The association between grandparental support and closeness with child self-concept

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Abstract

The study was designed to explore the association between grandparental support and closeness, and child self-concept in middle childhood. Data were obtained from 146 children (aged 8-12 years) using the Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC) and the social convoy model. Self-concept was split into global self-worth and five specific domains, namely, scholastic competence, social acceptance, athletic competence, physical appearance and behavioural conduct. Multiple regression analyses were conducted to test whether there was an association between grandparental closeness and support, and the total self-concept scores in the global self-worth, social acceptance, athletic competence, physical appearance and behavioural conduct domains. Results revealed that neither grandparental closeness nor support were significantly associated with children's global self-worth and the other five domains of self-concept. Grandparental support was significantly, positively correlated with children's perceived scholastic competence. However, grandparental support was not a significant independent predictor of perceived scholastic competence after controlling for parental closeness and support, and demographic variables. Although the results were not significant, they help clarify the mixed findings of previous research regarding the implications of non-resident grandparental involvement for grandchildren.

Keywords: grandparental support, grandparental involvement, middle childhood, self-concept

Background

In recent years increased attention has been given to the influence of external factors on the aspects of child development. One of the aspects, namely a child's self-concept, is vulnerable to influences from social interactions (Levitt, Guacci-Franco, & Levitt, 1993). The development of self-concept is particularly significant during middle childhood (ages 8-12) as a child's social network extends further than the nuclear family during these years (Harter, 1985). Thus, the child's self-concept is susceptible to influence from a larger group of people. Grandparents constitute a key part of the extended family in a child's life, and therefore, their potential to affect the development of a child's self-concept is highly probable. However, the relationship between grandparental involvement and grandchildren's self-concept has received little attention and has not previously been investigated in South Africa. Additionally, studies focussing on grandparents in South Africa have focussed mainly on adolescents, thus grandparent's particular influence on children during their middle childhood years remains largely unknown. Therefore, exploring the association between the child's self-concept and their grandparents can shed more light into this area of knowledge.

Opportunities for grandparental involvement

In recent years there have been increased opportunities for grandparents to play a role in children's lives due to changing family dynamics. The shift in family dynamics has resulted from the rise of single parent homes (Dunifon, 2013), the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has increased parents inability to care for their children due to the illness, and is particularly relevant in South Africa (Madhavan, 2004), and increased maternal employment which has induced greater reliance on individuals other than parents for child care (Griggs, Tan, Buchanan, & Attar-Schwartz, & 2010). Furthermore, global advancements in technology have enhanced contact between people, which has potentially influenced closeness between grandparents and grandchildren (Dunifon, 2013). These changing factors have essentially increased the presence of grandparents in families (Cuddeback, 2004; Goodman, 2003). However, despite agreement on the high presence of grandparents in families around the globe, the level of involvement, type of role and the nature of the support from grandparents varies considerably (Griggs et al., 2010).

The nature and impact of grandparental involvement and support

There are mixed results regarding the nature of the impact grandparents have on grandchildren (Griggs et al., 2010). The influence of this social relation can occur through direct interactions, such as through assistance with school work, as well as through the provision of encouragement and emotional support (Dunifon, 2013; Flouri et al., 2010). However, grandparents can also have a negative influence on grandchildren if they cause tension and interference in family situations (Dunifon, 2013). It must also be noted that the level of involvement or support grandparents provide in their grandchildren's lives only plays a part in determining the nature of the grandparent-grandchild relationship. It is the child's interpretation of the involvement and support they receive from their grandparents that is equally as important in determining the relationship they have (Dunifon, 2013). Their perception of their relationship with their grandparents is likely to have more influence on their psychological and emotional outcomes than simply the provision of effective support. Therefore, if a child were to perceive their relationship and support from their grandparents positively, they are more likely to have positive outcomes regarding their psychological and emotional well-being (Griggs et al., 2010).

The specific role grandparent's play is often predicted by the amount of contact between the grandparent and grandchild (Griggs et al., 2010). High levels of contact are mostly seen in situations where grandparents reside with their grandchildren, either in three generational homes (grandparents, parents and grandchildren) or skipped generation homes (grandparents and grandchildren) (Dunifon, 2013). Grandparents living in skipped generation homes naturally have higher levels of involvement and support as they are more likely to provide supportive functions to children (Griggs et al., 2010). However, the few published studies that explore the impact of grandparents on grandchildren in skipped generation homes have elicited unfavourable results (Casper & Bryson, 1998; Downie, Hay, Horner, Wichmann & Hislop, 2010). Negative emotional and general health problems were found in children in the US living in skipped generation households (Casper & Bryson, 1998). Worse behavioural scores were seen in UK toddlers from skipped generation homes compared to those living with parents (Hansen, 2006), as well as reported feelings of unhappiness in qualitative interviews of 20 children ages 8-15 in grandparent-headed households (Downie et al., 2010). This may indicate an unfavourable influence of grandparents on children in situations of co-residence.

However, the results of research on skipped generation households may be reporting the influence of other factors associated with grandparent-headed households (Downie et al., 2010). This may include factors such as the financial strain of caring for grandchildren, which can be seen in the high rates of poverty and low educational levels reported by grandparent-headed households compared to other family types (Bachman & Chase-Lansdale, 2005). This is likely to induce stressful home environments which are associated with inadequate support for children (Bachman & Chase-Lansdale, 2005). Additionally, issues of elderly ill-health (Downie et al., 2010) and reasons for parental absence in children's lives may be more to blame for poor developmental outcomes in children than grandparental influence (Downie et al., 2010; Gleeson et al., 2009). Feelings of rejection and abandonment are common amongst children who live in the care of their grandparents. This is often related to the perceived stigma and unhappiness in children in this living situation (Downie et al., 2010). Conversely, qualitative interviews with 40 children living with grandparents in Australia revealed feelings of safety and security (Downie et al., 2010), however, this was seen to be in comparison to other family experiences in their previous homes. Most of the children reported anxiety and confusion regarding their experiences prior to living with grandparents, thus these results may not adequately depict the sole association between grandparents and child well-being (Downie et al., 2010).

