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# Ethnic Differences in Grandparent–Grandchild Affectionate Communication

Quinten S. Bernhold & Howard Giles

*Researchers have repeatedly called for more careful attention to how ethnicity and culture influence grandparent–grandchild communication. Using affection exchange theory as our guiding lens, we examined how grandchildren’s perceptions of receiving affection from their grandparents differ according to grandparents’ ethnicity. After controlling for a range of potentially confounding factors, grandchildren of Asian American, European American, and Latina/o American grandparents differed in the love and esteem, caring, memories and humor, and celebratory affection they reported from grandparents. Grandparents’ ethnicity also moderated associations between love and esteem and closeness, as well as between memories and humor and closeness. Implications of these findings and directions for future research are considered.*

**Keywords:** *Affectionate Communication; Culture; Ethnicity; Grandparent–Grandchild Communication*

As the United States population shifts toward greater numbers of older adults and ethnic minorities, it becomes increasingly important to understand the relationships young adults form with their Asian American, European American, and Latina/o American grandparents. Average life expectancies in the United States have risen from 47.3 years in 1900, to 68.2 years in 1950, to 78.8 years in 2015, and this number continues to climb (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). Along with a larger segment of older adults, American society is also becoming more ethnically diverse. *Ethnicity* refers to cultural customs grounded in race, national origin, or religion (Gordon, 1964). As Socha (2001)

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noted in the *Journal of Family Communication*'s inaugural issue, "Although mostly invisible in the family communication research in the 20th century, understanding the role of ethnicity in family communication is among the most important concerns on the horizon" (p. 5; see also Mansson & Booth-Butterfield, 2011; Soliz, 2007). Researchers have begun to study the role of ethnicity in grandparent–grandchild (GP-GC) relationships as it pertains to multiethnic families (Soliz, Thorson, & Rittenour, 2009), and there is much room to continue examining ethnicity. Almost 59 million immigrants have arrived to the United States over the past half-century, most of whom are from Asia and Latin America (Cohn & Caumont, 2016). Population growth rates for Asian Americans and Latina/o Americans are also faster than the rate for European Americans, and the former two groups are more likely than the latter group to live in multigenerational households that include grandparents (Cilluffo & Cohn, 2017).

Given these demographic and cultural considerations, researchers would benefit from continued consideration of how ethnicity and culture qualify various aspects of GP-GC relationships. The purpose of this study is to better understand how grandchildren perceive affectionate communication and relational closeness from their Asian American, European American, and Latina/o American grandparents.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, we consider whether grandchildren from these groups differ in the extent to which they experience affectionate communication from grandparents, as well as whether grandchildren from these groups differ in the degree to which affectionate communication is associated with relational closeness.

### **Ethnicity and GP-GC Affectionate Communication**

As a bioevolutionary theory, affection exchange theory (AET; Floyd, 2006) proposes that giving and receiving affection are associated with health and relational benefits for both partners. *Affectionate communication* refers to expressions of fondness and positive regard for another person (Floyd & Morman, 1998). Scholars have begun to study the health and relational correlates of GP-GC affectionate communication (Mansson, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2013d, 2013e, 2014a, 2014b). Mansson (2013a) found that grandchildren who perceived their grandparents as communicating more affection reported greater commitment to the GP-GC relationship. Grandchildren have also reported less stress, loneliness, and depression when they receive gifts and cards from grandparents (known as *celebratory affection*), as well as less loneliness and depression when their grandparents tell them jokes and stories from the past (known as *memories and humor*; Mansson, 2013b). Expressing that their grandchild is loved and valuable (known as *love and esteem*), asking about new developments in the grandchild's life (known as *caring*), conveying memories and humor, and giving

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<sup>1</sup> Our study was open to all students, but these three groups were the only groups that yielded samples large enough for statistical testing. African Americans comprised 4.0% of our sample, which approximates the percentages at the university as a whole (Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment, 2018) and the state of California as a whole (U. S. Census Bureau, 2017). Future researchers are strongly encouraged to prioritize data collection from African Americans, Native Americans, and other ethnic groups with rich cultural traditions.

celebratory affection have been positively associated with grandparents' mental health and negatively associated with grandparents' stress (Mansson, 2014a). Thus, in line with AET, research has shown that grandparents' affection toward grandchildren is associated with health and relational benefits.

