Sustaining Families in the 21st Century: The Role of Grandparents

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Abstract: As the world's population ages there is a growing interest in the lives of older people. Older people may be parents, grandparents, members of extended families neighbourhoods and countries. This paper will focus on one particular role, that of being a grandparent and its role in sustaining families, including those where the grandchild has a disability. In the past grandparents were integral to the success of societies. Often respected and revered. Grandfathers, in particular held much of the power and control within families and were responsible for the distribution of the land and property amongst their kin. Grandmothers were seen as the custodians of the family rituals and the development of kinship relationships. In the 21st century, grandparents do not have the same status or position they once had but many contribute to sustaining the family. This may be by way of instrumental support such as the provision of housing, clothing child-care, school fees and in some cases assuming the full time caring role of the grandchild. Others may assume a more symbolic role, providing an environment which is stable, where the child feels safe and unconditionally loved and where the grandparent is seen as a role model, responsible for the transmission of wisdom and knowledge including the families history and traditions. This paper adds to the dearth of literature in this area by presenting a comprehensive picture of the contribution (both past and present) grandparents make in sustaining families.

Keywords: Families, Grandparents, Relationships, Grandchildren with a Disability

THE WORLD'S POPULATION of people 65 years and over is expected to increase significantly over the next 30 years. Whilst the majority of this increase will be in developed countries, the proportion of older people in developing countries will also increase. In the United Kingdom, for example, the proportion of the population 65 years and over will rise to 26% by 2020 and to 38% 2050 (United Nations, 2002). In South Korea, 7% of the 47 million residents are aged over 65 (United Nations, 2002). In Australia, the proportion of the population 65 years and over is currently around 12%, and is predicted to exceed 25% by 2050 (United Nations, 2002). Whilst some countries will have less substantial population growth, for example in Africa where the impact of HIV has taken its toll, the ageing of the population has never the less stimulated significant interest in the experiences of older people and how this changing demographic will affect the structure of families. In the early twentieth century, it was unusual for children to have living grandparents. Children born in the twenty-first century, however, may have and know multiple generations of grandparents. This article discusses the changing role of grandparents, outlining the historical and societal factors influencing grand-parenting and the contribution grandparents make to sustaining families in the twenty-first century.

Historical Perspective on Grand-Parenting

Whilst Grandparents have been a feature of society since the beginning of human families, surprisingly little has been written about this experience prior to World War II. In the 17th and 18th Centuries, older generations held a place in many cultures and society which was respected and revered. However, this was also a time when society was both hierarchal and patriarchal; males, and in particular, grandfathers held much of the power and control within families and were responsible for the distribution of wealth, predominately in the form of land and property (Falk and Falk, 2002).

Indeed, early writers on the role of grandmothers tended to present a very negative perspective of their contribution to society. Vollmer (1937) went so far as to vehemently denounce the role as having a negative effect on the relationships within families, particularly the mother and the child. In fact, any positive comments on the role were always countered by comments that grandparents 'needed to know their place' (Kornhaber, 1996). Erikson (1950) reported that even in communities where grandparents had a high status and were described in mystical or spiritual terms, the delinquent activities of the child were often blamed on the grandmothers (even if the grandmother had since died). Notably, these writers all examined the relationship of grandparents to the family from the perspective of the child, with little

research conducted from the perspective of the older person.

Subsequently, social scientists such as Mead (1972) provided insight into the relationships of grandparents to their family from a cultural perspective. She identified that grandparents were responsible for providing a multitude of roles, including that of custodians of the history of the family, and that these roles were often delineated according to kinship relationships and the system used to assign membership of the particular group. The particular system which operates in a community is influenced by the cultural traditions of that society; for example the patrilineal descent system which operates in China clearly allocates more status to the male relatives on the father's side of the family. Mead (1972) argued that despite these particular systems, the presence of grandparents and grandchildren provides opportunities for understanding the future and the past and for individuals to become "a full human being" (p.282).

Historical knowledge concerning the role of grandparents appears to focus on two distinct period of time: pre-industrialization and post-industrialization. Both Mead (1972) and Erikson (1950) agreed that the industrial revolution had a significant impact on the status of grandparents and was responsible, together with the increasing life span of older people, for the changing role of grandparents.

