Exploring the role grandfathers play in the consumer socialisation of children

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Purpose: We examine the under-researched role grandfathers play in consumer socialization, shifting research attention from the usual focus on parent/child transfers to better reflect contemporary changes in child socialization processes.

Design/methodology/approach: This qualitative, interpretive study uses interview data from 22 UK-based grandfathers, employing a life course perspective.

Findings: We reveal how fatherhood experiences inform grandfather roles, showing transitions in socialization styles. We outline several forms of grandfather work which shape (grand)children's socialization. While grandfathers play a prominent role in their grandchildren's consumer socialization, they typically (re)turned to traditional masculine values to perform grandfatherhood, which often disrupted parent/child consumer socialization.

Originality/value: Due to dual-income families and rising childcare costs, grandfathers play an increasing role in childcare, yet their role in consumer socialization remains under-researched. This is the first study to explore the role grandfathers play in the consumer socialization of children. We reveal behaviours which disrupt parental consumer socialization efforts, problematizing neat models of parent-to-child consumer learning.

Research limitations/implications: We draw on a sample of middle-class, white, Western grandfathers. Our research highlights disruption to consumer socialization processes, which warrants further investigation.

Practical implications: Grandfathers play a key role in transmitting brand heritage and equity across generations and as such they remain an important segment for marketers to communicate effectively to. We highlight a need for nuanced marketing communications to portray more inclusive forms of masculinity across the life course.

Keywords: Children, Consumer Socialization, Family, Grandfathers, Life course, Men, Masculinity

Paper type: Research paper

Introduction

Consumer socialization, the processes through which children acquire the skills needed to function in the marketplace (Ward, 1974), offers significant insight into how consumers learn and develop over time (Hota and Bartsch, 2019). Whereas a variety of socialization agents have been identified, the family is often described as *the* most important. However, most studies of 'family' socialization solely focus on parental input (Harrison *et al*., 2021) and the neat, unidirectional transfer of learning from parent-to-child (with Godefroit-Winkel *et al*. (2019) and Kerrane *et al*. (2015) notable exceptions). In this paper, we shift focus to explore the role another familial agent plays in consumer socialization: grandfathers.

Grandparents play an increasingly visible and present role in contemporary family life, providing economic and social input through the care they provide to their grandchildren (Kastarinen et al., 2023; Timonen, 2020) acting as educators, confidants, and playmates (Gram *et al.*, 2019). Within Europe, 50% of grandparents report providing some form of regular childcare to grandchildren (Di Gessa *et al*., 2016), with grandparents in the United Kingdom spending over 8 hours each week caring for their grandchildren (Buchanan and Rotkirch, 2018). Such findings are not peculiar to European countries, with one in four children in the United States cared for by a grandparent monthly (Laughlin, 2013) and given rapid urbanisation in China, up to 60 million 'left behind' children are cared for by grandparents while parents work away from home (Ban *et al*., 2017).

Given the increasing involvement of grandparents in contemporary children's lives, marketers must understand their role in the consumer socialization of children (Godefroit-Winkel *et al*., 2019). Despite grandfathers spending a similar amount of time caring for grandchildren as grandmothers (Block, 2000), the involvement of grandfathers in family life has been underestimated (Mann, 2007). Relatively few studies specifically explore the role men play (and aging men, in particular) in the process of consumer socialization (Harrison *et*

al., 2021). In this paper we address this important gap, explicitly investigating consumer socialization within the grandfather/grandchild relationship. The transition to grandfatherhood offers men opportunity to contest and challenge traditional masculine values often associated with fatherhood (Sorenson and Cooper, 2010) in favour of a more supportive and involved style of 'intensive grandparenting' (Harman *et al*., 2022). Since the transition to grandfatherhood marks a period of role uncertainty, marketers need to support and responsibly represent older men as they develop new identities. Marketers also need a nuanced understanding of how consumer socialization processes change throughout the life course (Moschis, 2021), exploring how earlier life experiences inform later behaviours and patterns of consumption (Moschis, 2007).

We make several theoretical contributions to both the grandfatherhood and consumer socialization literature. In terms of consumer socialization, we reveal transitions in men's socialization style across the life course, problematizing static and rigid conceptualisations of socialization styles and communication patterns. We identify a range of disruptive processes that grandfathers undertake (*disregarding*, *diluting*, *deception* and *being duped*), questioning the neat, unilateral flow of learning from parent-to-child, shedding more light on consumer socialization processes (Ekström, 2006; Harrison *et al*., 2021). We contribute to the grandfatherhood literature by highlighting the weakening – yet enduring – influence of traditional masculine values which permeate grandfather behaviours and identities (Bates, 2009). We problematise Bates's (2009) concept of family identity work (which fosters family harmony) by revealing how grandfathers often contest parental authority. We outline a model which showcases the evolution of grandfather identities and socialization processes over the life course, highlighting disruptive grandfatherly processes.

Through qualitative research encounters with 22 grandfathers, placing primacy on their under-represented voice within the context of consumer socialization, and family research

more generally, we ask: *what role do UK-based grandfathers play in the lives of contemporary children? And how does this shape consumer socialization processes within the family setting?*

Literature review

First, we review the consumer socialization literature. We highlight how much 'family' socialization research concentrates on parental voices, largely ignoring the input of other family members (including grandfathers). Second, we review the masculinities literature, drawing on a life course perspective, to acknowledge that as men age, they seek to embrace a more hands-on grandfather role (which evolves from traditional, hegemonic masculine values and breadwinner identity). This allows us to examine how socialization styles evolve over the life course, and the impact this may have on familial consumer socialization processes.

Consumer Socialization

Consumer socialization is a developmental process "by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace" (Ward, 1974, p. 2). Although a life-long process, much socialization research explicitly focusses on how the child as consumer develops (John, 1999, 2008; Essiz and Mandrik, 2022). Various socialization agents have been identified, including peers (Mandrik *et al*., 2005); the media (Carlson *et al*., 2001); institutional organisations (e.g., school and care providers) (Shim, 1996); and culture (Singh *et al*., 2003). These socialization agents shape children's learning via modelling, reinforcement, and social interaction (Moschis and Churchill, 1978). The family, however, is often identified as yielding most influence in shaping the child consumer (Mikeska *et al*., 2017).

Research exploring familial consumer socialization largely focusses on parental efforts (Carlson *et al*., 2001; Kerrane and Hogg, 2013). Given parents' proximity to children, their

influence is believed to be most pervasive, yet changes in contemporary familial arrangements intensify the contribution of other family members, such as siblings (Kerrane *et al*., 2015) and grandparents (Godefroit-Winkel *et al*., 2019).

Parental socialization behaviour depends on *family communication patterns* (Carlson *et al*., 1994) and *parenting styles* (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988). Family communication patterns reflect the frequency and quality of communication amongst family members, underpinned by a socio- or concept-orientation (representing the extent to which harmonious relations are instilled, or whether children can challenge others' beliefs). Parents with high socio-orientation control child consumption, whereas a high concept-orientation enables children to develop their own views independently. Parenting style is characterised by warmth or restrictiveness, affecting consumer learning (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988). For example, authoritarian parents (restrictive/hostile) seek to control children and discourage communication, whereas authoritative parents (warm/restrictive) openly communicate with children, and balance children's rights (Mikeska *et al*., 2017). These concepts affect children's socialization experiences, yet remain underpinned by the uninhibited, unilateral flow of learning from parent-to-child (Kerrane and Hogg, 2013), failing to explore the *processes* through which learning occurs (Ekström, 2006; Harrison *et al*., 2021).

