financial resources to their grandchildren but have little relationship beyond that. To examine these questions, we use cluster analysis, a person-centered approach that groups people with similar patterns or configurations on key variables (Aldenderfer and Blashfield 1984; Bergman 1998; Kaufman and Rousseeuw 1990).

While we recognize the life course developmental nature of intergenerational ties and would ideally like to explore the inner workings of these relationships as they unfold over time, available data do not yet allow for such a study. We do have extensive data on grandchildren and their grandparents in late adolescence, which is a particularly important life stage for studying intergenerational relationships. As adolescent grandchildren make the transition to young adulthood, their relationships with their grandparents become increasingly elusive and voluntary in nature. The relationship changes from one of parent-like care, childhood play, and perhaps somewhat assumed contact (or lack thereof) contingent on the middle generation, to one that is characterized by deeper communication, mutual exchange, guidance, and support.

This study makes several contributions to the current state of the grandparent literature: (1) we use a person-centered rather than a variable-centered approach to identify the salient configurations in grandparenting behaviors that cluster together within individuals, (2) we use multinomial logistic regression to investigate the ways in which various social factors are related to patterns of grandparenting styles, and (3) we investigate the relationship between types and the perceived quality of grandparent-grandchild relationships.

## *Data and Method*

### *DATA*

We use data from the IYFP and the ISPP. The IYFP began in 1989 with 451 two-parent households that included a seventh grader and a near sibling. The ISPP began when the IYFP target children were in ninth grade, and the two studies continued to be conducted annually. The original ISPP sample included 207 households headed by a single mother who had permanently separated from her husband in the past two years; the household also included a ninth-grade child and a near sibling (see Conger and Elder 1994; King and Elder 1997 for more detailed descriptions of the data collection process).

We use the 1994 wave of data collection, which includes a telephone interview with up to four grandparents ( $n = 897$ ) of each target adolescent ( $n = 546$ ). The grandparents were asked about their relationship with the target adolescent, who was a high school senior at that time. The grandparents also reported on their own background, personal characteristics, and circumstances. We briefly describe the sample before turning to our analyses.

The average grandparent in this sample is 69 years old, became a grandparent at age 47, has 10 grandchildren, and lives 132 miles from the target grandchild. The sample is somewhat skewed toward female lineage; almost two-thirds are grandmothers and nearly 60 percent are maternal grandparents. Somewhat more than one-half of the grandparents report an income less than \$25,000 per year, three-quarters are not working outside the home, and another three-quarters have a high school education or less.

While our sample is by no means a nationally representative sample, the distribution of many of the social and demographic variables are not that different from the national average. One fundamental difference between this sample and a national sample of grandparents is the rural nature of the sample (Szinovacz 1998a). The majority—slightly more than 60 percent—report growing up on a farm, and another 8 percent report growing up in a rural area. The grandparents in our sample are slightly older, have more grandchildren, are less likely to be employed, and are more likely to be married than the national average. The sample is also entirely White and predominantly Protestant. Despite these differences, this sample is one of the

best available to study grandparent-grandchild relationships as it includes detailed information on all three generations and multiple aspects of the grandparent-grandchild relationship.

#### *PERSON-CENTERED ANALYSIS OF GRANDPARENTING*

Cluster analysis handles only a small number of variables with meaningful results. For this reason, we combine variables measuring grandparent involvement into scales that measure conceptually distinctive dimensions of grandparenting assessed in previous work (see Mueller and Elder 2000). These dimensions are face-to-face contact, activities done together, intimacy, helping, instrumental assistance, and authority/discipline (for a full description of items see the appendix).<sup>2</sup>

Face-to-face contact is indexed by a single question that asks how often grandparents see their grandchildren and has a range of 1 to 4. The second dimension is a scaled measure of participation in shared activities. This scale includes doing activities in the community (e.g., going shopping), working on projects together, attending the grandchild's events (e.g., plays), providing the grandchild with an opportunity to learn the grandparent's skills, and encouraging a talent of the target's. For the first four items, a grandparent received 1 point if they reported doing this at least once in the past year and 2 points if they engaged in the activity more than once. The fifth item is a yes-no format question for which they can receive 1 point, resulting in a possible range of 0 to 9 on this scale.

Next, we include a measure of intimacy between the grandparent and grandchild. The intimacy scale includes three items: the grandparent's serving as a confidant, the grandparent's acting as a companion or friend, and the two discussing the grandparent's childhood. The grandparents receive 2 points for filling this role "often," 1 point for "sometimes," and 0 points for "rarely" or "never," resulting in a 0 to 6 range.

We also look at two types of assistance. The first is instrumental assistance—providing financial assistance to the grandchild and helping him or her find a job. Grandparents received 1 point for each, resulting in a 0 to 2 range on this scale. A second type of assistance centers on interpersonal support or helping. This includes the grandparent's serving as a voice of experience or wisdom for the grandchild,

the grandparent's giving the grandchild advice, the pair's discussing the grandchild's problems, and the grandparent's both discussing and assisting with the grandchild's future. This scale is scored similarly to the intimacy scale, with a possible score of 0 to 2 for each item and 0 to 8 for the summed scale.