Pre-Industrialisation and Post-Industrialised Society

To understand the role of grandparents in pre-industrialised society it is important to understand the nature of families during that time. Families provided the only source of both emotional and economic well being (Fry, 1995). Older people were important contributors to the overall survival of the family and therefore received recognition as they aged for this contribution from the younger members of the family. Erikson (1950) stated that pre-industrial societies appeared to value grandparents not for what they could contribute to the family but for what they had contributed in the past in order that the family should survive.

However, it appears that after the industrial revolution, the status of grandparents changed significantly, for the worse. Older people ceased to have a respected role in society and were no longer valued for their prior contribution to the family; rather, they were seen as a burden on families. Fry (1995) suggests that this change coincided with the increased wealth of the family. The shift to a reliance on government to provide for the "disadvantaged" from the taxes it received from employees in the factories and industries also resulted in a diminished role for the elders of families. No longer were extended families

who owned and worked the farmlands of the nation, providing food and other materials for the larger cities, seen to be important contributors to the overall well being of society (Falk & Falk, 2002).

As the industrial revolution gave way to events such as the Depression of the 1930's and World War II, further changes to the role of grandparents became evident.

Although narratives about the experiences of African-Americans during the depression of the 1930's and the period of slavery in America highlight the value of elders or grandparents, little is known about the experiences of grandparents in tribal or indigenous communities during this time-period (Falk & Falk, 2002). With the outbreak of war across the world the role of women in society changed as many men were recruited to the armed services. Women were expected to take on roles that had previously been the domain of the males. In industry, in agriculture and in providing services, women were engaged in activities which took them away from their traditional role of wife and mother. Many men did not return from the war, thus leaving families without a male figurehead and requiring women to remain in the workforce in order to provide for their families. Those men who did return from the war often had physical and emotional injuries which rendered them unable to return to their previous role. Cramped housing and shortages of food as a result of the war meant that families suffered considerable stress and anxiety, with older people often subjected to significant abuse (Ikels, 1998). Given the limited resources of these families, grandparents were often seen to be an additional burden that the family had to contend with. Thus, post war, the role of grandparents was relegated to little more than a ceremonial one. In addition, changing work and housing demands resulted in many families being dislocated from each other for the first time, relocating to other parts of the country and outside the country in some cases migrating from Britain to Australia and from Europe to the United States (Kornhaber, 1996).

Contemporary Society

In the latter part of the twentieth century, researchers began to report on the changing role of grandparents in contemporary society. Grandparents were acknowledged as providing high levels of support, both emotional and financial, to families in times of stress and crisis (Kornhaber, 1996). Grandparents are increasingly valued in the 21st century for how they contribute to and sustain the family structure and how they "act out" this role (Kornhaber, 1996). Increasingly, grandparents are called upon to provide both social and instrumental support for their families. This may range from occasional to full time child

care, assisting with school fees, providing housing, being role models for education and careers paths, providing emotional and financial support when relationships dissolve, and as custodian of the families history and traditions. Thanks to significant and rapid societal change in the twenty-first century, the role, nature and influence of grand-parenting has changed significantly. Contemporary grandparents often navigate non-traditional and complex family arrangements, with limited experience about how to relate to issues arising from divorce, same sex couples raising children, parental substance abuse and neglect, or a grandchild with a disability.

Defining Families – Theoretical Perspectives

A number of theoretical approaches can be used to examine families, the impact of changing family structures and the role of grandparents. Family Systems theory (Minuchin, 1974; Turnbull, 1990) contributes to our understanding of how families operate, suggesting that the relationship between mother and child is not the only important relationship for children and that all relationships within the system have the opportunity to influence the experiences of the child and each member of the family. Turnbull et al (1986) argue that the unique nature of each family is influenced by the characteristics of each member of the family and by the culture and ideological style which has developed over time. These beliefs can affect how families cope; for example, whether they are able to ask for assistance should they need it and, more importantly, whether they allocate blame for an unexpected outcome, such as the birth of a child with a disability.

Alternatively, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecological model suggests that not only are the interactions between members of the family important but that the capacity of the family to cope with situations, such as, the birth of a child with a disability, is influenced by where that family sit in terms of the wider societal systems (i.e., external factors such as poverty, social class, resources). In some cases they can be influenced by decisions made without the consultation or participation of the individual themselves.