Relatively few studies have explored how non-parental family members impact consumer socialization. Recent research has investigated the volatile sibling role and its effects on consumer learning (Kerrane *et al*., 2015); and the grandmother/grandchild dyad, albeit through a relational identity focus (Godefroit-Winkel *et al*., 2019). Men's role in consumer socialization remains under-explored (Harrison *et al*., 2021). Where included, this often relates solely to fatherhood. Coskuner-Balli and Thompson (2013), for example, investigated the role of stay-at-home fathers who felt illegitimate in the traditionally feminine role of primary caregiver. They found that participants appropriated the cultural model of rebellious

masculinity (Holt and Thompson, 2004) to combat feminine connotations through a range of capitalizing practices to help elevate their at-home status. Del Bucchia and Peñaloza (2016) find that fathers are less vulnerable to 'good' parenting discourse when shaping children's eating habits. Harrison *et al.* (2021) provide initial insight into how single fathers socialize their children, highlighting co- and self-socialization practices. Other research explores the transition to fatherhood, showing how men balance nurturing and provider roles, employing technological, codified masculine items to legitimise their 'falling back' to breadwinner roles (Bettany *et al*., 2014).

While these studies advance our understanding of family consumption, relatively little research explores men's role within the socialization process beyond fatherhood (Harrison *et al*., 2021).

Evolving masculinity, (grand)fatherhood and the life course

Despite growing interest in masculinity within the family context, "the location of men in families and households is more than a question of the analysis of fatherhood" (Morgan, 2004, p. 390). Accordingly, research is needed which acknowledges the role aging men play within family life/socialization. Exclusive investigations of grandfatherhood are, however, rare (Mann *et al*., 2016), with grandparenting synonymous with grand*mother*hood (Mann, 2007). Grandmothers characteristically adopt warmer relationships with grandchildren, whereas grandfathers often appear as peripheral figures (Mann, 2007), displaying more authoritarian, distant styles (Mann *et al*., 2016). 'Hands-on' grandfathering is common in collectivist cultures (Hossain *et al*., 2018), yet Western grandparenting practices (Harman *et al*., 2022), particularly Western grandfathering, remain underexplored (Kerrane *et al*., 2024).

Factors such as family circumstance (e.g., divorce/separation) and grandchildren's characteristics shape grandfathering. Grandfathers demonstrate increased involvement during

family breakdown, especially maternal grandfathers (Sorensen and Cooper, 2010); with stronger bonds typically formed with grandsons (Ojala and Pietilä, 2020) through outdoor and 'doing' pursuits (Tarrant, 2013).

Western grandfathers' limited involvement reflects hegemonic masculinity and the dichotomy between 'expressive' and 'instrumental' family roles (Mann, 2007). Connell's (1987) concept of hegemonic masculinity describes dominant masculine forms (e.g., physical toughness, power) which subjugate 'alternative' masculinities. Fatherhood links with masculinity through economic provision and protection, synonymous with breadwinner norms (Harrison *et al*., 2021) that support essentialist gender assumptions surrounding how men should 'do' gender, with fathers historically detached from the home/childcare (Kimmel, 1996). For many older men, particularly those who began their careers in the 1950s-1960s, and who were likely excluded from occupations surrounding care work, employment was the basis of their identity (Sorensen and Cooper, 2010).

Two aspects of grandfatherhood are primarily explored in existing literature (Bates, 2009). First, grandfather identity recognises role uncertainty as aging men negotiate their family position. While aging confers 'sage' status (Hearn, 2011), men's weakened bodies and altered life circumstances (e.g., retirement) often brings them into an unfamiliar domestic realm (Kerrane *et al*., 2024). Second, generative grandfather work represents "the effort, energy, time and resources grandfathers put forth to care for, serve, meet the developmental needs of, and maintain relationships with their descendants" (Bates, 2009, p. 338). This action-orientated work involves *lineage* (sharing family heritage), *mentoring* (transferring skills and knowledge), *spiritual* (offering moral guidance), *recreation* (participating in fun, 'doing' activities), *family identity work* (reinforcing parental authority/instruction) and *investment work* (investing time and financial resources to secure their grandchild's future). Such

grandfather work suggests a shift from distant family headship towards more emotionally invested roles with grandchildren (Mann *et al*., 2016) through softer masculine identities.

The life course perspective (LCP) offers a framework for exploring such changes across men's paternal and grandfather roles (Marhanakova, 2020). The LCP aids understanding of how social change impacts individual lives, recognising how prior experiences shape later behaviours (Moschis, 2007; Moschis, 2021). The LCP shifts discussion from the individual and conflicting or enabling roles at a fixed point, to one which captures the dynamic nature of relationships and roles among individuals as lives play out (Moschis, 2007).

Within consumer research, the LCP has explored events and changes which individuals experience at a fixed point (T_1), which triggers three adaptation mechanisms (Moschis, 2021) in response to such changes: (1) *stress and coping* highlights how disruptive life events create psychological disequilibrium, which individuals seek to resolve; (2) *socialization* shows how prior experiences shape later relations and patterns of consumption; and (3) *development and decline* highlights how former identities continue/change (Baker *et al*., 2013; Moschis, 2007). This adaptation leads to change in behaviours evident at a later point in life (T_2).

More recently, Moschis (2021) recognises how three theoretical positions underpin each adaptation mechanism: *normative perspectives* contend that behaviour is an outcome of socially prescribed roles, as experienced during role transition; *stress perspectives* recognise how behaviours are the outcomes of stress experienced in early life, motivating consumers to establish psychological equilibrium to overcome dislocation; and *human capital* acknowledges how different cognitive resources are needed in response to new life experiences/transitions.

Given that grandfatherhood offers men 'transformative potential' (Tarrant, 2013) to bond and nurture their grandchildren in a way rarely experienced with their own children given primacy surrounding paid work (Ojala and Pietilä, 2020), we adopt a life course perspective in this study, exploring the intersection of life course with masculinity and socialization practices.

This allows opportunity to explore how men navigate the transition to grandfatherhood and to investigate how earlier life course subjectivities (i.e., fatherhood) inform later grandfather practices, including socialization behaviours.

In summary, as men age "the tough image of masculinity softens" (Thompson *et al*., 1990, p. 190), providing men "the potential to counter the notion of hegemonic masculinity" (Sorenson and Cooper, 2010, p. 117) with alternative discourse of masculinity apparent. Informed by a life course approach and recognising a lack of understanding surrounding both grandfatherhood (Mann *et al*., 2016) and the role older men play within consumer socialization (Harrison *et al*., 2021) we ask: *what role do UK-based grandfathers play in the lives of contemporary children? And how does this shape consumer socialization processes within the family setting?*

Methodology

We draw on qualitative, in-depth interviews conducted with 22 grandfathers based in the United Kingdom to explore their role as socialization agents (see Table 1). This relatively small sample size is in line with other interpretive studies of family consumption (see, for example, Voola *et al*., 2018). Depth of understanding is instead favoured over larger sample sizes (Thompson, 2005), which is particularly important when exploring a new context or relatively under-explored phenomenon. For example, Harman et al.'s (2022) novel exploration of intensive grandmothering was based on a sample of 21 grandmothers; and Kastarinen et al.'s (2023) investigation of grandparental care work draws on a sample of 14 grandparents (and 9 grandchildren) capturing multilayered, inter-generational complexity. Our life-course approach similarly captured such complexity. During interviews, participants reflected on, and navigated us through, their previous and current life course subjectivities, (grand)parenting experiences, emotions, and shifting perceptions of masculinities over time. This 'insight

oriented' approach necessarily required a smaller sample size, affording depth of understanding in our novel research context.