Finally, we index discipline and authority, which may be more common among rural grandparents than among grandparents more generally. Grandparents receive 2 points for filling this role "often," 1 point for "sometimes," and 0 points for "rarely" or "never," resulting in a possible score of 0 to 2.

#### *Clustering Method*

We used the Sleipner statistical package for pattern-oriented analysis to identify grandparents who were similar in their enactment of this role (Bergman and El-Khoury 1998). Missing data are problematic when a large number of variables are used to create scales, and thus we imputed missing values in the following manner. Respondents were assigned a value of "missing" on a scale if information was not available on any of the variables used to create that scale. If respondents were missing on more than one of the scales, they were deleted from the analysis. Respondents with a missing value on only one scale were assigned a score on that scale using a methodology in which a "twin" who has identical scores on the remaining scales is found; the missing value is then replaced with the twin's value on that scale. There were 89 cases with a value imputed, resulting in 884 valid cases.

Since cluster analysis is sensitive to outliers, we used the average squared Euclidean distance between observations to locate observations that fell outside a threshold distance of 0.5 from at least one other observation (Bergman 1998). Five outlying cases were identified, leaving a final sample size of 879 respondents. Ward's method, a hierarchical agglomerative clustering procedure, assigned cases to initial clusters. This method begins with observations as separate clusters and then gradually links them together, based on their squared Euclidean distance from one another, until a single cluster containing all the observations is created. This method is designed to optimize the variance between clusters (Aldenderfer and Blashfield 1984). Based on an analysis of the additional variance explained by solutions containing fewer or more clusters, we decided on a five-cluster solution, which



explained about 50 percent of the total variance. While a higher-cluster solution will explain more of the variance, there are diminishing returns with increasing cluster solutions. In this instance, the amount of increase in error sum of squares was not offset by the additional groupings. At the same time, a four-cluster solution did not explain nearly as much variance as the five-cluster solution; therefore, we went with the most parsimonious solution, which resulted in five clusters.

The final step in the clustering process reassigned cases by moving ill-fitting observations into better-fitting clusters so that more homogeneous clusters were obtained (Bergman and El-Khoury 1998). This is an iterative procedure; observations are reassigned iteratively until all observations are assigned to the best-fitting cluster. This procedure increased the explained error sum of squares to about 52 percent and resulted in the final typology described below.

To increase our confidence in this solution, we ran two additional analyses. First, we drew two random samples, each containing two-thirds of the original data set. We then ran the clustering procedure on each sample in an identical manner as above. In both cases, our resulting typology was very similar to the original, giving us confidence in our original solution. Second, we “shook” the data, creating an artificial data set in which the variable values in the original data are randomly assigned to different observations. The cluster solution for this data set should be a poorer fit than the solution for the original data set. Five-cluster solutions on shaken data sets explained less than one-third of the variance, compared with more than one-half of the variance explained in the original data set.

#### *A MULTINOMIAL-LOGISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE GRANDPARENT TYPOLOGY*

The five categories or types of grandparents were defined as the dependent variable for multinomial logistic regression models. These models provide a comparison of the odds of being in one grandparent category compared to any other category. We convert all coefficients to odds ratios, which show the effect of a one-unit increase in the independent variable on the likelihood of a respondent’s falling into the category in question compared to the omitted category. Odds ratios above 1.00 indicate an increased likelihood while those below 1.00

indicate a decreased likelihood of being in the stated category compared to the omitted category. Since a single grandchild could have up to four grandparents in the sample, we correct for nonindependence by using the “cluster” option in STATA (StataCorp 1999), which provides a robust standard error for nonindependent observations.<sup>3</sup>

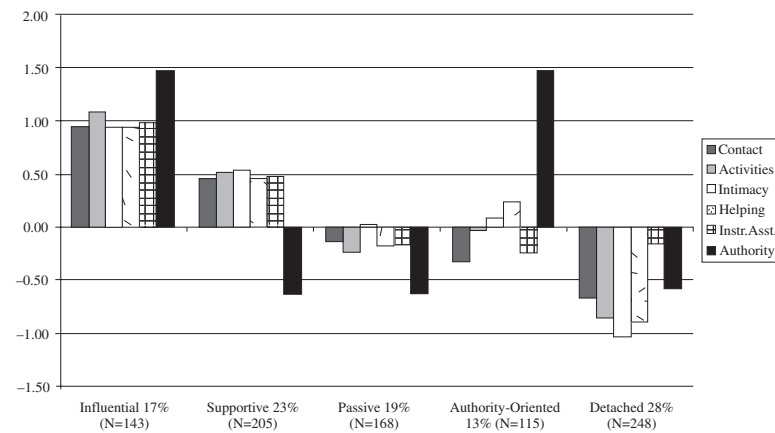
We use the detached grandparents as the reference group since they are the least engaged on all measures, making the coefficients intuitively meaningful. We also individually compare each of the five groups of grandparents to every other category, enabling a better understanding of the intricacies of each category and what makes it stand out from all others, as opposed to simply comparing each group to the least involved group. These comparison coefficients and their standard errors can be computed from the original coefficients (see Long 1997:158-60); however, we use the “mcross” option in STATA, which automatically computes all cross-comparisons (StataCorp 1999). Ultimately, this analysis resulted in 20 coefficients for each independent variable of interest (four comparisons and five sets of analysis). We present only the most relevant comparisons here.