Defining Grandparents - Theoretical Perspectives

Grandparents have been a feature of families since primitive time; yet, whilst the birth of a grandchild confers the title it does not describe the role. Individuals decide the nature of the role and the relationship based on their own experiences, the meanings and symbols ascribed to the role in their particular culture

and the expectations of the family unit as a whole (Szinovacz, 1998).

Kornhaber (1996) discusses grandparenthood in the context of lifespan development, using Erikson's Identify and Lifecycle model to suggest that grandparenthood usually occurs at a time of "generativity". Essentially, as the grandparent ages they seek to ensure that there is a meaning for one's life, purpose, understanding and self-worth. Becoming a grandparent provides the individual with the opportunity to share their knowledge gained from years of experience with the new generation, therefore ensuring that some part of them remains once they are gone. Kornhaber (1996) also suggests that this could be better explained by adding a ninth stage to Erikson's eight Identify and Lifecycle stages, with the ninth stage potentially classed as "continuity", where an older person remains connected to mankind through the relationships and interactions that they have with the wider society. The relationships and interactions they have with their grandchildren are particularly important, as the grandchildren become the vessel in which the "wisdom, experiences and personal examples" are stored ready to be passed on to successive generations (p58). Joan Erikson (Erik Erikson's wife), discussed the ninth stage as being a time when questions about identity and self worth are contrasted with increasing frailty. Importantly, the role of grandparent provides an opportunity for the older adult to identify with the previous stages in a positive way (Erikson, 1997).

As with Erikson's other stages, all of which have an alternative position, Kornhaber proposes that the contrary position to "continuity" – which is leaving something behind of oneself for future generations – would be "disappearance". Without this legacy which has been passed on through the grandchild, the older person eventually would disappear, unknown to no one, without any mark of their contribution to be seen.

Kornhaber (1996) builds further on these concepts through the Grandparent Study, a longitudinal study commenced in 1970 which examines the relationships between grandparents and their grandchildren. From this, Kornhaber develops his theory of Latent Grandparent Identity (LGI). He argues that although this identity does not come to the fore until the birth of the first grandchild, it has in fact been forming since early childhood and is informed by the individual's own experiences. It is added to along the way in terms of one's personality, feelings of altruism and negative experiences (such as absent grandparents) and affects the individual's ultimate perceptions and views on how they will play out the grandparent role (when and if biological grandparenthood occurs). Interestingly, recent research has illustrated that grandparent identity impacts on an older person's

well-being; Reitzes and Mutran (2004) found that positive grand-parenting identity had a positive effect on the well-being of the individual and intergenerational relationships, whereas a negative grandparent identity was linked to depressive symptoms in the older person.

Grandparenting Drive

Together with the LGI, Kornhaber's studies developed the concept of a Grand-parenting Drive. This he explains, provides an understanding of why some grandparents are "driven" to establish and keep relationships with their grandchildren even when the "going gets really tough" and why for others it is suffice for them to remain at a distance both emotionally and physically. Yet, as Strom (1997) notes, no matter what the grandparent drive is or what stage the grandparent may be at, the success or otherwise of the grandparent role is dependent on a number of variables, such as the expectations of the family, the expectations of the grandparent and the expectations of the grandchild. Strom (1997) argues that opportunities for grandparents to fulfill their role require all participants to be involved and for there to be an openness in communication between all groups so that clarity exists and expectations are more likely to be met.

Indeed, the individual grandparent constructs his or her own particular version of this role, drawing on the symbols and beliefs of their culture in establishing the relationships they may or may not have with their grandchild (Kornhaber, 1996). In particular, Westheimer and Kaplan (1998) suggested that grandparents played "symbolic" and "instrumental" roles when it came to being a grandparent to their particular grandchildren.

Symbolic and Instrumental Roles

In a symbolic role, the grandparent provides an environment which is stable, where the child feels safe, unconditionally loved and receives support in ways that are *not* of a monetary nature. This grandparent role has been described by a number of writers as having responsibility for the transmission of wisdom and knowledge in relationship to the family history and traditions, and is often described in terms of a mentor or role model (Gutmann, 1985; Neugarten & Weinstein, 1964; Kivnick, 1982). It has been suggested that this particular role, which links the generations, is becoming increasingly important in a world where grandchildren's lives are far more complex than in the past (Kornhaber, 1996)

