



National Stepfamily
Resource Center

GRANDPARENTS,
STEPGRANDPARENTS, AND
EXTENDED FAMILY
RELATIONSHIPS



LAWRENCE GANONG, PH.D.
AND MARILYN COLEMAN, PH.D.
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN
DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY STUDIES
AND
SINCLAIR SCHOOL OF NURSING
UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI



DEFINITIONS

- Stepfamily – at least one of the adults has a child or children from one or more previous.
- A multigenerational stepfamily is an extended family system of three or more generations that contain one or more intergenerational steprelationships.



STEPGRANDPARENT:

- (a) has a partner with offspring from one or more prior unions & those offspring have children, or
- (b) has offspring who has remarried or repartnered someone who has at least one child from a previous union.



STEPGRANDCHILD

- (a) has a stepparent with living parents (i.e., the stepgrandparents) or
- (b) has a grandparent who has remarried or repartnered someone who is not related genetically or legally to the grandchild.



IN WESTERN SOCIETIES LIKE THE U.S., GRANDPARENTS AND STEPGRANDPARENTS ARE INCREASING IN NUMBERS DUE TO:

- Longer life spans
- Increases in divorce, separation, cohabitation, and remarriage throughout the life course.
- increase in women bearing children with multiple partners, both within and outside of marriage



GRANDPARENTS AND GRANDCHILDREN IN STEPFAMILIES

When Offspring Remarry or Repartner:

- Relationships between grandparents and grandchildren are mediated by the middle generation.
- Frequency of contacts between grandparents and grandchildren and
- the type of involvement grandparents are allowed to have with grandchildren, are controlled to a degree by the child and/or child-in-law of the grandparents, who are also the parents of the grandchildren.
- Marital and relational transitions by the middle generation adults have enormous potential to affect grandparents' relationships with grandchildren



GRANDPARENT INVOLVEMENT INCREASES AFTER DIVORCE & SEPARATION

- Grandparents are often more involved in helping raise their grandchildren after divorce than they were before, at least when it is the grandparents' son or daughter who has physical custody of the grandchildren.
- Divorced and separated mothers with minor-age children frequently turn to their parents for financial support, child care, emotional support, advice, and even a place to live.
- Divorced fathers also seek support from their parents - particularly help with child care if their children are young .



SOMETIMES GRANDPARENTS' CONTACT IS LIMITED AFTER DIVORCE

- Post-divorce contact between grandparents and grandchildren depend on a number of issues:
 - Whether or not grandparents' offspring have primary or shared physical custody of grandchildren
 - Which parent initiated the break-up
 - Quality and closeness of the relationship between grandparents and their former son- or daughter-in-law
 - Physical distance between grandparents and grandchildren (Johnson, 1992).



REMARRIAGE OR COHABITATION ALSO AFFECTS GRANDPARENTS' TIES TO GRANDCHILDREN

- The new couple draws a boundary around the stepfamily household, creating distance between themselves and others, including grandparents.
- Grandparents' support and involvement with grandchildren are reduced when the middle-generation parent remarries.



MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS OFTEN SEE GRANDCHILDREN MORE THAN PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS AFTER MIDDLE-GENERATION REMARRIAGE

- Most stepfamily households are headed by mothers and stepfathers.
- Mothers are more involved than fathers in maintaining connections with extended family members, so paternal grandparents may lose more time with grandchildren after middle-generation remarriage than do maternal grandparents.
- In addition, some remarried fathers emotionally and psychologically “replace” stepchildren with whom they live for their nonresidential biological children (Manning & Smock, 2000), and if this is the case, there may be pressure on paternal grandparents to substitute sets of children as well.
- On the other hand, mothers, and even stepmothers, have been found to help maintain family ties with all of the children’s grandparents, which helps paternal grandparents stay in touch.