## *Results*

### *TYPOLGY OF GRANDPARENTS*

Figure 1 shows the five grandparental styles: influential, supportive, passive, authority-oriented, and detached. The scales are standardized with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1, so that comparisons can be made between each cluster, as well as with the mean for all grandparents in the sample.

Scoring highest on every measure are the influential grandparents, about 17 percent of the sample, who score a full standard deviation above the mean on every measure. Second in order of contact are the supportive grandparents, who constitute almost a fourth of the sample and rank highly on all scales except authority. Third in order of contact are the passive grandparents, about 19 percent of the sample. These grandparents score near or below the mean on activities, intimacy, and helping and provide little to no instrumental support or discipline. Fourth, about 13 percent of the grandparents are authority oriented. They also score near the mean on activities, intimacy, and helping, and



**Figure 1: Standardized Scale Means by Grandparent Cluster**

they provide instrumental assistance and discipline for the grandchild. What distinguishes this group is that they distinctly see themselves as authority figures for their grandchildren. Finally, about 28 percent of the sample are detached, showing the lowest levels of contact of all the grandparents as well as the lowest levels on all other scales. Let us turn to a fuller description of each grandparental style, as well as the social factors that differentiate them. The complete descriptive statistics are reprinted in Tables 1 and 2.

#### *Influential*

We label the first cluster of grandparents influential because the majority are highly involved in all aspects of grandparenting. As such, they have the opportunity to be quite influential in their grandchild's life. Most (61 percent) are physically present in their grandchild's daily life; another 25 percent are present weekly. Three-fourths of the influential grandparents report doing activities with the grandchild in the community at least once in the past year, most of them more than once. Most have worked on projects with the grandchild, felt their grandchild had the chance to learn their skills, and thought that they had done something in the past year to help the grandchild with his or her talents. Clearly, this is an involved group of grandparents.

Influential grandparents also feel that they have an intimate relationship with the grandchild. They are one of only two groups in which

TABLE 1  
Description of Grandparents on Clustering Variables (in percentages)

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Influential (n = 143)</i>	<i>Supportive (n = 205)</i>	<i>Passive (n = 168)</i>	<i>Authority-Oriented (n = 115)</i>	<i>Detached (n = 248)</i>
Contact (1-4)						
Daily	22.0	61	35	13	5	3
Once per week	20.5	24	31	21	21	9
One to three times per month	31.9	11	22	44	45	38
Less than once per month	25.6	4	12	23	29	50
Activities (0-9)						
Community activities						
Once in the past year	8.5	6	10	8	13	7
More than once	29.2	69	45	16	24	4
Worked on projects						
Once in the past year	5.2	5	6	5	10	2
More than once	22.0	56	32	12	17	4
Chance for grandchild to learn skills						
Sometimes	56.4	68	68	58	70	32
Often	10.6	26	14	9	8	0
Attends grandchild's events						
Once in the past year	19.1	5	16	25	30	21
More than once	50.1	84	69	44	43	22
Encourages grandchild's talents	44.4	66	61	40	39	24
Intimacy (0-6)						
Acts as a confidant						
Sometimes	41.1	68	57	45	44	8

(continued)

TABLE 1 Continued

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Influential (n = 143)</i>	<i>Supportive (n = 205)</i>	<i>Passive (n = 168)</i>	<i>Authority-Oriented (n = 115)</i>	<i>Detached (n = 248)</i>
Often	4.1	12	6	1	4	0
Acts as a friend						
Sometimes	54.5	33	49	65	64	60
Often	35.1	66	49	34	36	6
Talks about childhood						
Once in the past year	12.5	9	14	19	18	6
More than once	35.3	69	55	33	31	3
Helping (0-8)						
Voice of wisdom						
Sometimes	70.2	74	83	77	85	46
Often	11.2	26	13	9	12	2
Gives advice						
Sometimes	67.1	80	80	68	87	39
Often	7.3	18	9	3	11	1
Discusses grandchild's problems						
Once in past year	8.8	7	13	10	11	4
More than once	15.5	44	23	6	12	1
Grandchild's future						
Discusses future	14.6	10	17	27	11	9
Discusses and helps	34.6	64	50	24	37	10
Instrumental support (0-2)						
Provided financial support	54.0	87	84	2	44	50
Helped grandchild get a job	12.8	44	14	0	6	6
Role of authority/discipline (0-2)						
Sometimes	28.0	92	0	0	96	2
Often	1.6	6	0	0	4	0

