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# Grandparents Today: A Demographic Profile

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This article presents a demographic profile of grandparents, using the National Survey of Families and Households. Specific dimensions of grandparenthood addressed include grandparents' survival, the timing of grandparenthood, grandparents' involvement in other roles, surrogate parenting, and stepgrandparents. The data indicate considerable heterogeneity among grandparents of different genders and races or ethnicities. They also suggest modifications in previous descriptions of modern grandparenthood.

Key Words: Grandparents, Gender, Race

# Grandparents Today: A Demographic Profile<sup>1</sup>

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Several researchers contend that demographic and social changes have significantly altered the experience of grandparenthood during this century (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; George & Gold, 1991; Hagestad, 1988; Wilk, 1993). However, evidence for this assertion is limited. Past studies either refer to general population trends (census) among the elderly or rely on mostly small or nonrepresentative samples of grandparents (Aldous, 1995; Robertson, 1995). Estimates based on census data are questionable for several reasons. First, grandparenthood constitutes a countertransition; that is, a transition determined not only by the grandparent's own characteristics and life choices but also by those of his or her children and grandchildren (Hagestad, 1988; Sprey & Matthews, 1982; Troll, 1985). Consequently, trends in the experience of grandparenthood reflect not only population trends in at least two generations but also behavioral dispositions within families. For example, age of transition to grandparenthood is contingent on the timing of births among the grandparents as well as their children, and specific fertility patterns such as teenage pregnancy are known to recur within families over several generations. Trends in grandparenthood thus reflect complex generational and intrafamilial behavior patterns, which are difficult to capture with census data. Furthermore, the onset of grandparenthood varies considerably. Thus, specific characteristics of grandparents, such as their involvement in other roles, cannot be derived from data on specific age groups. Also, census reports on surrogate parenting are limited to "current" house-

holds among the population at large, leading to potential underestimates of this phenomenon.

Studies on grandparents, on the other hand, rarely provide generalizable data. Even the few large-scale investigations of grandparenthood performed during the past decade are not truly representative. For example, both Cherlin and Furstenberg (1986) and King and Elder's (1995) studies focused exclusively on grandparents of teenagers or adolescents, and Bengtson and Harootyan (1994) referred only to grandparents of adult grandchildren. Much of the grandparent research further contains a gender and/or race basis: Studies often neglect grandfathers and address only specific racial/ethnic groups. In addition, both census estimates and grandparent studies often fail to consider that selected grandparent characteristics (e.g., survival or involvement in other roles) vary for different grandchildren. For instance, grandparents may survive well into the adulthood of their first-born but not their last-born grandchild.

Because of these limitations, we lack even a basic demographic characterization of grandparents in general and of specific aspects of current grandparenthood (e.g., timing, divorce, household composition) in particular. As Aldous (1995) noted, such information is essential to assess grandparents' ability to provide support when needed, to estimate the potential of multiple care needs in families (e.g., frail grandparents and great-grandparents), or to determine the prevalence of disrupted grandparent-grandchild relations due to divorce. Demographic information on grandparents also is sought by market researchers as grandparents constitute an important and growing target for businesses selling merchandise for children and adolescents (Schlosberg, 1990; Schwartz & Waldrop, 1992).

The purpose of this article is to provide a nationally representative demographic profile of grandparents that addresses some of the most important characteristics of current grandparenthood, namely, prevalence, survival, timing, divorce, surrogate parenting, and grandparents' other roles. Demographic trends in grandparenthood identified in earlier stud-

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ies are presented first and then contrasted with data on current grandparents from a nationally representative survey, the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH). Whenever sample size permits, these data are presented by gender and race, thus paying tribute to the heterogeneity among today's grandparents. A detailed discussion of grandparent-grandchild relationships would go beyond the demographic emphasis of this article.

## Literature Review

### *Prevalence, Survival, and Timing*

How many individuals eventually experience grandparenthood depends on longevity and their own and their children's fertility and timing of parenthood. Life expectancy—both at birth and at typical childbearing age—increased dramatically during this century (Watkins, Menken, & Bongaarts, 1987). Most individuals in industrialized societies now survive well beyond the usual age of becoming a grandparent; that is, their 40s or 50s (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Uhlenberg, 1980, 1996), and a considerable number survive to become great-grandparents (Farkas & Hogan, 1995). Thus, both the likelihood of surviving to grandparenthood and the duration of grandparenthood increased during this century (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Hagestad & Burton, 1986). This implies that most of today's grandchildren will have all or most of their grandparents survive at least during part of their childhood and adolescence, and many will have surviving grandparents well into their adult years. Uhlenberg (1996) estimated, for example, that by the year 2000 over one third of grandchildren will have all of their grandparents survive to age 10, and that three quarters will have at least one surviving grandparent at age 30.

Estimates of fertility for two successive generations are not readily available. Uhlenberg and Kirby (in press) estimated that the peak fertility during the baby boom will lead to particularly low rates of grandchildlessness during the last two decades of this century, whereas declining fertility for more recent cohorts is likely to result in increased proportions of grandchildless individuals after the turn of this century.

Median age of first parenthood underwent only relatively minor changes during this century. Stevens' (1990) estimates from census data indicated that except for the baby boom period (when median age at first parenthood was 21–22 years), women's median age at the birth of their first child remained relatively stable between 23–24 years from 1890 to 1980. However, both the relatively large number of teenage births in the later part of this century and the more recent simultaneous trend toward delayed parenthood (Bumpass, 1990; George & Gold, 1991) are likely to result in greater heterogeneity in the onset and duration of grandparenthood.

How many and how long their grandparents survive also is contingent on grandchildren's birth order as well as on the birth order of their parents. Obvi-

ously, first-born children of first-born parents will enjoy surviving grandparents longer than children of any other birth order combination. Due primarily to the sharp decline in number of births per woman during this century (with some increases during the baby boom), the interval between first and last births is now much smaller than it was at the beginning of the century (Spanier & Glick, 1980), so that differences in grandparents' survival between first-born and last-born grandchildren are minimized.

The reduction in fertility and in the interval between first and last births during this century led some researchers to assert that today's grandparents will have launched their own children by the time they become grandparents; that is, active parenthood (children under 18 in the household) and grandparenthood are seen as sequential rather than overlapping life phases (Hagestad, 1988; Hagestad & Burton, 1986). The only exception to this trend is noted for parents of teenage parents and associated with perceptions of "off-time" grandparenthood (Burton, 1987).

Increased life expectancy and reduced fertility led to the characterization of today's families as *beanpole* families, a term reflecting the expanding vertical and declining horizontal extension of families (Bengtson, Rosenthal, & Burton, 1990; George & Gold, 1991). The validity of this characterization for today's and future families remains debated (Farkas & Hogan, 1995; Treas, 1995; Uhlenberg, 1995). Whereas more individuals than in the past may survive to great-grandparenthood, the duration of great-grandparenthood and the prevalence of four-generation families is not known. Also, grandparents of the baby boom cohorts will have several siblings and cousins throughout most of their lives.

Although increases in life expectancy during this century cut across all population groups, pronounced gender and racial or ethnic differences in life expectancy remain (Markides & Black, 1995; Moen, 1995). The gender gap in life expectancy increased during this century, leading to sometimes pronounced discrepancies in the survival of grandmothers and grandfathers (Baranowski, 1985; Kinsella, 1995). The effects of continued lower life expectancy among racial or ethnic minorities, on the other hand, may be partially offset by earlier childbearing among these groups (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990). In addition, age differences between spouses often lead to discrepancies in the survival of maternal and paternal grandparents. Age heterogeneity between spouses declined during this century from about 4 years in 1900 to 2 years in 1993 (Saluter, 1994). Because two generations are involved, this means that age differences between maternal grandmothers and paternal grandfathers will have declined on average from 8 to 4 years since the beginning of this century. Also, large age differences between spouses (10 years or more) were much more common at the beginning of this century than they are today, as were marriages in which husbands were younger than their wives (Atkinson & Glass, 1985). Consequently, today's grandchildren will be more likely than grand-

children in the past to have grandparents who are similar in age and less likely to have grandfathers who are younger than grandmothers or who survive grandmothers.

Overall, this research implies that today's grandparents will spend several decades as grandparents and will share their role as grandparents with other grandparents (both their own spouse and the grandparents from the other lineage). Similarly, grandchildren will have more surviving grandparents and will have grandparents who survive for a longer time. Trends in fertility and the timing of marriage and parenthood further suggest greater homogeneity in grandparents' ages and in siblings' access to grandparents and a separation of parent and grandparent roles during the life course. Declines in fertility coupled with increased life expectancy are likely to lead to increased verticalization of families. However, teenage births and delays of parenthood in recent cohorts, as well as gender and racial or ethnic differences in life expectancy, will account for some heterogeneity both in the onset and duration of grandparenthood among diverse population groups.