Insert Table 1 around here

Given privacy surrounding family life, and that male familial respondents are a hard-to-reach group, personal contacts were initially used to recruit grandfathers from North-West England. Parents of children attending two schools within the same city were initially asked to discuss the project with grandfathers, with the men's contact details subsequently provided (with their consent) for follow up. Recruiting grandfathers who provided care to their grandchildren proved more difficult than anticipated. Given that only a small number of men opted-in to our study via the personal contact route, a snowball approach was then utilised to gradually grow our sample. Respondents were asked to recommend one further grandfather from their personal network, avoiding restricting our understanding to established friendship groups alone. With reflection, we felt this personal recommendation/encouragement to take part helped to ease initial recruitment struggles. To broaden our sample further, and to capture greater diversity within grandfather experiences (e.g., divorced grandfathers), we also adopted a purposive recruitment approach via local community groups.

Our participants are white, middle-class and are all based in the North-West of England. We recognise that this is far from ideal and is likely a result of our recruitment approach (i.e., via schools in an affluent area with a predominantly white pupil profile, and a below average number of pupil premium children - those entitled to free school meals/in local authority care). Social homophily also likely informed participants referred to us via snowballing. While we attempted to seek greater variety within our sample (e.g., through community groups with diverse membership), this was not successful. Although the use of personal contacts in family

research is a well-established recruitment strategy (see, for example, Harman *et al*., 2022; Kerrane *et al*., 2024), we recognise the lack of within-sample diversity this often affords. However, given the private nature of family life and relations, and that men are often reluctant to opt-in to research projects (Kerrane and Hogg, 2013), we necessarily made trade-offs in our recruitment approach. Accordingly, we would encourage family researchers to adopt multiple-recruitment strategies (alongside the use of personal contacts), while recognising the pragmatic need to collect data in a timely manner.

While there was not great diversity in our sample in terms of ethnicity, the sample was diverse in other ways. Participants were aged between 58-78 years old and had grandchildren aged between 5-19 years old. Most participants had several grandchildren, and the majority had retired; some were, however, in the latter stages of their career or worked part-time. Although not part of our recruitment criteria, they lived within an approximate 30-minute drive from at least one of their grandchildren, and each grandfather reported caring for a grandchild regularly (mainly after school, at weekends, or during school holidays). The level of care provision varied, with childcare often undertaken alongside their female partner (where present), although each participant had experience of solo-caregiving. Although it was not our specific intention, the men were white, middle-class grandfathers (a point we return to in our limitations/directions for future research section).

Each grandfather participated in one in-depth interview, which lasted between 60-90 minutes. The interviews were conducted at the grandfathers' homes (although one interview took place at work). The grandfathers were asked to discuss their life, past and present, capturing key life events/milestones and daily activities/routines (informed by Godefroit-Winkel *et al.*'s (2019) study of grandmotherhood). Participants were encouraged to discuss their earlier fatherhood identity, their fatherhood role, and how they socialization their children. Discussion then moved on to capture both becoming and being a grandfather, exploring the

everyday nature of their relationship with their grandchild (e.g., how they spent time with them; how their relationships/interactions shaped their grandchild's consumption; if relationships had changed over time; and how/if their grandfather practices affected relations with their adult children).

Data were collected and handled according to strict ethical processes, informed by the researchers' institutions. Our analytical approach employed an iterative process of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) guided by hermeneutic interpretation principles (Thompson, 1997). Initial coding was conducted independently by all researchers who then compared interpretations to enhance analytical rigour. This process yielded first-order descriptive codes capturing the grandfathers' experiences, practices, and reflections. These were subsequently abstracted into second-order analytical themes that captured patterns across participants' accounts. Three overarching themes eventually emerged over several iterations of thematic development, as is customary in qualitative data reduction (Morgan and Nica, 2020): transition in consumer socialization style; generative grandfather work; and disruption of parental socialization efforts. Throughout the analysis, we employed researcher triangulation to challenge emerging interpretations. Our analytical process was also sensitized by existing literature on family consumption practices (e.g., Epp and Price, 2008) and masculine identity projects (e.g., Coskuner-Balli and Thompson, 2013), while remaining open to novel patterns specific to the grandfather context. For example, while our analysis was informed by Bates' (2009) conceptual framework of grandfatherhood, it was not rigidly guided by it; indeed, our third theme represents an extension of this framework through identifying disruptive practices not captured in previous research.

Findings

Findings are organised around three themes. First, we discuss participants' transition to grandfatherhood, showing how they embraced this role largely to address earlier fatherhood deficiencies. Our life course approach reveals transitions in socialization styles between fatherhood and grandfatherhood. Second, we explore the 'doing' of grandfatherhood through action-orientated grandfather/child interactions. Drawing on Bates (2009), we illustrate the *lineage, recreation, mentoring, spiritual,* and *investment* work performed when socializing their grandchildren. We highlight how many participants lacked human capital (Moschis, 2021) and (re)turned to familiar traditional masculine values/activities with their grandchildren. Third, extending beyond Bates' (2009) framework, we demonstrate how grandfathers disrupted parental consumer socialization through four practices (*disregarding, diluting, deception* and being *duped*), problematising existing models that depict unencumbered, unilateral transfer of learning from parent-to-child (Kerrane and Hogg, 2013).

From fatherhood to grandfatherhood: transitions in socialization styles

Participants reflected on their transition to grandfatherhood, making comparisons with their previous life course subjectivities. The grandfather identity they wanted to perform was often held in sharp contrast to the "*classic breadwinner*" father role predominantly adopted when their own children were young. Participants were reflexive of the "*mistakes*" they felt they had made during their children's upbringing, explained through reported absence/career focus, which generated feelings of stress and discomfort (Moschis, 2021).

Peter, for example, described the distant, authoritarian socialization style (Carlson *et al.*, 2001) he adopted with his own children, which controlled their behaviour, instilled obedience, and discouraged verbal interaction, mirroring a socio-orientated family communication pattern (Carlson *et al*., 1994). This reflected most of our participants' earlier fatherhood styles, informed by essentialist gender norms of the period surrounding work/care

division. Like many men of his generation, Peter discussed how he was cut off from the softer side of parenting, given breadwinner ideology:

> With my own children, I hold my hands up and admit that I wasn't around much when they were little. I was working long hours and I often spent periods working away from home, but that's what the arrangement was like. I was the breadwinner, she was the homemaker and she spent time with the kids…My role was the authority figure, discipline, telling them off, and not really talking to them about their friends or interests, or what have you. It was my rules, my say, and that was it…They certainly weren't involved in any decision making. I didn't need their input.

Although most participants acknowledged deficiencies in their earlier fatherhood/socialization style, Tony was an exception. Due to periods of unemployment when his children were young, Tony experienced stay-at-home fatherhood and acknowledged how he was more "*hands on*" than his contemporaries:

> I was in and out of work, not by choice, just because I was laid off, made redundant. My wife's work was more stable, so we sort of switched roles, which was unusual, back in the day. Men weren't likely to be at home, caregiving. Not men of my generation. I was more hands on with my children, so the roles reversed…I was the closest to them. It was me who joked 'wait until your Mum gets home' if they'd done something naughty.

While Tony wanted to emulate his warm, involved fatherhood socialization style with his grandchildren, other participants consciously chose to depart from their former

(deficient/cold) parental style. The transition to grandfatherhood disrupted their approach to socialization (Moschis, 2007), leading participants to over-compensate with their grandchildren, which led to a more involved, available, and hands-on grandfather role, as Peter explained:

> Hindsight is a wonderful thing, but I do feel that I missed out on the kids, my kids, growing up in a way that I don't let happen with my grandchildren. I was quite conscious of that, for the need to be there for them in a way that I wasn't with my own. There's a bit of remorse there, which is possibly why I'm so involved now. I spend more time with my grandchildren, which I absolutely love, because I'm not working, and I don't have to be the breadwinner.