In an instrumental role, grandparents play a more utilitarian role in the lives of their grandchildren. They will often contribute to child-care, school fees, provide housing for the family and, in some cases,

are responsible for the day today care of the grandchildren (assuming more of a parenting than grand-parenting role). A recent report presented to the Australian Government by Council on the Ageing and National Seniors entitled 'Grandparents raising Grandchildren' (2003) indicated that despite Australia experiencing an increasing number of grandparents caring for their grandchildren, there is no specific data indicating the exact numbers. However, Australian Bureau of Statistics data, released in 2005, suggests that there are 22,500 Australian families where grandparents were the guardians of their grandchildren. Nearly half (47%) of these grandparent families were lone grandparent (usually grandmother) families.

Grand-Parenting Styles

Several decades ago, in an article entitled "*The changing American Grandparent*", Neugarten and Weinstein (1964) developed a typology of five grand-parenting styles: formal, fun-loving, distant, reservoirs of family wisdom and surrogate parents. These five styles are frequently used to describe different grand-parenting styles today, although it is important to note that each reflects a predominate style and that, in reality, grandparents may adopt a composite style (Westheimer & Kaplan, 1998).

Historically, it is more likely that grandparents follow a more formal style, which emphasised grand-parenting at arms length and roles are respected. That is, the grandparents do not interfere with the parenting roles and may offer limited instrumental such as baby sitting but would not necessarily be interested in understanding the friendship networks or be involved in the social activities of the grandchild. Conversely, the fun-loving style of grand-parenting sees the relationship between the grandparent and the grandchild operating in a very social context, with a focus on friendships, mutual satisfaction and where authoritarian boundaries often initiated by the parents do not exist. This style of grand-parenting appears to be a phenomena of contemporary grand-parenting, as there is little reference to this style in the historical literature and this style of grand-parenting is not referred to in literature which explores different cultures (Westheimer & Kaplan, 1998).

A 'distant' grand-parenting style does not necessarily relate to geographic distance from the grandchild but rather captures involvement with the grandchild. A grandparent whose involvement with their grandchildren is only on ceremonial and special days, such as Christmas and birthdays, is utilising a distant style. The 'reservoir of family wisdom' style captures the symbolic role of family historian discussed by Kornhaber (1996), providing the intergenerational link often needed to provide meaning to

the child's life. Opportunities for answers to the "what was it like in your day, grandpa?" discussion provide the context in which this family wisdom and experience is passed on to the younger generation.

The final style of grand-parenting, 'surrogate parent' style is becoming more common due to changes to family structure (i.e., divorce, parental substance abuse or neglect). In this style the grandparent, on most occasions the grandmother, steps in to attend to the needs of the grandchild when the parent/parents are unable to do so; for example, the grandparent may take the children to child care or school, be available when the child is ill, volunteering at the school etc. This style of grand-parenting can result in role confusion for the grandchild, especially if the parent/parents are absent for long periods of time and the grandchild becomes quite used to relying on the grandparent for both symbolic and instrumental activities (Westheimer & Kaplan, 1998).

More recent research suggests grandparents see their roles as ever-changing, depending on the circumstances for themselves and for their grandchildren (Kornhaber, 1996), with Weibel-Orlando (2001) finding that grandparents generally fulfilled one or a number of symbolic or instrumental roles, Weibel-Orlando's roles were "distanced grandparent"; "ceremonial grandparent"; "custodial grandparent"; "fictive grandparent"; "cultural conservator", with grandparents adopting these roles based on their own experiences of grandparents and their desire to have some personal control in the development of the relationships with their own grandchildren.

Clearly, grandparents are often seen as vital to the well being of the family. They often contribute significantly to families through intergenerational transfers in the form of childcare, education fees, mortgages, clothing, transport and cultural activities. In different cultures, this contribution begins as soon as the child is born. For example, in Native American communities, grandparents provide much of the infant and toddler care and the relationship developed through these experiences continue well into the child's adult life (Kornhaber, 1996). However, given that individuals view their role as grandparents very differently, the contributions grandparents make to the family may also differ.

Families in the 21st Century

At the beginning of the 20th century, approximately 25% of newborns had both paternal and maternal grandparents still living. In 2000, this has changed to approximately 66% (Falk & Falk, 2002). Such statistics mean that an increasing number of young adults will have at least one grandparent who co-survives into the grandchild's third decade. Uhlenberg (1996) suggests that this demographic change

means the grandchild will have a number of relationships to negotiate, questioning whether the relationship a grandparent has with the grandchild is different to the one they may have with their great-grandchild.