#### *Grandparenthood and Life Course Transitions*

Changes in the timing and duration of grandparenthood have important implications not only for the experience of grandparenthood itself but also for its intersection with other life events and transitions, both grandparents' and grandchildren's. As several authors note (Hagestad & Burton, 1986; Troll, 1985), grandparent-grandchild relationships are at least partially contingent on grandparents' and grandchildren's roles in other life spheres (e.g., marriage, parenthood, labor force participation) and on the sequencing of life transitions in each of these domains. Generally, the onset of grandparenthood occurs in midlife when involvement in other roles is at its peak (Adelmann, 1994; Hagestad, 1988). Consideration of intersecting life transitions has become increasingly important with the prolonged duration of grandparenthood (i.e., both grandparents and grandchildren will undergo more life transitions as the duration of grandparenthood and the number of surviving grandparents increase).

As far as marriage is concerned, several fundamental changes in sequencing occurred during this century. Increases in longevity most likely led to a reversal in the timing of grandparenthood and widow(er)hood. Whereas early in this century widowhood often preceded the launching of the last child or occurred shortly thereafter, today's parents typically enjoy a lengthy empty-nest period together before one partner dies (Spanier & Glick, 1980; Uhlenberg, 1980). Thus, today's grandparents are likely to experience the death of their partner well after they become grandparents. Recent delays in parenthood are likely to decrease the interval between grandparenthood and widowhood but unlikely to fully reverse this trend.

However, the postponement of widowhood into later life does not necessarily mean that today's

grandparents will be significantly more likely to be married (and especially married to each other) than grandparents in the past. Rising divorce rates during this century and the gender differences in remarriage (Bumpass, 1990) suggest that more grandmothers will enter grandparenthood as divorcées and more grandparents of either sex will be married to partners other than the grandchildren's biological grandparents.

In addition, more grandparents than in the past will experience the occurrence of divorce and stepfamilies among their adult children. Glick (1989) estimated that close to one quarter of all children under 18 live with single parents and an additional 14% live with stepparents. Because stepgrandparenthood results from both grandparents' and their adult children's divorces, the proportion of stepgrandparents most likely exceeds the proportion of divorcées with children in either generation.

Changes in labor force participation during this century also have major implications for the experience of grandparenthood. Three trends are particularly significant; namely, the increased labor force participation of women (including women in their 40s and 50s), the institutionalization of retirement, and the decline in retirement age (Szinovacz & Ekerdt, 1995). The increased labor force participation among middle-aged women implies that many of today's grandmothers will be employed (especially when their grandchildren are still relatively young) and thus less available to care for grandchildren during work hours. The institutionalization of retirement and reduction in retirement age mean, first, that grandfathers will be more available for their grandchildren. During the first half of this century many men either did not retire at all (i.e., death occurred at a time when they were still in the labor force) or survived their retirement by only a short time, often ill or frail (Atchley, 1976; Haber & Gratton, 1994). The implementation of Social Security and pension plans as well as economic pressures led to a steady decline in men's retirement age at least since the 1950s (Szinovacz & Ekerdt, 1995). Thus, a larger proportion of today's men will spend close to a decade as grandfathers and retirees. Similarly, few women are employed beyond their mid-60s and many leave the labor force in their early 60s or even in their late 50s (Szinovacz & Ekerdt, 1995). Thus, grandmothers of older children are unlikely to be in the labor force, but in contrast to grandmothers in the past they are more likely to be retirees rather than long-term housewives.

In general, then, today's grandparents are not necessarily occupying more roles than grandparents in the past (e.g., grandmothers are more likely to be employed but less likely to be active parents). Rather, they are prone to undergo more life transitions during grandparenthood. In addition, the rising divorce rate during this century has contributed to increasingly complex family structures. It also implies that grandparent-grandchild relationships can be disrupted not only by death but also by divorce in either the parents' or the grandparents' generation.

### Household Extension and Surrogate Parenting

In assessing trends in household extension, it is important to distinguish between upward and downward extension; that is, whether adult children take in their parent(s) (upward extension) or whether adult children and their children reside in their parents' household (downward extension), and whether both, one, or neither of the grandchildren's parents live in the household (Burton, Dilworth-Anderson, & Merriwether-deVries, 1995; Gratton, 1987; Szinovacz, 1996). The distinction between upward and downward extension typically (though not always) indicates whether the extended household is maintained to serve the grandparents' or the adult children's and the grandchildren's needs (Aquilino, 1990; Lee & Dwyer, 1996; Szinovacz, 1996). The presence of grandchildren's parent(s) offers rough estimates concerning grandparents' responsibility for the grandchildren (i.e., whether they have full responsibility for the grandchildren or function more as co-parents or helpers to the grandchildren's own parents).

Some evidence concerning trends in extended households and surrogate parenting is available from census data. The proportion of grandchildren coresiding with grandparents (in both upward and downward extended households) increased slightly between 1940 (10.3% White, 16.0% Black) and 1950 (10.6% White, 18.5% Black), then it declined steadily until 1980 (4.8% White and 12.2% Black) and rose slightly in the 1990s (5.3% White, 14.9% Black; Hernandez & Myers, 1993; Uhlenberg & Kirby, in press). This general pattern varies by family structure and race. The strongest decline in coresidence with grandparents since the middle of this century occurred among two parent families suggesting that traditional extended households (children remaining in parents' household after their marriage and parenthood) and/or adult children taking elderly parents into their homes are becoming increasingly rare (Hernandez & Myers, 1993; Uhlenberg & Kirby, in press). This conclusion is supported by other census analyses, which indicate a decline since mid-century in the proportion of elderly parents living with their adult children (Ruggles, 1994; Saluter, 1992). In contrast, the proportion of White grandchildren living with single or no parents and grandparents declined slightly from 1940 to 1970 (3.1% to 2.1%) and then rose to 2.5% in 1980 (Hernandez & Myers, 1993). Among Blacks, the proportion of grandchildren living with neither parent and grandparents declined from 7.6% in 1940 to 4.8% in 1980, whereas the proportion of grandchildren living with single parents and grandparents increased from 3.1% to 5.7% during the same time period (Hernandez & Myers, 1993).

Additional census data indicate that less than 10% of children lived at any one point in time in households headed by grandparents since the middle of this century. The proportion of children exposed to such living arrangements was highest in 1950 (5.8%), then it decreased during the 1960s (4.0%) and 1970s (3.2%), and started to rise again since the late 1980s (5.6% in 1995). Throughout this century, Whites were

much less likely than other racial or ethnic groups to live in grandparent-headed households. For example, in 1993 only 3.7% of White but 12.1% of Black children lived in grandparents' households (Saluter, 1996; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1953, 1964, 1973).

Assessments of *current* household structure may considerably underestimate lifetime exposure to extended households. Earlier analyses of data from the first wave of the NSFH indicate that 18% of Blacks and 9% of Whites have ever lived in the household of a grandparent, whereas 11% of Blacks and 19% of Whites had a grandparent live with their family (Szinovacz, 1996). Thus, well over one quarter of the NSFH respondents experienced coresidence with grandparents sometime during their childhood or adolescence, a percentage considerably higher than that captured by the census data (see also Hernandez & Myers, 1993).

### Expected Trends

The purpose of this article is to assess whether prevailing depictions of grandparenthood are accurate. The preceding literature review suggests the following characterization of today's grandparents:

1. Most individuals will experience grandparenthood.
2. The onset of grandparenthood typically occurs during middle age. However, there will be some heterogeneity in the timing of grandparenthood. Specifically, minorities and women will experience grandparenthood earlier than Whites and men.
3. Grandparents typically survive beyond their grandchildren's adolescence, and grandchildren have several surviving grandparents by the time they reach adulthood (age 18). This trend should apply regardless of grandchildren's birth order.
4. Because of gender differences in life expectancy and age differences between spouses, grandchildren should be most likely to have surviving maternal grandmothers and least likely to have surviving paternal grandfathers.
5. The concept of the beanpole family suggests that the majority of families will have a surviving great-grandparent or four living generations (or that grandparents will have a surviving parent at least while their grandchildren are still young).
6. Grandparenthood and active parenthood have become sequential life phases. Thus, at the onset of grandparenthood most individuals will no longer have dependent children in the household.
7. Widow(er)hood will typically follow rather than precede the transition to grandparenthood. Consequently, only a minority of grandparents with young grandchildren will be widowed.
8. Between 20% and 25% of grandparents will be stepgrandparents either through their own or through their adult children's divorces and remarriages.
9. The majority of grandparents (both male and female) with young grandchildren will be em-

ployed. The majority of older grandparents (age 60 and over) or of grandparents with older grandchildren will not be employed.