The legacy of the traditional breadwinner role that the men earlier performed, tied up in notions of hegemonic masculinity and provisioning (Gentry and Harrison, 2010), in turn informed how they approached grandfatherhood: in a qualitatively different way from fatherhood (with Tony the exception). The men reflexively recognised that breadwinner ideology and the structural features of work negatively held them back from playing a more pronounced role in their children's upbringing (Miller, 2011), somewhat questioning their prominence/input during the primary socialization of their own children. This created tension and stress (Baker *et al*., 2013) which triggered changes in both their emotions and behaviours (Moschis, 2007).

Adopting a life course perspective offered insight into changing roles and societal expectations. As grandfathers, the men reportedly adopted warmer, less strict, and more indulgent socialization styles (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988), representing shifting normative expectations surrounding men and caregiving (Moschis, 2021). They frequently communicated with their grandchildren about the latest trends and their consumption desires, mirroring

concept-orientated communication patterns and authoritative socialization styles, and actively sought the opinions of (grand)children, encouraging their self-expression (Carlson *et al*., 2001). Martin explained:

> The grandchildren can wrap me round their little fingers. I'm much softer with them. I wouldn't let them run riot, or let them do anything ridiculously unsafe, but it's like my eyes have been opened. They're functioning little people, and I don't think I gave my own children that credit when they were little…My grandson might ask me for something, a game, something for his computer, something expensive, and I'll take the time to explain to him why I think it's a good or bad idea and just listen to his points. I just didn't do that with my own. The answer was usually a quick no and a brush-off…I'm more mellow now…Perhaps it's because I've time on my hands and I'm not so obsessed with work, but I enjoy being a grandfather more than when I was a father.

Martin was among a small sub-set of our sample who had experienced divorce. While Martin illustrates shifts between his fatherhood and grandfather style, he goes on to recognise further messy complexities that divorce afforded. He noted that while he was close to both of his grandchildren, he felt more able (and comfortable) to spend time with his biological grandson compared with his step-granddaughter. Martin acknowledges how this could be a factor of gender, with most of our male participants feeling more expert performing 'doing' activities with grandsons, but he alludes to feelings of legitimization and his prioritization of biological lineage ties:

> I love them both, but there's a slight feeling of difference. With Adam, there's this instant connection. I'm *his*, and he's mine, and I think that brings more responsibility

> on my part. I suppose I'm more used to boys, too. But with Sophie, I suppose she's only half-mine. I don't feel as able to spend as much one-on-one time with her. I feel a bit of an imposter, like people are looking at me in case I might not look after her properly, or do something inappropriate, and that makes it a bit uncomfortable, sometimes. I do spend more time and money on Adam…I suppose I prioritise time with him, over Sophie.

While making further comparison between biological vs. step-grandfathering is limited by our small sample, our data offers glimpses of the messy complexities at play within the family unit, which appear exacerbated by divorce and re-coupling. Yet across our data, participants reported a general softening of their socialization style in later life, regardless of lineage categorisations.

While most participants recognised deficiencies in their fatherhood style, enduring notions of masculinity were difficult to shed completely. Circumstance, such as the breakdown of their children's marriage and family disruption, caused some of our participants (Andrew and William, in particular) to act as "*a father figure*" to their grandchildren in the absence of biological fathers. Dissolution of their children's relationships shaped grandfathers' intergenerational contact, particularly so in the case of their daughter's children. Family break-up and divorce often necessitates the need for extra help, with grandparents reportedly filling the parenting gap (Timonen, 2020). Andrew recalled having to "*step up*" following the breakdown of his daughter's marriage when his granddaughter, Chloe, was very young:

> I had to step up to almost become her second dad…she needed shielding and protecting from all that. I spent so much time with her, I still do, just playing with her, dropping

her off at school and helping with homework as she's got older…I missed out doing those sorts of things with my own children. This was my time to pay it forward.

Andrew's description of involved grandfatherhood departs from the peripheral role Western grandfathers are thought to play with their grandchildren (Mann, 2007). But more than this, Andrew's story highlights how he drew on familiar masculine values ("*shielding*" and "*protecting*") and portrays himself as Chloe's "*second dad*" in a highly masculine way.

Most participants felt out of their depth transitioning to grandfatherhood (with Tony again the exception). While early grandfatherhood garnered feelings of pride and excitement, it was often interspersed with feelings of role uncertainty. Faced with caring for new-born infants (e.g., changing nappies, sterilising bottles, and making formula) the men largely hid behind their female partners, where present (who were positioned as more expert caregivers). Peter, for example, commented: "*I felt out of my comfort zone, when the first one [grandchild] was born. Because I wasn't hands-on when my own were little, everything was just so new, so daunting*". James, a single grandfather, who separated from his wife several years ago, felt particularly side-lined as incapable: "*It was all completely alien…I didn't have anyone else as back-up, or to ask for advice. I'm sure that's why I wasn't asked to do much to begin with*". Lacking 'human capital' (Prakitsuwan and Moschis, 2021) surrounding the knowledge and mastery of childcare, the transition to grandfatherhood garnered feelings of stress and uncertainty.

This first section of our findings highlights shifts in socialization styles that the life course perspective revealed. Distant and authoritarian fatherhood socialization styles were replaced with warmer, authoritative, and indulgent grandfather tendencies. While our (aging) participants moved away from traditional masculinity (in favour of a more emotionally invested/involved grandfather role) many found it difficult to shed the remnants of hegemonic

masculinity completely. This is further explored in the following section, which outlines the masculine consumer socialization practices participants performed with their grandchildren.

Generative grandfather work: socializing grandchildren in to gendered fields

Most participants reported feeling increasingly at ease with grandfather work as their grandchildren aged. Informed by Bates (2009), we examine how participants engaged in several types of generative grandfather work (*lineage*, *recreation*, *spiritual*, *mentoring* and *investment*) as coping responses (Prakitsuwan and Moschis, 2021) in their 'doing' of grandfatherhood. We find that such work was purposefully managed by participants to avoid becoming all-encompassing, and often remained imbued with norms of masculinity which permeated socialization processes.

The grandfathers engaged in *lineage work* to connect grandchildren with their past (Bates, 2009), fostering intergenerational connection through nostalgic consumption practices. For Charlie, lineage work involved passing on his passion for music to his grandchildren, through the consumption of vinyl records:

> I really enjoyed teaching [granddaughter] how to use my old record-player, and now every time she comes over, she begs me to let her put some records on. When she was younger, she'd pull me up and we'd dance around. Now she's older, we talk about which bands are cool. She loves the Smiths and the Beatles, I'd talk to her about the bands I'd seen…We go into town and spend time together looking through the retro record shop, choosing new records to buy. We take it in turns to try and haggle a bit off the price if there's a scratch on the cover.

As a marketplace icon (Bartmanski and Woodward, 2016), vinyl record consumption provided an intergenerational connection that enabled grandfathers to reflect on their former self and to share stories about their youth and family heritage (Bates, 2009). Grandfathers, like Charlie, socialized their grandchildren to develop a 'craft' consumer mindset, which emphasised authenticity and storytelling within contemporary consumer culture (Schauman *et al*., 2021), with the men simultaneously keen to transfer consumer skills to grandchildren (e.g., how to barter; how to check for quality purchases). Clive, for example, discussed how his granddaughter now wears some of his Ralph Lauren jumpers kept from his youth, recognising the cyclical nature of fashion and vintage chic, which allowed him to impart wisdom on the importance of purchasing quality items:

> I gave Kerry some of my old jumpers, which cost a fortune, back in the day, but you get what you pay for. Good quality usually costs, which is an important life lesson…it has some holes in it now, it's old, but I'm told 'it's vintage'. She's on the hunt for more in the loft and from charity shops…It's kind of sweet that we have this connection, and I tell her about when I bought it, who I was with, what I was doing, about my younger years.