TABLE 2  
Means on Original Clustering Scales (Five-Cluster Solution)

		<i>Contact</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Intimacy</i>	<i>Helping</i>	<i>Instrumental</i> <i>Assistance</i>	<i>Authority</i>
	n	(1-4)	(0-9)	(0-6)	(0-8)	(0-2)	(0-2)
Influential	143	3.43 <sub>a</sub>	6.18 <sub>a</sub>	4.06 <sub>a</sub>	4.79 <sub>a</sub>	1.31 <sub>a</sub>	1.05 <sub>a</sub>
Supportive	205	2.89 <sub>b</sub>	4.82 <sub>b</sub>	3.41 <sub>b</sub>	3.87 <sub>b</sub>	0.98 <sub>b</sub>	0.00 <sub>b</sub>
Passive	168	2.23 <sub>c</sub>	3.02 <sub>d</sub>	2.61 <sub>c</sub>	2.65 <sub>d</sub>	0.02 <sub>d</sub>	0.00 <sub>b</sub>
Authority- oriented	115	2.03 <sub>d</sub>	3.49 <sub>c</sub>	2.69 <sub>c</sub>	3.43 <sub>c</sub>	0.50 <sub>c</sub>	1.04 <sub>a</sub>
Detached	248	1.65 <sub>e</sub>	1.50 <sub>e</sub>	0.93 <sub>d</sub>	1.27 <sub>e</sub>	0.56 <sub>c</sub>	0.02 <sub>b</sub>

NOTE: Error sum of squares = 52.16. Significant differences on means by cluster are indicated by subscripts. Clusters with different subscripts differ significantly at  $p < .05$  using Duncan's multiple-range post hoc tests.

most claim that they act as a confidant to the grandchild. Most also report talking about their own childhood with their grandchild. All of these grandparents believe that they are at least sometimes the voice of wisdom, and virtually all report advising their grandchild. While only half report discussing the grandchild's problems with him or her, most do discuss their grandchild's future.

This group also helps in instrumental ways. Almost 90 percent provide financial assistance; a smaller percentage, though considerably more than the other clusters, have helped the grandchild find a job. Finally, the influential grandparents are one of only two clusters in which authority and discipline are a part of the grandparent role. Virtually all influential grandparents claim to fill that role sometimes, although relatively few claim to fill it often. Influential grandparents represent both companionate and parent-like dimensions in their role as grandparents and thus are similar to the influential grandparents in Cherlin and Furstenberg's (1985) study.

Turning to the multinomial logistic models, we find that the factors related to influential grandparenting vary depending on the comparison category. Factors differentiating the influential from the detached grandparents (see Table 3) are maternal lineage, parental encouragement of the relationship, grandparent's education, grandparent's employment as a farmer, living closer, and having fewer grandchildren (all in the expected direction). These grandparents seem to live in a close family system, and grandchildren encounter that grandparent at least every week if not daily (see Tables 3 and 4). It is

TABLE 3  
Multinomial Logistic Regression of Grandparenting Clusters  
on Selected Independent Variables (in odds ratios)  
(Comparison Category is Detached)

	<i>Influential</i>	<i>Supportive</i>	<i>Passive</i>	<i>Authority- Oriented</i>
Family system				
Grandmother	1.51	1.43	2.16**	1.17
Age	0.98	0.96	0.98	0.92***
Number of grandchildren	0.90***	0.94**	1.00	0.97
Maternal side	2.19**	2.17**	1.63*	2.38**
Female grandchild	0.75	0.79	0.93	1.43
Parent encourages relationship	4.56***	4.12***	2.04*	4.47**
Socioeconomic status				
Income more than \$25,000	1.12	1.92*	1.29	1.14
Education (high school)				
Less than high school	1.82	1.81	1.83	1.61
Some college	2.04*	2.15*	2.08*	1.04
College	0.94	2.15	1.82	1.35
Employment				
(Not employed)				
Employed full-time	1.97	0.69	0.88	0.58
Employed part-time	0.50	0.70	0.74	0.52
Farming	7.42*	7.22*	6.88*	4.22
Proximity				
(0-10 miles)				
11-25 miles	0.22***	0.35**	0.68	0.73
26-50 miles	0.05***	0.17***	0.27**	0.44
51-100 miles	0.10***	0.19***	0.52	0.66
101-250 miles	0.08***	0.20***	0.64	0.62
More than 250 miles	0.06***	0.16***	0.29**	0.46

NOTE:  $N = 754$ . Log-likelihood = -1063.49.  $p < .001$  (chi-square). Model also controls for grandparent's health, religion, marital status, and residential background.