GRANDPARENTS CAN BE EITHER HELPFUL OR HARMFUL TO NEW STEPFAMILIES

- Grandparents can help by:
 - accepting the remarried spouse or new partner,
 - offering assistance when requested, and
 - developing positive relationships with stepgrandchildren
 - maintaining good attachments with grandchildren,



GRANDPARENTS CAN HARM BY:

- trying to undermine the new stepfamily by criticizing the new stepparent's treatment of their grandchildren,
- refusing to accept new stepgrandchildren or a new son- or daughter-in law,
- using money and inheritance to punish or to divide younger generations, and
- favoring grandchildren over stepgrandchildren



STEPGRANDPARENT – STEPGRANDCHILD RELATIONSHIPS

The Complexity of Stepgrandparenthood depends on:

- Ages of Stepgrandchildren and Stepgrandparents
- Gender of the “connecting” middle generation adult
- Genders of Stepgrandchildren and Stepgrandparents
- How the stepgrandparent relationship comes to exist.



THREE TYPES OF STEPGRANDPARENTS

- **Long-term Stepgrandparenthood**

- the remarriage or repartnering occurs years before stepgrandchildren are born

- **Later-life Stepgrandparenthood**

- an individual remarries or repartners with a person who has grandchildren

- **Inherited Stepgrandparenthood**

- an individual's *adult son or daughter* marries or repartners with someone who already has children