10. Because the census data refer to living arrangements of children rather than grandparents, it is difficult to estimate how many grandparents live in extended households. The census data would suggest that less than 10% of grandparents will reside with grandchildren at any one point in time, but a considerably higher proportion (20% or more) should have ever lived with grandchildren. Upward extended households should prevail among Whites, whereas downward extended households should be more common among Blacks.

## Methods

### Sample

This study relies on Wave 2 of the NSFH, which was conducted from 1992 to 1994 ( $N = 10,008$ ). The NSFH is based on a multistage area probability sample, which was augmented by oversampling of minorities, one-parent families, families with stepchildren, cohabitators, and recently married persons. The oversample was achieved by doubling the number of targeted households. The original sample (including the oversample) consisted of 33,869 addresses. These addresses were first screened, and successfully screened households were approached for interviews. Data for the first wave were collected from a randomly selected household member age 19 or more, his/her spouse, and a tertiary household member (if the respondent was a child or other relative of the householder). First wave interview response rates for the successfully screened households were 73.5% for the main sample and 76.8% for the oversample, resulting in a total sample of 13,017 respondents. The response rate for spouses was 83.2%. Most respondents ( $n = 10,008$ ) completed the Wave 2 interviews, representing an attrition rate of 23.2%. To restore the representativeness of the Wave 2 data, weights adjust for sampling and response rates at Time 1 as well as attrition in Wave 2. (For a detailed description of the study design and sample, see Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988).

All data presented here (except for those based on grandchildren's responses) are weighted to adjust for oversampling of selected population groups as well as refusals and attrition. Because the grandchildren data rely on responses from "focal" children (one child age 9 or over was randomly selected to be interviewed), they are not comparable to the total sample. Therefore, use of overall weights would be inappropriate, and special weights for the focal children are not available. The analyses presented below rely on different subsamples, contingent on the "at-risk" population. For example, analyses of specific characteristics of grandparents are based on the subsample of current grandparents. The subsample sizes for these groups are shown in the tables.

### Measures

Data on the prevalence of grandparenthood rely on two sources: respondents' own reports and interviews with focal children age 9 to 26. Respondents were asked whether and how many grandchildren they have and how old their youngest and oldest grandchild is. In addition, they completed household rosters both for all current household members as well as for children and spouse's children living outside the household. The current household roster includes information on all household members' relationship to the respondent (including children, stepchildren, and grandchildren). Furthermore, respondents were asked to complete a series of questions about children (own and stepchildren) both inside and outside the household, including their ages, and for children age 16 and over, the respondents were asked to answer questions about marital status, number of children, and whether the child has stepchildren. Existence and number of grandchildren for respondents was derived from both the direct questions about grandparenthood as well as the household rosters. Comparisons of both measures not only serve validation purposes but can also provide some preliminary assessment on whether self-defined grandparenthood differs from strictly biological grandparenthood. Self-defined grandparenthood may include stepgrandchildren as well as "fictive grandchildren" who may have any blood or other relationship to the respondent. Grandchildren's responses are based on questions about whether each of their grandparents is currently alive.

To estimate duration of grandparents' survival, the timing of grandparenthood, as well as the prevalence of three- and four-generation families, the analyses further rely on questions about respondents' parents. Specifically, respondents were asked whether their parents are still alive and, if alive, how old their parents are. If parents had died, information was obtained on the year of death and parents' age at the time of their deaths. By converting all age data (e.g., birth of first child, birth of last grandchild, death of parent) to calendar years, it was possible to calculate parents' survival for specific grandparent transitions (e.g., birth of their first grandchild or great-grandchild). It should be noted that nonresponses were relatively high for these questions especially when parents had died a long time ago. Furthermore, some responses were clearly invalid (e.g., age at birth of children or grandchildren was biologically impossible or highly unlikely). Because the validity of responses about parents is sometimes ambiguous (for example, men may have children late in life), births prior to age 12 and after age 49 were treated as missing, yielding altogether 5% missing responses for mothers and 14% missing responses for fathers. Calculations of respondents' own timing of parenthood and grandparenthood were based on responses concerning their own ages, the ages of their children, and the ages of their youngest and oldest grandchild.

To assess the prevalence of stepgrandparenthood, it is necessary to combine information on children

and stepchildren with information on divorce in families. Stepgrandparenthood occurs when (a) individuals with children have living stepparents, (b) individuals with stepchildren have living parents or individuals with children from another person than the current spouse have living parents-in-law, (c) when individuals' own children or their partners' children have stepchildren, or (d) when individuals or their partners' stepchildren have children. These different types of stepgrandparenthood were derived from data on respondents' and their partners' children (based on the household and child rosters) as well as from information on the survival and marital status of their parents and parents-in-law. The household and child rosters yield the necessary data on whether or not respondents' own or their partners' children have children or stepchildren, whether respondents' children are offspring of their current partners, and whether respondents have stepchildren. Because data on ex-spouses' children (who are not respondents' own children) are fragmentary and ex-stepchildren may not be defined as relatives, most of the analyses rely on married respondents and stepchildren from their *current* partners.

The analyses on stepparents rely exclusively on stepparents who are *currently* married to respondents' parents. This relatively narrow definition of stepparents seems warranted for both data availability and conceptual reasons. Although the NSFH does contain information on stepparents during respondents' childhood, no information is available on stepparents acquired after childhood but who are no longer married to respondents' parents. From a conceptual standpoint it also is not clear whether stepparents are still considered as such once their marriages to respondents' parents are dissolved by death or divorce. The overall prevalence of stepgrandparenthood was assessed by determining whether any of the relationships described under (a) through (d) above was present for either spouse.

The analyses on household extension and surrogate parenting rely mostly on information from the household rosters. Respondents indicated whether grandchildren or children (their own, their spouses', or in-laws) with children reside in the household. On the basis of these data as well as on information concerning children's marital status, it was determined whether grandchildren are in the household with or without their parents. Because coresidence with grandchildren is not always indicative of grandparents' surrogate parenting, especially if the grandparent is not the householder, separate analyses were performed for grandparents who are and those who are not household heads or spouses of household heads. The interviews further contained the question "Did you ever have primary responsibility for your grandchild(ren) for more than six months?" Those answering "yes" were classified as having been surrogate parents, regardless of whether or not they are *currently* surrogate parents. Analyses referring to this question thus represent *lifetime* experiences of surrogate parenting among today's grandparents. Fuller-Thomson, Minkler, and Driver's (1997) analyses of

the NSFH data offer more detailed analyses of the composition of surrogate grandparents. However, their analyses focus on those grandparents who were surrogate parents during the 1990s. They thus exclude those grandparents who stopped their surrogate roles prior to 1990.

Assessment of the prevalence of three-generation households also relies on the household rosters. Three-generation households were defined as households that include either a household member of the parent generation (respondents' own parent, stepparent, or parent-in-law) and *respondents'* children (including children-in-law and stepchildren) or households that include children (including stepchildren and children-in-law) and grandchildren or step-grandchildren.

To arrive at estimates of grandparents' other responsibilities, we considered their involvement in other family roles as well as their employment status. Family responsibilities refer to the presence of a living parent (in this case, only respondents' own parents were counted), of dependent children (age 18 or under) in the household, and of a spouse. Respondents were deemed full-time employed if they worked 30 h or more per week. Because involvement in such roles may change during grandparenthood, the data are presented separately for all grandparents and for those with grandchildren age 5 or under.

## Results

### Prevalence

As shown in Table 1, between one third and two fifths of all NSFH respondents are grandparents. This proportion increases to about two thirds when only individuals "at risk" of grandparenthood (i.e., those with children of childbearing age) are considered. Eventually, though, very few individuals remain grandchildless: Among those with children aged 40 years and over, close to 95% are grandparents. On average, grandparents have five to six grandchildren. The data further indicate that over 80% of today's families contain three generations, and 16% have four or more living generations. It should be noted that the estimates of three- and four-generation families shown here are likely underestimates. Because the NSFH does not contain information on the survival of respondents' grandparents or the existence of great-grandchildren, only adjacent generations and grandchildren could be considered in the calculations.