In cases of less grandparental involvement, such as with non-residential grandparents, the influence is still worth exploring as grandparents can still play an important role in the family (Hank & Buber, 2009). Non-residing grandparents have been seen to have a positive influence on adolescent well-being (Attar-Schwartz, Tan, Buchanan, Flouri & Griggs, 2009), prosocial behaviour (Wild & Gaibie, 2014), academic achievement, self-confidence and maturity (Elder & Conger, 2000; Griggs et al., 2010; Ruiz & Silverstein, 2007; Yorgason, Padilla-Walker, & Jackson, 2011). Conversely, non-resident grandparents are also seen to have no effect as well as a negative association with various aspect of grandchildren's wellbeing (Dunifon, 2013; Dunifon & Bajracharya, 2012). It is important to note that support includes both psychological characteristics, such as emotional support and being there for a grandchild, and physical support characteristics, such as involvement in school activities (Griggs et al., 2010). The psychological and physical aspects of grandparental support and closeness are equally important. There is little information regarding the possible positive influence that grandparents have on preadolescent children, it has been found that adolescents benefit from these relationships. By 'being there', grandparents provide unconditional love

and reassurance of worth to their grandchildren (Van Ranst, Verschueren, & Mercoen, 1995) and this type of relationship was found to be essential for the positive correlation between the support and adolescent well-being (Griggs et al., 2010).

Development of the self-concept

Children begin to develop the ability to perceive themselves more accurately in middle childhood (age 8-12) (Donohue, Wise, Romski, Henrich, & Sevcik, 2010; Harter, 1993). Middle childhood is known to be a period where children's social networks expand as they begin to regard a larger group of people as being important (Levitt et al., 1993). Along with this expansion of the child's social network, children begin to develop perceptions of themselves in relation to others (Levitt et al., 1993). Bryant (1985) suggest that the extended family is a particularly important part of the extension in middle childhood, compared to other periods of life such as early childhood where parents are regarded as being primarily important and adolescence where the importance of peers dominates (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Levitt et al., 1993).

This particular expansion of the child's social circle at this stage is important because the self-concept, which is constructed by a satisfaction of one's self in various domains, is influenced by social interactions. Along with the satisfaction in specific domains, a general satisfaction with one's self as a person is also of primary importance (Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, 1998; Hattie & Marsh, 1996). As children's thinking becomes more abstract, they develop the ability to adopt others' perspectives and to make social comparisons which may result in a more negative self-concept (Bear, Minke, & Manning, 2002; Dunifon & Bajracharya, 2012; Harter, 1999; Harter &Whitesell, 1989; Ruble, Boggiano, Feldman, & Loebel, 1980).However, there is evidence that healthy social relations can buffer children from these potential negative effects.

Social relations and self-concept

Social interactions that occur in the social environment provide evaluations which are internalised and serve as the base on which the child builds their self-concept (Harter, 2006). Research has widely shown that positive evaluations received from parents are interpreted as acceptance by the child which leads children to evaluate themselves positively. This results in a more positive self-concept (Gecas, 1972; Lau & Pun, 1999; Rosenberg, 1987). This positive self-concept is further strengthened when both the maternal and paternal evaluations are positive (Lau & Pun, 1993). Thus healthy social relations have the potential to provide more

positive appraisals such as those received from grandparents who are seen to be motivational and encouraging (Griggs et al., 2010). These positive appraisals are then internalised, reinforced and subsequently affect behaviour. This was shown in research done in Australia when three-quarters of the children interviewed revealed that they sought to make grandparents proud of their achievements (Downie et al., 2010). This implies that the appraisals received from grandparents facilitated feelings of worth that encouraged behaviour in accordance with achievement (Griggs et al., 2010). It must be noted that the research conducted focussing on the association between the grandparent-grandchild relationship and self-concept in middle childhood has been limited, despite indications that this period of life is critical for healthy self-concept development. The research done thus far studying the association between grandparents and self-concept have revealed a positive association, where high levels of grandparental involvement was associated with a positive sense of self-worth in an adolescent population (Downie et al, 2010). Furthermore a study by Levitt et al., (1993; 2005) suggested that these results may be applicable to children in middle childhood as children who had high levels of support from extended family (which included grandparents) had higher self-concept scores. These studies showed promising results regarding the association between grandparents and self-concept; however they did not specifically focus on the unique affect grandparents had on children's self-concept in middle childhood.

Summary and Limitations of previous research

With the knowledge that grandparents are living longer, their presence in the lives of their grandchildren has become a point of interest in the field of research (Mueller, Wilhelm, & Elder, 2002). However, surprisingly, there is little known about the role grandparent's play in the growth of their grandchildren.

The presence of grandparents in South African children's social networks during middle childhood remains unstudied which constrains the ability to determine the social influences on developmental outcomes at this age. However, evidence from abroad and locally show that grandparents are seen to play a larger role in families when there are changes in economic situations, health issues and increased family breakdowns (Griggs et al., 2010). Since a large portion of the South African population faces these issues due the AIDS epidemic and high rates of poverty, it is interesting to explore the influence of grandparents within the South African context.

Research conducted thus far on grandparents has not considered the possible role that parents play in mediating this relationship. Thus, remaining relatively unknown is whether the nature of the relationship between the grandparent and grandchild is dependent on the relationship between the child and the parents (Dunifon & Bajracharya, 2012). Determining whether children's self-concept is uniquely affected by grandparents is confounded by not knowing whether children who have a better relationship with their grandparents may also have a better relationship with their parents. Hence any apparent association between the grandparent-grandchild relationship and children's self-concept may actually be due to the quality of the parent-child relationship. Furthermore, the quality of parent's relationships with the grandparents may be an important predictor of the grandparent-grandchild relationship (Dunifon & Bajracharya, 2012). This reveals that one needs to consider the role parents play in relation to grandparents in the development of self-concept (Dunifon & Bajracharya, 2012)

There is also limited literature that focuses on the perceptions that children have of their relationships with their grandparents. Perspectives from children may give more insight into the grandparent-grandchild relationship and how children actually experience these relationships. Furthermore, there is a limited knowledge, both internationally and locally, about the influence that grandparents have on a child's self-concept in terms of their closeness and support in children's lives. Despite limited knowledge, it has been documented that the involvement of grandparents in the life of a child has various benefits for the child's development (Mueller et al., 2002). Therefore exploring the profile of grandparental closeness and support in South African children's lives, and the relationship between the differential levels of support and closeness to children's self-concept in middle childhood, is worthwhile.

Aims and Hypotheses

The study aimed to further the understanding of the grandparent-grandchild relationship. We explored the relationship between grandparental closeness and support and the child's self-concept during middle childhood. . More specifically, we tested the following hypotheses:

H1: A higher level of grandparental closeness will be associated with a more positive self-concept in a child during middle childhood.

H2: A higher level of grandparental support will be associated with a more positive self-concept in a child during middle childhood.

Method

Design and setting

A quantitative, correlation, cross-sectional, research design was used in this study. The correlation design allowed us to determine direction and strength of the relationship between naturally occurring variables (grandparental closeness, support and self-concept) that cannot be manipulated. Additionally, in a cross-sectional design, a cross-section of the population (children in middle childhood) is studied at a single point of time (Wilson & MacLean, 2011), which was the case in this study. Data were collected using an anonymous, structured questionnaire that allowed data to be easily attained and compared.