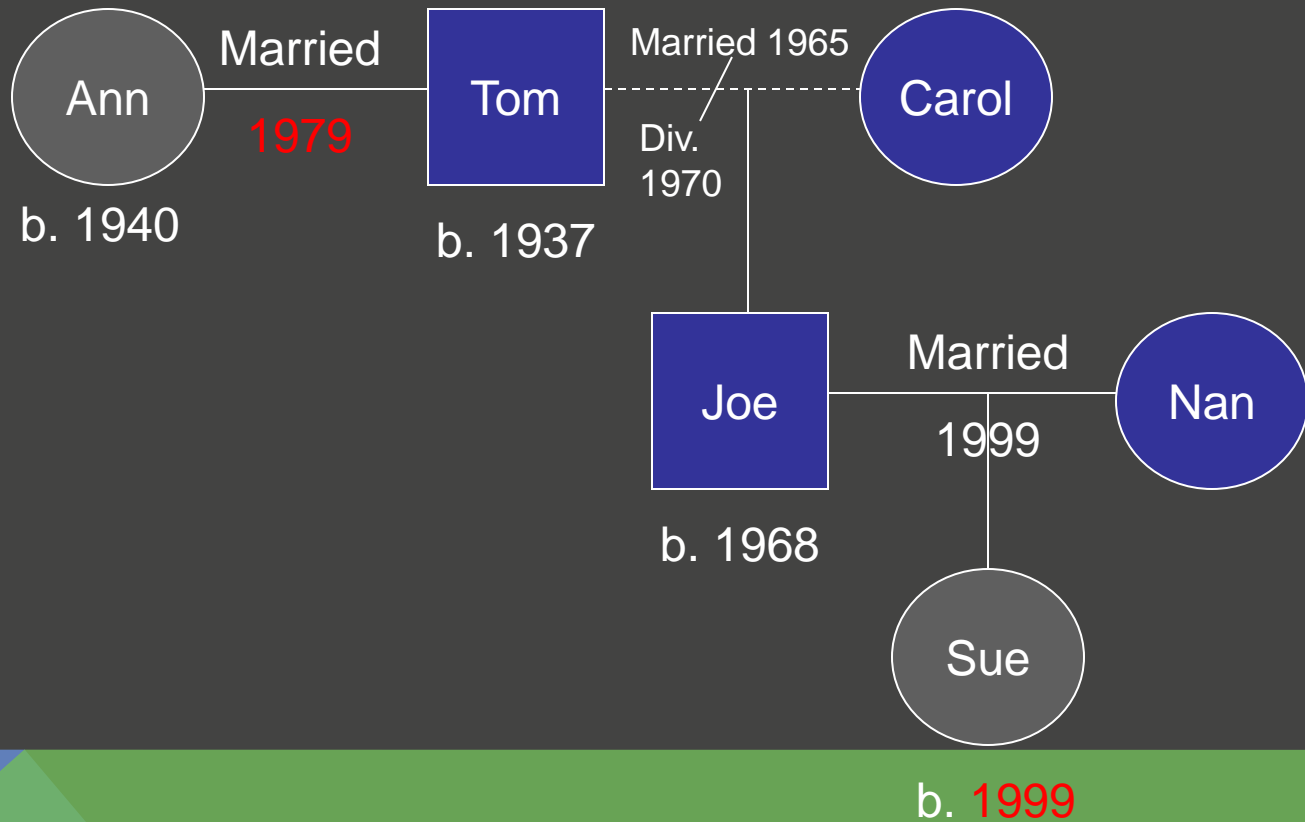


LONG-TERM STEPGRANDPARENT

Long-term stepgrandparents start their relationships with the children at the same time as the grandparents do; From the stepgrandchild's perspective, the SGP is on equal footing with the other grandparents.



LONG-TERM STEPGRANDPARENT



LONG-TERM STEPGRANDPARENT

We hypothesize:

- if long-term stepparent-stepchild relationships have been emotionally close,
- if stepparents invested instrumental and expressive resources in raising the stepchild (creating a sense of the need to reciprocate in the adult stepchild), then
- SGP-SGC relationships will be emotionally close.



QUALITY AND CLOSENESS OF LONG-TERM STEPGRAND-RELATIONSHIPS

- **Due to multiple influences:**
 - the stepgrandparents' efforts to develop close attachments with the stepgrandchildren
 - other family members actively encouraging the creation and maintenance of a grandparent-like relationship for stepgrandparents.
 - closer stepparent-stepchild relationships may facilitate closer stepgrandparent-grandchild ties.
 - a past history of helping between older stepparent and adult stepchild may mean more efforts to facilitate stepgrandparent-grandchild bonds.
 - length of time older stepparent and adult stepchild have known each other may affect how they perceive each other (e.g., as kin, as friends).
 - genders of the stepgrandparents and adult stepchildren.



LONG-TERM STEPGRANDPARENT

- Long-term stepgrandparents function as grandparents and are seen as grandparents even when stepparent-stepchild relationships have been neutral or even emotionally distant (Clawson & Ganong, 2002).
- Middle generation adults can facilitate or serve as barriers to relationships between SGP and SGC.