Prevalence and number of grandchildren vary by both gender and race or ethnicity. Generally, Hispanic men report grandparent status somewhat less frequently than other men and women. A similar trend is apparent for Black men whose children are age 40 and over.

Because the onset of grandparenthood occurs earlier for Blacks (both men and women) as well as for Hispanic women, well over one half of Black women but only one third of White women under age 55 are



Table 1. Prevalence of Grandparenthood

Measure	All	Male			All	Female			All	Significance <sup>a</sup>
		Black	White	Hispanic		Black	White	Hispanic		
Percent With Grandchildren										
All (self-defined) <sup>b</sup>	36.9	36.4	33.9	27.6	33.4	43.0	40.7	33.7	40.1	a,b,c,d,e,f
All (children's children)	34.3	32.9	31.5	25.0	30.8	39.6	38.1	31.9	37.4	a,b,c,d,e,f,g
With children age 15+	64.7	68.1	62.3	58.1	62.4	71.0	67.1	56.5	66.5	a,b,d,f
Youngest child age 40+	94.6	83.5	94.3	86.1	93.6	99.3	94.7	100.0	95.1	e
Respondent's Age										
21–39	2.8	3.6	2.0	1.6	2.1	7.8	2.7	3.8	3.4	a,b,d
40–54	33.4	42.6	26.2	26.9	27.7	58.7	36.0	47.0	39.0	a,b,c,d,e,f,g
55–64	78.7	86.0	73.5	95.2	75.4	85.8	81.8	69.1	81.3	a,c,d,f,g
65 and over	81.4	84.5	83.7	89.7	83.7	78.7	79.3	90.3	79.6	a,f
Mean Number of Grandchildren										
Self-defined	5.5	5.1	4.9	7.4	5.1	6.6	5.5	7.2	5.8	a,b,c,d,e,f
Children's children	5.2	5.7	4.6	7.2	4.9	5.9	5.3	6.6	5.4	a,b,c,d,f
Percent of Respondents With										
Three-generation families <sup>c</sup>	80.0	79.5	77.8	88.1	78.4	84.2	80.9	82.9	81.3	a,b,c,f
Four-generation families <sup>d</sup>	16.1	18.6	13.5	16.8	14.2	25.7	17.1	16.1	17.8	a,b,c,d,e,f
N	10,008	474	3,847	372	4,753	599	4,192	382	5,255	

<sup>a</sup>Significance is reported as follows: a: overall gender difference  $p < .05$ ; b: overall race difference  $p < .05$ ; c: race difference for men  $p < .05$ ; d: race difference for women  $p < .05$ ; e: gender difference for Blacks  $p < .05$ ; f: gender difference for Whites  $p < .05$ ; g: gender difference for Hispanics  $p < .05$ .

<sup>b</sup>Self-defined grandparenthood reflects "yes" responses to the question whether respondent has any grandchildren. Children's children refers to an assessment of grandparenthood based on whether respondent reports that his/her children have themselves children using the household rosters. Unless otherwise indicated, self-defined grandparenthood is used in the analyses.

<sup>c</sup>Respondents aged 35+ with either living parents and children or with children and grandchildren or all three.

<sup>d</sup>Respondents aged 35+ with living parents, children, and grandchildren.

grandmothers. The earlier onset of grandparenthood among Blacks also enhances the proportion with four-generation families: Compared to under 20% for all other groups, about 25% of Black women aged 35 and over have living parents, children, and grandchildren.

Comparisons between self-defined and biological (children's children) grandparenthood reveal some ambiguity in the definition of grandparenthood. Generally, both figures for prevalence and number of grandchildren are somewhat higher for self-defined than biological grandparenthood. Apart from reporting errors (some grandparents have over 20 grandchildren and may very well have given inconsistent answers because of the large number of grandchildren), the acknowledgment of stepgrandchildren as grandchildren or the incorporation of "fictive" grandchildren into one's kin network may account for these discrepancies. Because the discrepancies are most pronounced for Black and Hispanic women who are more prone than other groups to adopt fictive kin (Scott & Black, 1994; Stack, 1974) or to have stepgrandchildren (see below), the results probably reflect real differences and not only measurement error. Black men are the only grandparents who report fewer self-defined than biological grandchildren.

### Survival

The analyses relying on reports of grandchildren (Table 2) confirm both gender and lineage effects in

grandparents' survival: Maternal grandmothers are most likely to survive into grandchildren's adult years, followed by paternal grandmothers, maternal grandfathers, and paternal grandfathers. In addition, there are significant race differences in the survival of grandparents for the young children (age 9 to 18). White grandchildren are more likely to report that any of their grandparents are alive than are Hispanic and Black grandchildren. These differences are particularly pronounced for grandfathers (both maternal and paternal). Except for maternal grandmothers who tend to be the youngest grandparent, similar race differences do not occur for older grandchildren (age 19 to 26), perhaps as a consequence of the mortality crossover in old age (Markides & Black, 1995; Markides & Machalek, 1991). The data further show that most grandchildren will experience the death of one or more grandparents during adolescence and early adulthood. Even by age 12, only one third of grandchildren have four living grandparents. This proportion declines to fewer than 10% for grandchildren in their mid-20s. Nevertheless, the majority of grandchildren (about 70%) have more than two living grandparents by the time they reach adulthood.

For the most part, data based on respondents' reports confirm these trends (see Table 3). Respondents' parents typically survived past the births of respondents' first- and last-born children, and close to two thirds of respondents' mothers and about 40% of their fathers survived the birth of respondents' first grandchild (or the parents' first great-grandchild).



Table 2. Survival of Grandparents—Grandchildren's Reports (Percentages)

	Maternal grandmother alive	Paternal grandmother alive	Maternal grandfather alive	Paternal grandfather alive	Number of living grandparents					N
					0	1	2	3	4	
Children's Age <sup>a</sup>										
Young children										
9–12	85.8***	78.6*	66.6**	61.5**	1.9	11.1	23.3	30.7	33.0**	480
13–15	78.0	73.6	60.0	53.4	5.6	12.9	26.3	32.2	23.0	546
16–18	76.4	70.5	53.4	45.3	7.8	15.9	27.4	30.4	18.5	369
Old children										
19–22	67.2	62.6**	45.2**	36.1**	11.2	19.2	28.0	29.5	12.0**	661
23–26	62.3	48.6	33.0	24.8	17.7	30.0	25.6	19.8	6.8	300
Children 9–18										
Black	74.3**	67.1**	48.6**	41.2**	7.8	19.4	32.1	29.1	11.6**	265
White	82.3	76.6	65.1	58.4	3.9	10.4	23.7	31.7	30.3	990
Hispanic	75.2	71.3	50.9	45.7	6.9	19.0	27.6	31.0	15.5	113
Children 19–26										
Black	55.5*	53.6	37.2	28.0	19.2	27.2	23.2	21.6	8.8	137
White	67.9	59.0	42.2	33.2	12.1	22.2	27.8	27.5	10.4	758
Hispanic	60.3	58.2	37.9	32.7	16.4	21.8	27.3	21.8	12.7	58

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

<sup>a</sup>Data for "young" (9–18) and "old" (19–26) children are contained in two separate data files. Significance tests for age differences are, therefore, presented separately for each group of children.

<sup>b</sup>Significance tests for the first four columns indicate whether grandparents' survival differs by children's age and race. Significance tests for the last five columns indicate whether number of living grandparents differs by children's age and race.

However, fewer than 30% of respondents' mothers and fewer than 15% of their fathers survived to the birth of their last great-grandchild. By the time respondents' children reach early middle age (age 30 or over) or their oldest grandchild reaches school age, the majority of respondents' parents (80% of mothers and 90% of fathers) are no longer alive.

Gender and lineage effects are again evident. Respondents' mothers are more likely to survive grandchildren's and especially great-grandchildren's births, and women's parents survive longer than men's. However, the race effects differ from those shown for grandchildren's reports. The longer survival of White grandparents shown in the grandchildren's reports is not upheld by respondents' data, and race differences vary depending on the specific survival date (e.g., birth of first or last child or grandchild) under consideration. This discrepancy between grandchildren's and respondents' reports may occur because grandchildren's birth order is not controlled in the data relying on grandchildren's report.

#### Timing of Grandparenthood

As expected, the transition to grandparenthood occurs during middle age (under age 50), whereas the transition to great-grandparenthood typically happens in young-old age (age 60 to 65). This trend applies to both respondents as well as to their parents and to both male and female grandparents (Table 4). However, close to a third of respondents experience grandparenthood off-time, either before age 40 or after age 60 (data not shown in the table).