Participants

Sample characteristics. The sample consisted of 146 grade 3-6 learners from a school in the metropolitan area of Cape Town. The sample consisted of 88 female learners (60%) and 60 male learners (40%) in middle childhood, ages 8-12 years (M=10.2, SD=1.77).

Sample size calculation. The statistical programme, G*Power (Version 3.1.9.2.) was used to calculate our sample size. We did an a priori calculation for multiple regression analysis. Assuming that α = .05, with a medium effect size (Cohens f^2 = .15), six predictors, directional hypotheses, and a power of .80, the minimum sample size needed for this study was 98 participants. A post-hoc power analysis indicated that with a final sample size of 146 participants, the target power of .80 was achieved with an effect size of f^2 = .05.

Sampling procedure. Purposive and convenience sampling were used in selecting a primary school in the Cape Metropolitan area (Wilson & Maclean, 2011). An easily accessible school who consented to participate in the study was selected based on having the age groups of the children (middle childhood) that met the study criteria.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion in the study was determined by learners who were in middle childhood (aged 8-12) and had at least one living grandparent.

The original eligible sample consisted of 205 potential participants, from which 59 (29%) were excluded from the study. Exclusions were based on 28 parents refusing consent for their child's participation in the study, 12 learners with no living grandparent, and 19 who had spoiled scripts.

Measures

The study employed three measures. These were preliminary demographic questions; self-concept measured by The Self-Perception Profile for Children Scale and finally grandparental support and closeness measured by the social convoy model (see Appendix A).

Demographics. The learners were asked to state their age and gender.

Grandparental closeness. Grandparental closeness was measured using the Social Convoy model for children and adolescents (Levitt et al., 1993). The model represents the child's social networks and their closeness to each figure. Visually the social convoy is laid out as three concentric circles surrounding an individual representing the closeness of a child's family members, with the closest members being closer to the centre and the less close being towards the outer regions or not appearing on the circle at all.

Children were instructed as follows: in the inner most circle they were told to "write down the names of the people closest and important to [them] – people [they] love the most and cannot imagine life without them". In the middle circle, children were prompted to name the "people who are not quite as close, but who are still important – people [they] really love or like, but not quite as much as the people in the first circle". In the outermost circle children were instructed to write down the "people [they] still really love or like, but not quite as much as the people in the middle circle or inner circle".

The scoring of the convoy was done using a scale of 0-3, where 0 indicate a low degree of closeness and 3 indicates a high degree of closeness. The grandparent with the closest placement in the convoy was looked at and scored a 3 if placed in circle 1, 2 if placed in circle 2, 1 if placed in circle 3 and 0 if a grandparent did not appear in the convoy at all.

The convoy mapping procedure has been shown by Levitt et al. (1993) to have high internal consistency and test-retest reliability across age ranges and ethnic groups. The sample alpha reliability was .83 (African-American, .80; European-American, .87; Hispanic-American, .82).

Grandparental support. Following the Social Convoy, children were asked to identify the people in their network who provided the six support functions. Specifically, they were asked to identify people "you talk to about things that are really important to you", "who make you feel better when something bothers you or you are not sure about something", "who would take care of you if you were sick", "who help you with homework

or other work you do for school", "who like to be with you and do fun things with you", and "who make you feel special or good about yourself".

Grandparental support was then assessed by summing the number of support functions provided by the most supportive grandparent. Thus, if a child writes 'grandpa' for 3 of the questions, the grandparental support received a score of 3. An internal consistency of .79 was reported for this measure for close family members (Levitt et al., 1993).

Parental closeness. Parental closeness was controlled for in order to test the independent association between grandparental closeness and self-concept. It was measured using the Social Convoy model, as described above, and was summed in the same way as grandparental closeness, where the parent (if given both mum and dad) who appeared closest in the circle was given a score between 0 and 3.

Parental support. This variable was controlled to test whether grandparental support had an independent positive bearing on a child's self-concept. Parental support was also measured using the Social Convoy model and the six support questions. Scoring for both measures was done in the same way as was done when measuring grandparental support, where the parent was given a summed score based on how many times the child answered with that parent. In the case where both mother and father were mentioned, the score for the parent who provided the most supportive functions was captured.

Self-concept. The child's self-concept was measured using the Self-Perception Profile for Children Scale (SPPC) by Harter (1985). The SPPC is a self- report questionnaire. It consists of five specific domains of self-concept as well as global self-worth:

1. Scholastic Competence: These items refer to how a child perceives their competence at school.

2. Social Acceptance: These include the child's view of his/her ability to make friends.

3. Athletic Competence: These items refer to a child's perception of their ability to do well at physical activity.

4. Physical Appearance: These items refer to how content the child is with the way he/she looks. It reveals the child's perception of their appearance, and if they are happy with it.

5. Behavioural Conduct: These items refer to how pleased the child is with their behaviour.

6. Global Self-Worth: This is how happy one is with oneself and the general perception of oneself.

Each domain consists of six items making a total of 36 items. The SPPC items are composed of two opposite descriptions, for example, "Some kids are happy with the way they look but other kids are not happy with the way they look." First children have to select the description that they best identify with and then select whether it is really true for them, or sort of true for them.

The items are scored on a four-point scale with a higher score reflecting a more positive view of oneself. For each self-concept domain and for global self-worth, a total score is calculated by summing the relevant items.

Harter's scale has received substantial empirical, theoretical and psychometric support for its effectiveness in establishing an indication of a child's self-concept. Factor analysis confirmed the use of domains and internal reliabilities of 0.71 to 0.86 were obtained for the domain-specific subscales over four samples of children (Harter, 1985). This scale is able to represent the multidimensional nature of self-concepts and that they exist in a variety of domains (Harter, 1985).

Procedure

Permission to proceed with our study was obtained from the Western Cape Education Department and the Department of Psychology Research Ethics Committee, as well as the relevant school principal and teachers. The school counsellor then provided us with a list of classes we could administer the questionnaire to over a two-week period. There were seven classes in total which comprised of two grade 3 classes, two grade 4 classes, two grade 5 classes, and one grade 6 class.

We used passive parental consent procedures as the nature of the study and questionnaire were assumed to cause little to no distress or harm to the children. Consent forms were sent to parents and they were only required to send back signed forms if they were unwilling to allow their child to participate in the study (see Appendix B). Children completed assent forms on the days we met with them to conduct the research (see Appendix C). Both the parents' consent forms and the children's assent forms included the aims,

requirements, procedures and duration of the study. We made sure to read through the assent forms and inform children that their involvement was voluntary. We also emphasised that if they felt uncomfortable at any time during the study that they could withdraw from completing their questionnaires without any penalties. Also, children were informed that their answers were confidential and anonymous. Although children had the option to withdraw, none withdrew from the study.