From a gendered perspective, participants appeared to engage in more expressive activities with younger granddaughters (e.g., painting, craftwork), with grandsons engaged in more 'doing' activities beyond the domestic setting of the family home.

Most grandfathers willingly undertook *recreation work* with grandchildren (Bates, 2009) and invested a great deal of time socializing children (particularly grandsons) through physical or sporting activities. Whereas early grandfather experiences were daunting, the men felt able to re-direct time spent with older grandchildren to areas they seemed more comfortable/expert. Here, grandfather work was very much driven by their own interests and

pursuits. Typically, recreation work required "getting their hands dirty" (Bates, 2009, p. 343), pursuing play and outdoor pursuits (Mann et al., 2016). These activities emerged as particularly gendered pastimes and maintained links with hegemonic masculinity (Mann, 2007). Whereas our participants appeared more protective of granddaughters during recreation work, their grandsons were afforded greater (gendered) freedoms (e.g., to engage in louder, boisterous play ("*boys will be boys*"); to play fight ("*that's what little boys do*"); and to explore parks and unfamiliar outdoor spaces unattended ("*I keep an eye on the boys, but they can fight back, if anyone tried it on*")).

Many grandfathers took their grandchildren to both play and watch team-based sports, such as football and rugby. Henry, for example, introduced his first-born grandson (Mark) to rugby and cultivated his love of the game over several years: "*all I ever knew was rugby, so it made sense to take Mark there*", mirroring Moschis' (2021) assertation that consumers seek equilibrium during times of change. Henry frequently took Mark to matches ("*a lads and grandads, type thing*") and enjoyed watching him play rugby at school. He reflected how his affluence in later life afforded him the ability to "*splash out*" on his grandchildren, as he chose to buy them "*top quality"* sporting equipment and team merchandise, something which "*just wasn't an option"* when raising his own children as "*money was much tighter, back then"*.

Watching rugby matches together enabled Henry to impart his knowledge of the game, with his grandson reportedly inquisitive and full of admiration of his grandfather's knowledge: "*I'd tell Mark about my time playing rugby, or the times I'd broken my jaw, but that I played on, not to let the side down. He'd ask me questions, 'who's that player, grandad?', 'how good is he, grandad?' and he'd look at me as if I knew it all*". Through watching rugby and recounting tales of his bygone youth and sporting accomplishments (reflecting *lineage* work), Henry socialized his grandson into highly masculine practices (and concomitant gender norm expectations). In doing so, he imparted advice and wisdom which fell beyond the context of

rugby. For example, Henry, like other men we spoke with, promoted a sense of competitive spirit among each of his grandchildren ("*losing isn't really an option. Don't get me wrong, you've got to be a good sportsman, but be honest, we all know you've failed if you haven't won*") with the suppression of weakness and pain promoted to ensure success at all costs (c.f. Henry's continuation of playing rugby with a broken jaw, to ensure a win/that he didn't let his teammates down). By imparting advice on how to be successful in life, such examples demonstrate a form of *spiritual work* (Bates, 2009), albeit intertwined with masculine gender norms.

Although the men recognised that rugby and football were increasingly accessible to their granddaughters, they reported feeling most at ease in engaging their grandsons with sport. Some felt that the practicalities of using changing rooms and public toilets at such venues rendered sporting activities more difficult with granddaughters, as the masculinity attached to ageing men remains "constructed as threatening and associated with harmful sexuality" (Marhankova, 2020, p. 280). Activities that may once have been acceptable as fathers, such as providing physical and intimate care (e.g., "*getting kids changed"*), were deemed 'risky' for grandfathers (Marhankova, 2020), especially with granddaughters, with the men feeling out of place and unusually visible in child-dominant spaces.

Participants also performed *mentoring* and *investment work* (Bates, 2009), teaching grandchildren skills and knowledge, and they invested time, energy, and finances to aid their grandchildren's future success. Several grandfathers, including Charlie, were keen to foster their grandchildren's educational development and creativity:

> I found this kids magazine called Aquila[1] – it's not full of toys and tv characters, it's more educational and scientific than the junk you see on the shelves. If it gets them thinking about things a bit more, doing well at school, I'm happy to pay for the subscription.

Similarly, Michael felt a sense of pride taking his grandchildren to the local bookshop: "*trips to Waterstones have become our little monthly treat"*. Other participants were motivated to help their grandchildren's educational attainment by paying for private tuition or helping with homework, particularly the larger, extraordinary pieces of work, as Barry recalled: "*I don't involve myself in the everyday stuff. I don't do the mundane spellings, or the weekly quiz type things, there's none of that. It's the larger, like monthly tasks, the grander, more important things that I help with*".

Barry's quote was reflective of our wider dataset: grandfather time was limited and carefully managed in terms of the activities the men would/would not involve themselves. Helping grandchildren with homework granted participants opportunity to help their grandchildren via further display of their knowledge and expertise. However, as grandchildren aged, and as homework became more challenging, many participants absented themselves from this aspect of their grandchildren's' lives (fearful that their 'expert' status would be diminished). In pushing grandchildren to excel, participants enrolled elements of intensive parenting in their grandfatherly performance: developing the competitive advantage of their (grand)child over others (Harman *et al*., 2022), as Andrew illustrated: "*I want her to be the best in the class, top of the class, and outshine the rest*". Competitiveness, domination, power, and mastery were important values that most participants tried to impress upon their

[1]AQUILA is monthly children's magazine. The AQUILA website states that the magazine promotes education and entertainment through a 'superb learning extension…to widen children's interest and encourage critical thinking'.

grandchildren (often informed through their career histories and experiences), maintaining continuation with traditional masculine values.

The second section of our findings has illustrated how participants typically socialized their grandchildren into masculine worlds. From a life course perspective, departure from former life course subjectivities (e.g., absent father roles) was apparent, although elements (e.g., masculine practices surrounding sport) endured, providing some participants with a degree of comfort during role transition (Moschis, 2021). While displaying affection and spending time with their grandchildren, grandfather work primarily centred on participants' interests. We show how participants prioritised aspects of their role over others (e.g., absenting themselves from menial duties/everyday childcare tasks) in favour of more significant shared experiences.

Grandfathers disrupting parental consumer socialization

A longstanding edict has been identified amongst grandparents: do not interfere in the parenting of (grand)children (Mason *et al*., 2007). However, as our understanding of grandparenting largely emerges from grandmothers, this doesn't necessarily hold for grandfathers. Familial obligations and responsibilities are not governed by consensus, with grandparenting "not a uniform experience" (Mason *et al*., 2007, p. 702). Many participants found the norm of non-interference difficult to follow and violated Bates' (2009) family identity work through disregarding parental authority. Consequently, the men's grandparental consumer socialization style reportedly caused conflict with their adult children. Disruption was evident surrounding how participants contested parental socialization efforts, either explicitly, by *disregarding* and *diluting* parents' intentions, or implicitly, by *deception* and being *duped.*

Disregarding involved deliberate contestation of parental instruction, which had consumer socialization implications. While parents were keen to instil healthy and positive child behaviours, and restricted access, for example, to unhealthy foods, technology and social media, grandfathers often deliberately undermined such efforts. As Jason explained, such consumption activities (e.g., unrestricted Netflix/internet access) helped ease their childcare burden:

> When the grandchildren come to my house, after I've dropped them off at school, after I've picked them up from school, after I've carted them around to after school clubs, to training, or to their friend's house, you get the picture. When they're with me, my rules apply. Screen time rationing, treats only on certain days, that sort of thing, that goes completely out the window. I think that's perfectly legitimate. My time with them means my rules with them, and their parents have learnt to accept that.