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

important to remember that none of these grandparents live with their grandchildren—they are all noncoresidential grandparents. In light of this, their ability to maintain daily contact with their grandchildren is indeed remarkable.

Social factors also differentiate influential grandparents from authority-oriented and passive grandparents (see Table 4). Grandparents who are older, live closer to the grandchild, have fewer grandchildren and have a male target grandchild are more likely to be influential than authority-oriented. Influential grandparents differ from passive

TABLE 4  
Multinomial Logistic Regression of Grandparenting Clusters  
on Selected Independent Variables (in odds ratios)  
(Remaining Relevant Comparisons)

	<i>Influential Versus Authority- Oriented</i>	<i>Supportive Versus Authority- Oriented</i>	<i>Influential Versus Passive</i>	<i>Supportive Versus Passive</i>
Family system				
Grandmother	1.30	1.23	0.70	0.67
Age	1.06*	1.04	1.00	0.98
Number of grandchildren	0.93*	0.96	0.90***	0.93**
Maternal side	0.92	0.91	1.34	1.34
Female grandchild	0.53*	0.55*	0.81	0.85
Second generation encouragement	1.02	0.92	2.23	2.02
Socioeconomic status				
Income more than \$25,000	1.06	1.68	0.94	1.48
Education (high school)				
Less than high school	1.13	1.12	1.00	0.99
Some college	1.95	2.06	0.98	1.04
College	0.69	1.59	0.52	1.18
Employment (none)				
Full-time	3.38*	1.18	2.22	0.78
Farm	1.76	1.71	1.08	1.05
Part-time	0.96	1.33	0.68	0.94
Proximity				
(0-10 miles)				
11-25 miles	0.31**	0.48*	0.33**	0.51
26-50 miles	0.12**	0.39	0.20*	0.63
51-100 miles	0.16**	0.29**	0.20*	0.36*
101-250 miles	0.13**	0.32*	0.12***	0.30**
More than 250 miles	0.14***	0.34**	0.22**	0.55

NOTE:  $N = 754$ . Log-likelihood = -1063.49.  $p < .001$  (chi-square). Models also control for grandparent's health, religion, marital status, and residential background.

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

grandparents only in that they live closer and have fewer grandchildren. Finally, the only factor differentiating influential grandparents from supportive grandparents is that full-time employed grandparents are more likely to be influential (results not shown).

#### *Supportive*

Supportive grandparents differ from influential grandparents primarily in that they do not see themselves in a role of authority and discipline in the grandchild's life. They engage in only slightly lower



levels of the other types of behavior included here. Like Cherlin and Furstenberg's (1985) supportive grandparents, they do engage in exchange types of behavior (as well as intimacy and activities) but not in the more parent-like role of authority.

Supportive grandparents see their grandchild somewhat less frequently, on average, than influential grandparents. But most (two-thirds) see their grandchild at least once per week. Like influential grandparents, they are substantially involved in activities with their grandchild. Most had attended at least one of the grandchild's events in the past year, and slightly more than half had participated in activities with the grandchild. Working on projects with the grandchild was less common for this group, with only about a third doing so. However, the majority of supportive grandparents report that their grandchild had the chance to learn their skills and that they had done something to encourage the grandchild's talents. The supportive grandparents resemble those in the influential category, but at a lower level of engagement.

Tables 3 and 4 show that many of the social factors that differentiate influential grandparents also differentiate supportive grandparents.

#### *Passive*

Passive grandparents are moderately involved in their grandchild's life. However, they do not see themselves as fulfilling the more parent-like functions of providing instrumental assistance and being a source of authority/discipline. Most passive grandparents encounter their grandchildren at least once a month but engage in relatively few activities with them. Only a fourth report doing at least one community activity together with their grandchild over the past year, a fifth had worked on projects with the grandchild, two-fifths report doing something to encourage the grandchild's talents, and more than two out of five indicate attendance at an event of the grandchild's in the past year. Despite these low levels of engagement, more than half report that the grandchild has had some chance to learn skills from them. The majority of passive grandparents define themselves as a friend to their grandchild, and half believe that they serve as a confidant on such matters as the parents' marriage and the child's future.

Although passive grandparents report levels of helping behaviors that resemble other grandparents, virtually none provided financial support to their grandchild or served as a resource in helping the grand-

child find a job. This should not be assumed to be an unwillingness to help; it is possible that they had not been asked to help in this way. By contrast, the influential and supportive grandparents are sufficiently involved to be able to both see and fill needs when they exist. Gender of the grandparent emerges as a significant factor here. Grandmothers are more likely to be passive than either detached (see Table 3) or authority-oriented (not shown). The number of grandchildren does not distinguish passive from detached grandparents. Finally, grandparents who both have more grandchildren and live farther from the grandchild are more likely to be passive than more involved (see Table 4).

#### *Authority-Oriented*

Being an authority figure is a central component of the role these grandparents play. Although they are also moderately engaged in social activities and helping roles, they are relatively inactive compared with both influential and supportive grandparents and primarily define themselves as authority figures for their grandchild.

