

“They don’t listen”: contemporary respect relations between Zulu grandmothers and granddaughters/-sons

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Abstract

Intergenerational respect is the hallmark of social relations in African society. In South Africa, respect for older persons is thought to have suffered due to factors such as rapid urbanization and modernization, and the disruptive effects of labour migration and harsh apartheid laws on family life. Individual and group interviews were conducted with over 80 Zulu grandmothers and teenaged granddaughters and grandsons living in urban and rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal in 1995 and 1996, to elicit contemporary views on respect for older persons. The study confirmed that the teaching of respect is regarded as a key role of Zulu grandmothers. Contemporary granddaughters are less obedient and subservient than earlier generations but nevertheless rely on their grandmothers for moral guidance and practical assistance. The grandmothers in the study complained that their granddaughters did not always listen to their advice. In particular, issues relating to teenage pregnancy threatened to strain good grandmother-granddaughter relationships. The participants discussed the value of the re-introduction of rituals controlled by older women in traditional society, such as virginity examinations, to restore the social order. The study concludes that many aspects of grandmothers' teachings still have relevance for today's young people who are starved of authority and guidance in their lives.

Introduction

Gerontologists world-wide are witnessing what is described as a decline in respect for elders. A major concern is that lack of respect for the older generation will impact on the availability and quality of care for ageing parents. In Africa, the complaint “Old people don’t get the respect they used to” is commonplace. In her study of ageing in a Ghanaian setting, Apt (1996) laments the neglect of elderly parents which she attributes to influences of Westernization and urbanization. Other studies in Africa have taken up the theme (Bruun, 1994; Tlou, 1994). Some research suggests that loss of respect is a mere figment of the imagination. Each successive cohort complains of the lack of respect for its generation. Complaint discourse engaged in by elders serves to remind children of their duties towards their ageing parents and rein-

forces the social contract between generations (Makoni, 1996; Cattell, 1997a, 1998). Elders who are neglected may have broken some of the rules guiding intergenerational relations in the course of their lives (Van der Geest, 1997).

The literature

Respect is thought to be an integral part of filial piety (Sung, 1997), which ensures the care and well-being of ageing parents in many societies with patrilineal systems and age hierarchies (see Albert & Cattell, 1994). Mutual support is a strong feature of the African extended family (Krige, 1950; Ross, 1995) in which elders, who are closest to the ancestors, are venerated. The role of grandmother as primary child carer and socialization agent is well documented in the research literature on Zulus (Brindley, 1982; Møller, 1990, 1997).

Cattell (1997a) describes the intergenerational contract in African society as a lifetime exchange relationship: children should help parents, be obedient to them, and show them respect throughout their lives. When parents are too old to work, they should be fed by their children – just as those children were fed when they were too young to work. However, the obligation of a child to a parent does not wait for the parent to become old; it is lifelong. At an early age, children should begin to “reward” their parents by minding a young child or doing errands. Throughout their lives children should give the older generation their labour (work) and the fruits of their labour (gifts and money). Elsewhere, Cattell (1989: 334) notes that African children are expected to be obedient to all elders. Disobedience or failure to respond to a request is regarded as a failure of respect, a challenge to the status and authority of a senior person.

The ideology of the intergenerational contract is a powerful one. Nevertheless, the fabric of the African family has endured multiple stresses in the past decades. In South Africa, the migrant labour system, industrialization, apartheid and the liberation struggle of the 1980s have undermined the African family structure and the authority of elders.

Global communication has also no doubt had a strong influence on mores in society, including intergenerational relations. South Africans have been exposed to Western influences to a greater extent since the advent of television in

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the 1970s and rapid urbanization in the 1980s, following the repeal of influx control regulations. At the same time, the demise of apartheid rule has empowered Africans to review the value of traditional customs. The discourse on respect relations between the generations may be seen as an attempt to redefine the contract to meet the demands of global society and South Africa's democratic era.

The research

The research reported in this paper explored the following questions: Do contemporary respect relations between the top and bottom generations pose a threat to the well-being of older South Africans? Alternatively, do the changes in respect relations signify a rewriting of the social contract between the generations in terms of greater openness, mutual respect and equality which benefit older persons in the longer term?

Impetus for the research was given in an earlier baseline study among older South Africans which found that black older persons perceived that young people show less respect today compared with the past (Ferreira, Møller, Prinsloo & Gillis, 1992). The present study aimed to explore intergenerational respect relationships to identify the main reasons underlying this reported decline in respect and its possible impact on the care of older persons.

This study inquired into what Zulu grandmothers teach their granddaughters and what granddaughters learn from these teachings, as well as how grandsons perceive their grandmothers' teachings, with a view to exploring socialization in respect and the response of the youth. The study was informed by other research undertaken on intergenerational exchanges over the life course, in particular the African studies by Cattell in Kenya (1989, 1994) and KwaZulu (1997b,c), and by earlier South African studies with a special focus on intergenerational relations from the perspectives of both older persons (Møller, 1994a) and youth (Møller, 1994b).

Method

Focus group methodology was used as the major tool of investigation. The method was thought to be well-suited to exploring sensitive issues relating to interpersonal relations.

The sample

Fifty-four grandmothers, 20 granddaughters and 12 grandsons (total n=86) in KwaZulu-Natal participated in personal interviews and focus group sessions to discuss issues of intergenerational relations. An aim of the study was to explore differences in the opinions of urban dwellers and rural dwellers, and interviews were therefore conducted in both urban and rural areas.

Grandmothers

The older interviewees (grandmothers) were contacted in townships in the Durban metropolitan area and in areas under traditional authority in KwaZulu. Of the 54 older women in the study, 33 were urban dwellers and were interviewed individually and 21 were peri-urban and rural dwellers and were interviewed in group sessions. The sample areas were as follows:

<i>Urban</i> (n = 33)	Umbogintwini (5), Isipingo (1), Lamontville (11), Umlazi (6), Chesterville (1), Clermont (8), Ntuzuma (1).
<i>Peri-urban</i> (n = 4)	Inanda.
<i>Rural</i> (n = 17)	Maqadini (4), Nangoma (4), Tugela Ferry (5), Emakhabeleni (4).

