

Intergenerational Transmission in the Multiracial Context

The relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is an important one. Researchers have found that the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren acts as a unique bond that provides children with strong emotional support (Barranti, 1985). Specifically, this bond, “confers a natural form of social immunity on children that they cannot get from any other person” (Kornhaber&Woodward, 1981; Barranti, 1985). For this study, I am going to attempt to understand this bond between grandparents and grandchild in the multiracial family. Previous research on multiracial families suggests that there is a potential disconnect could exist between the multiracial family and their extended kin networks.

We know multiracial families are on the rise, 1970’s 1 in 100 children were born to parents of different races and in the last 6 year it is up to 1 in 19 children (*Herman, 2004*). However, despite this increase in the population, social stigma still exists for biracial couples. A primary source of unease comes from relatives, in particular grandparents, who are uncomfortable with the unions producing children (St Jean, 1998; O’Donoghue, 2004). Qualitative literature suggests that many grandparents are uneasy about what a multiracial grandchild might look like and are concerned about what identity the child might take. Furthermore, research documents the turmoil associated with interracial unions, going as far as individuals being disowned by parents and extended family members (Byrd and Garwick, 2006). Research also suggests that due to this experience of disapproval, multiracial families make specific decisions about their residential location and their social networks. Multiracial families are more likely to live in a non-white urban area, withdraw from public activities, and have less contact with

their spouses and their own extended family members (Winddance Twine, 1997; Aldridge 1978). This could be particularly problematic for the grandparent/grandchild bond due to the fact that researchers have found that parental feelings toward grandparents are transmitted to children and that these transmitted feelings persist through their life course (Gilford & Black, 1972).

All of these findings suggest that children in multiracial households might not enjoy the same relationship with their grandparents as their monoracial counterparts. Not having these relationships can result in a variety of negative outcomes for the children in these households.

Previous research on monoracial has shown that a warm or indulgent grandparent/grandchild relationship acts as a tension reliever between parents and children (Radcliffe & Brown, 1952). Also, researchers claim that without close bonds to grandparents “children experiences a deprivation of nurturance, support and emotional security” (Barranti, 1985). The absence of a grandparent bond could also be harmful to the development of self-identity for a child. Grandparents assist in identity formation for children and without them researchers claim that children can lack a cultural and historical sense of self (Mead, 1978).

Previous research also suggests that the grandparent/grandchild relationship might vary on the basis of sex. Specifically, as women typically act as “kin keepers” in a family, women are usually the ones who keep close ties with their parents (Barranti, 1985). This means that grandchildren typically have a closer relationship with their maternal grandmother (Eisenberg, 1988). This could be particularly interesting for

multiracial families as this would mean that grandchild would often only have a close relationship with a grandparent of one race of the racial heritage. Therefore depending on the racial combination of their parents, a multiracial child might only have a close relationship with either their minority heritage or their Non-Hispanic White heritage.

Currently, no quantitative study has directly examined the closeness of relationships between grandparents and grandchild in multiracial families. For this research project I would like to use the Kindergarten Wave of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey data to examine the grandparent/grandchild relationship in more depth for multiracial families. Specifically I would like to answer the question: Do multiracial children tend to have less close relationships with their grandparents than monoracial children? Additionally, I would like to know if the race of grandparent matters. Specifically, are children typically closer to the minority race grandparent or White grandparent? Does grandparent relationship vary by specific multiracial combination involved? I predict that I will find systematic disadvantage for multiracials compared to monoracials when examining relationship closeness between grandparents and grandchildren. I also expect findings to vary by racial combination of the multiracial family, with specific variation on basis of race and gender combination of the parents.

The dataset that will be utilized for this study is the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS). ECLS is a nationally representative sample of children which utilized multi-stage stratified probability design using U.S. birth certificates. Data from this sample was collected at home from the adolescents and through parent surveys. This study will utilize data from the Kindergarten sample (N=21,260, total sample size). A particular advantage of this dataset is that it over-samples Asian and American Indian

populations, both of which have the high of children with a multiple race heritage. This data has also provided a unique advantage for examining intergenerational transmission in multiracial families. As I will be using the Kindergarten wave of this dataset and my particular interest in is familial heritage, racial classification will be solely based on parental self-reports of racial heritage.