While existing research recognises grandparents holding to tight parental boundaries (Mason *et al*, 2007), the prevalent view amongst participants was that they had freedom, albeit while ensuring child safety, to (grand)parent how they saw fit, even if this clashed with parental instruction. This contests Bates' (2009) harmonious family identity work. The grandfathers recognised that their/their partner's ongoing (unpaid) childcare provision was something their adult children were wary of upsetting, which afforded them a degree of privilege: "*they might make the odd grumble, but do they have any alternative? We're saving them a fortune in childcare, so they might not like it, but it's my way of doing things, or not at all*" (Henry).

Dilution was another explicit socialization practice participants used which disrupted parental socialization agency. While disregarding involved the outright contestation of parental intent, with little attempt to justify transgressions, dilution was a way the men attempted to

justify subverting parental wishes (explained through having the best interests of their grandchildren at heart). Clive, for example, recalled how he purchased his youngest grandson, Paul (age 9), a Nintendo Switch (a video game console). Paul's parents were attempting to promote financial consumer socialization, educating Paul on the cost of items, and encouraging him to save his money to contribute financially to the purchase. Clive, however, bought his grandson the device outright – and justified this purchase for fear of Paul being ostracized by his peers:

> I think his Mum and Dad thought it was too much money or that he'd be glued to it all day. I think they wanted him to save his money or get it for Christmas, something like that. But he said he was the only one at school not to have one and that his friends all played online after school, and that he felt a bit left out. I just bought him one, took him out one weekend and bought it. I have the money; I wanted to spoil him. I'd bought it and that was that…I didn't want him being the odd one out.

Financially secure, most participants could purchase high-end items for their grandchildren, and demonstrated little reluctance to dilute parental consumer socialization intentions *if* they perceived their grandchildren were at risk/disadvantage.

Deception was identified as a more implicit grandfather/child socialization practice and involved covert purchases. Deals were often made, which involved much secrecy within the grandfather/child dyad. David, for example, introduced his grandchildren to Nerf[2], despite parents banning violent play and gun culture:

[2]Toy guns manufactured by Hasbro that fire foam darts, discs, or foam balls.

> They [parents] were really against the guns. They thought they'd grow up to be gun-toting criminals, or that the darts would take someone's eye out…it didn't stop me buying them more, for birthdays or Christmas or just whenever I pleased…they were left at my house, and in the end, it was our little secret. It was something we did when their parents were gone.

Keeping contraband items hidden at the grandfather's home reportedly motivated grandchildren to spend time with participants, as David acknowledged: "*it gave them an extra reason to come round and play*". David, like some men we spoke with, felt particularly strongly that his grandsons "*needed to be brought up around boy things*" such as the Nerf guns. While participants acknowledged gendered stereotypes surrounding 'appropriate' toys and activities for their grandchildren, some nevertheless seemed to inadvertently perpetuate outdated, stereotypical gender norms amongst their grandchildren, despite wider societal shifts.

Participants often engaged in secretive financial arrangements with older grandchildren (helping them save for the latest mobile phone handset or designer clothing). With older grandchildren, participants easily demonstrated their economic success in a way that was reportedly appreciated by brand-hungry teenagers. Participants covertly gifted money directly into (older) grandchildren's bank accounts, without parents knowing, or they over-compensated grandchildren for undertaking chores. Trevor, for example, circumvented the deal made between his granddaughter/her parents, who had agreed to the purchase of a new iPhone, if both parties contributed equally to the cost: "*I paid her over the odds, played her parents at their own game, I just sped up the process of getting her what she wanted*" (Trevor).

Being *duped* was characteristic of participants "*being played*" by their grandchildren. Seemingly out of touch with fashion, technology and modern-day parenting norms, the men often purchased items for grandchildren which parents deemed inappropriate. Participants

reported how their grandchildren tricked them into certain purchases. Jack, for example, recalled inadvertently granting his grandchildren access to the computer game Fortnite[3], which their parents had banned:

> There are things that I do that've got me in trouble, but I'm not going to change. Like Fortnite, they brought their console over when I was looking after them, a little portable thing, and connected it up and they asked me to click this and that, and before I knew it, they'd downloaded it…they'd spend hours just playing Fortnite, and I left them to it…that didn't go down well, something about the blood and the guns and the fighting, it being too graphic or too old for them, too violent…I don't see the harm, they have a bit of fun, I have some peace.

Through a somewhat lackadaisical grandparental style, Jack's grandchildren were inadvertently exposed to aspects of consumption (in this case, violent computer games) their parents tried to shield them from. Recalling their previous (albeit, limited) experiences when their own children were young, such norm-violating behaviours were explained through a "*it didn't do my kids any harm*" mentality, with grandsons often encouraged to engage with traditionally masculine activities.

A particularly gendered reading of being *duped* was noted within our dataset. Participants reported feeling most "*out of my depth*" with granddaughters, and teenage granddaughters particularly. The purchase of items like fake tan, nail polish, and 'inappropriate' clothing items for tween/teenage granddaughters were recalled, which was particularly problematic for solo-grandfathers (who lacked a female co-grandparent to help

[3]Fortnite is free-to-play online battle game, where players land on an island in a dystopian future and must fight for better equipment and weapons to become the last person standing. It has a UK age rating of 12-years+.

screen purchase suitability). William, a single grandfather with two teenage granddaughters, recalls:

> I've no daughters, so having granddaughters was a revelation. As they've got older, they want to shop. I'd take them into town, leave them to it for a while, and then they'd ring me to come and buy whatever they wanted…I'm out of my depth with young adults, their age, girls. I trust them to make sensible decisions…Their Mum hit the roof when she found out I'd bought them fake tan. I was told all their friends had it, and this was the brand to get. I didn't realise school had banned it, that it stained bedding, or that it would make them look like an Oompa-loompa[4], according to their Mum.

Although naïve, William's account (like Clive's earlier example) highlights how participants felt they were acting in their grandchildren's best interests: they may not have *purposefully* intended to contest parental socialization efforts but were willing to do so. For participants like William, who lived alone, however, the enjoyment of spending time with his granddaughters (and ensuring they, in turn, wanted to spend time with him) seemingly encouraged his "*light touch*" spending habits and socialization style – and revealed an ulterior motive behind his consumption behaviours.

In this final section of our findings, we have illustrated the ways in which grandfathers reported disrupting parental socialization intentions, questioning the neat, sterile transfer of learning from parent-to-child prevalent in existing consumer socialization models. We have shown how participants subverted and contaminated parental socialization efforts, whether

[4]The term 'Oompa-loompa' refers to the orange-faced fictional characters in Roald Dhal's 'Charlie and the chocolate factory'; with over-application of fake tan associated with lower-class youth.

intentionally or unintentionally, exposing grandchildren to aspects of consumption parents prohibited.

Discussion

We contribute a nuanced understanding of the under-explored process of socialization within the family environment (Ekström, 2006; Harrison *et al*., 2021; John, 1999). We explore the role UK-based grandfathers play in the lives of contemporary children, and how this impacts consumer socialization processes. We respond to calls for research which explores Western grandparenting practices (Harman *et al*., 2022) and Western grandfathering, in particular (Kerrane *et al*., 2024). While it may be argued that parents play the most significant socialization role for their children (Kerrane and Hogg, 2013), societal and familial change (e.g., the rise of dual-income couples, high childcare costs) necessitate the involvement of other actors in the lives of contemporary children, with grandfathers reportedly spending much time caring for grandchildren (Block, 2000).

