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HUSBANDS' AND WIVES' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR IN-LAW PARENTS

by

Carlos F. Watkins

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Family and Human Development

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express deep appreciation to Dr. Glen O. Jenson for giving so willingly of his time, talents and ultimately through giving encouragement--bringing this research project to fruition. His steadfast interests and concerns are greatly appreciated by the researcher.

At the conclusion of this research project I wish to express my deep abiding love and appreciation to my wife, Janet, for her support given throughout the duration of this seemingly endless quest for a Master of Science Degree. Considering the editing, counsel, support and encouragement for the past four years, this is "our degree."

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## ABSTRACT

## Husbands' and Wives' Perceptions of Their In-law Parents

by

Carlos F. Watkins, Master of Science

Utah State University, 1978

Major Professor: Dr. Glen O. Jenson  
Department: Family and Human Development

The critical lack of research in the area of in-law relationships leaves interested persons wondering about the nature of such relationships.

The purpose of this study was to ascertain how the independent variables of sex, number of children, education and age of the sons or daughters-in-law effected the relationship with the mothers and fathers-in-law. The four directional hypotheses tested were: (1) as the age of the son or daughter-in-law increases, the chances for a more positive relationship with mothers and fathers-in-law and their sons and daughters, increases significantly; (2) females feel significantly closer to their parents-in-law than males; (3) as the number of children in the homes of the sons and daughters-in-law increases, the quality of their relationship increases significantly with their parents-in-law; and (4) the higher the educational level of the sons or daughters-in-law the greater the quality of their relationship with their mother or father-in law.

A total of 238 persons living in the married student housing responded to the questionnaire. The questions were answered according to their current or most recent marriage. The questionnaire

asked respondents to answer how they felt towards their parents-in-law--feelings of closeness towards them; titles used to address them; how troublesome they were perceived to be; the type of help received from them; and how their parents-in-law compared to other parents-in-law.

The following findings were derived from the data using the chi square test, mean scores and F ratios:

1. Respondents 30 years of age and older felt significantly closer emotionally to their parents-in-law than did those 25-29 years of age.

2. Those 30 years of age and older felt their fathers-in-law were less troublesome than those 25-29.

3. Those 30 years of age and older felt emotionally closer to their mothers-in-law than those 25-29.

4. Females did feel emotionally closer to their mothers-in-law than males. They also addressed their fathers-in-law in a more positive and personal manner, but when their mean scores and F ratios were analyzed for the problematic and closeness index there were no significant differences.

5. Those with one child felt significantly closer to their mothers-in-law than those with two or more or no children.

6. Those with a high school or less education felt significantly closer to their mothers-in-law than those with some college.

The sample was drawn from a university related population, and from a heavily weighted religious group. Both of which could bias the above finding.

(74 pages)

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## INTRODUCTION

The problem relating to in-laws is not new. In Old Testament times it was recorded that God commanded man to "....leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." (Genesis 2:24) From the beginning of recorded christian history, in-laws have been a part of each marriage. The first recorded example in biblical history of in-law variance is the case of Jacob and his father-in-law, Laban. After working seven years for Rachel, Jacob's prospective father-in-law gave him another daughter named Leah to be his wife. In the morning when Jacob discovered what his father-in-law had done he asked, "What is this thou hast done unto me? Did not I serve thee for Rachel? Wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?" (Genesis 29:21-25)

Parents-in-law, in most cultures of the world, have not always had the final say on who their future son-in-law or daughter-in-law would be. Many cultures of the world have at least some informal regulation of in-law relationships.

When a new couple marries in China, the new bride is cutoff completely from her family economically and legally. She then becomes entirely dependent on her husband and his family and more directly, her new mother-in-law's wishes (Adams, 1971). Evans (1976) tells of future Moslem mothers-in-law who will sew continually during the actual marriage ceremony which is symbolic of sewing her mouth closed "....so she won't be tempted to nag the bride after the wedding."

Nye and Berardo (1973) mention several countries where there has been or presently are various ways of maintaining a mother-in-law avoidance phenomena. In Northern Australia if a man does not avoid speaking to his mother-in-law he is put to death. In the South Pacific if a man speaks to his mother-in-law they both should commit suicide. If a Navajo Indian ever sees his mother-in-law, he believes he will go blind.

The various cultural stigmas about mothers-in-law began way back in time. In many cultures, as illustrated above, there is a definite mother-in-law avoidance.