Mansson (2013c, 2013d) created and validated these four subdimensions of affectionate communication (love and esteem, caring, memories and humor, and celebratory affection) as considerations relevant to GP-GC relationships in particular. This is important because other measures used to assess affectionate communication (e.g., traditional measures of direct verbal affection, direct nonverbal affection, and social support) have been proposed as potentially invalid when applied to GP-GC relationships (e.g., grandchildren have reported low levels of receiving kisses on the lips and massages from grandparents, two items traditionally included on nonverbal measures of affection; see Mansson & Booth-Butterfield, 2011). Hence, focusing on love and esteem, caring, memories and humor, and celebratory affection offers a more valid way to study affection in GP-GC relationships as a unique relationship type.

Different ethnic groups have different traditions and customs, yet it remains unknown whether grandchildren of Asian American, European American, and Latina/o American grandparents differ in the extent to which they perceive their grandparent as communicating love and esteem, caring, memories and humor, and celebratory affection. Because this is the first study to examine ethnic differences in the four subdimensions of affectionate communication, we propose the following:

RQ1: Do grandchildren perceive different levels of affectionate communication from their Asian American, European American, and Latina/o American grandparents?

It is also possible that certain types of affectionate communication "mean more" or "mean less" in terms of enhancing relational closeness depending on grandparents' ethnic backgrounds and cultures. We expect grandchildren's perceptions of receiving affection from grandparents to be positively associated with relational closeness in all three ethnic groups, but these associations might be strengthened or attenuated for different ethnic groups given differences in the cultural practices considered meaningful within families of different ethnicities. Because no known past research has examined ethnicity as a moderator of the associations between grandparents' affectionate communication and relational closeness, we ask the following:

RQ2: Does grandparents' ethnicity moderate the associations between grandchildren's perceptions of receiving affection and relational closeness?

## Method

### *Participants*

Young adult grandchildren were recruited through a communication department's online research participation system at a large university in the western United States. A total of 21 grandchildren incorrectly answered a question designed to ensure they were paying attention. These 21 surveys were discarded, resulting in a total of 302 valid responses. The 302

students reported on grandparents of the following ethnicities: African American (3.6%), Asian American (20.5%), European American (42.1%), Latina/o American (15.9%), Multiethnic (2.0%), Other (14.2%), and unreported ethnicity (1.7%). Because sample sizes were large enough for students reporting on Asian American, European American, and Latina/o American grandparents, we used the subset of surveys ( $n = 237$ ) reporting on grandparents of these three ethnicities. Of the 237 grandchildren in this study, 77.2% were female and 22.8% were male. Grandchildren identified as African American (0.4%), Asian American (22.8%), European American (43.9%), Latina/o American (22.8%), Multiethnic (8.9%), and Other (1.3%). Grandchildren were predominantly of middle socioeconomic status (76.4%) and an average of 19.75 years old ( $SD = 1.38$ , range: 18–27).

The 237 grandparents in this study were maternal grandmothers (29.1%), maternal grandfathers (18.1%), paternal grandmothers (24.5%), and paternal grandfathers (28.3%). The vast majority of these grandparents were biologically related to grandchildren (94.1%). Some grandchildren were adopted and reported on a grandparent (1.3%), some grandchildren reported on a stepparent's parent (0.4%), and the remaining grandchildren reported on a grandparent's second spouse through remarriage (4.2%). Of the 237 grandparents, 26.2% were Asian American, 53.6% were European American, and 20.3% were Latina/o American. Similar to grandchildren, the majority of grandparents were of middle socioeconomic status (69.6%). Grandparents were an average of 78.50 years old ( $SD = 8.57$ , range: 55–106) and had on average 8.04 grandchildren ( $SD = 6.36$ , range = 1–50). On one Likert-type item ("Overall, my grandmother/grandfather is physically healthy," 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), grandparents were perceived to be of moderate physical health ( $M = 4.51$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ). On a corresponding Likert-type item ("Overall, my grandmother/grandfather is mentally healthy"), grandparents were perceived to have good mental health ( $M = 5.43$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ).