Excerpts from interviews in the text are followed by the area of the speaker, to indicate whether the speaker lived in an urban, a peri-urban or a rural area.

Granddaughters and grandsons

The young interviewees were interviewed in seven group sessions. Four of the sessions were held with granddaughters, two with grandsons, and one with a mixed group. The urban groups included four or five persons, the rural groups six or seven persons. The 32 younger persons (20 granddaughters, 12 grandsons) were divided between urban and rural areas as follows:

<i>Urban</i> (n = 20):	Ntuzuma (4 females, 4 males); Hambanathi (4 females, 4 males), Zamani (4 females).
<i>Rural</i> (n = 12):	Shalodi (3 females and 4 males in the same session), Emakhabeleni (5 females).

Sample composition

With the exception of the grandmothers from Inanda who were in their forties, the majority of the older women were 60 years or older. The average age of the women who knew their age in years was 65 years. The women from Emakhabeleni did not know their age in years but all were state old-age pensioners. An estimated 72% of the 33 older women interviewed individually were state pensioners. Most of the rural older women in the study lived in three or four generation households. On average, the grandmothers had two co-resident granddaughters.¹

The granddaughters were aged between 15 and 22 years, the grandsons between 15 and 20 years. The average age was 18 years for both men and women. The majority was still in school. The Emakhabeleni group reported that it is not customary for young women in its area to attend school. Only one participant in this group had completed more than four years of primary school. The vast majority of the young interviewees in the study had either a live grandmother or had known one of their grandmothers before she died. The majority of the rural dwellers lived in three-generation households. No attempt was made to distinguish between maternal and paternal grandmothers, which posed no problems to interviewees but may have been a serious omission, as discussed later.

The data

Topics of discussion

Similar sets of probes were included in the guide for interviewing the older and the young participants. Initially, the grandmothers were asked to speak about one of their granddaughters. The discussion was then redirected to what grandmothers teach their granddaughters and what young persons learn from older persons. The teaching of respect was a special focus area. The older women who were interviewed in groups were also asked to identify roles which grandmothers play in the family and society. Other items on the list of topics included positive and negative facets of grandmotherhood, problems which grandmothers face in socializing grandchildren, and factors which inspire pride in grandmothers. The older women were also asked to comment on the life chances which they perceive for their granddaughters. Towards the end of an interview, the women were asked whether it is true that youth no longer show older persons the respect which is their due.

The young interviewees were asked to speak generally about their grandmothers. The focus of discussion was then directed to topics such as the teachings of grandmothers, respect relations, role definitions for grandmothers and granddaughters, role expectations, and factors which inspire pride in grandmothers and granddaughters/-sons. Towards the end of the sessions, the young interviewees were asked the same question on the decline of respect for elders which had been put to the grandmothers.

Data collection and analysis

Fieldwork commenced in early October 1995 and was completed by February 1996. Interviews were conducted in Zulu by the second author and an assistant researcher, with the use of an interview guide. The interviews lasted between three-quarters of an hour to over two hours. The interviews were tape recorded and an English language version prepared during transcription by the second author. The protocols were content-analysed according to recurrent themes. Individual contributions to the group discussions were identified according to speaker.

Results

The multiple roles of Zulu grandmothers

The discussions with the grandmothers and grandchildren identified five major roles of Zulu grandmothers:

- Teacher and spiritual advisor/counsellor to the young
- Confidante
- Guardian of morals and customs
- Keeper of kin
- Peacemaker

The manner in which the grandmothers and the grandchildren described these roles is shown in Chart 1. The focus of this report is on the roles of grandmothers as teachers/advisors and guardians, and to a lesser extent confidantes to the young.

The role of teacher and advisor appeared to be uppermost in the minds of both young and old interviewees. Spontaneous mention of this role was often made at the outset of interviews. Both grandmothers and granddaughters stated that they are indebted to their grandmothers who had taught them a wide range of practical and social skills for life. The inclusive nature of teachings was highlighted in the many tributes to a grandmother who "taught me everything."

Practical home-making skills taught by grandmothers included sweeping, cleaning the house, scrubbing pots and pans, lighting the fire and also cooking, in the case of the older granddaughters. In the rural areas fetching water and wood were important duties. Less frequent mention was made of working in the fields and traditional handicrafts, including the making of mats and kitchen utensils such as strainers. Grandmothers offered sex education, instruction on personal cleanliness, and guidelines on how a young woman should behave. The manner in which the grandmothers gave sex education and advice to young women is shown in Chart 2. Virtually all grandmothers warned their charges not to trust young men nor to get involved in relationships with boy-friends along the lines of the examples shown in Chart 2.

Both generations of interviewees cited similar norms of behaviour, either spontaneously in anecdotes from their own experiences, or in response to probes on role expectations. Traditional teachings appeared to be the common reference guide. Even urban youth were conversant with traditional life-styles and behavioural norms, at least from hearsay.