Authority-oriented grandparents interact with their grandchild at levels resembling passive grandparents and seem to maintain more indirect contact with their grandchild rather than directly interact with him or her. About 40 percent had engaged in at least one activity with their grandchild in the community during the past year, only one-fourth worked on a project with their grandchild, and two out of five did something to encourage their grandchild's talents. Almost three-fourths had attended at least one of the target's events, with most attending more than one.

Like most grandparents, those in the authority-oriented cluster see themselves as a friend to their grandchild. However, only half regard themselves as a confidant to their grandchild and/or discuss their childhood with him or her. Authority-oriented grandparents help their grandchild at levels approaching that of supportive grandparents. Almost all felt that they were at least sometimes the voice of wisdom for their grandchild, and almost all provided advice. Half discussed their grandchild's future with him or her, and most also did something to help their grandchild reach his or her goals. Clearly, many provide instrumental assistance to their grandchild, though less so than influential and supportive grandparents.

Authority-oriented grandparents have already been compared to the preceding three types (see Table 3), and this description will not be repeated here. Being on the maternal side of the family and having the encouragement of the parent generation distinguished this type of grandparent (as well as the other more involved grandparents) from the most detached category. Age emerges as a salient factor for authority-oriented grandparents, with younger grandparents being more likely to be authority oriented.

#### *Detached*

Detached grandparents are the least involved in their grandchild's life. They score lowest on all of the included dimensions of involvement. Detached grandparents tend to see their grandchild less than average; less than half had face-to-face contact with their grandchild more than once per month.

As a result of this relative lack of contact, detached grandparents tend not to participate in or attend activities with their grandchild. Only 11 percent had engaged in an activity with the grandchild, only 6 percent had worked on a project with the grandchild, and more than half had not attended a single event in the past 12 months.

As might be expected, given the above, detached grandparents are also far less likely to have a close relationship with their grandchild than the other groups of grandparents. Two-thirds claim to be a friend to their grandchild, but less than one out of ten claims to be a confidant or discuss the grandchild's problems. Finally, a mere 10 percent of detached grandparents discussed the grandchild's future with him or her, with a similar percentage also helping the grandchild reach his or her goals. Only 40 percent reported advising their grandchild compared with almost three-quarters of the sample as a whole. These grandparents rarely talked about their own childhood with their grandchild.

Lack of interaction, shared activities, and closeness between detached grandparents and their grandchildren do not preclude tangible support. About half have provided financial assistance, and a few have served as a resource in helping the grandchild find a job. Although detached grandparents see their grandchild periodically and may help support him or her financially, they do not appear to know the child all that well.

TABLE 5  
Relationship Between Grandparenting Style and  
Relationship Quality (in percentages)

	n	Influential	Supportive	Passive	Authority- Oriented	Detached
Quality of relationship						
Excellent	502	78	72	60	56	32
Good	312	20	27	38	40	48
Fair to poor	62	1	1	2	4	20
How close grandparent feels to grandchild						
Very close	395	76	57	70	39	24
Pretty close	318	23	35	46	46	34
Somewhat close	117	1	8	11	14	26
Not very/not at all close	42	0	0	2	1	15
Closeness compared with other grandchildren						
Closer than to most	77	17	13	5	9	3
Closer than to some	135	24	22	11	15	8
About the same	553	57	61	76	68	58
Less close than to some	74	1	3	7	6	19
Less close than to most	37	1	1	2	2	12

#### QUALITY RELATIONS AND GRANDPARENTAL STYLE

We further explored how these grandparental styles are related to the quality and closeness of intergenerational relationships. We have the grandparents' subjective appraisals of three measures of their relationship with their grandchild: the grandparent's report of relationship quality, closeness to the grandchild, and closeness to the target child relative to other grandchildren (see Table 5).

As expected, the grandparent clusters are linked to relationship quality. In general, grandparents who are more involved, particularly in multifaceted ways, are more likely to report a higher-quality relationship with their grandchild ( $p = .001$ ). Detached grandparents are more likely than grandparents in the other categories to report fair or poor relationships with their grandchild. Grandparents in more involved categories are more likely to report excellent relations with their grandchild. We observe a similar pattern for closeness ( $p = .001$ ). Very few of any except for the detached grandparents report the lack of a close relationship. Again, there is a clear pattern for the other four

clusters in which more involved grandparents report more closeness to their grandchild.

It is important to note that these are relationship-specific styles and that a grandparent may behave differently toward different grandchildren. As a simple test, we asked the grandparents to compare their relationship with the target grandchild to their relationship with other grandchildren. As one might suspect, most grandparents report that they do not distinguish between their grandchildren and that they have a similarly close relationship with all their grandchildren. Nevertheless, a higher proportion of more involved grandparents (42 percent influential and 35 percent supportive) do report having a closer relationship with this grandchild than to others. The reverse applies to the less involved grandparents; almost one-third of the detached grandparents report feeling closer to other grandchildren than to this grandchild ( $p = .001$ ).