### *Procedures*

After reading a consent form and agreeing to participate, participants were randomly assigned to think about their maternal grandmother, maternal grandfather, paternal grandmother, or paternal grandfather for the remainder of the survey. Participants were given a simplified definition of their assigned grandparent to help ensure they were thinking about the correct one (e.g., "Your paternal grandmother can be defined as your father's mother"). Consistent with past research (Fowler & Soliz, 2010), random assignment was implemented in order to prevent participants from reporting on a favorite grandparent. Participants were randomly reassigned to a new grandparent if they did not currently have a relationship with the grandparent to which they were initially assigned. They then completed measures about the affection they received from the grandparent, relational closeness to that grandparent, and demographics.

## Measures

### *Grandchildren's Received Affection*

The Grandchildren Received Affection Scale (GRAS: Mansson, 2013d) measured grandchildren's received affection from grandparents. Five items measured love and esteem (e.g., "My grandfather tells me he is proud of me,"  $M = 5.87$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ,  $\alpha = .92$ ), four items assessed memories and humor (e.g., "My grandfather tells me funny stories,"  $M = 5.51$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ,  $\alpha = .83$ ), five items assessed caring (e.g., "My grandfather asks how I am doing,"  $M = 6.07$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ,  $\alpha = .92$ ), and three items measured celebratory affection (e.g., "My grandfather sends cards for my birthday and holidays,"  $M = 5.30$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ,  $\alpha = .70$ ). Participants answered the 17 items on Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

### *Grandchildren's Relational Closeness*

Three 7-point semantic differential items measured grandchildren's closeness with their grandparent (i.e., "*detached – intimate, close – distant, warm – cold*";  $M = 5.41$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ,  $\alpha = .92$ ). Harwood (2000) argued a one-item measure of closeness was sufficient given the straightforward nature of asking how close a relationship is. We supplemented Harwood's one-item measure with two additional items. Higher scores indicate greater closeness.

## Results

Grandparents' sex, lineage, age, total number of grandchildren, socioeconomic status, and overall physical and mental health (as perceived by their grandchildren) were controlled in all analyses. Grandchildren's sex and their status as the oldest grandchild or not were also included as covariates. Although discussed less often than the other covariates, status as the oldest grandchild has been proposed as a potentially important consideration associated with reception of affectionate communication (Mansson, 2014b). Finally, the ethnic match between the grandparent and grandchild (not the same ethnicity as one another versus the same ethnicity as one another) was included as a covariate given the potential implications of shared family identity based on ethnic (dis)similarity (Soliz & Harwood, 2006).

### *Tests of RQ1*

RQ1 asked whether grandchildren would report different levels of affection from their Asian American, European American, and Latina/o American grandparents. To test this research question, we ran a one-way MANCOVA with grandparents' ethnicity as the fixed factor, the 10 variables listed above as covariates, and grandchildren's reports of receiving love and esteem, caring, memories and humor, and celebratory affection as outcomes. The omnibus test was significant for ethnicity,  $\Lambda = .79$ ,  $F(8, 436) = 6.74$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $p\eta^2 = .11$ . Follow-up univariate tests revealed that ethnicity exerted a significant effect on love and esteem,  $F(2, 221) = 8.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $p\eta^2 = .07$ . Table 1

displays means, standard errors, and confidence intervals for the four outcomes, broken down by grandparents' ethnicity. As Table 1 illustrates, grandchildren perceived their European American and Latina/o American grandparents as communicating more love and esteem than their Asian American grandparents. Perceptions of the love and esteem received from Latina/o American grandparents did not differ from the love and esteem received from European American grandparents. The follow-up univariate test was also significant for caring,  $F(2, 221) = 6.65$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $p\eta^2 = .06$ . Grandchildren perceived their European American grandparents as communicating more caring than their Asian American grandparents. Grandchildren with Latina/o American grandparents did not differ from other grandchildren for caring.