The onset of grandparenthood and great-grandparenthood varies by gender and race. Minorities and especially Blacks experience grandparenthood and great-grandparenthood earlier than Whites, and

women experience these transitions earlier than men. The cumulative effects of both race and gender can lead to substantial differences in the timing of grandparenthood. For example, on average White men make the transition to grandparenthood about 9 years later than Black women and Whites start great-grandparenthood about 5 years later than Blacks. There also are pronounced race and gender differences in the experience of off-time grandparenthood. Black women are particularly prone to enter grandparenthood early; that is, before age 40 (37.6% of Black women compared to 16% of White women), whereas both White (16%) and Black men (16.8%) make the transition at age 60 or later. Because some Black women (13.6%) also experience grandparenthood late, this means that the majority of Black women (51.2%) enter grandparenthood off-time, compared to 27.9% of White and 34.1% of Hispanic women. Similarly, 38.2% of Black men but only 23.5% of White and 21.4% of Hispanic men enter grandparenthood either early or late.

The interval between the births of the first and last grandchild is quite long; on average it is a decade and close to 15 years for Blacks. On the other hand, the interval between the births of respondents' last child and their first grandchild is typically less than 18 years, so that the majority (62%) experience some overlap of active parenthood and grandparenthood. Overlapping experiences of active parenthood and grandparenthood are particularly common among Blacks (close to 80%) but much less prevalent among Whites (less than 60%).

#### Grandparents' Roles

According to Adelman (1994), middle age constitutes the peak of an individual's involvement in dif-

Table 3. Survival of Grandparents—Respondents' Reports (Percentages)

Measure	Male				Female				Significance <sup>a</sup>	N
	All	Black	White	Hispanic	All	Black	White	Hispanic		
Mother Alive at										
Birth of first child <sup>b</sup>	93.0	90.2	91.9	96.4	92.1	92.6	94.1	92.0	a,c,f,g	7,537
Birth of last child <sup>c</sup>	87.3	79.1	86.5	94.4	86.4	83.7	89.0	82.8	b,c,d,f,g	5,084
Birth of first grandchild <sup>d</sup>	63.0	64.5	58.5	81.5	60.6	71.4	63.8	64.9	a,b,c,f,g	3,262
Birth of last grandchild <sup>e</sup>	28.8	26.8	28.3	58.6	15.9	—	—	—	a,b	643
Father Alive at										
Birth of first child <sup>b</sup>	85.7	81.6	84.1	80.6	83.6	87.5	87.2	88.2	a,e,f,g	7,069
Birth of last child <sup>c</sup>	74.0	68.2	71.8	67.3	71.4	76.0	76.6	69.3	a,f	4,725
Birth of first grandchild <sup>d</sup>	38.3	46.2	33.3	49.0	35.3	52.5	38.8	42.4	a,b,c,d,f	2,953
Birth of last grandchild <sup>e</sup>	13.7	18.5	13.6	9.1	8.0	—	—	—	a	596
Respondent (R) Has Living Mother										
R's oldest child										
<18 <sup>b</sup>	86.7	77.7	87.0	88.4	86.2	83.7	87.7	88.0	b,c	3,123
19–29 <sup>b</sup>	64.4	66.7	63.7	74.4	64.1	62.8	65.7	58.5		1,726
30+ <sup>b</sup>	20.9	14.4	19.1	22.8	18.9	25.3	22.1	21.6	a,e	2,992
R's youngest child										
<18 <sup>b</sup>	82.1	72.9	83.1	81.5	81.5	77.9	83.8	79.6	b,c,d	4,053
19–29 <sup>b</sup>	47.8	44.8	46.2	46.5	46.2	42.9	50.9	36.2	d	1,744
30+ <sup>b</sup>	14.4	7.7	13.4	24.0	13.5	19.4	14.6	15.8		2,041
R's oldest grandchild										
<5 <sup>d</sup>	57.3	55.7	60.8	34.1	58.8	63.3	56.1	41.1	b	756
R's oldest grandchild										
>5 <sup>d</sup>	22.1	24.3	19.3	30.0	20.5	28.6	22.5	25.4	b	2,673
R's youngest grandchild										
<5 <sup>d</sup>	38.4	39.5	38.9	29.8	38.3	44.7	38.5	29.9	b	2,213
R's youngest grandchild										
>5 <sup>d</sup>	14.6	14.2	11.2	43.9	12.6	17.7	15.1	27.7	b,c	1,228
Respondent Has Living Father										
R's oldest child										
<18 <sup>b</sup>	72.8	60.4	73.8	64.6	71.4	66.6	76.1	69.9	b,c,d	3,090
19–29 <sup>b</sup>	37.9	34.8	32.0	50.5	33.0	41.9	43.2	34.8	a,f	1,714
30+ <sup>b</sup>	5.6	5.6	4.9	2.8	4.9	9.9	5.9	3.1		2,975
R's youngest child										
<18 <sup>b</sup>	65.7	53.1	66.5	58.8	64.1	58.5	70.0	60.2	a,b,c,d,f	4,006
9–29 <sup>b</sup>	22.2	17.4	18.5	19.4	18.4	29.7	25.6	11.8	a,d,f	1,738
30+ <sup>b</sup>	2.6	3.7	2.3	0	2.3	3.4	2.9	0		2,032
R's oldest grandchild										
<5 <sup>d</sup>	28.5	31.0	25.8	26.1	26.6	40.8	29.1	19.7		748
R's oldest grandchild										
>5 <sup>d</sup>	6.5	7.1	4.9	1.1	4.8	11.6	7.0	11.2	d,f,g	2,659
R's youngest grandchild										
<5 <sup>d</sup>	16.6	18.5	14.2	10.1	14.4	25.4	17.3	15.7	a,b,d	2,196
R's youngest grandchild										
>5 <sup>d</sup>	2.0	0	1.5	0	1.3	2.9	2.1	7.0		1,223

<sup>a</sup>Significance is reported as follows: a: overall gender difference  $p < .05$ ; b: overall race difference  $p < .05$ ; c: race difference for men  $p < .05$ ; d: race difference for women  $p < .05$ ; e: gender difference for Blacks  $p < .05$ ; f: gender difference for Whites  $p < .05$ ; g: gender difference for Hispanics  $p < .05$ .

<sup>b</sup>Based on respondents with children.

<sup>c</sup>Based on respondents age 40 or over with children.

<sup>d</sup>Based on respondents with grandchildren.

<sup>e</sup>Based on respondents with grandchildren whose youngest child is age 40 or over. Race differences based on entire sample (men and women).

ferent roles. Thus, it is not surprising that the great majority of grandparents have roles other than grandparenthood (see Table 5). Except for Black women, the majority of grandparents are married, about one third still have at least one living parent, and about a third are full-time employed. In addition, 10% of all grandparents and over one quarter of minority grandparents have dependent children in

their households. These numbers increase somewhat when only grandparents with preschool-age grandchildren are considered. About one half of these grandparents have three or more competing roles. Primarily due to their higher labor force participation rates, grandfathers are somewhat more likely than grandmothers to have multiple roles. Minorities (especially Blacks) tend to have more roles than

Table 4. Timing of Grandparenthood (Means)

Measure	All	Male			All	Female			All	Significance <sup>a</sup>	N
		Black	White	Hispanic		Black	White	Hispanic			
Age at birth of first grandchild <sup>b</sup>	47.0	44.9	49.2	47.6	48.7	41.5	46.7	42.3	45.8	a,b,c,d,e,f,g	3,433
Age at birth of last grandchild <sup>c</sup>	60.5	57.9	60.8	54.9	62.5	—	—	—	59.5	a,b	752
Mother's age at birth of R's first child <sup>d,f</sup>	45.2	43.9	47.2	45.5	46.8	41.0	44.5	43.2	44.0	a,b,c,d,e,f,g	6,779
Mother's age at birth of R's last child <sup>e,f</sup>	51.9	51.1	53.4	54.0	53.3	48.9	50.9	52.2	50.8	a,b,c,d,e,f	4,307
Mother's age at birth of R's first grandchild <sup>b,f</sup>	64.6	61.6	67.2	64.9	66.5	60.2	64.0	60.4	63.3	a,b,c,d,f,g	1,896
Father's age at birth of R's first child <sup>d,f</sup>	48.1	46.8	50.0	48.0	49.6	44.2	47.3	46.1	47.0	a,b,c,d,e,f,g	5,714
Father's age at birth of R's last child <sup>e,f</sup>	54.4	54.7	55.6	54.1	55.5	50.8	53.6	55.8	53.4	a,b,d,e,f	3,343
Father's age at birth of R's first grandchild <sup>b,f</sup>	65.4	62.6	67.3	64.6	66.5	60.4	65.3	64.1	64.6	a,b,c,d,f	1,037
Interval Between Births of First - last grandchild <sup>c</sup>	10.9	14.8	10.7	9.1	10.6	—	—	—	11.0	b	741
First child - first grandchild <sup>b</sup>	23.9	21.5	24.4	22.4	24.0	21.7	24.3	21.6	23.8	b,c,d	3,295
Last child - first grandchild <sup>b</sup>	15.9	12.3	16.8	11.1	16.0	12.2	16.6	11.3	15.8	b,c,d	3,351
First child - last grandchild <sup>c</sup>	35.8	36.8	35.8	31.9	35.9	—	—	—	35.7		746
Last child - last grandchild <sup>c</sup>	31.1	32.4	31.1	27.1	31.5	—	—	—	30.8	b	752
Had children < 18 at birth of first grandchild <sup>b</sup>	62.0	82.8	57.3	84.3	61.5	76.4	58.8	83.8	62.3	b,c,d	3,351