In this article, we make several theoretical contributions. First, we extend understanding of consumer socialization, shifting focus beyond the more usual concentration on the parent/child dyad, to examine the role that grandfathers play as socialization agents. We reveal transitions in men's socialization styles over the life course (e.g., differences between their fatherhood and grandfatherhood styles) and uncover four forms of disruption which subvert parental socialization processes. Second, we contribute to the grandfatherhood literature, offering insight into how grandfathers cope with role uncertainty. We document the stickiness of traditional, hegemonic masculine values in the evolution of men's grandfather identity and work. In doing so, we extend the concept of grandfather work, outlining how men often contest parental authority in sharp contrast to Bates' (2009) framework (which is predicated on family harmony).

Informed by our findings, Figure 1 captures a visualisation of the discontinuities in socialization styles performed by most of our participants across the life course. As fathers (T_1) most participants reported an authoritarian/detached socialization style with their children (as the first section of our findings reveals). Yet in their grandfather role (T_2), they characteristically performed an engaged/authoritative socialization style with their grandchildren, showcasing the evolution of men's identities and socialization processes over time/across generations.

Figure 1 also highlights how earlier fatherhood experiences and socio-cultural norms surrounding traditional masculinity (T_1) evolve, informing grandfather socialization processes and identities (T_2). The figure depicts the 'stickiness' of traditional masculinity and associated gendered practices as they evolve into caregiving masculinities with grandchildren (as discussed in the second findings section). Through their grandfather work, participants utilised a range of coping strategies (*lineage, mentoring, recreation, identity, investment, spiritual*) to ease their transition to grandfatherhood (T_2). Finally (as discussed in our final findings section), the figure illustrates how grandfather work disrupts parent/child socialization efforts in four ways (*disregarding, diluting, deception, being duped*), shaping the socialization processes that children experience.

Insert Figure 1 around here

Contributions to socialization theory

In showcasing how grandfathers socialize grandchildren as consumers, we demonstrate the evolution of socialization styles over time, informed by earlier life course experiences and subjectivities. As fathers, participants adopted traditional breadwinning norms and largely adopted the socially approved and dominant role of authoritarian, distant father figures (T_1).

During the transition from fatherhood-to-grandfatherhood (T_1 to T_2), participants recognised discomfort in their absence from their own children's consumer socialization/upbringing. However, with grandchildren, and through more recent experiences of societal shifts in socio-cultural norms (T_2) which legitimize caregiving masculinities, our aging participants took steps towards a more involved, authoritative, and warmer socialization style. We question the static, rigid nature of socialization styles/communication patterns depicted in existing literature (demonstrating, instead, transitions in socialization styles across generations), demonstrating how early life experiences (T_1) inform later socialization performances (T_2), which a life course perspective reveals. Snapshot depictions of socialization behaviours at one point in time are problematized by the life course perspective, which, instead, recognises ongoing flux in socialization behaviours over time.

Our second contribution to consumer socialization is to question understandings associated with the transfer of learning from parent-to-child (Kerrane and Hogg, 2013). Existing models of consumer socialization more usually depict the neat, sequential flow of knowledge from agent (parents) to the target (children). In our study, we unearth various disruptions which subverted parental socialization intentions. While grandparents are suggested to comply with parental authority, pursuing the role of 'non-interference' (Bates, 2009; Mason *et al*., 2007), our participants often intentionally/unintentionally challenged parental socialization intent (yet also fostered 'good' consumership through, for example, encouraging the purchase of quality items). We identify four practices (*disregarding*, *diluting*, *deception* and *being duped*) that the men drew on which favoured their own socialization agenda. Scope exists to return to earlier socialization research, exploring whether other disruptions, and by other socialization agents, may also be apparent.

Contributions to grandfather identity and work

We contribute to two aspects of the grandfatherhood literature that Bates (2009) identifies: grandfather identity and grandfather work. In relation to identity, we incorporate a life course perspective to illustrate how men took steps away from traditional masculine values (T_1) towards a more involved caregiving role (T_2), recognising socio-cultural shifts surrounding caregiving. Feeling ill-equipped for their new role, participants developed coping strategies (Moschis, 2021) to reduce role uncertainty. While participants expressed a desire to play a more pronounced role in grandchildren's lives, some sought comfort through more familiar masculine practices (Bettany *et al*., 2014), particularly in relation to competitiveness, power and mastery, especially with older, male grandchildren.

Lacking the relevant human capital (Moschis, 2021) to become completely hands-on grandfathers, participants undertook several aspects of grandfather work (*lineage*, *recreation*, *mentoring*, *spiritual*, *investment*) often underpinned by traditional masculinity. The stickiness of hegemonic masculinity permeated much grandfather work, as the men sought to transmit competitiveness, domination, power, and mastery to ensure their grandchildren's future success. From a gendered perspective, we discern gender differences within the work that grandfathers often undertook, particularly in relation to recreation. The men felt more at ease with engaging grandsons in certain activities (e.g., sport), and less comfortable with how to socialize granddaughters, with the men feeling out of place and unusually visible in child-dominant spaces (Marhankova, 2020).

In stark contrast to Bates' (2009) family identity work, we show how grandfathers can act as rebels within the socialization process (Holt and Thompson, 2004), disrupting parental authority and causing familial disharmony. By adopting such rebel masculinity, participants sought to legitimize their grandfather identity enabling them to enjoy grandfathering, while limiting the incursion of grandfather work on their daily lives. The socio-cultural ramifications of grandfather's socialization practices may, therefore, shed light on the persistence of

traditional masculinity norms across generations, despite societal shifts towards more involved, caregiving masculinities.

Managerial implications

The global population is ageing. Within the United Kingdom, for example, the mature consumer segment (those over 50 years old) represents a third of the population, and holds most spending power, comparatively, then any other market segment (Saga, 2023). Through activities which include grandparenting, the mature market contributes £116 billion each year to the UK economy (Saga, 2023). Older consumers' increasing market size, their larger disposable income, and heightened leisure time makes them a lucrative segment for marketers to target (Yannopoulou *et al*., 2023). Indeed, their purchasing power has led to new products/services specifically targeting them. Our research encounters, however, illustrate the wider influence grandfathers have on other aspects of family consumption (e.g., for grandchildren) which marketers must consider. Existing consumer research has overlooked the influence older men have on (grand)child consumer socialization (Harrison *et al*., 2021) and child/family consumption, in general.

We highlight a need for marketing communications to portray more inclusive forms of masculinity across the life course, particularly the often stereotyped, less well-represented older male consumer role (Carrigan and Szmigin, 1998). This echoes broader critiques of campaigns which portray new fathers as incompetent caregivers (Molander, 2021), responding to wider societal shifts in terms of how men 'do' gender. A more nuanced marketing portrayal of involved grandfathers, facilitated by the deeper understanding our research brings, could also help new grandfathers in the often-tricky transition into the role, guiding them away from less positive behaviours, particularly relating to junk food and outdated gender norms.

Aligned to appropriately representing older men in marketing communication messages, marketers need to be mindful of the possible unintended consequences of older men's engagement with younger generations. While many marketing communication campaigns embrace a more inclusive, gender-neutral movement, with established gendered stereotypes weakening (e.g., those associated with toys), our research highlights how such shifts in gender norm can be undone (or at least, diluted) at the local level, which marketing campaigns must recognise. Helping older men navigate grandfatherhood in appropriate ways (e.g., through offering grandparenting courses; books and other resources that explain their role) can help them overcome grandparenting apprehensions (particularly in the initial period of role transition) and can reiterate broader societal shifts in the 'doing' of gender.