Third, memories and humor was significantly related to grandparents' ethnicity,  $F(2, 221) = 14.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $p\eta^2 = .11$ . Grandchildren's perceptions fell in a three-tiered ranking for the memories and humor communicated by grandparents, with grandchildren of Latina/o American grandparents reporting the highest degree of this affection, followed by grandchildren of European American grandparents, and then by grandchildren of Asian American grandparents. Fourth, grandchildren's reports of celebratory affection differed according to grandparents' ethnicity,  $F(2, 221) = 5.29$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $p\eta^2 = .05$ . Grandchildren of European American grandparents reported receiving more celebratory affection than grandchildren of Latina/o American grandparents. Grandchildren of Asian American grandparents did not differ from other grandchildren in their reports of celebratory affection.

Four of the 10 covariates were significantly related to outcomes: (1) whether or not the grandparent and grandchild were of the same ethnicity, (2) total number of grandchildren, (3) grandparents' socioeconomic status, and (4) grandchildren's global

**Table 1** Mean Differences in Grandchildren's Perceptions of Received Affection According to Grandparents' Ethnicity

	Asian American Grandparents	European American Grandparents	Latina/o American Grandparents
Love and Esteem	5.37 (0.15) [5.06 – 5.67] <sup>a</sup>	6.08 (0.11) [5.87 – 6.30] <sup>b</sup>	6.08 (0.19) [5.70 – 6.46] <sup>b</sup>
Caring	5.72 (0.13) [5.47 – 5.97] <sup>a</sup>	6.28 (0.09) [6.11 – 6.46] <sup>b</sup>	6.10 (0.16) [5.79 – 6.42] <sup>ab</sup>
Memories and Humor	4.94 (0.16) [4.63 – 5.25] <sup>a</sup>	5.57 (0.11) [5.35 – 5.78] <sup>b</sup>	6.32 (0.20) [5.93 – 6.71] <sup>c</sup>
Celebratory Affection	5.06 (0.17) [4.72 – 5.40] <sup>ab</sup>	5.59 (0.12) [5.36 – 5.83] <sup>a</sup>	4.91 (0.22) [4.49 – 5.34] <sup>b</sup>

*Note.* Cell means lie outside parentheses and brackets. Standard errors appear in parentheses, and 95% confidence intervals appear in brackets. For a given row, two cells without a common superscript significantly differ from each other, whereas two cells with at least one superscript in common do not significantly differ from each other. As an illustrative example, in the love and esteem row, grandchildren of European American grandparents reported receiving more love and esteem than grandchildren of Asian American grandparents, as indicated by no common superscript between these two cells. Grandchildren of Latina/o American grandparents also reported receiving more love and esteem than grandchildren of Asian American grandparents. Grandchildren of Latina/o American grandparents did not differ from grandchildren of European American grandparents in their perceptions of receiving love and esteem, as indicated by a common superscript.

perceptions of their grandparents' mental health. Grandchildren who were of the same ethnicity as their grandparent reported receiving *less* love and esteem, memories and humor, and celebratory affection compared to grandchildren who were of a different ethnicity than their grandparent ( $ps < .05$ ). Participants whose grandparents had more grandchildren reported receiving less affection on all four subdimensions ( $ps < .05$ ). Grandparent socioeconomic status was positively associated with celebratory affection ( $p < .01$ ). Perceptions of grandparents being mentally healthy positively predicted love and esteem, caring, and memories and humor ( $ps < .01$ ).

### Tests of RQ2

RQ2 asked whether grandparents' ethnicity would moderate the relationships between received affection and closeness. To test RQ2, we used PROCESS Version 2.16 (Hayes, 2016), an SPSS add-on that can accommodate multicategorical moderators. Four models were initially run using Model 1 in PROCESS (see Hayes, 2013). Each of these models included one GRAS subdimension as the continuous independent variable, grandparents' ethnicity as the multicategorical moderator, the 10 covariates, and relational closeness as the outcome. Continuous variables were mean-centered in these analyses. When the moderator is stipulated as multicategorical in Model 1, PROCESS automatically designates the first category as the reference group (which was European American grandparents in our data set). The four original models were therefore based on European American grandparents as the reference group. When a significant interaction was uncovered between a GRAS subdimension and grandparents' ethnicity, we reran Model 1 with another version of the multicategorical moderator such that Asian American grandparents replaced European American grandparents as the reference group in order to ensure that all significant pairwise differences were uncovered. Put differently, a possible pairwise difference between participants with Asian American and Latina/o American grandparents in the strength of the association between a GRAS subdimension and relational closeness would not be uncovered in the original model with European American grandparents as the reference group, therefore suggesting the need to rerun the model with another reference group in cases when significant moderation was uncovered.