Children were given approximately 1 hour to complete the questionnaires during the Life Orientation class time. We gave both verbal and visual instructions to children as to how to answer the questions. If any children did not understand vocabulary or questions we repeated or helped them individually.

There were no incentives provided and there was minimal disruption to the class timetable. The children were debriefed after the session in case some felt distressed after answering the questionnaire, where we emphasized the role of the school counsellor. Only one child expressed distress, but he was referred to the school counsellor and his teacher offered immediate support for him. Despite this single incidence, other children appeared to enjoy the questionnaires and were enthusiastic to share information about themselves and their relationships with their grandparents.

After completion of the questionnaires, a short debriefing session followed with any additional questions from the children. We organised their questionnaires and locked them away in a secure cabinet, only accessible to the researchers.

Data Analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 22.0 was used to perform our data analysis. Cronbach's alpha was used as a preliminary measurement of the internal consistency of each SPPC subscale (i.e., social acceptance, scholastic competence, athletic competence, behavioural conduct, physical appearance, and global self-worth). Descriptive statistics and correlations were also computed for all key variables to assess their relationships with each other. Although 146 participants' scores were captured, the total number of participants used in the analysis of each domain of self-concept varied due to missing data**.**

A series of 6 hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to test both our hypotheses while controlling for parental closeness and support. For each of the 6 regression

analyses we added the demographic variables in the first step, namely, age and gender as a block. In step 2 the control variables were added, namely parental closeness and parental support. In step 3, grandparental closeness and grandparental support were added as a block. Lastly, step 4 tested interaction effects, namely, grandparental closeness × parental closeness and grandparental support × parental support. Each interaction variable was centred on its sample mean to avoid multicollinearity before computing the product terms.

Results

Reliability of the Self-Perception Profile for Children

The Cronbach's alpha measure of internal consistency was calculated for each domain of the SPPC, including global self-worth. Results are presented in Table 1**.** Despite global self-worth ($\alpha = .63$) and athletic competence ($\alpha = .62$) being below the preferred values 0.7, their values are acceptable considering that psychological constructs, such as self-concept, are diverse (Kline, 1999). Therefore such values below .7 can be expected (Kline, 1999).

Table 1
Cronbach's alpha for each SPPC subscale

Self-Concept Domains	
Scholastic Competence	.70
Social Competence	.71
Athletic Competence	.62
Physical Appearance	.74
Behavioural Conduct	.77
Global Self-Worth	.63

Descriptive statistics

Tables 2 and 3 display the number of participants (N=146), means (*M*) and their standard deviations (*SD*) of the independent and dependent variables. The data presented in Table 2 suggest that in general, children felt quite close to their parents and grandparents. However grandparents did not fulfil as many supportive roles as parents did.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Demographic, Control and Predictor Variables

Social Convoy	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Parental Closeness	1	3	2.98	.18
Grandparental Closeness	0	3	2.46	.89
Parental Support	0	6	3.62	1.50
Grandparent Support	0	5	.74	1.18
Age	8	12	10.12	1.17

n=146

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of outcome variables

Domain	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Scholastic Competence	138	8	24	17.51	4.24
Athletic Competence	137	7	24	17.66	4.01
Social Competence	140	8	24	17.11	4.47
Behavioural Conduct	140	6	24	17.19	4.30
Physical Appearance	138	7	24	18.5	4.64
Global Self-Worth	137	9	24	19.3	3.62

Correlations

Table 4 displays the correlations between all key variables. Parental closeness and parental support had a small significant, positive correlation with each other. Grandparental closeness and grandparental support were also found to be significantly correlated with each other, with a small, positive correlation. A small significant positive correlation was found between grandparental support and scholastic competence $r = .18$; $p = .03$. There were no significant correlations between grandparental support, global self-worth and the other four domains of self-concept (i.e., social competence, athletic competence, physical appearance and behavioural conduct). There were also no significant correlations found between grandparental closeness, global self-worth and the other five domains of self-concept (i.e., scholastic competence, social competence, athletic competence, physical appearance and behavioural competence). In terms of the demographic variables, age had small significant negative correlations with athletic competence $r = -.19$; $p = .02$, global self-worth $r = -.18$; $p = .03$ and physical appearance $r = -.28$; $p = .001$. Gender was significantly negatively correlated with athletic competence $r = .28$, $p = .001$, indicating that boys reported more athletic competence than girls. All domains of the self-concept, including global self-worth were significantly, positively correlated with each other except for the correlation between behavioural conduct and athletic competence.

Table 4

Correlations between Demographic Variables, the SPPC Domains of Self-Concept (n = 146)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Gender	-											
2 Age	.05	-										
3 Parental Support	-.09	-.09	-									
4 Parental Closeness	-.12	-.05	.270**	-								
5 Grandparental support	-.28**	.07	-.14	.03	-							
6 Grandparental closeness	-.22**	.03	.20*	.14	.28**	-						
7 Scholastic Competence	-.12	-.02	.05	.11	.18*	.07	-					
8 Social Competence	-.02	.05	-.14	-.04	-.04	.08	.33**	-				
9 Athletic Competence	-.28**	-.19*	.13	.10	-.01	.03	.28**	.17*	-			
10 Physical Appearance	-.08	-.28**	-.04	.04	-.03	.03	.22*	.27**	.41**	-		
11 Behavioural Conduct	-.05	-.12	-.13	-.05	-.12	-.04	.26**	.43*	.14	.35**	-	
12 Global Self Worth	-.04	-.18*	-.04	.03	-.06	-.02	.33**	.38**	.46**	.58**	.31*	_

Notes: *p <.05. **p<.01. ***p< .001.

Hierarchical Multiple Regression

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to test whether grandparental support and closeness significantly predicted a more positive self-concept in children.

After taking age, gender and the parental control variables into account, neither grandparental support nor grandparental closeness explained significant variance associated with the any of the five domains of self-concept and global self-worth (see Table 5). Therefore results for both predictor variables are discussed holistically.

Grandparental support and grandparental closeness did not significantly contribute to the variance in global self-worth $F (2, 130) = .419$, $p = .658$. Findings for the other five domains of self-concept similarly yielded non-significant results. Grandparent support and closeness failed to significantly predict any variance in scholastic competence $F (2,131) = 1.720$; $p = .183$, despite a previously significant correlation between grandparental support and the child's scholastic competence. Social competence was not significantly predicted $F (2, 133) = 1.750$; $p = .178$. Similar results were yielded for athletic competence $F (2,130) = 1.564$, $p = .213$. Although age and gender significantly explained 11.2% of the variance in the behavioural conduct at middle childhood $F (2, 14) = 8.67$ $p < .001$, the addition of grandparental support and closeness did not significantly explain further variance in behavioural conduct $F (2,133) = .26$, $p = .771$. This is similar for physical appearance where age and gender significantly explained 7.5% of variance $F (2, 135) = 5.47$ .44, $p < .05$. However, grandparental support and closeness added at step 3 failed to significantly explain the variance in the physical appearance domain of self-concept at middle childhood $F (2,131) = .44$, $p = .65$.