Appropriate behaviour was taught to children from birth. Mindful of her mentor role, a grandmother in rural Maqadini

Chart 1

Roles of grandmothers

Teacher and spiritual advisor/counsellor to the young

Most of the time, it's we grandmothers who teach things and guide them. (Inanda grandmother)

In most cases they consult us because we are the ones who have more knowledge. (Inanda grandmother)

A grandmother teaches right and wrong. (Inanda grandmother)

She shows you where you go wrong and where you go right. (Hambanathi granddaughter)

I sit down with her and tell her how to look after herself. (Nangoma grandmother)

A granny is the only person who is able to sit down with me and explain to me because my parents would have no time for me. (Hambanathi grandson)

Being a grandmother means you keep telling them to stop doing this and that, trying to put them straight. (Nangoma grandmother)

Whenever I do something wrong, she is there to correct me and tell me if it is wrong. (Ntuzuma granddaughter)

Confidante

Children trust her. (Maqadini grandmother)

A granny is a person you are able to talk with. (Hambanathi granddaughter)

Sometimes we women have problems that do not need to be told straight to your mother. So you report them to granny. (Hambanathi granddaughter)

When she [the granddaughter] gets punished by her parents, she will say, 'Granny, help me' That is where our love lies. (Nangoma grandmother)

Sometimes when your parent shouts at you, a granny is able to protect you. (Hambanathi grandson)

Guardian of morals

The one who sees everything. (Maqadini grandmother)

Grandmothers are wide eyed people during the growing of a grandchild. (Inanda grandmother)

She is the first person who is able to see everything that does not go well. (Hambanathi granddaughter)

Guardian of customs

They know how to call on the ancestors to bless the feast. (Inanda grandmother)

She is able to tell us things that are long past. — like history before we were born. Things that have gone past like respect. (Hambanathi grandson)

They are the ones who know our old customs and culture. (Ntuzuma granddaughter)

A granny is a person to be well treated because she is taken as an ancestor at home. (Hambanathi grandson)

Tells you izanganekwana [folk tales] until you fall asleep. Tells you Zulu things. (Zamani granddaughter)

When you go to sleep, granny tells us stories that were happening long ago. We laugh until we sleep. (Shalodi granddaughter)

Makes you laugh with her tales. (Hambanathi grandson)

Keeper of kin

She brings my family together and other outside relatives. (Hambanathi grandson)

Peacemaker

If anything bad appears at home, she is the one who stops it. (Maqadini grandmother)

If you say a word, it will be strong, because you are experienced in the world. And they should listen to you because you have seen the world and travelled a long way. (Inanda grandmother)

If they beat you, you run and hide in granny's house. (Shalodi grandson)

If they fight with each other, she is able to help them solve their problems. (Emakhabeleni granddaughter)

gave her grandchildren names that would act as constant reminders of dutiful behaviour. "I am frightening them so as to stop them from behaving badly," was the rationale. The granddaughter was named Balondile (to keep this child) as a reminder of her lifelong obligation to her grandmother who had chosen to raise her.

Chart 2

Sex education and related instructions

Sex education

A grandmother will teach her what happens when she is in her menstruation time. Then she has reached the stage when she must know that if she sleeps with a boy she will get pregnant. In her menstruation time she must not keep on laughing and giggling with boys. She must be scared of boys during this time. (Inanda grandmother)

Appropriate behaviour

I taught her how a girl should behave. I told her girls need to stay at home all the time. They are not supposed to move up and down the street. Girls should work at home. We sent her to school to get a future. (Umlazi grandmother)

Boyfriends

We also teach them about boyfriends. If you are a girl you are to keep your virginity. (Inanda grandmother)

Pregnancy

I tell her that there are boys on the street, be careful. They must not mislead you — your sisters here, one is having two children and no marriage. The only thing she did was to give herself to boys to play with her ... I say, watch the boys because you will get pregnant! (Nangoma grandmother)

I started raising those children at a young age. I told them if they involve themselves with boyfriends, they are going to have children like their mothers. I told them that I am not ready for great-grandchildren. (Umlazi grandmother)

Value of education

She teaches them how important education is and she must not break education at school and run away with boys and do such bad things. (Inanda grandmother)

The teaching of respect

The teaching of respect was consensually the most important of all instructions imparted to the young. "There is nothing so important as respect," claimed one of the Ndwedwe women from rural Nangoma Ward. "The main thing we have to do is teach them respect as they grow up," echoed a 71-year-old grandmother from Clermont township.

Respect is a moral value which determines one's world-view and life chances. According to another Clermont grandmother, "those who have respect succeed in everything they do." As the Emakhabeleni grandmothers explained: "There are lots of things about respect."

The following composite picture of prescribed respect behaviour emerged from the study. According to the grandmothers, respectful behaviour encompasses helping behaviour and female duties and virtues. All the home-making skills listed above are regarded as respectful behaviour. Appropriate behaviour for adolescent females and young women includes good manners, such as greeting elders, serving refreshments to visitors and running errands for elders. Personal cleanliness was sometimes included in the list of moral teachings. Appropriate behaviour, indicative of both

self-respect and respect for elders, requires girls to protect their honour and virginity and to refrain from "having boyfriends" at a young age. Young girls should stay home and attend to their home-making duties and avoid the dangers of the outside world. They should refrain from unseemly loose behaviour such as "running up and down," consorting with boyfriends, and sleeping away from home until they reached marriageable age. In practical terms, this means asking permission from elders to leave the house, or at least informing elders of intentions and whereabouts when leaving the house, and returning promptly after carrying out activities away from home. References were frequently made to the pitfalls of not coming straight home after fetching water from the river in the case of rural girls. The urban and modern equivalent of the sin of dallying down at the river referred to dawdling on the way home from school. In contemporary times, "good" granddaughters had to show respect for education and go to school regularly. The grandmothers told the researchers that they concentrated on teaching and advising the girls in the expectation that the men would instruct the grandsons. However, grandmothers as guardians of morals were usually not shy to reprimand young men when they misbehaved.