The father-in-law, daughter-in-law avoidance, according to Stephens (1963) is common also, and both examples are characteristic of most avoidances. Avoidance to Stephens does not mean either person is inferior or superior to the other. "Avoidance merely is a restriction on intimacy and spontaneous expressions of emotions." (p. 87)

In-law relationships in the United States are not free of the avoidance phenomenon. For example, mother-in-law jokes flow freely in male gatherings such as civic clubs, religious meetings, etc. Too often mother-in-laws are "put down" by their married children via the medium of mother-in-law jokes or avoidance. The joking is usually done by the males. Couples are encouraged after marriage to separate themselves physically from both their parents. The in-law problem in the United States does not carry as stringent mother-in-law avoidance patterns; however, there is some avoidance.

Family therapists, counselors, and researchers indicate that in-laws are sometimes significant contributors to marital discord.



Duvall (1954), Karen, Henton, and Marotz (1975), Marcus (1951), and others mention in-laws as a possible source of conflict. The degree of involvement varies with each marriage. Some may cause merely a passing difference of opinion between husband and wife. In other marriages in-law problems may be serious enough to be the cause of separation and/or divorce. On the other hand, while some have an adverse effect on a marriage others are advantageous to building and strengthening the marriage of their son or daughter and his or her spouse.

One of the positive effects of in-laws was explained by Thomas (1956). We indicated that parental aid saves more marriages than it breaks up. Unfortunately, little is said or written of the positive parent-in-law or son and daughter-in-law relationships. Duvall (1954) reports one of the few positive sides of mother-in-laws when she indicates that 51 percent of 1,853 persons mentioned they appreciated their mother-in-law for her mothering qualities.

#### Statement of the Problem

In the United States during the year 1976 there were approximately 2,133,000 couples married (DoImatch, 1978). With those 2,133,000 marriages there were 4,266,000 individuals who were newly married and approximately 12,798,000 people who became in-laws when just the bride and groom and each set of parents were considered.

For the millions of people who get married each year in the United States, automatically a new set of relatives is introduced in their

new union referred to as in-laws. This in turn opens new channels for communications, demands, service, expectations and relationships that are inwardly expected to be met by all persons involved. When more than two interact at learning to meet demands, render service or reach expectations, the chances for difficulties and the possibilities of warmth and closeness between all involved persons increases.

..... According to Duvall (1954), in the research regarding in-law relationships four things seem to stand out:

1. In-laws have a potential to be a source of trouble.
2. American couples at the point of marriage expect to be independent of their parents.
3. Relatives can influence the marriage for good or bad.
4. Researchers have, for the most part, neglected the area of in-law relationships.

Other problems with in-laws, as suggested by other authors relate to the stigma attached to in-laws and in particular to mothers-in-law. Bell (1971), in his courtship and marriage textbook entitled Marriage and Family Interaction, listed in-laws in its subject index with a cross reference to, "see marriage problems." In-laws can be troublesome, but it seems an injustice to insinuate that all in-laws are problematic. It is equally an injustice to recite the many mother-in-law jokes that have been created over the years. Mother-in-law jokes are such a part of our culture that Duvall (1954) wonders if the previous hearing of mother-in-law jokes does not create a stigma for new sons and daughters-in-law.

Kane (1952) states that there is a strong potential for difficulty when any two adults are living together. When two people marry, they have only increased the fibrous web of emotional and physical interactions that exist within a family. When more people are interacting with each other, there are increased chances for either a positive or negative interaction pattern to emerge.

Several questions need to be asked regarding in-law relationships. Can in-law problems be avoided? What are some factors that influence the impact in-laws have on each other? Does the age of the young couple affect the in-law relationship? Does the educational level of a young couple effect how the couple treat and respond to their parents-in-law? Will the number of children in the couple's family of procreation influence how their parents-in-law respond to them and in what way? These and other questions are addressed in this thesis.

#### The Purpose

The purpose of this study was to ascertain how the independent variables of sex, number of children, education and age of the son or daughter-in-law effect the dependent variable of the quality of the relationship with mother's and father's-in-law. Measures were set up to ascertain if females felt closer to their parents-in-law than males and if there was a difference in opinion due to age. Other questions asked about the relationship between parents and their in-law children, as family size of married children increased. The amount of formal education was also looked at as having a possible effect on the in-law relationship.

Specifically, the dependent variables were addressed to married childrens' feelings regarding how troublesome parents-in-law had been, how they would compare their parents-in-law to others, how emotionally close they felt to them, the quality of their relationship over the past five years, and how acceptable they felt to their parents-in-law.

.....

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

Cavan (1969) believes the closest human relationship that exists is with grandparents, their married son or daughter and his or her spouse and their grandchildren, as illustrated in Figure 1.