At step 4, these interaction terms failed to significantly explain additional variance in global self-worth and the other five self-concept domains. Therefore, no significant interactions were found between grandparental support × parental support, and grandparental closeness × parental closeness, in predicting the child's self-concept in middle childhood.

Table 5

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Child Self-Concept, From Grandparental Support & Grandparental Closeness

	Self-Concept Domains										
	Scholastic		Social		Athletic		Physical		Behavioural		Global Self Worth	
Predictors	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.017		.003		.018		.075*	.	.112**		.035	
Gender		-.01		-.01		-.04		-.09		.27**		-.03
Age		-.12		-.04		-.12		-.25**		.18*		-.08*
Step 2	.10		.023.01		.025		.006		.011		.005	
Parental Support		.09		-.16		-.03		-.78		.08		-.07
Parental closeness				-.16		-.14		.64		.04		-.08
Step 3	.025		.025		.022		.006		.003		.006	
Grandparental Support		.16		-.12		-.16		.62		-.04		-.01
Grandparental Closeness		-.00		-.14		.03		.05				
Step 4	.002		.008		.002		.031		.013		.004	
Grandparental Support × parental support		-.8		.04		-.11		-.83		.17		.17
Parental closeness × Grandparental Closeness		-.66		-1.01		.39		1.70		-.07		.03
	R^2 = .053		R^2 = .058		R^2 = .067		R^2 =.118		R^2 = .140		R^2 =.051	
n	138		140		137		138		140		137	

Notes: *p <.05. **p<.01. ***p< .001.

Discussion

  This study investigated the association between grandparental support and closeness with children's self-concept in South Africa. It was hypothesized that higher levels of grandparental support would be associated with a more positive self-concept. Additionally, it was expected that the closer grandchildren perceived their grandparent to be, the more positive their self-concept would be. With the relatively small sample of 146 eligible participants, from a school in Cape Town, the evidence supporting the study hypotheses was very limited.

  Firstly, no significant relationships were reported between grandparental support and grandparental closeness and four of the five self-concept domains (athletic competence, social competence, behavioural conduct and the physical appearance) as well as global self-worth .Grandparental support was significantly positively correlated with children's perceived scholastic competence, but was not a significant independent predictor of perceived scholastic competence after controlling for parental closeness and support. Furthermore, grandparental closeness and support were not significant predictors of a positive self-concept in any of the other self-concept domains. The non-significant results simply imply that both grandparental support and grandparental closeness do not have a prominent impact on children's self-concept during the middle childhood years. Since limited studies have investigated the specific relationship between grandparents and self-concept during middle childhood, the findings are unique.

  A previous study exploring the association between self-concept and a child's social network during middle childhood, contradicted our findings (Levitt et al., 2005; Levitt et al., 1993). Levitt et al. (2005) studied the impact of extended family on self-concept once at middle childhood and then again at the start of adolescence. Their results indicated that at both time periods children who had higher levels of support from extended family members had higher self-concept scores. However, the extended family members in this case included aunts, uncles as well as grandparents. This may have influenced finding, because accumulative support from a higher number of extended family members is often associated with higher self-concept scores (Levitt et al, 2005). Furthermore, a group of children (grades 1-2, 4-5 and 8-9) who received high levels of support from close relations (including grandparents) had a more positive self-concept compared to children who had support from less close individuals (Levitt et al., 1993). The cumulative impact of a child's extended social

network on self-concept does not adequately portray the unique influence of grandparents as does our study.

The research exploring the specific influence of grandparents, thus far has been limited to adolescents in association with factors such as well-being (Wild & Gaibie, 2014; Griggs et al., 2010). Therefore, this restricts the inferences that can be made about the specific influence grandparents have on the child's self-concept, particularly during middle childhood. However, in a qualitative study that looked at the association between grandparents and self-concept, adolescents living with grandparents with high levels of involvement had a positive sense of self-worth (Downie et al., 2010). The discrepancies between our results and research looking at the grandparent's unique effect on self-concept may be due to factors that are age related. There is a common perception that grandparents play a role as emotional buffers against the negative effects of parent-child conflict (Dunifon, 2013). Therefore their role may be more useful and valuable during the adolescent years compared to middle childhood as adolescence is a known time of conflict between parents and teenagers (Griggs et al., 2010; Levitt et al., 2005).

Interestingly, the self-concept domain that did show significant association with grandparental support was scholastic competence. The study showed that scholastic competence was significantly positively correlated with grandparental support. However, the relationship was no longer significant after controlling for parent closeness and support and demographic variables. Previous studies have found a significant relationship between grandparental support and adolescent self-concept in relation to scholarly ability (Elder & Conger, 2000; Griggs et al., 2010; Ruiz & Silverstein, 2007; Yorgason et al., 2011). This can be attributed to the type of relationship between grandparents and grandchildren, where support with school related activities are dominant (Griggs et al., 2010). Additionally, the common reference to the role grandparents play as teachers may be in support of this finding (Dunifon, 2013). On a more psychological level, encouragement surrounding academic achievement is likely to play a role in reinforcing notions of positive self-worth with regards to scholastic achievement (Dunifon, 2013; Griggs et al., 2010). Positive appraisals for academic achievement received from grandparents would explain the significant association between scholastic competence and grandparental support. By receiving high levels of support of this nature, both actively and emotionally, children are likely to feel a positive pressure to achieve (Griggs et al., 2010). In support of this, family support was related to higher scholastic self-concept compared to support from peers (Felner, Aber, Primavera, &

Cauce 1985). The finding implies that the involvement of grandparents in the scholarly aspect of a child's life has a positive impact on their self-concept, subsequently having a potential positive impact on their academic achievement (Jansen, Shroeder, & Ludke, 2014).