Results for the original model with love and esteem predicting relational closeness are displayed in Table 2. The overall model was significant,  $F(15, 218) = 8.45, p < .001, R^2 = .37$ , and the two-way interaction between love and esteem and grandparents' ethnicity in predicting relational closeness explained a significant amount of additional variance,  $F(2, 218) = 3.98, p < .05, R^2_{\text{Change}} = .02$ . As demonstrated in the last line of Table 2, the association between love and esteem and closeness was attenuated for participants with Latina/o American grandparents compared to participants with European American grandparents (the reference group). No other ethnic groups differed from one another in the strength of the association between love and esteem and closeness, including when the model was rerun with Asian American grandparents as the reference group.

**Table 2** Love and Esteem and Grandparent Ethnicity as Predictors of Relational Closeness

	B	SE	t	p
GP's Sex	0.03	0.15	0.18	.86
Lineage	0.24	0.15	1.60	.11
GP's Age	0.01	0.01	0.51	.61
GP's Total Number of GC	-0.02	0.01	-1.64	.10
GP's Socioeconomic Status	-0.11	0.14	-0.74	.46
GP's Overall Physical Health	-0.08	0.06	-1.47	.14
GP's Overall Mental Health	0.28	0.06	5.06	<.001
GC's Sex	-0.20	0.18	-1.12	.27
GC's Status as the Oldest GC	-0.32	0.21	-1.50	.13
Ethnic Match Between the GP and GC	0.15	0.22	0.67	.50
Love and Esteem	0.66	0.10	6.36	<.001
Asian American GP	0.24	0.18	1.29	.20
Latina/o American GP	0.33	0.22	1.48	.14
Love and Esteem × Asian American GP	-0.21	0.14	-1.51	.13
Love and Esteem × Latina/o American GP	-0.44	0.15	-2.82	.01

Note. GP = Grandparent, GC = Grandchild. Binary variables were as follows: GP's Sex (0 = male, 1 = female); Lineage (0 = paternal, 1 = maternal); GC's Sex (0 = male, 1 = female); GC's Status as Oldest GC (0 = no, 1 = yes); Ethnic Match (0 = no, 1 = yes). European American grandparents served as the reference group.

Inspection of control variables in this model suggested that grandchildren were closer to grandparents with stronger mental health.

The overall model for caring was also significant,  $F(15, 218) = 8.01, p < .001, R^2 = .36$ . Caring positively predicted relational closeness at the main-effect level (see Table 3), but the interaction between caring and ethnicity did not explain a significant amount of unique variance,  $F(2, 218) = 1.48, p = .23, R^2_{\text{Change}} = .01$ . Results for control variables revealed that grandchildren reported greater closeness to grandparents with stronger mental health and grandparents with fewer total grandchildren.

Table 4 displays the results for memories and humor predicting closeness. The overall model was significant,  $F(15, 218) = 10.81, p < .001, R^2 = .43$ , and the interaction between memories and humor and ethnicity explained a significant amount of additional variance,  $F(2, 218) = 4.41, p < .05, R^2_{\text{Change}} = .02$ . The negative interaction product coefficient for Latina/o American grandparents and memories and humor revealed that the association between memories and humor and closeness was attenuated for grandchildren with Latina/o American grandparents compared to grandchildren with European American grandparents (the reference group; see the last line of Table 4). Table 5 displays the results for the memories and humor model with Asian American grandparents as the reference group. The negative interaction product coefficient for Latina/o American grandparents and memories and humor in