### *Discussion*

While virtually all the grandparents in our sample had some level of contact and an identifiable relationship with their grandchild, five distinct types of grandparent-grandchild relationships have emerged from this analysis, with face-to-face contact as only one of several dimensions. Neither contact nor relationship quality captures the multifaceted diversity of this relationship—instrumental assistance, helping, authority, shared activities, and intimacy are also important dimensions. These findings also highlight the value of person-centered approaches for furthering understanding of the more typical variable-centered analyses of grandparent-grandchild relationships. Cluster analysis indicates that different grandparenting behaviors do indeed configure within individuals in meaningful ways and affords a deeper understanding of the totality of certain types of grandparenting experiences.

To facilitate discussion of these five groups of grandparents, it is first useful to consider the more involved grandparents, influential and supportive, as opposed to the less involved ones, passive and detached, and keeping the authority-oriented grandparents as a separate category. What factors are related to more involved grandparenting? Influential and supportive grandparents both tend to (1) have fewer

grandchildren, (2) have more education, (3) live closer to the target grandchild, and (4) be involved in farming. What we are capturing seems to be a strong, cohesive family system. These grandparents appear to be embedded in an opportunity structure that facilitates the development of strong intergenerational bonds. With the farm as a family-based unit of production, close living, and fewer family members drawing on the grandparent's resources, these grandparents have enormous potential to become significant figures in their grandchildren's lives, and many of them in fact do.

Remember that the primary distinction between the influential and supportive grandparents is that for the former, having a role of authority in their grandchild's life is extremely salient, while it is nonexistent for the supportive grandparents. Having the additional role of authority matters for the closeness of the grandparent-grandchild relationship. The more multifaceted the relationship, the greater the absolute closeness and also relative closeness of the relationship.

What about the passive and detached grandparents? We find that the factors that most consistently predict a lack of involvement are (1) distance, (2) being on the paternal side, (3) lack of encouragement from the parent generation, (4) not being involved in farming, and (5) having a large number of grandchildren. Just as the more involved grandparents seem to have a system of opportunity for developing close ties with their grandchild, these so-called passive and detached grandparents do not. Does this mean that these older adults are not worthy grandparents—are not interested in developing strong intergenerational bonds? The relative closeness measure reveals that nearly one-third of the detached grandparents say they do have strong intergenerational ties but that they are closer to some of their other grandchildren than they are to this particular grandchild. Perhaps there are other grandchildren for whom they are on the maternal side, whose mother is a daughter encouraging a relationship, and to whom they live closer with more opportunity to engage in a relationship. Again, evidence suggests that it is erroneous to reify these grandparenting styles as characteristic of the grandparents themselves but rather as indicators of a type of relationship that is embedded within a system of family relations.

Finally, the authority-oriented grandparents are an interesting group to consider. They tend to be younger, maternal, and employed full-time and have a female grandchild. Distance is not a factor for

these grandparents. Given that a portion of our sample comprises children in households headed by single mothers, we thought that the single parent sample might contain the majority of the authority-oriented grandparents. However, whether the grandchild was in an intact or single-parent family was irrelevant (results not shown). It is more probable that due to their age, these grandparents are closer to the parental role and take on this role of authority for their granddaughters more than their grandsons. They are not particularly close to their grandchild, but they are not much closer to their other grandchildren either. Interestingly, the parents seem to be largely encouraging the authority-oriented relationship between their parent and child.

Clearly, there is much more to a grandparent-grandchild relationship than simply how often the pair sees each other. Although levels of contact are often positively correlated with behaviors, this tells us very little about the behaviors themselves. Our influential group of grandparents report high contact and a full relationship. By contrast, detached grandparents see their grandchild periodically but have a comparatively empty relationship. Between these two extremes, we find considerable variation in elements of grandparenting that are present for any particular pair in our sample. Some grandparents emphasize activities, help, and intimacy while forgoing both supportive and authority roles. In some instances, high levels of contact and other types of involvement include a role of authority, but other times not. Some grandparents see their grandchild rarely but still see themselves in a role of authority and provide instrumental assistance to their grandchild, but not all do so. And although grandparents are generally reluctant to compare their relationships with different grandchildren, the type of grandparent-grandchild relationship is related to relationship quality and closeness.