At the same time as changes to fertility and mortality rates have significantly increased the numbers of grandparents, other societal changes have occurred which has implications for the role of grandparents in today's society. Increasing participation in education and increased career choices has resulted in many women delaying becoming mothers or in some cases not having children at all. Whilst there is a call for policies such as access to paid maternity and parental leave, and family friendly workplaces, as a response to these changes to the nature of family life, the role of grandparents in this environment is also changing. Grandparents are still reportedly the largest providers of care for children under school age in Australia (Weston, Stanton, Qu, Soriano, 2001). That care ranges from occasional care in the case of emergencies through to full time day care on a five to seven day basis.

Other changes to family structures which have impacted on the role of grandparents have been the consequences of the breakdown of the marriage or relationship of their adult children. Divorce rates in Australia at the beginning of the 20 century and up until the 1960's were consistently around the 2 per 1000. The introduction of the Family Law Act in 1975 in Australia, which significantly changed the criteria necessary to dissolve a marriage, resulted in a dramatic increase in this figure; today, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2003) suggests that 4 out of 5 marriages will end in divorce. This change has meant that many more children find that the family networks with which they are familiar, and which provide them with substantial security and support as they grow, become uncertain and fragmented. This may include access to grandparents (Weston, Stanton, Qu, Soriana, 2001), with a number of researchers noting that in the case of divorce, young children will have a much stronger relationship with their maternal grandparents than with their paternal grandparents (Uhlenberg & Kirby, 1998; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Kornhaber, 1996). This is normally because the majority of the grandchildren remain in the custody of their mothers rather than their fathers following divorce or relationship breakdown (Weston, Stanton, Qu, and Soriana, 2001).

As well as providing instrumental support for grandchildren, there are growing numbers of grandparents who are primary caregivers for their grandchildren. The grandparents take on this role when their children are no longer able to care for them. In America, the 2000 census identified that 2.4 million grandparents had sole responsibility for 4.4. million

children. Often called the “skipped generation”, grandparent headed families develop as a result of incarceration, mental and physical illness, drug and alcohol addiction, HIV aids or an unwillingness to parent. In the case of primary care-giving, constructing the role of grand-parenting takes on a very different dimension (Administration for Children and Families, 2002).

Grandfathers and Grandmothers

An important feature in considering the role of grandparenthood is the issue of gender. Thomas (1995) argues that the perceived role of grandparent for an individual is influenced in three ways by gender: the gender of the grandparent, the gender of the grandchild and whether the grandparent is the paternal or maternal grandparent.

Traditionally, it has been thought that grandfathers are more likely to see their role as influencing grandchildren in an instrumental role i.e. financial support and work related advice. However, recent research (Kivnick, 1982; Gutmann, 1975; Thomas, 1995; Falk & Falk, 2002) reports that many grandfathers indicate that they are able to participate more with their grandchildren than they did with their own children, where work commitments and social expectations of the time meant mothers were primary care-givers. Fathers were often at arms length from their children, expected to provide resources for the family at a more instrumental level.

Cunningham-Burley (2001) reported that grandfathers appeared to have some concerns regarding their role. Many were keen to make up for not being there for their own children, but also were concerned that they did not repeat their past mistakes. This caused many grandfathers to be somewhat hesitant in taking control of the development of the role with their grandchildren. This ambivalence comes at a time when family formations are no longer what they used to be. For example, fathers today are currently more engaged with their children than in the past and both partners are likely to contribute to the provision of instrumental support. The male breadwinner-female homemaker model is no longer the predominant model for families in to-days western society (Weston et al, 2001). However, with changes to the workplace, including downsizing, often resulting in longer working hours, the influence of technology and less job security, families are still time poor and need to call upon grandparents to assist.