**Table 3** Caring and Grandparent Ethnicity as Predictors of Relational Closeness

	B	SE	t	p
GP's Sex	0.05	0.15	0.34	.74
Lineage	0.20	0.15	1.35	.18
GP's Age	0.01	0.01	0.36	.72
GP's Total Number of GC	-0.03	0.01	-1.98	.05
GP's Socioeconomic Status	-0.06	0.14	-0.42	.67
GP's Overall Physical Health	-0.10	0.06	-1.75	.08
GP's Overall Mental Health	0.24	0.06	4.11	<.001
GC's Sex	-0.29	0.18	-1.62	.11
GC's Status as the Oldest GC	-0.23	0.21	-1.09	.27
Ethnic Match Between the GP and GC	-0.08	0.22	-0.37	.71
Caring	0.70	0.13	5.55	<.001
Asian American GP	0.15	0.18	0.84	.40
Latina/o American GP	0.37	0.22	1.69	.09
Caring × Asian American GP	-0.27	0.16	-1.65	.10
Caring × Latina/o American GP	-0.07	0.21	-0.34	.73

*Note.* GP = Grandparent, GC = Grandchild. Binary variables were as follows: GP's Sex (0 = male, 1 = female); Lineage (0 = paternal, 1 = maternal); GC's Sex (0 = male, 1 = female); GC's Status as Oldest GC (0 = no, 1 = yes); Ethnic Match (0 = no, 1 = yes). European American grandparents served as the reference group.

**Table 4** Memories and Humor and Grandparent Ethnicity as Predictors of Relational Closeness

	B	SE	t	p
GP's Sex	0.14	0.14	0.98	.33
Lineage	0.33	0.14	2.30	.02
GP's Age	0.01	0.01	0.12	.91
GP's Total Number of GC	-0.03	0.01	-2.68	.01
GP's Socioeconomic Status	-0.27	0.14	-2.00	.05
GP's Overall Physical Health	-0.09	0.05	-1.67	.10
GP's Overall Mental Health	0.23	0.05	4.32	<.001
GC's Sex	-0.28	0.17	-1.69	.09
GC's Status as the Oldest GC	-0.33	0.20	-1.65	.10
Ethnic Match Between the GP and GC	0.19	0.21	0.91	.36
Memories and Humor	0.64	0.08	7.89	<.001
Asian American GP	0.18	0.17	1.04	.30
Latina/o American GP	0.16	0.24	0.67	.50
Memories and Humor × Asian American GP	-0.14	0.12	-1.18	.24
Memories and Humor × Latina/o American GP	-0.60	0.20	-2.94	.004

*Note.* GP = Grandparent, GC = Grandchild. Binary variables were as follows: GP's Sex (0 = male, 1 = female); Lineage (0 = paternal, 1 = maternal); GC's Sex (0 = male, 1 = female); GC's Status as Oldest GC (0 = no, 1 = yes); Ethnic Match (0 = no, 1 = yes). European American grandparents served as the reference group.

**Table 5** Memories and Humor and Grandparent Ethnicity as Predictors of Relational Closeness

	B	SE	t	p
GP's Sex	0.14	0.14	0.98	.33
Lineage	0.33	0.14	2.30	.02
GP's Age	0.01	0.01	0.12	.91
GP's Total Number of GC	-0.03	0.01	-2.68	.01
GP's Socioeconomic Status	-0.27	0.14	-2.00	.05
GP's Overall Physical Health	-0.09	0.05	-1.67	.10
GP's Overall Mental Health	0.23	0.05	4.32	<.001
GC's Sex	-0.28	0.17	-1.69	.09
GC's Status as the Oldest GC	-0.33	0.20	-1.65	.10
Ethnic Match Between the GP and GC	0.19	0.21	0.91	.36
Memories and Humor	0.50	0.09	5.69	<.001
European American GP	-0.18	0.17	-1.04	.30
Latina/o American GP	-0.02	0.27	-0.07	.95
Memories and Humor × European American GP	0.14	0.12	1.18	.24
Memories and Humor × Latina/o American GP	-0.46	0.21	-2.25	.03

Note. GP = Grandparent, GC = Grandchild. Binary variables were as follows: GP's Sex (0 = male, 1 = female); Lineage (0 = paternal, 1 = maternal); GC's Sex (0 = male, 1 = female); GC's Status as Oldest GC (0 = no, 1 = yes); Ethnic Match (0 = no, 1 = yes). Asian American grandparents served as the reference group.