Chart 3

Model granddaughters

The child must obey the rules of her home. (Emakhabeleni grandmother)

She must listen and not answer back. (Clermont grandmother)

If you speak she must not stand, she must kneel down carefully and listen to an older person. After I finish talking she must say, 'yes Granny'. (Clermont grandmother)

Look down when talking to older people, speak softly when talking to another person. (Clermont grandmother)

She must do everything she is asked to do. (typical response)

She must only sit and listen to the radio when she has finished [her work]. (Lamontville grandmother)

It's a child who stays at home all the time helping at home. (Umlazi grandmother)

If she wants to go somewhere she must ask permission from her parent or granny. If we say no, she must accept that. (Umlazi grandmother)

She is not supposed to respect her family only. She must respect everybody. The child must respect the whole community. (Inanda grandmother)

She must know that it is not only her parents who are supposed to tell her about her mistakes. (Clermont grandmother)

Avoid the bad things of this world like having a lover (ukugoma). The child must first concentrate on her studies and finish schooling before she involves herself in those things. (Emakhabeleni grandmother)

While older persons are expected to watch over the behaviour of the young, the young are expected to accept admonitions, criticism and punishment from all older persons for behavioural transgressions of norms. Respectful behaviour towards elders also includes doing their bidding without hesitation, assisting without prompting, and heeding the advice of elders who are known to be wiser in the ways of the world than young people. Respect should be shown not only to elders in one's own family but to all older persons in the community. Chart 3 lists some of the most common behavioural prescriptions for respectful granddaughters in the words of the grandmothers.

Guardians of morals

The role of guardian of morals is an extension of the teacher role. Grandmothers were said to be constantly on guard that younger family members and society absorb their teachings and practise what they have learnt. Both young and old interviewees were of the opinion that grandmothers are far more perceptive than other members of the family in the matter of morals. For example, a grandmother is more likely to notice that her granddaughter is pregnant than the girl's own mother.

The very presence of an elder acted as a reminder of customs and appropriate behaviour in society. The Inanda women described this moral presence as follows: "If there is a grandmother, that home is respected ... If they [grandmothers] are in the community, there is dignity in the community. ... If a grandmother is passing, the child will *zotha* [*ukuzotha*: to appear calm, cool, respectful] to show respect." Examples of *ukuzotha* gestures of respect include hiding an offensive cigarette, adapting the tone of conversation and letting go of a boyfriend's hand in public.

An element of reciprocity was inherent in most respect behaviour. Self-respect commands respect from others. A daughter's good behaviour reflects on her family and community, but reflects more heavily on grandmothers as the protectors of morals in society. Grandmothers express their approval of the moral state of affairs in terms of their personal happiness. If their perceptive eyes have not spotted any misdemeanour on the part of their granddaughters, they will invariably say they are "happy."

Throughout the discussion, the reciprocal nature of relationships between grandmothers and granddaughters came to the fore. An exception was the discussion stimulated by an item on what grandmothers could learn from their granddaughters. The responses to the item shed further light on the twin roles of teacher and guardian of morals. A few grandmothers simply stated that there is nothing that they can learn from their granddaughters because they, the grandmothers, are the teachers. "I do the teaching," claimed a Lamontville grandmother. However, the majority of responses referred to the impact of the grandmother's teachings on the grandchild. "I learn that what I teach her gets into her ears," was the response of a woman from Maqadini Ward. It was obvious that grandmothers watch their granddaughters closely, and that their primary interest is to learn whether she is heeding their teachings and behaving accordingly. "I learn that she is still a good girl," was the typical reply. In the case of very young granddaughters, the response was often indecisive in the sense that the girl was too young to think of misbehaving with boys.

Changes in respect behaviour patterns

As if time has stood still, the respect behaviour expected of contemporary, dutiful granddaughters growing up in deep-rural areas of Nangoma and Emakhabeleni appears to be no different from that expected of their grandmothers when they were young. Two examples were given in the group interviews:

I taught her, when she has finished eating, she must take a broom and sweep the floor and take her plate and wash it. When I call her, she comes quickly and kneels down to listen to what I am going to say. I taught her that if she is called upon by an older person, she must not stand on her feet, but must kneel down. (Nangoma grandmother)

They have respect because they go to Tugela River to fetch water when I ask them to do so. They go to the forest to fetch firewood and come home with firewood. They cook food. They work very hard at home. They do everything for me.

(Emakhabeleni grandmother, speaking of her young teenage granddaughters)

While the chores assigned to dutiful granddaughters may have remained essentially the same over several generations, other aspects of close-knit rural society have changed dramatically. Some of these changes have had a profound impact on respect behaviour, especially in urban areas. Both grandmothers and their charges reported that some facets of respect had eroded faster than others. Cases in point are the inclusive definition of elders, fear of elders and courting behaviour.

New definition of elders

The practicality and wisdom of an inclusive definition of elders to whom respect is due was questioned in the urban context. The anonymity of loose-knit urban society makes it impossible to practise some of the helping behaviours prescribed by traditional codes of respect. Consequently, younger persons are reluctant to offer help to older persons. Similarly, older persons are wary of sanctioning the behaviour of the young and offering advice to unknown youth or, in some instances, even their neighbours' offspring in urban areas. A 64-year-old widow from Umlazi avoided giving advice to youngsters in town, although she felt bad about shirking her duty as an elder.

If you see them with boyfriends, you just pass them without saying a word. But inside it is painful, because you wish to warn this child about her behaviour but you cannot do that. I sometimes tell them to stop behaving this way because they won't have a future if they continue in this way.

Physical punishment

A change in grandparenting styles was evident in the case of physical punishment. Many grandmothers recalled that as children they were beaten regularly. "If you did something wrong, they told us not to do it again. They even beat us" (Lamontville grandmother). In many cases obedience was a function of fear in grandmother's time. A Clermont respondent who was brought up by a strict mother, now deceased ("Where she is today, she knows that I respected her a lot"), recalled that she never refused to carry out an errand as a child in fear of punishment. "You had to go, because if you refused saying you are tired, they were going to beat you." In contrast, contemporary grandmothers are more likely to spare the rod. For example, a 67-year-old Chesterville widow who lives with her daughter and granddaughter said that she refrained from beating her grandchildren because her daughter disapproves. Some grandmothers speculated that contemporary youth are less in awe of authority persons than they had been in their youth. In their opinion, the fearlessness of the youth is related to a decline in respect behaviour.