Grandmothers were seen to have more of a role in developing the social skills of the grandchildren, with many grandchildren reporting greater satisfaction regarding relationships with their grandmothers than grandfathers. Spitz and Ward (1998) suggest that this is because the relationship between grand-

mothers and their grandchildren is likely more long standing, with many grandfathers not as engaged with the grandchildren and dying younger. Facilitating communication and interactions between different family groups (kin-keeping) is often done by women, thus resulting in stronger relationships across generations (Thomas, 1995). Indeed, grandfathers report that it is often difficult to take over this role, should the grandmother pre-decease them as this is not seen as a normal or expected role by members of his family. Grandmothers report that it is possible to have stronger relationships with younger grandchildren than with their adult grandchildren, although this can change in the case of the marriage breakdown. Many adult grandchildren will continue to count on the support of their grandmothers at this time whereas young children are often unable to make decisions and will be influenced by the relationship the adult child with custody has with the grandmother (Spitze & Ward, 1996)

Whilst it is possible to identify distinct differences in the grand-parenting experience based on gender, these differences are to be expected given the social construct of male and female roles within society in general. It is nevertheless important to remember that how the individual grandparent develops their role will be a consequence of their own experiences and the relationship that they had or did not have with their own grandparents. For example, when Waldrop and colleagues (1999) interviewed grandfathers about teaching values and life lessons to their grandchildren, the grandfathers described how they either copied their own fathers’ grand-parenting style or did the opposite.

Grand-Parenting – When a Grand-Child has a Disability

Relationships within families are complex and various roles come with certain assumptions and expectations; this becomes even more so when a child has a disability, either from birth or as a result of trauma (Kornhaber, 1996). As few prospective parents expect to have a child with a disability, grandparents can play a crucial role in terms of support and helping families negotiate the complex issue of providing care for that individual. Whilst support from professionals is important, parents need to draw on the social support of families and friends to enable them to cope with the day-to-day caring of their child (Schilmoeller & Baranowski, 1998). Often when a child has a disability, family resources and support become stretched as the primary caregiver – typically the mother - are required to negotiate the complex demands of personal care, accessing professional care and the day-to-day requirements of the family as a unit. Financial resources of the family can also

become an issue, as funds for treatment, mobility aids and alternative care need to be considered (Schilmoelle & Baranowski, 1998).

It is well established that grandparents often contribute significantly to families through intergenerational transfers in the form of childcare, education fees, mortgages, clothing, transport, and cultural activities, and this is particularly true for families where the child has a disability (AARP, 2003). Hastings (1997) identified that in the case of families where a child has an intellectual disability, grandparents are an important resource, with maternal grandparents providing significantly more support than paternal grandparents.

As identified earlier in this paper, grandparents draw on role models and prior experiences to construct their own role, and develop intergenerational relationships. This becomes significantly more challenging for grandparents when their grandchild has a disability as many have little experience of disability. Many grew up in an era where children were described in terms of normal and sub-normal and where individuals with disability were removed from their families to spend their days in institutionalized care (Sebeok, 1991). It is therefore not surprising that many grandparents report mixed emotions at the time of the diagnosis and have similar needs for information in order to be there to support their families (Scherman, Gardner, Brown & Schutter, 1995). Attention to the needs of grandparents will continue to grow as more and more grandchildren with disability are able to survive into their adult years due to improvement in diagnosis, early intervention and other medical advances. Whilst there have been limited studies on the role and experiences of grand-parenting a child with a disability, (Hastings, 1997; Trute, B., 2003) relatively few studies

have focused exclusively on the relationships that grandparents have when a grandchild has a disability.

Conclusion

This paper has traced the development, changes and challenges involved in grand-parenting over the past one hundred years. It has illustrated how, in the twenty-first century, grandparents often play a crucial role in sustaining families. On the one hand, some grand-parents are kin-caregivers and raise grandchildren when their parents are unable due to illness or substance abuse. On the other hand, in light of increasingly non-traditional and complex family arrangements, contemporary grandparents also often provide a significant source of symbolic and instrumental support. For example, a growing literature illustrates how grandparents can provide a stable and supportive environment for grandchildren during divorce, custody and separation disputes. Whilst different grandparents play different roles in their grandchildren's lives, it is clear that most grandparents offer important sources of support during crises and unexpected life events. However, more research is needed to explore the experience and nature of grand-parenting in different cultural contexts, as well as developing a better understanding of grandparents relationship with grandchildren raised by same sex couples or their interactions with a grand-child who has a disability. Moreover, with increasing life expectancies of grandparents meaning that many will have long-term relationships with grandchildren and great-grandchildren, there are a myriad of new questions about the role, nature and influence of grand-parenting in complex and diverse twenty-first century families.

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