Table 5 suggested that the relationship between memories and humor and closeness was also attenuated for grandchildren with Latina/o American grandparents compared to grandchildren with Asian American grandparents. The significant covariates in the caring model also emerged as significant in the memories and humor model. Moreover, grandchildren reported greater closeness to maternal (as opposed to paternal) grandparents and to grandparents of lower socioeconomic status in the memories and humor model.

For celebratory affection, the model explained a significant amount of variance,  $F(15, 218) = 4.21, p < .001, R^2 = .22$ . A main effect was observed for celebratory affection, such that greater amounts of celebratory affection predicted greater closeness (see Table 6). However, the two-way interaction between celebratory affection and grandparents' ethnicity did not explain additional variance in closeness,  $F(2, 218) = 1.71, p = .18, R^2_{\text{Change}} = .01$ . The two significant covariates in the caring model were also significant in the celebratory affection model.

In sum, then, grandparents' ethnicity moderated the associations between love and esteem and closeness, as well as between memories and humor and closeness. Partial correlations between the GRAS subdimensions and relational closeness, controlling for the 10 covariates, appear in Table 7.

**Table 6** Celebratory Affection and Grandparent Ethnicity as Predictors of Relational Closeness

	B	SE	t	p
GP's Sex	-0.02	0.17	-0.14	.89
Lineage	0.27	0.16	1.62	.11
GP's Age	0.01	0.01	0.39	.70
GP's Total Number of GC	-0.04	0.02	-2.43	.02
GP's Socioeconomic Status	-0.24	0.16	-1.45	.15
GP's Overall Physical Health	-0.12	0.06	-1.86	.06
GP's Overall Mental Health	0.35	0.06	5.72	<.001
GC's Sex	-0.29	0.19	-1.46	.14
GC's Status as the Oldest GC	-0.23	0.23	-1.00	.32
Ethnic Match Between the GP and GC	-0.05	0.24	-0.19	.85
Celebratory Affection	0.28	0.09	3.02	.003
Asian American GP	-0.03	0.20	-0.16	.87
Latina/o American GP	0.34	0.25	1.37	.17
Celebratory Affection × Asian American GP	-0.24	0.15	-1.56	.12
Celebratory Affection × Latina/o American GP	-0.20	0.13	-1.50	.13

Note. GP = Grandparent, GC = Grandchild. Binary variables were as follows: GP's Sex (0 = male, 1 = female); Lineage (0 = paternal, 1 = maternal); GC's Sex (0 = male, 1 = female); GC's Status as Oldest GC (0 = no, 1 = yes); Ethnic Match (0 = no, 1 = yes). European American grandparents served as the reference group.

**Table 7** Partial Correlations for Relationships Between Received Affection and Relational Closeness

	Love and Esteem and Relational Closeness	Caring and Relational Closeness	Memories and Humor and Relational Closeness	Celebratory Affection and Relational Closeness
Asian American Grandparents	.46**	.34*	.61***	.02
European American Grandparents	.56***	.45***	.59***	.29**
Latina/o American Grandparents	.26	.57***	-.12	.20

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

### Findings of Mean Differences (RQ1)

Grandchildren of European American and Latina/o American grandparents reported receiving more love and esteem than grandchildren of Asian American grandparents;

grandchildren of European American grandparents also reported receiving more caring than grandchildren of Asian American grandparents. Notably, many of the items for love and esteem (e.g., “My grandmother tells me that she misses me”) and caring (e.g., “My grandmother asks me how things are going”) refer to explicit verbal communication. We suspect that many European American and Latina/o American adults prioritize low-context cultural norms of verbal communication, explicitness, and clarity, whereas many Asian American adults value high-context norms such as nonverbal communication, indirectness, and unspoken meaning (Croucher et al., 2012; Hall, 1976). If so, prioritization of these norms might have encouraged European American and Latina/o American grandparents to communicate more love and esteem and caring compared to their Asian American counterparts.