Age stratification

Traditional African society is age-graded along gender lines. Stratification by age is rapidly disappearing according to the grandmothers, and with it traditional courtship rituals which ensure that young women come of age in a manner which pleases grandmothers. In former times respectable girls adhered to the norms of age-graded society and did not openly display their affection for young men. Growing up was very different in an age-graded community, recalls an Umlazi grandmother. "The older girls, the *amaqhikiza*, taught us, they beat us. We grew up knowing that we had to fetch wood, grind mealies, plant and hoe." Another Umlazi grandmother explained that in an age-graded society, only the older girls knew of secret love matches. "Knowing grand-

daughters' boyfriends, that was a great shame in our days. It was only girls of your age who were supposed to know that you are in love, not older people."

Teenage pregnancy and virginity examinations

Although the topic of teenage pregnancy did not feature in the interview guide, it emerged as a key issue in many of the interviews and group discussions. The threat of teenage pregnancy appeared to preoccupy all grandmothers who took their dual roles as advisors to the young and guardians of morals in society seriously. The discussion on the protection of young girls from unwanted pregnancy was most explicit among the rural grandmothers.

The women from Maqadini, when discussing the importance of grandmothers in the community, spoke of grandmothers facilitating the *muliswa*, the coming-out party for young women in an age-graded society who have reached marriageable age. Alternatively, the ritual was referred to as the 21st birthday party. In many rural areas, until recent times, grandmothers not only instructed young women on the facts of life and how to keep their virginity; they also kept checks on their virginity until such time as they came of age. According to the Maqadini women virtuous granddaughters would gladly submit to the ordeal of a physical examination. The ritual prescribed that grandmothers on finding that "the virginity is still full" thanked their granddaughters for good behaviour. At the coming-of-age ceremony, it was the grandmothers who announced to the community that the girl's virtue was untouched. The girl had passed the older woman's inspection and was "still looking after herself." The occasion of the wedding afforded a unique opportunity for grandmothers to "show their accomplishment, that they have produced an *intombinto* [a virgin]."

Of course, the Maqadini grandmothers did not expect their granddaughters to be virgins except in the technical sense. "In nature," they explained, "a girl does sleep with a boyfriend. A good girl *somas* [has sexual intercourse between the thighs] to avoid pregnancy." The Maqadini women were indignant that contemporary girls are ignorant of the traditional practice of *ukusoma*.

The women from Tugela Ferry also considered it their duty to teach young girls traditional virtues. The older women were still checking the girls' virginity, although they felt discouraged because so many girls are misbehaving. In the week before the interview the women had conducted such an inspection among all the girls in their area who were 12 years and older.

The significance of dress codes was debated at length by the Tugela Ferry women. Tugela Ferry is one of the few areas in KwaZulu-Natal where some women still scorn Western fashions.² As a rule, the women reported, traditionally dressed girls do better than others in virginity examinations, "because they are still following the teachings of their grandmothers."

Successful and failed teachers/moral guardians

A pertinent question is whether grandmothers feel they have failed as teachers and guardians of morals when their daughters and granddaughters "don't listen" and fall pregnant. Probes on what instilled pride and fulfilment in grandmothers indicated that a proper marriage for granddaughters is regarded as a crowning achievement in a grandmother's career as a socializer of the young. The fact that a granddaughter has no boyfriends is taken as an indication that things are on track and granddaughters are still "listening" to the teachings of grandmothers. Tellingly, the most dissatisfied grandmothers stated that their charges had defied the

rules of good behaviour and respect. However, the study also revealed that many grandmothers tend to be easily swayed and to forgive their pregnant daughters and granddaughters after the infant is born and they become doting child carers. The youth in the study, including girls who had become pregnant in their teens, expected grandmothers to warn them of dangers, but also to rescue them if they failed to heed the older generation's advice.

The grandmothers' viewpoint on the changing face of respect

The question on declining respect towards older persons was put to both generations. All but one grandmother generally agreed that contemporary youth are less respectful than persons in their generation were. However, most grandmothers were quick to exclude their own granddaughters from the category of disrespectful youth. "Some do and some don't respect," was the typical evasive answer.

"They don't listen," was the most common complaint about young people. Granddaughters ignore the teachings of their grandmothers and listen to their age peers instead. "They decide to do what other children are doing and that is not right" (Lamontville grandmother). Signs of disrespect are forms of behaviour offensive to the older generation. For example, the younger generation does not greet or simply ignores them. A few grandmothers cited extreme behaviour: the young generation was "mad" and running wild like "animals." Young men smoke and drink and get caught up with the police for pickpocketing, housebreaking and disorderly conduct. Youth are shameless. They assault their teachers in school. They brazenly demand money from their pensioner grandmothers and bring back the wrong change when sent to the shops. Girls are on the streets at all hours of the day and night ("Sometimes you hear girls screaming in the street at night. They are fighting. And you wonder, how come this girl is in the street at this time of night?" (Umlazi grandmother)).

Grandmothers feel both "hurt" and threatened by the casual manner in which youth conduct their affairs. Neither young men nor young women take responsibility for their actions, yet grandmothers are not allowed to issue a warning to the youth. When the damage is done, the grandmothers are literally left holding the baby.

Boys walk hand in hand with girls in front of us. This hurts because they get pregnant. The boy won't take responsibility. It is ours. (Lamontville grandmother)

Girls get pregnant and come home with children and leave them with us and go back in the street. (Umlazi grandmother)

The typical comments following these illustrations of disrespectful behaviour were: "We did not do this in our time" and "They can't be compared to us" – qualified by the exemplary behaviour of grandmothers as young women. The grandmothers were certain that they had been more respectful when they were young. They had assisted older persons "willingly" in a "happy" way. In contrast, contemporary youth cannot be expected to assist older persons of their own accord. They have to be prompted. Nevertheless, many grandmothers in the study had learnt that drawing on their own behaviour as a reference standard alienated them from their charges. If they show their disapproval of disrespectful behaviour, they risk being labelled old-fashioned or rumour mongers.