The finding of the significant relationship reported between grandparental closeness and parental support was in accordance with previous research (Dunifon & Bajracharya, 2012). This implies that if children have adequate parental support they feel closer to their grandparents. This is aligned with research which postulates that the relationship between the grandparent and grandchild is dependent on the parent (Mueller & Elder, 2003; Mueller et al., 2002). Thus, when a child has a supportive parent, the parent may be more likely to facilitate access between the child and the grandchild as children at this age have little control over who is a part of their social circle (King, 2003). Parents can provide opportunities that would allow for this closeness, the parent becomes a key element to grandparent-grandchild relationships. Alternatively, the relationship observed between the grandchild and grandparent may reflect the family relationships as a whole, as well as the family processes that are said to underlie the grandparental involvement (Flouri, Buchanan, Tan, Griggs & Attar-Schwartz, 2010). This suggests that the finding may reflect that all family members are closely linked to each other and have ample opportunity for social interactions for all members. This is relevant to South African children where it is possible that children have a close bond with their grandparents as well as their parents due to the collectivist culture, which encourages closeness and support from multiple role players in a child's life (Sibanda, 2011). However, the finding may have been constrained due to the virtue of consent received from parents for children to participate. Parents who may not have a good relationship with their parents (the child's grandparents) may have opted their children out of the study thus limiting the finding to children whose parents are on good terms with the grandparents. This reveals the confounding nature that parents play in studying the grandparent-grandchild relationship.

Additionally, as expected, grandparental support and closeness were found to be significantly correlated with each other. This supports the premise that members regarded as being close to the child are likely to provide high levels of support (Levitt et al., 1993).

Finally, gender was significantly, negatively correlated with grandparental closeness and grandparental support. The significant association between gender and grandparental support and closeness indicated that girls experienced higher levels of support and closeness

with their grandparents. These gender findings were consistent with the findings of Levitt et al. (1993), where extended family support only related to self-concept in girls. This may be suggestive of the tendency of females to draw on broader networks for social well-being (Dubas, 1989).

Limitations and suggestions for future research

The research conducted was associated with a number of limitations that are worth considering for future research. The first limitation that we encountered was social desirability in the questionnaire answers. Social desirability bias tends to reduce the quality of data collected and the accuracy in which they represent reality (Stodel, 2015). Some children tended to answer questions that reflected a positive self-concept for almost all 36 questions, thus selecting the most desirable response. This resulted in unrealistic representations of their self-concepts and suggested that they wanted to please the reader with a desirable image of who they were. However, this bias was not a concrete reason for us to exclude some of the scripts from the data capturing process since we cannot be sure if their high scores were due to social desirability or their actual perceptions of themselves. Although we emphasised the anonymity and confidentiality of their answers, children may still have felt pressured to answer desirably in front of us and their peers. Future studies using the SPPC measure may be administered in a setting where children are seated further away from each other when they complete the questionnaires to avoid the pressure of their peers glimpsing their answers.

In terms of administering the questionnaire, many children struggled with the wording of the SPPC measure and this may have contributed to some confusion when answering the questionnaire. The SPPC, although reputable for its measure of the child self-concept, may have used some vocabulary that children did not understand at this stage (Harter, 1985). Also, the use of words may have been more specific to the American context in which Harter produced the SPPC measure (Harter, 1985).It is emphasised that one may not change the wording of the measure, but explanations of words that children struggle with could be explained prior to commencing with answering the questionnaires.

A third limitation is that we only obtained data from the child's perspective of the closeness and the amount of support they believed they received from their grandparents. Although there is evidence shown that a child's perception of their support is more beneficial to psychological functioning than the actual closeness and support that they receive (Grezsta, 2006), additional information from the grandparents' perspective may have been beneficial to

understanding the overall grandparent-grandchild relationship. We did not obtain any data from grandparents regarding their perspectives of the closeness and supportive relationships they had with their grandchildren. However, if we had this information then it could have supplemented our understanding of the closeness and the type of support that children receive.

Another notable shortcoming of our study is that we did not account for the racial demographics in our sample size. We are therefore unable to ascertain whether there were differences in racial groups, and if the racial demographics of our sample were representative of the demographics of South African children in middle childhood. Although most children were coloured or black African students, with a few white and Indian children, it is more likely that our sample was not representative. There has been evidence to show that there are racial differences in the types of relationships that children have with their grandparents. For example, in black African families, grandparents are more frequently take on the role as caregivers for the grandchildren compared to other race groups (Cox & Miner, 2014). In a country rich in a variety of cultures and races, it would be beneficial to know whether there are racial differences in the type of relationships children have with their grandparents in South Africa. Further research should account for race to possibly achieve more substantial results if the sample size was larger and more diverse (Wild & Gaibie, 2014).

Moreover, we are unsure of how the living arrangements of families affected the grandparent-grandchild relationship in our sample. In South Africa, due to varying socioeconomic contexts, family structures often differ. In poorer households, grandparents tend to reside in their adult-children's homes to help take care of their grandchildren. In comparison, in more affluent homes the nuclear family is still a common structure. Therefore the type of living arrangements in South Africa varies across contexts and can influence the proximity in which children and their grandparents interact (Amoateng & Heaton, 2007). Future research and studies interested in the association between grandparental closeness and support and the child self-concept may benefit from this knowledge, especially in the South African setting.

Another limitation of our study is that the data we collected could not give an indication of whether children had more close and supportive relationships with either their grandmothers or grandfathers. We grouped the both grandmothers and grandfathers into one variable either named 'grandparental support' or 'grandparental involvement' to simply

ascertain whether there was a link between grandparental support and closeness and the child self-concept. However the literature does suggest that there are differences in the grandparent-grandchild relationship depending on the gender of the grandparent (Cameron, Pinto, Hancock, & Sombat-Tipanya, 2014). More research and findings have been conducted regarding the grandmother-grandchild relationship and shows that grandmothers often play a supportive and positive role in the grandchild's life. However, research into grandfathers and their impact on the child's development is neglected, supposedly due to an often feminised view of grandparenting (Cameron et al., 2014). Although little is known about the grandparent-grandchild relationship, an exploration of the differences in gender roles of grandparents may elicit some important findings regarding this network of interaction between child and grandparents.

Study contributions and implications

Although we met with a number of limitations, being the first study of its kind in South Africa, our research did contribute to the growing knowledge base focusing on the grandparent-grandchild relationship as well as the child's self-concept during middle childhood.

In our exploration of the self-concept, our study highlighted the importance of focusing on the self-concept in middle childhood. Attending to grandparents as possible figures in children's lives, we contributed to the exploration of what factors may enhance the child's self-concept (Jansen, Schroeders, & Ludtke, 2014). It has been researched and noted that children's social networks expand during middle childhood beyond the interaction with their parents. Other family members become more salient figures in their lives and as social networks influence the way in which children develop, much focus has been given to how these social networks influence development. Research on the grandparent-grandchild relationship has shown that grandparents do have an impact on grandchildren's development; however, there is scarce knowledge of this in relation to self-concept, especially in the South African setting. Based on this study and previous research, grandparental involvement appears to be linked to some aspects of children's wellbeing (such as prosocial behaviour) (Attar-Schwartz et al., 2009; Wild & Gaibie, 2014; Yorgason et al., 2011) but not to others such as self-concept or substance use (Profe & Wild, 2015). Although our study found that grandparental closeness and support were not significantly associated with the child's self-concept during middle childhood, it provided a space for more research to explore this area

while taking in consideration the limitations and suggestions for future research. Therefore, it is likely that more knowledge could form a concrete understanding of whether the relationship bears significance or not when these limitations and suggestions are addressed.