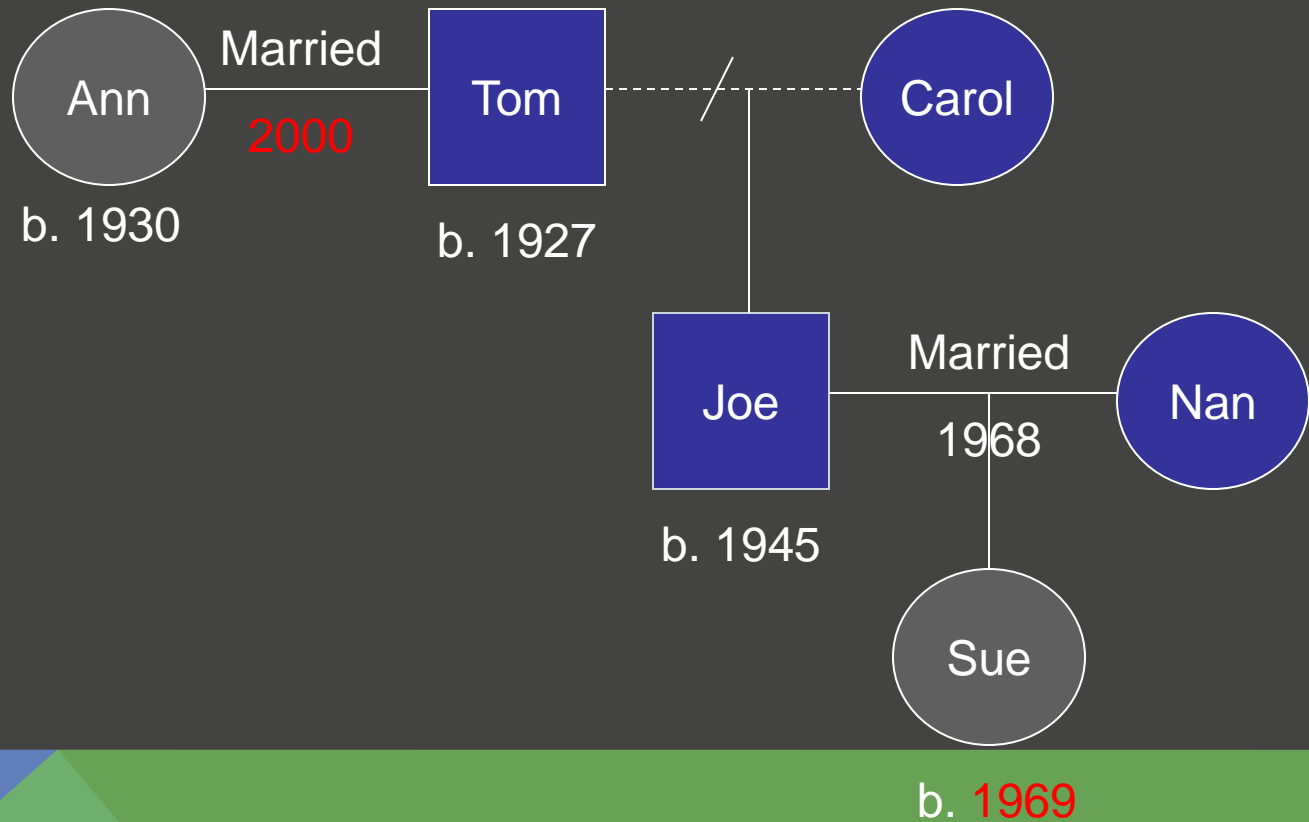


LATER-LIFE STEPGRANDPARENTHOOD

- When an older adult remarries later in life a person who has grandchildren, that older adult becomes a later-life stepgrandparent.
- Stepgrandchildren in these families may be adolescents or even emerging adults when their grandparent remarries.



LATER-LIFE STEPGRANDPARENTHOOD



LATER LIFE STEPGRANDPARENT

- It is probable that step-grandrelationships formed in later life rarely become emotionally close;
- They may not even be perceived as kinship bonds (Bornat et al., 1999; Ganong & Coleman, 2006; Ganong, Coleman, & Rothrauff, 2009).
- It is more likely that a new spouse or cohabiting partner of a grandparent will be seen at best as a family friend or acquaintance rather than as a family member (Ganong & Coleman, 2006).
- Members of intergenerational stepfamilies formed later in life may have little motivation to develop close ties.



LATER LIFE STEPGRANDPARENT

- Children and grandchildren often do not welcome a grandparents' new partner into the family (Sherman & Boss, 2007).
- New partners are often perceived by children and grandchildren as a threat to family wealth (Bornat et al., 1999).
- Children and grandchildren wonder who will take care of grandparents' new partners if they become frail (Kuhn, Morhardt, & Monbrod-Framburg, 1993; Sherman & Boss, 2007) , and
- they worry about who will pay the costs of long-term care (Sherman & Bauer, 2008).