<sup>a</sup>Significance is reported as follows: a: overall gender difference  $p < .05$ ; b: overall race difference  $p < .05$ ; c: race difference for men  $p < .05$ ; d: race difference for women  $p < .05$ ; e: gender difference for Blacks  $p < .05$ ; f: gender difference for Whites  $p < .05$ ; g: gender difference for Hispanics  $p < .05$ .

<sup>b</sup>Based on respondents with grandchildren.

<sup>c</sup>Based on respondents with children age 40 or over. Race differences for entire sample (men and women).

<sup>d</sup>Based on respondents with children.

<sup>e</sup>Based on respondents age 40 or over with children.

<sup>f</sup>Based only on parents who were alive at the time of the specific transition.

Whites, because of their higher involvement in all roles (employment, active parenting, living parents) except marriage. On the other hand, about one quarter of female grandparents of all races report no involvement in any of the roles under consideration.

### Divorce

The data on stepgrandparenthood are presented separately by age of respondents' children (Table 6). For respondents with children under 18, stepgrandparenthood occurs either through the divorce of their parents or parents-in-law or through respondents' own divorce. Stepgrandparenthood through divorce in respondents' parents' generation is relatively rare (less than 10% except for Black men). In contrast, between 15 and 30% of married individuals have stepchildren and living parents and between one quarter and one half of couples have stepchildren and surviving parents. These proportions are even higher when stepgrandparents from several generations are considered. The prevalence of stepgrandparents in families differs by race: Black families are much more likely to include stepgrandparents than either Whites or Hispanics.

As far as respondents with adult children are concerned, about one quarter become stepgrandparents through their own or their spouse's divorce. How-

ever, close to 10% derive their stepgrandparent status through their children's divorces. Considering the prevalence of divorce in all generations and by both current spouses results in much higher proportions: Close to two fifths of couples with adult children have at least one stepgrandparent relationship in their family. As in the case of individuals with young children, race differences are pronounced: Over 55% of Black couple families contain stepgrandparents compared to less than 40% of Whites and Hispanics.

These data demonstrate that stepgrandparenthood is becoming a widespread phenomenon among families of all races and characterizes the majority of Black couples. It should also be noted that the particularly complex family structures created by multiple divorces involving children are becoming more common. Whereas fewer than 5% of couples report stepgrandparent relations in more than one generation, between 10% and 33% of couples report more than two divorces (e.g., both spouses, parent and spouse, etc.) involving children in their families (data not shown). Multiple divorces also vary by race: 32.5% of Black couples with children over 18 and 24.9% of Black couples with children under 18 report multiple divorces involving children, compared to, respectively, 18.5% and 10.8% of Whites, and 20.2% and 13.7% of Hispanics.

Table 5. Grandparents' Work and Family Roles (Percentages)

Measure	All	Male			Female				All	Significance <sup>a</sup>	N
		Black	White	Hispanic	All	Black	White	Hispanic			
Roles											
All Grandparents											
Employed > 30 hr	34.5	47.8	40.5	46.7	41.6	41.3	26.8	36.2	29.3	a,b,d,f	3,563
Children < 19 in household	11.7	22.0	9.0	31.8	11.9	24.3	8.2	29.4	11.5	b,c,d	3,717
Married	67.0	64.6	84.0	78.5	81.4	33.9	60.1	50.7	56.2	a,b,c,d,e,f,g	3,717
Has living parent(s)	33.9	35.9	31.6	38.6	32.6	43.4	33.7	34.4	34.9	b,d	3,717
Number of roles											
0	19.0	13.7	9.6	8.2	10.0	26.5	25.4	26.3	25.7		
1	39.4	34.4	45.3	37.3	43.6	30.8	37.7	29.7	36.2		
2	22.4	29.2	22.3	13.8	22.5	22.0	22.7	17.6	22.3		
3+	19.3	22.7	22.8	40.7	23.9	20.7	14.2	26.4	15.8	a,b,c,d,e,f,g	3,717
Respondents With Grandchildren Under Age 6											
Employed > 30 hr	45.0	58.8	54.8	42.7	54.2	47.7	36.3	35.0	37.8	a,b,d,f	2,117
Children < 19 in household	15.5	28.2	12.6	32.8	16.0	27.9	11.1	36.4	15.2	b,c,d	2,219
Married	71.9	65.2	86.0	85.5	83.4	34.6	68.0	58.9	62.7	a,b,c,d,e,f,g	2,219
Has living parent(s)	42.8	43.3	42.1	29.8	41.4	51.9	43.8	31.6	43.9	b,d	2,219
Number of roles											
0	11.4	8.4	6.8	5.5	6.9	18.2	14.0	17.8	15.1		
1	34.8	28.2	33.2	40.9	33.3	31.6	37.0	34.8	36.0		
2	27.6	34.2	27.2	14.3	27.1	25.6	29.1	21.3	28.0		
3+	26.2	29.1	32.8	39.4	32.7	24.6	19.8	26.1	21.0	a,b,f,g	2,219

<sup>a</sup>Significance is reported as follows: a: overall gender difference  $p < .05$ ; b: overall race difference  $p < .05$ ; c: race difference for men  $p < .05$ ; d: race difference for women  $p < .05$ ; e: gender difference for Blacks  $p < .05$ ; f: gender difference for Whites  $p < .05$ ; g: gender difference for Hispanics  $p < .05$ .

Table 6. Grandparenthood and Divorce (Percentages)

Measure	All	Male			Female				Significance <sup>a</sup>	N	
		Black	White	Hispanic	All	Black	White	Hispanic			
Respondents With Children < Age 18											
Has stepparent(s)	4.2	3.0	3.5	4.1	3.5	4.6	5.1	3.4	4.9	a,f	4,092
Married Respondents With Children or Stepchildren < Age 18											
Either spouse has stepparent(s)	7.2	12.0	6.0	7.7	6.6	5.9	8.3	5.9	7.8	c,f	3,204
Living parent and stepchildren	14.5	20.7	12.1	18.6	13.5	30.7	14.5	13.9	15.6	b,c,d	3,204
Living parent-in-law and child(ren) from previous spouse	17.4	29.0	15.8	14.9	16.6	31.3	17.1	20.9	18.2	b,c,d	3,204
Either spouse has living parents and stepchildren	26.2	40.8	23.6	28.2	25.3	48.7	25.3	28.1	27.1	b,c,d	3,204
Any stepgrandparents in family	32.7	52.6	28.4	39.6	31.3	58.4	32.5	32.7	34.0	b,c,d,f	3,204
Respondents With Children > Age 18											
Has children with stepchild(ren)	8.7	9.3	8.1	12.6	8.5	10.1	8.7	8.3	8.9		4,889
Married Respondents With Child(ren) or Stepchild(ren) > Age 18											
Has stepchild(ren) with child(ren)	13.7	19.0	12.6	13.9	13.2	23.7	13.6	12.7	14.2	b,d	3,624
Has stepchild(ren) from previous spouse with child(ren)	17.1	32.5	15.8	19.9	17.3	26.7	16.3	17.3	16.9	b,c,d	3,624
Either spouse has children with stepchildren	9.5	10.2	8.3	15.9	8.9	12.0	10.2	8.5	10.2	c	3,624
Either spouse has stepchildren with children	23.9	42.9	21.8	27.7	23.7	41.8	22.7	26.1	24.0	b,c,d	3,624
Any stepgrandparents in family	39.2	55.4	35.8	43.4	37.9	59.7	39.1	40.7	40.6	b,c,d	3,624

<sup>a</sup>Significance is reported as follows: a: overall gender difference  $p < .05$ ; b: overall race difference  $p < .05$ ; c: race difference for men  $p < .05$ ; d: race difference for women  $p < .05$ ; e: gender difference for Blacks  $p < .05$ ; f: gender difference for Whites  $p < .05$ ; g: gender difference for Hispanics  $p < .05$ .