Grandchildren of Latina/o American grandparents were more likely than grandchildren of Asian American and European American grandparents to report receiving memories and humor. Previous research has examined storytelling in Latina/o American social networks as it pertains to health communication and other topics (e.g., Kim, Moran, Wilkin, & Ball-Rokeach, 2011), and our results also suggest that Latina/o GP-GC relationships involve extensive storytelling in the form of memories and humor. We also found that grandchildren of European American grandparents reported receiving more celebratory affection than grandchildren of Latina/o American grandparents. Future researchers might include a measure of materialistic values in their surveys of grandparents. Such values may encourage European American grandparents—*moreso* than their Latina/o American counterparts—to give their grandchildren gifts and other tokens of affection, potentially contributing to the mean differences uncovered in this study.

### *Findings of Moderation (RQ2)*

Grandchildren of Latina/o American grandparents benefited the least from their grandparents’ expressions of love and esteem and memories and humor in terms of enhanced relational closeness. Recent meta-analysis (Vargas & Kimmelmeier, 2013) has revealed that European Americans score higher than Latina/o Americans on vertical individualism (i.e., subscribing to an autonomous notion of self that garners gratification through personal accomplishments). To the extent that love and esteem consists of explicit praise for the grandchild’s achievements, such expressions of affection might be stronger predictors of relational closeness in European American families. The association between memories and humor and relational closeness was negative (albeit nonsignificant) for grandchildren of Latina/o American grandparents. The high frequency of memories and humor in Latina/o American GP-GC relationships might “wear off” the relational benefits of this form of affectionate communication. Another potential explanation pertains to the actual content of the memories and humor Latina/o grandparents convey. Many Latina/o Americans still face discrimination and disparate treatment compared to their European American counterparts (e.g., Giles, Linz, Bonilla, & Gomez, 2012). It is possible that Latina/o grandparents’ memories and humor detail

the struggles they have faced in the past, more so than the memories and humor of Asian American and European American grandparents. Grandchildren of Latina/o American grandparents might find it difficult to listen to these hardships, perhaps perceiving them as painful self-disclosures (see Barker, 2007). Future qualitative interviews with grandchildren of Latina/o American grandparents will be crucial in exploring these possibilities and uncovering additional explanations of these findings that resonate with the grandchildren's lived experiences.

### *Limitations and Directions for Future Research*

We focused on Asian American, European American, and Latina/o American grandparents because these were the groups with sample sizes large enough to conduct statistical analyses. Students of all ethnicities were welcome to take our survey, but the low university enrollment of African Americans, Native Americans, and students of other ethnicities meant that our sample sizes for these ethnic groups were not large enough to include in the study. Future research on GP-GC relationships in African American and Native American communities is needed in order to understand ways in which these communities' rich traditions influence their affectionate communication. Another limitation concerned the fact that our sample contained more granddaughters than grandsons. Although we controlled for grandchildren's sex and other potentially confounding variables, future researchers should collect more data from grandsons and test for differences between granddaughters and grandsons given the mixed findings on whether grandchildren's sex influences GP-GC communication (for a review, see Kam & Hecht, 2009).

Despite these limitations, our findings raise intriguing possibilities for future tests of AET. AET is also concerned with people's responses to affection (Floyd, 2006). Researchers might examine how grandchildren's enhanced relational closeness might mediate the associations between grandparents' affectionate communication and grandchildren's intentions to care for their grandparents in the future (see also Pusateri, Roaché, & Kam, 2016). Our findings of grandparent ethnicity moderating the associations between affectionate communication and relational closeness might also suggest moderated mediation models (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007), with grandparents' affectionate communication as the predictor, relational closeness as the mediator, grandchildren's intentions to provide care for their aging grandparents as the outcome, and grandparents' ethnicity as the moderator of the associations between affection and closeness.

### **Conclusions**

In sum, this study addressed the repeated calls for more careful attention to the role of ethnicity and culture in GP-GC relationships and, as such, is a novel contribution to the GP-GC literature (see also Soliz et al., 2009). The results supported the traditional adage of "money cannot buy happiness," in that the associations between celebratory affection and closeness were nonsignificant for two ethnic groups and significant, but of small magnitude for one ethnic group. Latina/o American grandparents might be particularly encouraged to

express affection by asking about their grandchildren's lives, whereas Asian and European American grandparents might be especially encouraged to pass along memories and humor. In total, this study furthered Mansson and colleagues' extensive line of research and emphasized the need to more carefully consider how ethnicity and culture qualify GP-GC affectionate communication.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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