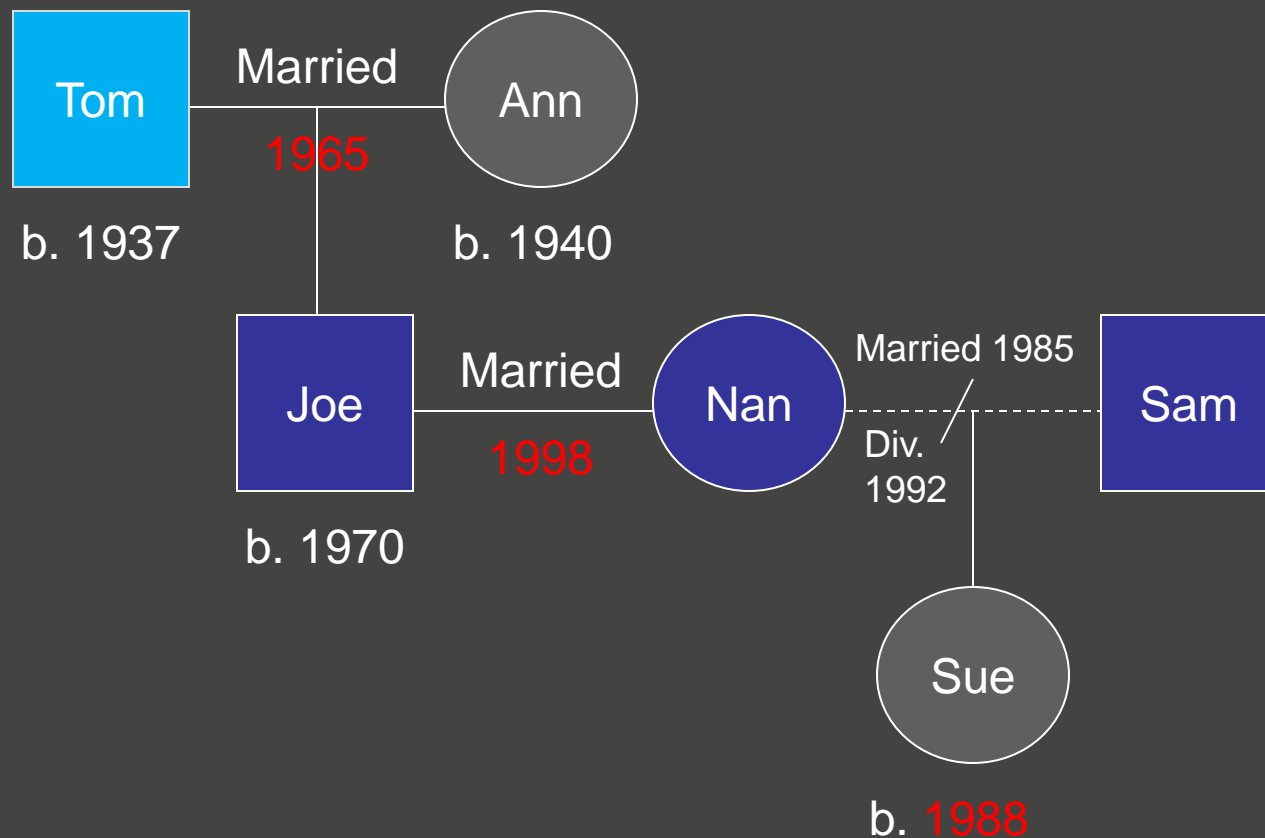


INHERITED STEPGRANDPARENTHOOD

- Neither the older adult nor the grandchild does anything to achieve their new stepfamily statuses. Instead, they “inherit” each other when a grown son or daughter (or parent) becomes a stepparent by marrying or cohabiting with someone who has children from a prior union.



INHERITED STEPGRANDPARENTHOOD



INHERITED STEPGRANDPARENTHOOD

We hypothesize that these relationships will be closer if (a) they live near each other and/or have frequent contact, (b) the middle-generation stepparent and the older stepgrandparent are women,

(c) the stepgrandchildren and stepgrandparents are younger when their relationship begins,

(d) the stepgrandchildren live with the stepgrandparent's offspring, and

(e) the stepgrandchildren have few or no genetic grandparents available to them and the stepgrandparents have few or no genetic grandchildren available to them.



GRANDPARENTS AND STEPGRANDPARENTS

- Not many studies.
- Many questions remain about how older adults' remarriages affect younger kin and about how older adults are affected by the remarriages of adult children.
- No research on multigenerational stepfamily relationships after cohabitation.



A RESEARCH AGENDA

- What do stepgrandparents do that enhances the lives of their stepgrandchildren?
- Are stepgrandparents perceived as kin by stepgrandchildren, and, if so, under what conditions?
- How do long-term stepfamilies decide that they will “construct” stepgrandparenthood as grandparenthood?
- How do the long-term stepfamilies who do this differ from those who do not?
- Does redefining these as kinship bonds change the nature of the relationships?



EXTENDED FAMILY MEMBERS IN STEPFAMILIES

- Grandparents are clearly important extended family members, at least in many stepfamilies, but what about other extended kin? Unfortunately, we know little about the roles and relationships of extended family members in stepfamilies. Researchers have not studied extended kin who are genetically related to stepfamily members, nor have they studied extended kinship created by a remarriage.