### Surrogate Parenting and Household Extension

The data on household composition are shown in Table 7. Overall, 3.3% of respondents live in households with grandchildren and 4.7% live in households with three or more generations. These proportions are considerably higher when grandparents are used as the sample basis and vary significantly by race and gender: Twenty-six percent of Black and close to 23% of Hispanic grandmothers live in households with grandchildren, compared to only 7% of White grandmothers and 4% of White grandfathers. Well over one quarter of Black but only 12% of White grandmothers were surrogate parents for grandchildren sometime during their lives.

Most households with grandchildren are downward extended (i.e., the grandparent is the householder). This applies especially to minorities (89% of Blacks and 90% of Hispanics), whereas close to 18% of White grandparents living with grandchildren are not householders. Furthermore, among grandparents in upward extended households, White grandparents typically live with married children and their children, whereas Black grandparents live either

with a single parent (usually a daughter) and her children or with relatives other than the grandchildren's parents.

When grandparents are the householders, the household rarely includes both of grandchildren's parents. Prevalent in this situation are households including the grandchildren's single mother, but grandparent-headed households with neither of grandchildren's parents also are relatively common. Sons with children only rarely reside with their parents.

### Summary and Discussion

The main objective of this article was to present a representative demographic profile of today's grandparents and to contrast it with prevalent descriptions of demographic trends in the grandparenthood experience. Generally, the profile of grandparents evolving from the NSFH data is consistent with many of the trends noted in earlier research. Nevertheless, some modifications in earlier depictions of grandparenthood seem warranted.

The data confirm that grandparenthood is a near

Table 7. Extended Households and Surrogate Parenting (Percentages)

Measure	Male				Female				All	Significance <sup>a</sup>	N
	All	Black	White	Hispanic	All	Black	White	Hispanic			
All Households With											
Grandchildren <sup>b</sup>	3.3	5.3	1.6	1.6	1.9	12.3	3.1	8.6	4.5	a,b,c,d,e,f,g	10,008
Grandchildren <sup>c</sup>	8.3	12.9	4.4	5.6	5.4	26.0	7.3	22.8	10.5	a,b,c,d,e,f,g	3,717
Three generations	4.7	6.6	2.2	7.2	3.0	16.0	4.0	12.8	6.1	a,b,c,d,e,f,g	10,008
Ever had primary responsibility for grandchild <sup>d</sup>	11.0	14.0	5.4	7.3	6.4	29.1	12.1	18.8	14.5	a,b,c,d,e,f,g	3,501
Households With Grandchildren <sup>d</sup>											
Respondent is householder	85.5	89.0	82.1	92.8	90.4	—	—	—	83.7		329
Respondent is not householder	14.5	11.0	17.9	7.2	9.6	—	—	—	16.3		
Respondent Is Householder <sup>e</sup>											
Households with											
Grandchildren (total)	7.5	13.3	4.0	5.9	5.1	25.0	6.0	22.7	9.3	a,b,c,d,e,f,g	3,540
Grandchildren with both parents	0.8	0.0	1.1	0.7	1.0	1.2	0.6	1.8	0.7		3,540
Grandchildren with single parent	3.9	8.8	1.4	1.9	2.2	15.6	3.3	11.2	5.2	a,b,c,d,e,f,g	3,540
Grandchildren with no parent	3.9	4.5	2.1	3.3	2.4	11.9	2.2	9.7	3.9	a,b,d,e	3,540
Grandchildren with daughter	4.0	7.9	1.9	2.6	2.5	16.0	3.2	11.8	5.2	a,b,c,d,e,f,g	3,540
Grandchildren with son	0.8	0.9	0.7	0.0	0.6	0.9	0.9	1.8	0.9		3,540
All Respondents											
Respondent Is Not Householder <sup>f</sup>	All	Black	White	Hispanic	Male	Female					
Households with											
Grandchildren (total)	26.3	25.3	28.7	17.4	12.9	33.1				a	172
Grandchildren with both parents <sup>g</sup>	15.8	2.7	20.9	12.1	10.6	18.5				b	172
Grandchildren with single parent <sup>g</sup>	14.2	17.1	13.9	14.3	9.0	16.9					172
Grandchildren with no parent <sup>g</sup>	4.1	13.5	1.9	0.0	2.4	4.9				b	172
Grandchildren with daughter <sup>g</sup>	18.0	11.0	20.2	22.3	3.9	25.2					172
Grandchildren with son <sup>g</sup>	11.5	8.7	13.8	4.1	15.6	9.4					172

<sup>a</sup>Significance is reported as follows: a: overall gender difference  $p < .05$ ; b: overall race difference  $p < .05$ ; c: race difference for men  $p < .05$ ; d: race difference for women  $p < .05$ ; e: gender difference for Blacks  $p < .05$ ; f: gender difference for Whites  $p < .05$ ; g: gender difference for Hispanics  $p < .05$ .

<sup>b</sup>Based on entire sample.

<sup>c</sup>Based on respondents with grandchildren.

<sup>d</sup>Based on respondents with grandchildren in household. Race differences refer to entire sample (men and women).

<sup>e</sup>Because some households include different groups of grandchildren (e.g., with and without parents), the percentage for total grandchildren is lower than the sum of the subgroups.

universal experience. In addition, most grandparents have multiple (on average, 5 to 6) grandchildren. However, about 15% of Black and Hispanic men report that they are not grandparents. Two factors may account for the lower proportion of grandparents among minority men: immigration (for Hispanics) and nonmarital parenthood or divorce among respondents' children. Especially older Hispanic men who immigrated during midlife may have lost contact with their adult children and thus may not know whether or not they have grandchildren. Similarly, the greater prevalence of mother-headed families among both Blacks and Hispanics (Hernandez & Myers, 1993) may isolate older men from their kin (Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1990) and thus reduce their awareness of existing grandchildren. The data also indicate that it may be quite misleading to infer grandparent status from individuals' ages. Even though age and grandparent status are highly correlated, they are by no means identical. For example, 81% of individuals age 65 and over are grandparents compared to close to 95% of respondents with children beyond childbearing age. These discrepancies reflect individual, generational, as well as cohort differences in both childlessness and timing of grandparenthood.

Earlier descriptions of grandparenthood as a mid-life transition (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Uhlenberg, 1980) also are essentially correct, but they detract attention from the considerable extent of "off-time" grandparenthood especially among Black women. Because the majority of Black women make the transition to grandparenthood either before age 40 or after age 60, timing standards derived from Whites may be inapplicable to this group. Thus, what may be defined as "off-time" grandparenthood among Whites may very well constitute "on-time" grandparenthood for many Black women. These discrepancies are, however, consistent with claims that there is considerable heterogeneity in the experience of grandparenthood among diverse population subgroups (Bengtson, 1985).

As suggested by numerous authors (George & Gold, 1991; Uhlenberg, 1996), the extension of longevity enhanced the duration of grandparenthood. The data support assertions about grandparents' survival into grandchildren's adulthood to some extent and also confirm gender and lineage effects reported in earlier studies. The majority of grandmothers typically survive well into the adulthood at least of their oldest grandchild, and close to two thirds of women experience the birth of great-grandchildren. Men, on the other hand, are unlikely to survive to their grandchildren's adulthood or to the birth of their first great-grandchild. In contrast to earlier claims that grandchildren will have multiple surviving grandparents well into their adulthood, the data indicate that the majority of grandchildren experience deaths of one or more grandparents well before they reach adulthood, and the majority have only one surviving grandparent by the time they reach their late twenties.