If you warn them, they say, 'Where do you come from, granny?' (Clermont grandmother)

If you tell them you don't like it, they say you like to gossip.
(Lamontville grandmother)

They shout in the street, saying, look at oondaba [the gossip]. (Chesterville grandmother)

Grandmothers are also afraid to intervene when they see youth misbehaving.

If you say something to them, they beat us. They beat grandmothers. They say we are disturbing them so they kill us.
(Lamontville grandmother)

If you warn them, they say you are not their parents.
(Lamontville grandmother)

Explanations for the loss of respect varied. The reasons included "times have changed," education, Westernization and township life; drugs, peer pressure and the economic situation; and the independence of contemporary youth, boyfriends and teenage pregnancy. The grandmothers found it difficult to make a distinction between the signs of disrespect and their underlying causes. For example, not heeding the advice of grandmothers invariably leads to young girls having boyfriends and becoming pregnant, which was cited as both a cause and a consequence of misbehaviour and disrespect.

A few grandmothers referred to the "changing times" by way of explanation. Some older women sympathized with today's school leavers who are less likely than in former times to find jobs to keep them occupied. The restlessness of youth was attributed to unemployment and its attendant problems. The loss of respect among the youth was also thought to be due to the influences of Westernization and education. "These children think they know much more and are better than us at this age," commented a grandmother from Lamontville. A grandmother from rural Tugela Ferry associated education with boyfriends and the risk of pregnancy. "I don't know if it is going to school that is spoiling these children. But these children who are going to school no longer want to listen. They have boyfriends and get pregnant."

It was generally thought that rural children are less "spoiled" than their urban counterparts. Life is "too fast" in the townships. Township youth, who are "glued to television" according to one respondent, have less time for old people. Young people are too busy with their own lives to care about the needs of others. Township children have no qualms about "hurting" their elders.

A number of grandmothers acknowledged that contemporary youth are far more independent than their generation was. As a consequence, young people are unwilling to defer to older people as is the traditional custom. A Clermont grandmother reflected as follows: "Time has changed. These children are independent these days. In our day, your neighbour was your parent too."

Many grandmothers had difficulty understanding the care-free attitude of contemporary youth. Two grandmothers who were caring for their granddaughters' children held strong views on the different outlooks of the older and young generations.

There are problems we face now that we didn't know about when we were still girls. We grew up not knowing that a child can say she is free or independent before she gets married. We lived under the rules of older people. I find it difficult when a child says she is free, she can go wherever she likes... I also find it difficult for me to understand why some people bring children into this world and neglect them with the hope that granny is there. (77-year-old Umlazi grandmother)

A 67-year-old Chesterville widow brought up in the rural areas by a strict grandmother stated that she is shocked to see young men and women walk hand in hand. In her view contraception has turned young women into "prostitutes." She remembers that when she was young, "there was always a job waiting." Young women did not take lovers in her time. They worked until late at night. There was no time "for moving up and down." She is hurt that young people do not listen when she instructs them on *ukusoma* and warns them of the dangers of unwanted pregnancy. "Even when you tell them that is not good, we never did this in our days, they tell us that was during *your* days. They tell us this is the new South Africa."

Grandmothers often observed that it is difficult to predict how their charges will turn out. "The children change their behaviour once they grow up. We teach them respect at a very early age and they change later," explained the Clermont grandmother cited above. Some grandmothers were resigned that their teaching might be in vain. "There is nothing we can do, because we have tried to show them things, but they don't listen or follow them. These children do not *want* to listen, so there is nothing we can do," lamented another Clermont grandmother. However, the Emakhabeleni grandmothers believed that in spite of setbacks they must continue to do their duty as advisors to the young. They are determined to continue teaching their granddaughters good behaviour and respect.

Discussion and conclusions

Descriptions of model behaviour for granddaughters in the present study suggest that granddaughters growing up in the 1990s are socialized to become respectful persons (Sung, 1997), as were their grandmothers in the 1920s and 1930s. References in the study to rituals of significance to socialisation and the descriptions of the important roles of grandmothers came very close to those found in the authoritative literature on the Zulu social system (Krige, 1950) and older Zulu women (Brindley, 1982). Brindley's descriptions of grandmothers as educators (1982:73) and confidantes (1982: 87ff) are strikingly similar to those offered by contemporary grandmothers and granddaughters. In some instances the descriptions in Chart 1 are almost identical to those obtained by Brindley 20 years earlier.³

Some might argue that there is role strain between the expressive roles of confidante/advisor and the instrumental roles of teacher and guardian. A major omission of this study was not to make a distinction between maternal and paternal grandmothers, although it may be assumed that most of the young participants from multigeneration households were living with their maternal grandmothers. It is possible that there is a role division between maternal and paternal grandmothers, which assigns the nurturing role to the one and the sterner role to the other. To explore this hypothesis, which has major implications for the intergenerational social contract, will be an important task for future research.⁴

Contemporary grandmothers and grandchildren appeared to be conversant -- at least from hearsay -- with Zulu customs, many of which are still practised, especially in the rural areas. According to Brindley's research, the grandmother is regarded as the right person to supervise a granddaughter's menarche. Reportedly, "the mother is still a child and knows nothing" (1982: 82), while the grandmother is the only person experienced in Zulu custom. Apart from the *amaqhikiza* (older girls with lovers), the only prominent person in the life of a courting girl is her grandmother. The grandmother alone is central to "the web of security spun around a teenage love affair" (1982: 88). However, Brindley (1982: 90) observed

that already in the early 1980s, an older woman was becoming increasingly irrelevant to the courtship system.