Conclusion

Although our study did not produce significant results regarding the association of grandparents with the child's self-concept, it is the only study conducted thus far in South Africa that focused specifically on the child's self-concept in relation to grandparents. Having a positive self-concept often equips children with the ability and belief in themselves to do well at school and to make positive connections and relations with peers in the school environment. Our finding of the slightest indication of a significant positive correlation between scholastic competence and grandparental support may inspire more research into the nature of this relationship. Factors that enhance educational success for children are important to explore in a country that often lacks support and security for school-going children (Spreen & Vally, 2006). Thus, this study served to fill the gap in research conducted on grandparental support and closeness on a child's self-concept, during the critical developmental period of middle childhood. The study reveals the need to explore the grandparental-grandchild relationship and possibly investigate its association with the scholastic self-concept of children.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

ALL ABOUT ME
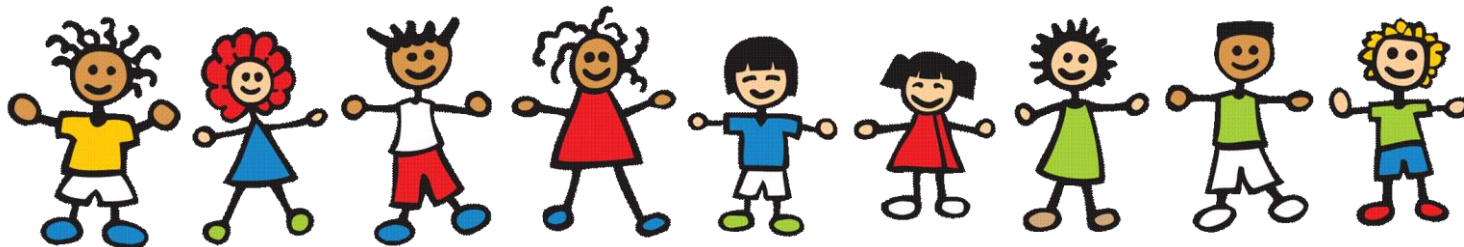
Age:
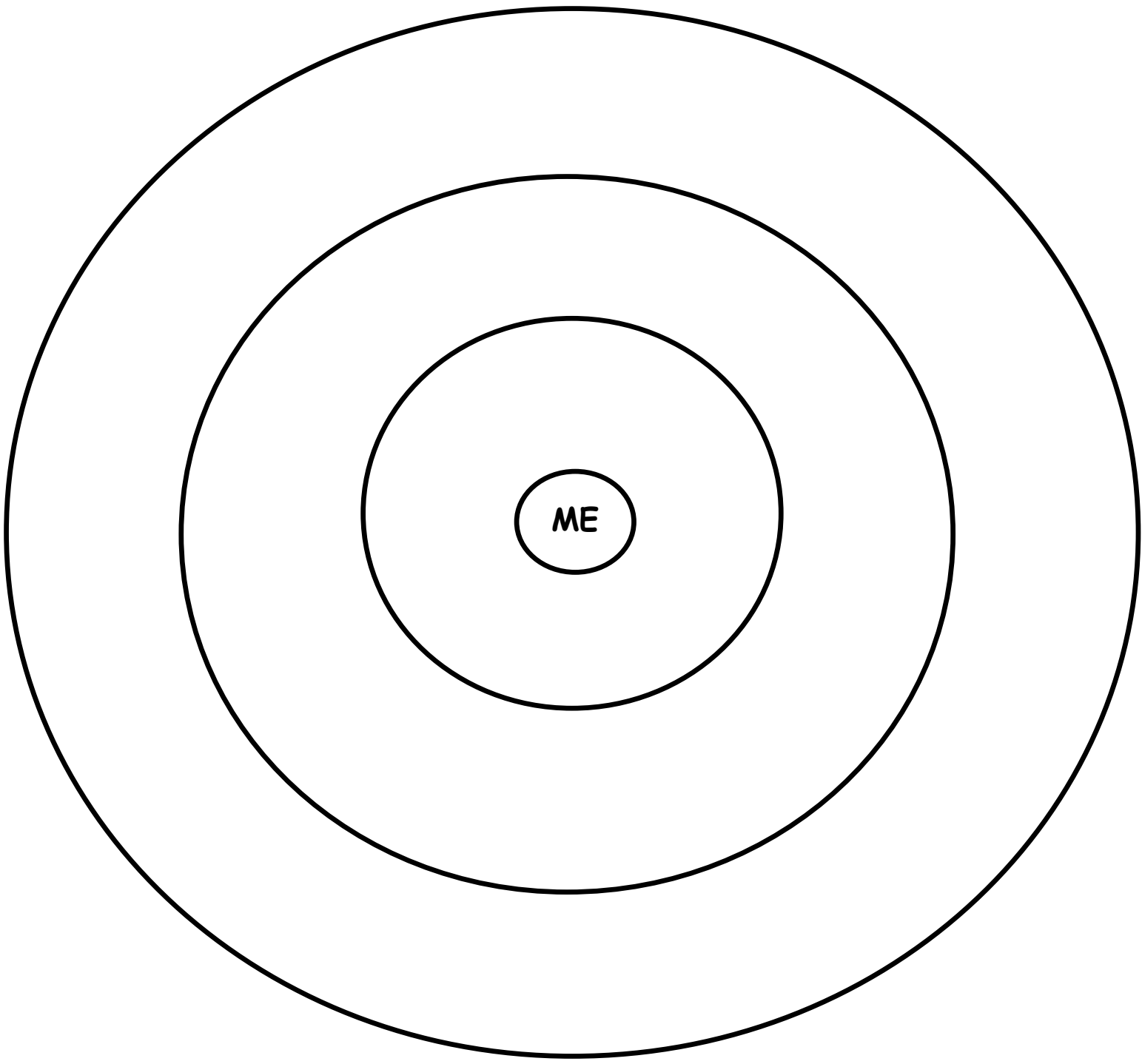
Are you a boy or girl? (Please tick one)

Boy:

Girl:

I have at least one grandparent (Please tick one)
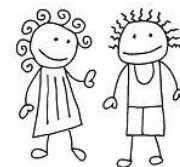
Yes