Our findings demonstrate how older consumers act as important custodians for consumption objects and brand heritage, introducing younger consumers to established brands (Moore, Wilkie and Lutz, 2002). Grandfathers play a key role in transmitting brand messages between generations. From a practical perspective, this offers scope for brand managers to engage with older consumers, aiding intergenerational transfers of consumer-brand relationships (c.f., Clive's introduction of vintage Ralph Lauren to his granddaughter). From a brand equity perspective, this works to create a continuation of brand loyalty, emotions, and affiliations not just to the brand, but as manifest through enduring intergenerational familial relationships (Moore et al., 2002). Our research highlights the specific product categories (e.g., sporting goods and educational products) which older men likely feel more willing to engage with, which is ripe for exploration. Similarly, we identify how our participants appeared more susceptible (and in a position to financially respond to) 'pester power', particularly surrounding designer clothing brands and gaming requests. 'Pester power' has traditionally been associated/studied with parents, and it would be prudent for marketers to understand nuances

in family decision-making (recognising the prominent role contemporary grandparents play in children's lives).

As challenging market conditions increasingly drive marketers to develop customer-centric marketing strategies, our findings reveal that grandfathers may play an important role in socializing children into a 'craft' consumer mindset, which emphasises authenticity and storytelling (Schauman et al., 2021). Market research that draws on older generations' heritage could help brands to create more 'authentic' and personalised histories of brands (c.f., Charlie's discussion of vinyl with his granddaughter), which could inform marketing communications programmes that encourage the transmission of consumer skills to grandchildren (e.g., how to barter; how to check for quality purchases).

Given significant changes within the family unit, for example, the rise in multi-generational family homes, the increase in childcare performed by grandparents, and changes to the traditional family due to divorce and step-parenting, children spend more of their time with 'other' family members beyond the parent-child dyad. This paper contributes an enhanced understanding of these changing socialization influences for marketers, who can use this to broaden their representation and communications, recognising the shifting and potentially weakening role parents play in the consumer socialization processes of modern-day children.

Limitations and future research

We acknowledge a range of limitations with our sample which, in turn, offer directions for future research. Participants reported a pronounced role in grandchildren's lives, and we acknowledge that other men may differ in the elements of consumer socialization they/their grandchildren experience together (e.g., those who live some distance from grandchildren). We feel that it is pertinent to better understand how such physically distant, yet involved, grandfathers socialize their grandchildren (e.g., via the use of technology, such as Zoom or

FaceTime, or telephone). Recent research highlights shifts in the behaviours of older consumers, with their increased online presence attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic (Bubphapant and Brandão, 2024). While Covid-19 disruption may have placed barriers on grandfather/child time, scope exists to explore, post-pandemic, whether such relations have bounced-back (and whether aspects of consumption/technology are integral to enduring grandchild/parent relations).

Equally, it is important to understand the motives behind those grandfathers who play a less-involved role with their grandchildren (understanding potential barriers to their lack of engagement). Most of our participants were drawn from intact, nuclear family forms. Research is therefore needed which explores the 'doing' of family amongst a wider variety of family forms (e.g., blended families, extended families), recognising the diversity of contemporary family life (Cappellini *et al*., 2021; Kastarinen *et al*., 2023), and the factors that may restrict individual involvement in socialization processes.

Our sample comprises white, middle-class, predominantly affluent grandfathers, likely informed by our recruitment strategy. Future research should explore a wider profile of grandfathers, examining, for example, the effects of socio-economic class or cultural background on grandfatherhood performances - and gender norms that grandfathers may instil. We recognise our culture-specific examination of consumer socialization within Western grandfather/child relations. Acknowledging that grandparents in many Asian cultures, for example, often co-parent grandchildren (Hossain *et al*., 2018), opportunity exists to further explore the involvement of grandfathers, as socialization agents, in wider cultural settings, beyond our focus on UK-based, Western families. Further factors (e.g., the age of mothers at the point of first birth, and moderating effects on the grandfather role) also need to be examined.

We also recognise that we have not captured the voice/experiences of participant's female partners, where present, those of their adult children and grandchildren themselves. Future research should adopt a family-systems perspective, recognising the need to collect data from multiple family members, intergenerationally. Essiz and Mandrik (2022), for example, highlight the importance of intergenerational influences within the context of environmental consumer socialization. This signals the need to explore family decision-making and socialization issues at a holistic/network level, acknowledging the multi-layered complexity of the family unit and problems surrounding its disaggregation through capturing limited familial voices or dyadic accounts (Kastarinen *et al*., 2023).

When researching men's caregiving roles within the family more broadly (e.g., father/grandfather) qualitative in-depth interviews dominate, however, focus groups have also emerged as an appropriate and realistic method (Diniz *et al*., 2023) which might inform and enrich future studies. Observational methods capturing grandfather/child relations could also be revealing, helping overcome any concerns surrounding masculine 'bravado' or desirability bias/that reflections captured from in-depth interviews also correspond to observational findings. We recognise the strength a life course perspective affords consumer researchers (Moschis, 2021). Future research would benefit from exploring the evolution of socialization processes over time, and whether other sources of disruption occur in the transfer of learning from parent-to-child.

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Table 1: Participant information table

Participant pseudonym	Age	Work status	Marital status	Number of children	Number of grandchildren and their ages
Andrew	74	Retired (Senior Manager)	Married	2	3 grandchildren (15, 11 and 9)
Barry	59	Engineer	Married	2	3 grandchildren (11, 8 and 5)
Charlie	74	Retired (College lecturer)	Divorced	3	3 grandchildren (19, 17 and 16)
Clive	58	Doctor	Married	3	4 grandchildren (12, 11, 10 and 9)
Craig	67	Retired (Solicitor)	Married	3	6 grandchildren (14, 13, 12, 8, 6 and 5)
David	70	Retired (Dentist)	Married	2	5 grandchildren (17, 15, 15, 13, 10)
Dylan	78	Retired (Carpenter)	Married	2	4 grandchildren (17, 15, 14 and 11)
Gary	63	Office Manager (Part-time)	Married	2	3 grandchildren (8, 7 and 4)
Henry	59	Business Manager (Part-time)	Married	2	3 grandchildren (14, 10 and 8)
Jack	61	Solicitor (Part-time)	Married	3	3 grandchildren (10, 9 and 8)
James	58	Construction	Divorced	2	2 grandchildren (6 and 4)
Jason	64	Retired (Manager)	Married	3	5 grandchildren (13, 12, 11, 10 and 7)
Martin	69	Retired (Senior Management)	Divorced	2	2 grandchildren (12 and 10)
Michael	66	Retired (Headteacher)	Married	3	3 grandchildren (12, 9 and 7)
Peter	68	Retired (Education Specialist)	Married	3	5 grandchildren (aged 14, 13, 13, 10 and 7)
Simon	61	Teacher	Married	1	1 grandchild (3)
Steven	63	Entrepreneur (Part-time)	Married	2	4 grandchildren (16, 15, 15 and 13)
Terry	64	Retired (Firefighter)	Married	2	3 grandchildren (15, 14 and 14)
Timothy	58	Sales executive	Married	2	2 grandchildren (5 and 3)
Tony	66	Construction Management (Part-time)	Married	3	4 grandchildren (14, 12, 7 and 5)
Trevor	73	Retired (Sales)	Married	4	5 grandchildren (17, 16, 15, 15 and 14)
William	70	Retired (Education)	Divorced	2	2 grandchildren (15 and 13)

Figure 1: The evolution of grandfather identities and socialization processes over the life course