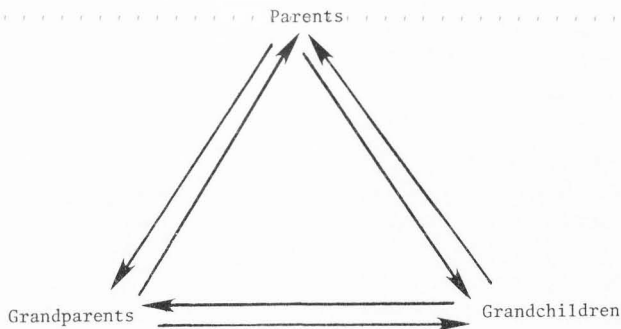


Figure 1. Relationships between parents, grandparents, and grandchildren.

As children marry and have offspring there are three generations intertwined with common experiences, psychological identity, and emotional feelings. These three generations can be helpful to each other and oftentimes sacrifice time, talents, and money for the others best interests. Yet, this extended family unit can be heavily laden with emotion. Cavan continues to say that when this extended family unit is held together it is done so by sentiment, a feeling of

identification and through informal physical services. The informal physical services need to be practical in nature, such as financial assistance, help while sick, child care, advice, and other beneficial gifts. These gifts are usually given on an informal basis with unwritten but implied social contracts. It is these emotional and physical services--when they are returned--that binds families together.

With almost every marriage, as Landis and Landis (1977) state, in-laws come automatically and an adjustment must take place with the newly acquired spouse and his or her parents-in-law. The newly acquired in-laws have become part of the family, often with relatively little time to become acquainted. Except for what the engaged couple may have told their future spouses or what the couple learned in the limited time they spent in their future in-law's home before marriage, many future parents-in-law know very little about their future daughter or son-in-law. Even though both parties may hardly know each other, they are expected to be understanding and considerate. The new parents-in-law have invested years of time, energy, resources and love, molding and shaping their son or daughter (Gustedt, 1976). If communications or relationships fail to form in the new in-law relationships, frustrations can be expected to surface, such as a probable emotional withdrawal from each other, according to Gustedt (1976). Nye and Berardo (1973) indicate in-law difficulties will occur more frequently during the early years of marriage. This all happens while the newly acquired "families" are adjusting and molding their future in-law relationships. This may be because separation of parents and children has just taken place and they are taking on new roles and letting others go.

Through it all they are gaining more maturity. Therefore, relationship bonding is most critical during the early years of marriage while the majority of differences are being resolved.

Few writers have outlined steps to insure a better adjustment with the new in-laws. Empirical research has contributed little to the knowledge about adjusting to the new "family". Marcus (1951) outlines nine precautions for a good marital adjustment with in-laws. The information was compiled from 79 questionnaires sent to graduates in home economics all of whom were females. These precautions according to Marcus are as follows:

1. Gain the approval of the marriage by the parents and parents-in-law.
2. Meet and become acquainted with the partner's family before marriage.
3. The future husband and wife's family should be friendly when they meet.
4. Live in a separate home from in-laws and other relatives.
5. Marry a person whose parents are happily married.
6. Marry a person of the same religion.
7. Have a happy relationship between parents and grandchildren.
8. Have the future wife educated in regards to marriage.
9. Have similar social activity patterns.

It is probably not possible for each future in-law family to fulfill all of the nine precautions. However, if a couple were to measure up in most of the above, Marcus would lead the reader to believe the in-law relationship should be better than average.

Ad previously stated by Landis and Landis (1977) the likelihood of having in-law problems is greater in the earlier years of marriage. Their survey respondents rated in-law relationships first on a list of difficult areas of adjustment in their marriages. This adjustment occurred more in the earlier years of marriage than the middle and later years. Insinuated here is that there has been and can be a transition due to age and maturity. The women according to Landis and Landis (1977), who were married under 20 years of age, had more difficulty adjusting to in-laws than husbands who were married under 20 years of age. The assumption was made by Blood and Wolfe (1960), that the younger the bride or groom the more immature they would be. Nye and Berardo (1973) support this statement in their finding that 45 percent of the husbands and wives that married between the ages of 17-19 were happy with their in-laws while 63 percent of those married at 24 years of age or older were happy with in-laws. The reason given was that the older the couples were the more emotionally mature they were apt to be and the more likely to have completed their education and have established their independence. Similar findings were indicated by Duvall (1954). The more a young couple has matured, become independent, and have learned to resolve their own difficulties, the less friction they will have with their parents-in-law.

Despite the fact that of those involved in an in-law relationship the couple may be young and immature and the parents older and more experienced, Landis and Landis (1977) believe that in-laws are less likely to contribute to breaking up a marriage as the son or daughters-in-law advance in age. The longer the duration of the marriage the



more stable it will be in comparison with a marriage just beginning. This might be because the marriage has more bonding forces such as children and property. Marriage stability, according to Hill (1952), depends on how the young couple is able to shift the trust of affection from their parents to their new full-time partner, yet continue to maintain the affection and relationship with their parents that is respectfully theirs. This, of course, is only a part of the adjustment process.