No

ME

WHAT I AM LIKE

Eg:	Really true for me	Sort of true for me	Some kids would really rather play outside in their spare time	but	Other kids would rather watch T.V	Sort of true for me	Really true for me
1			Some kids feel that they are very good at their school work	but	Other kids worry about whether they can do the school work assigned to them		
2			Some kids find it hard to make friends	but	Other kids find it pretty easy to make friends		
3			Some kids do very well at all kinds of sports	but	Other kids don't feel that they are very good when it comes to sports		
4			Some kids are happy with the way they look	But	Other kids are not happy with the way they look.		
5			Some kids often do not like the way they behave	But	Other kids usually like the way they behave.		
6			Some kids are often unhappy with themselves	but	Other kids pretty pleased with themselves		

7			Some kids feel like they are just as smart as other kids their age	But	Other kids aren't so sure and wonder if they are as smart		
8			Some kids know how to make classmates like them	But	Other kids don't know how to make classmates like them		
9			Some kids wish they could be a lot better at sports	But	Other kids feel like they are good enough at sports		
10			Some kids are happy with their height and weight	But	Other kids wish their height and weight were different		
11			Some kids usually do the right thing	But	Other kids often don't do the right thing		
12			Some kids don't like the way they are leading their life	But	Other kids do like the way they are leading their life		
13			Some kids are pretty slow in finishing their school work	But	Other kids can do their school work quickly		
14			Some kids don't have the social skills to make friends	But	Other kids do have the social skills to make friends		

15			Some kids think they could do well at just about any new sports activity they haven't tried before		Other kids are afraid they might not do well at the sports they haven't ever tried		
16			Some kids wish their body was different		Other kids like their body the way it is.		
17			Some kids usually act the way they know they are supposed to		Other kids don't often act the way they are supposed to		
18			Some kids are happy with themselves as a person		Other kids are often not happy with themselves		
19			Some kids often forget what they learn		Other kids can remember things easily		
20			Some kids understand how to get peers to accept them		Other kids don't understand how to get peers to accept them		
21			Some kids feel that they are better than others their age at sports		Other kids don't feel they can play as well		

22			Some kids wish their physical appearance (how they look) was different	But	Other kids like their physical appearance the way it is		
23			Some kids usually get in trouble because of the things they do	But	Other kids usually don't do things that get them in trouble		
24			Some kids like the kind of person they are	But	Other kids often wish they were someone else		
25			Some kids do very well at their classwork	But	Other kids don't do very well at their class work		
26			Some kids wish they knew how to make more friends	But	Other kids know how to make as many friends as they want		
27			In games and sports some kids usually watch instead of play	But	Other kids usually play rather than just watch		
28			Some kids wish something about their face or hair looked different	But	Other kids like their face and hair the way they are		
29			Some kids do things they know they know they shouldn't do	but	Other kids hardly ever do things they know they shouldn't do		

30			Some kids are very happy being the way they are	but	Other kids wish they were different		
31			Some kids have trouble figuring out the answers in school	but	Other kids almost always can figure out the answers		
32			Some kids know how to become popular	but	Other kids do not know how to become popular		
33			Some kids don't do well at new outdoor games	but	Other kids are good at new games right away		
34			Some kids think they are good looking	but	Other kids think that they are not very good looking		
35			Some kids behave themselves very well	but	Other kids often fund it hard to behave themselves		
36			Some kids are not very happy with the way they do a lot of things	but	Other kids think the way they do things is fine		

(a)Who do you talk to about important things?

_____

(b) Who makes you feel better when something bothers or you are unsure about something?

_____

(c) Who takes care of you when you are sick?

_____

(d) Who helps you with your homework or other school work?

_____

 (e) Who likes to be with you?

_____

(f) Who makes you feel good or special about yourself?

_____

Appendix B

Consent form

Department of Psychology

University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, 7701, South Africa
Telephone (021) 650-4605
Fax (021)
650- 4104

Dear Parent or Guardian

Research Study at your child's school: Grandparental support and child self-concept

We are Psychology Honours students from the University of Cape Town (UCT) wishing to conduct research study on the involvement of grandparents and the grandchild self-concept.

Research based on the presence and involvement of Grandparents in the lives of children has been shown to combat against a child's life stressors, help them cope at school and reduce negative impact on the child's well-being. However there is limited knowledge on the link between the relationship with the grandparent and the child self-concept internationally or locally in South Africa.

We would like to invite your child to participate in the study on the relationship between grandparents and the child self-concept. This will involve filling in questionnaires in class and shall not require more than an hour of your child's time. They shall be asked questions about their experiences, behaviours, thoughts and relationships with others. This is a voluntary exercise, and should you child wish to withdraw from the study, they may do so at any time without any repercussions or consequences. Withdrawal from the study will not affect the way your child is treated at school.

Your child's name will not be put on the questionnaire. Therefore their answers will be anonymous and kept confidential. All children's answers will be combined into one result which means that no child will be identifiable for having participated in the study.

Should you wish for your child not to participate, please fill in the attached form and send it by the respective date. If we do not receive a signed form we will regard this as permission for your child to participate in the study.

Thank you for your co-operation

Warm regards,

Alexa Berlein & Minoka Naidoo – Principal Investigators.

Please sign this form if you object to your child's participation in our study.

You may contact us if you have aby questions or complaints:

      Honours Students: Alexa Berlein brale003@myuct.ac.za
              : Minoka Naidoo ndxmin001@myuct.ac.za

_____I do not wish for my child to participate in the research study being conducted by Psychology Honours Students at UCT

Child's Name:
_____

Class: _____

Parent/Guardian's Name: _____.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

Assent Form

<u>Project Title: Grandparents and grandchildren</u>

Investigators: Minoka Naidoo and Alexa Berlein

We are doing research on grandparents and grandchildren. A research study means that we are trying to get to know more about people and children. In this research study the people we want to know more about are grandchildren and grandparents.

You can decide if you want to be a part of this study. If you say yes you will be asked to answer some questions that we will give to you on paper. We will also ask you to place your family members in a three different circles on a piece of paper. This will take up 1 lesson time for you to complete.

You should know that there are no risks if you take part in this study and it does not take a long time. The study will take place at school.

If you decide to take part in this study, we will not include your name or tell anyone that you took part.

You do not have to take part in the study. If you decide not to, you can say no. If you say yes, but then decide to stop after we begin the study, you can still say no and leave the study. Your parents know about this study too.

I, _____ (your name) know that my mom and dad/guardian know about this study and have agreed to let me take part.

I am taking part because I want to. I know that I can leave the study at any time if I feel uncomfortable. I understand that if I stop, nothing will happen to me

Signature _____