Two reasons could account for the discrepancies

between earlier estimates of grandparents' survival and the trends revealed in the NSFH data. First, prevalent generalizations about grandparents' survival in the literature apparently underestimate the combined effects of grandfathers' later transition to grandparenthood and the increased gender gap in life expectancy. Second, little attention has been paid to intrafamilial variations in grandparents' and grandchildren's experiences. The data show that the interval between the births of the first and last grandchild is quite long. This implies that grandparents' survival and grandchildren's exposure to grandparents of different ages vary considerably, depending on cumulative effects of grandparents' gender and lineage and grandchildren's birth order. Because of birth order effects, characterizations applicable to first grandparenthood may not be valid for later born grandchildren. For example, grandparents will typically have reached late middle age or early old age by the time their last grandchild is born and a considerable proportion will not survive beyond their youngest grandchild's adolescence. Similarly, children within the same family may experience grandparents' deaths at quite different ages. Furthermore, it might be more appropriate to conceive the transition to grandparenthood as a process. Whereas the initial transition to grandparenthood (i.e., the birth of the first grandchild) may be especially important (Cunningham-Burley, 1986; Fischer, 1983), additional births of grandchildren occur over a prolonged time period. This means that grandparents have access to young grandchildren for a considerable time. Thus, the period of active parenting may have shrunk considerably during this century, but many individuals today will be involved in some child care activities throughout most of their adult years, first for their own children and then for their grandchildren.

There also seems to be some validity to criticisms of the beanpole family concept (Treas, 1995; Uhlenberg, 1995). Whereas the majority of families experience four living generations at some point in time, the duration of four-generation families is typically quite short. Thus, the concept of the beanpole family—at least as an enduring characteristic of today's families—may be premature (Farkas & Hogan, 1995).

Claims that parenthood and grandparenthood now constitute sequential rather than concurrent roles (Hagestad, 1988; Hagestad & Burton, 1986) also require some modification. The data suggest, however, that for the majority of grandparents there is some overlap of active parenthood and grandparenthood and, of course, both roles typically continue simultaneously until grandparents'/parents' deaths. This overlap of active parenthood and grandparenthood is particularly common and also of longer duration among minorities, suggesting that earlier characterizations in the literature may have been racially and ethnically biased.

As noted previously (Hagestad & Burton, 1986; Troll, 1985), the intersection of other life course transitions and the overlap of other roles with grandparenthood define the meaning of grandparenthood, grandparents' and grandchildren's availability for

each other, as well as the potential for role conflict. Because today's grandparents survive longer, grandparenthood is likely to intersect with multiple life transitions, and both grandparents' and grandchildren's involvement in other roles will vary considerably over time, introducing even greater heterogeneity into the grandparent experience. The data confirm this depiction in several ways. First, the initial transition to grandparenthood may be marked by considerable role overlap and perhaps role conflict. At the onset of grandparenthood, grandparents are typically married and employed. Thus, both retirement and widowhood typically occur after the transition to grandparenthood. Also, whereas much attention has focused on "sandwiched" caregivers (i.e., individuals with dependent children and care responsibilities for parents), conflicting demands for the care of older parents and grandchildren are typically overlooked. The NSFH data indicate, however, that a considerable proportion of grandparents (and especially of grandparents with young grandchildren) still have living parents and may very well have to balance care responsibilities for parents and grandchildren. Although not explicitly addressed here, the data on the timing of grandparenthood and survival into great-grandparenthood further suggest that many grandchildren (and especially first-born grandchildren) may experience conflicting role demands from their own families of procreation and not only their parents but also their grandparents and great-grandparents. Some of the age differences in grandparent contacts documented in earlier research (Hodgson, 1992) may very well stem from older grandchildren's involvement first in mate selection and then in family-of-procreation activities. In addition, most grandchildren will be exposed to both grandparents' and great-grandparents' frailty and eventual deaths.

The NSFH data certainly validate recent research emphases on divorce and stepgrandparenting (Johnson, 1988; Trygstad & Sanders, 1989). A considerable proportion of families now include stepgrandparents. It also is clear, however, that the nearly exclusive focus on divorce in the middle generation is questionable. In many cases the stepgrandparent relationship is brought about by divorce in the grandparents' generation. Furthermore, major studies on grandparenthood and divorce rely on White samples (Johnson, 1988). This racial bias in existing research is particularly troubling because Black families are significantly more likely than Whites to include step-grandparents.

Likewise, the NSFH data attest to the fact that a considerable proportion, especially of Black grandmothers, assume primary responsibility for grandchildren at some point in their lives. This phenomenon is less common among Whites who, on the other hand, are more likely to have upward extended households. The fact that lifetime estimates of surrogate parenting exceed census estimates based on current household composition was expected. However, the NSFH data also reveal considerably higher rates of current surrogate parenting

when grandparents are used as sample basis. This suggests that census data of the total population considerably underestimate the prevalence of surrogate parenting by grandparents.

## Conclusion

Despite their simplicity, the data presented here suggest several directions for future research on grandparenthood. The data indicate great variability in the availability of specific grandparents, in the duration of specific grandparent-grandchild relations, as well as in the number of available grandparents and grandchildren. This suggests, first, that the emphasis on dyadic grandparent-grandchild relations as well as the rather static approach that permeates much current grandparent research may be problematic and lead to biased results. We need to pay much more attention to the composition of the available *group* of grandparents at any one point in time, as well as to the effect of changes in the composition of accessible grandparents on relationships between individual grandparents and grandchildren. The birth of a new grandchild may alter grandparents' contacts with other, older grandchildren. Similarly, deaths of grandparents, acquisition of stepgrandparents, or the births of siblings or cousins may alter grandchildren's relationships with any one grandparent. We also need to go further in considering the kin relationship context of grandparenthood. Although some studies on the bridge generation exist, more research is needed on the effects of relationships between maternal and paternal grandparents as well as among the sibling group of adult children (the grandchildren's parents) and among grandchildren (especially from different adult children).

Second, given the longer duration of grandparenthood and the considerable time span between the births of the first and last grandchild, we need to consider much more closely contextual factors that may impinge on grandparent-grandchild relationships, including changes in marital status, health, or employment status. For example, we should raise such questions as: How does widowhood of the grandparent or dating, marriage, and parenthood of grandchildren affect grandparent-grandchild relationships? What happens when the "active, fun-seeking" grandparent becomes seriously ill and a care recipient in the family? Or how do grandparents' retirement and grandchildren's beginning careers impinge on grandparent-grandchild relationships? Such attention to contextual factors also is essential for the interpretation of data on the support functions of the kinship network. Before we come to conclusions about lack of instrumental supports between adult children and their parents—or between grandparents and grandchildren—we need to take into account competing obligations and geographical availability of grandparents/grandchildren, as well as each generation's need for and ability to provide supports (see also Eggebeen, 1992a, 1992b).

Third, research on grandparenthood and divorce needs to be expanded in several ways. It is essential



to conduct more investigations on divorce and grandparenthood among minorities and especially Black families and to examine and compare effects of divorce in the grandparent and in the adult child generation on grandparent-grandchild relationships. Further, stepgrandparent relationships (either stepchildren's children or children's stepchildren) require much more research: Are stepgrandchildren defined as grandchildren? Are there differences in relationships to stepchildren's children and to children's stepchildren? Are meaning and frequency of contact with stepgrandchildren contingent on the presence or accessibility of biological grandchildren? What happens to such relationships if the parent's or grandparent's marriage is dissolved?

Fourth, research on surrogate parenting needs to go beyond small, nonrepresentative studies. As shown here, the phenomenon is sufficiently common especially among minority families to obtain larger and more representative samples. Further, other types of households including grandparents deserve more attention. Specifically, more research is needed on intergenerational and grandparent-grandchild relationships in grandparent- or parent-headed households with single parents as well as on the effects on grandchildren when a frail grandparent moves into the household.

Finally, the NSFH data further attest to considerable diversity in the grandparent experience and in grandparent-grandchild relationships among different population groups, ranging from the timing of grandparenthood and the number of grandchildren to experiences of divorce or surrogate parenting. The prevalence of specific grandparenthood characteristics within subpopulations may very well alter their meaning and impact. For example, the consequences of "early" grandparenthood or surrogate parenting may differ for subpopulations in which these phenomena are common (e.g., Blacks) or are relatively rare (e.g., Whites). In addition, subcultural norms are likely to affect the meaning of grandparent-grandchild relationships in general and the effects of specific grandparent-grandchild roles and experiences in particular. We thus need more research that contrasts the meaning and impact of specific grandparent experiences by gender, race and ethnicity, or urban versus rural residence (see King & Elder, 1995). In addition, heterogeneity within population subgroups requires more research. For example, we have learned a good deal about Black grandmothers who are surrogate parents but we still know relatively little about the majority of Black grandmothers who are not. Indeed, an increased emphasis on atypical grandparent experiences such as delayed grandparenthood among Blacks or surrogate parenting among Whites may prove especially beneficial for theory development.

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