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EXAMINING THE INTERGENERATIONAL STAKE HYPOTHESIS: RELATIONSHIPS AND CLOSENESS IN GRANDPARENT-GRANDCHILD DYADS

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The intergenerational stake hypothesis posits that older people tend to feel more positively about their relationships with younger people in their family because they have a greater perceived “stake” in the relationship. The purpose of the current study was to explore the intergenerational stake hypothesis in the context of grandparent-grandchild relationships. Pairs of grandparents and grandchildren ($n = 79$) completed a brief survey that asked questions about relational closeness, shared activities, and relationship quality. Both self- and proxy- reports were gathered from each participant. No significant differences were found between grandparent and grandchild self and proxy reports on measures of more objective features of the relationship, such as shared activities and contact frequency. On average, grandparents reported significantly more favorable self-reports of emotional closeness than their grandchildren ($t(78) = 4.71, p < .001, d = .61$). However, proxy reports revealed that grandparents were actually quite accurate at predicting their grandchildren’s relational closeness responses ($t(77) = .44, p > .05$). Moreover, difference score calculations identified a portion of the dyad sample (39 dyads) that appeared to refute the hypothesis in their relational closeness responses. Results from this study suggest that the generational stake phenomenon exists in the grandchild/grandparent relationship, at least in terms of perceived emotional closeness. However, as evident from these proxy report findings, the degree to which grandparents are aware of their grandchildren’s perspectives may deviate considerably in ways that are not yet fully accounted for by the generational stake hypothesis.