Finally, the role of gender is interesting to note. In this analysis, gender makes a difference in that grandmothers are less likely to be authority oriented, indicating that involved grandmothers are more likely than involved grandfathers to relinquish the authority role. On the other hand, when the grandchild is female, grandparents are more likely to be authority oriented than either supportive or influential, indicating perhaps a lower level of involvement with granddaughters and a maintenance of the authority role. These findings follow traditional gender expectations, with older women exerting less discipline and authority while teenage granddaughters are more subject to

authority than are adolescent males. It is also possible that gender is a dyadic phenomenon, with the grandmother-granddaughter relationships looking very different from mixed-sex or grandfather-grandson relationships. However, in models including an interaction between the grandparent's gender and the grandchild's gender, the results were not statistically significant ( $p > .05$ , results not shown). Similar results have been found in other research on the same data, perhaps due to the more rural nature of the sample (see King and Elder 1999). In qualitative interviews, for example, the grandfathers talk about engaging in farming activities with both their grandsons and granddaughters. Ties to the land and the legacy of farming in this sample foster intergenerational activities that are not available to all grandparents and grandchildren.

### *Future Directions*

These results improve on past research by investigating more nuanced outcomes than simply contact or quality of relationship and provide an initial exploration into social influences on grandparent-grandchild relationships. Furthermore, the study adds a focus on teenage grandchildren, thereby supplementing prior work on the grandparenting of younger grandchildren and on custodial grandparents. Unfortunately, our data are only cross-sectional. To capture life-course dynamics, we need a longitudinal study of the grandparent-grandchild relationship and its developmental implications. The content of this relationship should change significantly as both the grandparent and grandchild move through the life course. In particular, more emphasis on explaining why grandparents have various levels and types of involvement with their grandchildren is needed. In related work, for instance, we use a family systems approach to understanding grandparent-grandchild relationships. Future research should investigate grandparent relations with multiple grandchildren, perhaps along the lines of research that investigates the multiple grandparents of a single grandchild (Chan and Elder 2000).

Very little is known about developmental change in the context of adult relations with grandchildren. Grandparents are in a position to potentially play an influential role in the lives of their grandchildren. By delving into why some grandparents are more involved than



others, and the different patterns in attitudes and behaviors of grandparents, we may also make inroads to developing ways to encourage more frequent and useful interactions between grandparents and their grandchildren, serving the interests of both generations.

## NOTES

1. Other previous studies have identified typologies of grandparents but have focused on the psychological aspects of the grandparent role for older adults (see Neugarten and Weinstein 1964; Kivnick and Sinclair 1996).

2. The correlation matrix for variables in cluster analysis follows:

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Contact	—					
2. Activities	.44	—				
3. Intimacy	.40	.53	—			
4. Helping	.25	.51	.58	—		
5. Instrumental Assistance	.26	.30	.26	.31	—	
6. Authority	.21	.34	.33	.39	.26	—

3. We have 546 target grandchildren with at least 1 grandparent in the study; less than half (47 percent) of the target adolescents have all 4 grandparents in the study. We explored whether grandparents of the same grandchild tended to be categorized in the same cluster so that we did not “control” for differences that were substantively important. Of 250 married pairs of grandparents, only one-third are in the same cluster, and only 20 percent of either grandfathers or grandmothers of the same grandchild are in the same cluster.

## APPENDIX

### Items Used to Create Scales for Cluster Analysis

#### Contact

- During the past six months, how often have you seen (target) face to face?

#### Activities

- Over the past 12 months, did you attend an event in which (target) was involved, such as a play, sports competition, or a musical event?
- Over the past 12 months, did you and (target) do activities together in the community such as going to a museum, sports events, or shopping?
- Over the past 12 months, did you and (target) work on projects together such as repairs, farm tasks, or things around the house?
- How often does (target) have the chance to learn your skills?

- Does (target) have a particular talent, or is there something he or she is very good at doing, such as sports or playing a musical instrument? If yes, have you or are you doing anything to encourage this talent?

#### Intimacy

- Does (target) think of you as an advisor or confidant? If yes, how often are you a confidant for (target)?
- How often are you a companion and friend to (target)?
- Over the past 12 months, did you and (target) talk about your childhood?

#### Helping

- How often are you the voice of experience or wisdom for (target)?
- How often do you give advice to (target)?
- Over the past 12 months, did you and (target) discuss his or her personal problems?
- In the past year, have you discussed (target's) plans for the future with him or her? If yes, are you doing anything to assist (target) in achieving his or her goal?

#### Instrumental Assistance

- How often do you help (target) financially?
- How often have you served as a resource in helping (target) find a job?

#### Authority

- How often do you have a role of authority and discipline with (target)?
- 

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*Margaret M. Mueller is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a National Institute of Aging National Research Service Award winner and predoctoral trainee at the Carolina Population Center. Her interests lie primarily in work, family, and aging processes over the life course.*

*Brenda Wilhelm is currently an assistant professor at Mesa State College in Grand Junction, Colorado. She primarily studies the consequences of family structure as children reach adulthood. The research for this article was completed as part of a postdoctoral fellowship at the Carolina Population Center at the University of North Carolina.*

*Glen H. Elder, Jr., Ph.D., Howard W. Odum Distinguished Professor of Sociology, is engaged in a program of longitudinal studies of the life course, family, and human development in relation to variations in historical time and place. Elder directs the Carolina Population Center's demography of aging program as well as the Carolina Consortium on Human Development at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.*