The inquiry into respect relations between Zulu grandmothers and granddaughters aimed to shed more light on the capacity of younger generations to care for parents and grandparents in old age. The study showed that helping behaviour, including caring for frail and disabled elderly, featured as an important dimension of respect. However, the emphasis shifted in the course of the inquiry. The older interviewees, who told stories from their youth about helping blind and frail grandmothers with activities of daily living, reported that today's youth are less caring. The youth in the study agreed on this point and gave vivid examples of negligence and elder abuse. Although the grandmothers often insisted that their granddaughters showed respect and did "everything for them," they also pointed out that contemporary youth are less willing than they had been to aid their ageing kinfolk, let alone strangers as is the prescribed norm in Zulu society.

In many instances, the roles appeared to be reversed in that the grandmothers in old age were caregivers instead of care recipients. As social pensioners, many grandmothers in the study were breadwinners for their family far beyond retirement age. They also assumed the role of parents to the children born of unmarried daughters and granddaughters. Although teenage pregnancy was not intended to be a focal topic of the discussions with the grandmothers and granddaughters, the issue emerged spontaneously as a threat to harmonious relationships between the two generations. The literature states that Zulu mothers will take care of children born to unmarried daughters, who are reared alongside their own (Brindley, 1982: 68ff; Burman & Preston-Whyte, 1992). However, the grandmothers in the study clearly resented that their willingness to act as surrogate mothers was taken advantage of by the youth.

Many of the issues raised by both generations are probably no different from those referred to by successive generations over time. Members of the older generation have always been inclined to believe that they are more virtuous than their successors. However, the rapid changes which South Africa has experienced have telescoped developments which strain relationships between the generations. From a methodological perspective, the present study may be seen as "complaint discourse" between the generations. Complaints, according to Cattell (1998), have instrumental value in reinforcing ideals of filial obligation. Gauging from the literature on ageing, complaints may be universal. They are a strategy for defining social norms, negotiating care and affirming the self. Grandmothers' complaints serve as reminders or even exhortations to youth about the way things should be done (Cattell, 1997a). The comments on unsuitable behaviour of contemporary youth serve to reinforce culturally-valued standards of behaviour and social norms which are currently under threat. Cattell maintains that the discourse on the reinforcement of the intergenerational contract is particularly intense now because of the radical changes that have occurred in the lifetimes of today's old people. Moreover, she notes that young people also engage in complaint discourse. Their comments reflect modern stresses on families and struggles to live up to their own ideals (Cattell, 1997a: 168).

Complaint discourse theory allows us to interpret the hyperbole in the "big" stories told by the Zulu grandmothers of wayward youth who "walk up and down" and are involved in violent crime. These stories serve to remind the youth of their obligations to the older generation by way of negative example. Similarly, complaint discourse theory explains why grandmothers make a distinction between their own respect-

ful granddaughters and disrespectful youth in general. As in Makoni's (1996) research among older Xhosa women, the Zulu grandmothers in this study complained that young people no longer obey their elders – except in their own homes where their authority is intact. Makoni points out that an oppositional, complaining interpersonal style allows elders to demonstrate that they are still in control.

The very fact that both the grandmothers and granddaughters in the study acknowledged that "times have changed" significantly in the space of two generations is an important finding in itself. The perceptive young women from rural Emakhabeleni identified the problem as follows: "It's not that youth are not taught respect. In these days they are unable to show respect to older people." Both the old and young women in the present study appeared to have difficulty in coming to terms with the requirements of growing up in the era of globalization. The grandmothers had experienced firsthand the revolution of the youth. For the youth, the liberation struggle, in which many young people lost their lives, is history. The independence and freedom of choice which the 15 and 20 year olds in the study enjoy are the achievement of their parents' generation who were most likely to be the age peers of the school children of the Soweto uprisings of 1976. The young people in the study are also the successors of the cohorts of youth who were involved in the liberation struggles of the 1980s. The youth of the 1980s forfeited their education to achieve their political aims. The grandchildren under study here have different stakes. They use education as a tool to hold their parents and grandparents to ransom. They threaten to drop out of school merely to get their way, knowing that contemporary grandmothers set great store by education for granddaughters.

South Africa has belatedly created a "me" generation which is more concerned with individualistic goals than were their parents' and grandparents' generations. The youth in the study felt that they were in tune with the times and that their grandmothers were out of step. Individualism contradicts many values of African society which are based – as are many rural societies around the world – on kinship support systems and are collectivistic by nature (Triandis, 1995). Some of the grandmothers referred to the youth as "spoilt." The grandchildren admitted that they fit the description. The new generation of young South Africans is exposed to television and has adopted many Western ideals. Young people cannot wait their turn to gain novel experience as was the rule in an age-graded society. They want instant sexual gratification (Van Rooyen, 1997), unlike their grandmothers who had to defer sexual intercourse until their coming-of-age ceremony.

At the same time, the study showed that the younger generation has not discarded its sense of history. Only the members of the granddaughter generation made specific mention of the role of grandmothers as storytellers. The reciters of myths, folk tales and legends play an important role in the transmission of values in a society which has an oral tradition. As one grandchild told the researchers, the stories are like history lessons in that they make a moral point that has relevance for contemporary times. Both granddaughters and grandsons advocated that grandmothers should continue to act as advisors to the young. One group even recommended that this role should be institutionalized in the sense that grandmothers could staff an advice centre for young people.

Most discussions touched on the topic of teenage pregnancy without prompting from the researchers. The issues of having boyfriends at an early age and illegitimate births appear to be critical in terms of maintaining harmonious intergenerational relations. Many of the grandmothers had already experienced one or more unwanted pregnancies in

the family when their daughters were growing up. Some of the granddaughters were themselves the issue of teenage pregnancies. In these cases, the grandmothers pointed to their daughters as negative examples when they warned their granddaughters not to follow in the footsteps of their mothers.

Many of the grandmothers were ready to teach each cohort of youth manners, respect and values of Zulu society in the hope that they would listen. The rural-based grandmothers spoke of a return to customs which might protect the young. They were gratified to find that their idea of teaching young women the traditional practice of *ukusoma* (sex without penetration) had the support of their local airwaves. Surprisingly, some of the rural granddaughters were receptive to the idea of returning to the old ways. In their view, passing a virginity examination would enhance their status as respected young women (see Mchunu, 1995; Newton, 1996; Govender, 1998; Hamilton, 1998).

The return to traditional values as a solution to contemporary problems in South African society may be a reflection of a more general trend. The national policy of an African renaissance lends a positive connotation to traditional African values. The return to traditional practices may also be a sign of a revival of parent and grandparent power. The power of the older generation was undermined in the 1980s when the urban youth took the lead in the struggle to make the townships ungovernable. In consequence, liberated youth of both sexes enjoy far greater freedom and independence than their parents and grandparents. In the 1980s youth may have slept away from home to protect themselves or their families from the security police. In the 1990s, the new South African youth sleep away for personal reasons, to be with their boyfriends and girlfriends.

For young women, parental power and traditional practices such as virginity examinations may aid them to be more assertive in foiling the unwelcome advances of young men. Other research among youth found that young people are eager to find guidance in setting new norms for courtship behaviour. Girls expressed particular interest in increasing their assertiveness in peer groups (Mthembu & Møller, 1991). The grandmothers in the study referred to this problem when they reportedly warned their contemporaries that they should not dally down by the river as they would be severely punished if they came home late. In a more permissive age, young Zulu women are subject to strong peer pressure to "walk up and down the streets."

The AIDS epidemic, which will peak in South Africa early in the new millennium, adds urgency to providing guidelines for boy-girl relationships.⁵ Although only one grandmother mentioned AIDS explicitly, it was apparent that modern contraceptive devices do not find favour with the older generation in the deep-rural areas. Abstinence or traditional practices such as *ukusoma* are regarded as a better solution. This finding suggests that traditional grandmothers may feel uncomfortable with a Western-type AIDS campaign which promotes safe sex through the use of condoms. In discussion here, both grandmothers and granddaughters spoke of the re-introduction of traditional practices which were already abandoned in rural areas in the early 1980s (see Brindley, 1982). In the late 1990s some of these practices are again finding appeal among the youth, possibly in reaction to the uncertainties of the age (compare Hamilton, 1998). Rural parents and grandparents, in particular, may wish to re-introduce traditional values to strengthen societal norms where they have become lax in the last few decades. Self-respect in connection with pride in one's virginity and one's Zulu heritage is a notion that may be particularly salient among rural people.

A large proportion of the young interviewees stated that they are not prepared to turn back the clock and adhere to the norms of age-graded society. At the same time, young people are starved of authority and guidance in their lives. Grandmothers' teaching of respect, especially if it is adapted to the reality of township life, is still instructive for contemporary youth. Almost all the young interviewees wanted grandmothers to continue teaching them respect and good behaviour. They intimated that they rely strongly on grandmothers to keep them on the straight and narrow path. Even if they fail to "listen" on occasion, they need to know that there is a person to whom they can turn in times of personal crisis.

To conclude, the youth were of the opinion that respect behaviour has to change with the times. Grandmothers cannot expect grandchildren to show respect in the same manner as they had done in their youth. Contemporary youth demands a greater degree of independence than their grandparents enjoyed. However, regardless of their need for autonomy, young people still depend on the watchful eyes of their guardian grandmothers. As one of the Shalodi youths observed: "Grannies must accept that things have changed, but we as youth must not go astray."

In spite of experiencing many setbacks, the grandmothers in the study were determined to fulfil their roles as teachers and guardians of morals in society. Not to do so would be to fail as a grandmother. As one of the Emakhabeleni grandmothers advised: "The main thing is that you as a grandparent⁶ must take the responsibility and teach your children respect and good behaviour. You mustn't say that the time has changed, it's not like in our days. ... Try your best, even if you lose."

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Notes

1. In South Africa, women aged 60 years and over and men aged 65 years and over are eligible for a non-contributory old-age pension which is means-tested. The take-up rate of old-age pensions among black South Africans is approximately 90% (Van der Berg, 1998: 6). According to the 1995 October Household Survey, some 52% of the black elderly live in three-generational households (Møller, 1998).
2. Traditional dress disappeared with the introduction of Christianity in most rural areas of South Africa. Missionaries required schoolgirls and churchgoers to "cover up" and to wear Western clothes.
3. For example, Brindley cites the significance of the role of educator for the self-esteem of the individual and the continuity of society thus: "I am the one who gives advice, and I teach by sending children on errands, showing them things, and telling them what to do. I speak and I am listened to. I am the key of the home" (1982:73).
4. The authors are indebted to colleague Dr Robin Palmer, Anthropology Department, Rhodes University for making this point.
5. Nearly 400 000 teenage girls become pregnant every year in South Africa. In KwaZulu-Natal, 35% of female school dropouts are due to pregnancy (Morgan-George, 1997). A study conducted in a Cape Town township showed extensive male control over all aspects of early sexual practice. The teenage pregnancy rate is currently 330 per 1000 women under 19 years, while about 40% of all pregnancies are estimated to be teenage pregnancies (Naidoo, 1996). South Africa has the fastest growing AIDS epidemic in Africa. KwaZulu-Natal is most afflicted with an

estimated 32% of women attending ante-natal clinics testing HIV positive.

6. This grandmother used the term "parent" here, in the sense that she had assumed the dual roles of mother and grandmother to her orphaned grandchildren.

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