#### Physical Assistance

Husbands' and wives' parents contributed financially on a near equal basis to 203 married college students at the University of Arizona, as reported by Christopherson, Vandiver and Krueger (1960). The wives' parents contributed 36 percent of their daughters' family income while the husbands' parents contributed 40 percent of their income. Sussman and Burchinal (1962) state that financial aid is part of the informal practical aid that binds together those "branches" of the extended family. Parential aid according to Sussman and Burchinal, demonstrates the parent's approval of the marriage. The majority of new couples rejected aid from their parents that was not needed for the necessities of living, that is, for the rent, groceries, utilities, etc. Money, according to Sussman and Burchinal, seemed to be the principal form of assistance given by in-laws to 38 percent of the couples in their sample.

In another study by Sussman (1953), 79 percent of 195 couples received financial help that was in the form of gifts, furniture, household equipment, home loans, gardening, landscaping, etc. Although parents gave some assistance they felt it was not their responsibility to give complete support. Rather, it was their son or daughter's duty to

be independent and they were only assisting in helping him/her to begin married life. Moderate assistance seemed to be acceptable by both parties and did not create conflicts. This type of assistance strengthened their relationship with a greater emotional closeness.

Couples who married very young were the most likely to accept financial aid above and beyond the necessities of living, according to Blood (1962). The reason given, they have had less time to prepare for marriage and are more immature and unaware of problems that marriage may cause. They also may be less able to earn a living due to lack of employment possibilities or because they are going to school. Their lack of employment possibilities coupled with the fact that parents still feel a need to support their children, are believed to be reasons for young couples accepting financial aid. The marriage ceremony takes place over the course of an evening, but feelings within parents to support and "parent" take time to subside.

Another form of financial assistance is in-laws sharing the same residence. Those families having many children and their children scoring high on religious tests were more likely to share their home with in-laws according to Kosa, Rachiele, and Schommar (1960). Tradition-oriented families were also more likely to share their home with in-laws while students and success-oriented families were less likely to share. In the study done by Kosa, Rachiele, and Schommar, the tradition-oriented families were defined as having many children, possessing a positive attitude toward religion, having low level aspirations and having little desire for higher education. Success-oriented families were defined as possessing traits opposite of those demonstrated by a traditional-oriented family.

After studying 7,000 Catholic families, Thomas (1956) indicated newlyweds living with parents, or even close by parents, could present a possible source of tension. According to Grinstein and Sterba (1957), even though a couple may be more mature than the average couple and have a greater chance of solving their problems, couples starting out are very likely to have conflicts and friction when living with one or the other's parents. A more mature couple will be less dependent on either set of parents-in-law. Despite any past pleasant memories, feelings or experiences, there is an extremely powerful chance for conflicts when living too near in-laws.

A satisfying relationship can be maintained regardless of locale of residence from in-laws, according to Sussman (1955), but the most satisfying relationship is two marriages having two residences. He implies that even though in-laws living together may complement each other as far as life style, and not have many conflicts, there still is pressure to get along and make each other happy that is not found to the same degree when living some distance away from one another.

Cavan (1959) stated that to give of oneself will strengthen kinship ties if that service is returned. Financial assistance is giving of oneself. Those parents who did give some financial support to their son or daughter and spouse did not give complete support but gave only as was needed to help. Sharing residence is giving of oneself. This is possible to do without conflict but it is extremely difficult. Leichter and Mitchell (1967) echoed a similar note by indicating it is the reciprocity that strengthens kinship ties. When something is given, a kind deed in return can reinforce and strengthen. However, there must be limits to the amount or degree a person will

give so as to preserve the independence of the family receiving. Most young couples are not in a position to return the financial assistance or the service of residence they received from their parents-in-law.

#### In-Law Troublesomeness

Nye and Berardo (1973) and Blood (1962) believe that there are . . . . . family traditions or kinship ties that are maintained. Women are pre- . . . . . dominantly the ones that maintain them in our society. Women are more prone to try to maintain family ties by interacting with the family. Kelly (1974), Nye and Berardo (1973), and Blood (1962) believe that this is why they are the chief offenders in in-law conflicts.

Mother-in-law jokes are thought to be part of a self-fulfilling prophecy, in some cases, according to Duvall (1954), and Klemer (1970). Some such jokes widely used are:

1. "My Mother-in-law has a heart as big as a mountain and a mouth twice that size."
2. "I like my Mother-in-law because she is always right. . . any time I am unsure about a date, time, color or smell of anything, she knows the answer."
3. "The height of ambivalence is watching my Mother-in-law drive over the cliff in my new Cadillac!"

Although mother-in-law jokes do insinuate behavior, Duvall and Klemer believe there is something much deeper than that involved.

After counseling and interviewing 7,000 Catholic families, Thomas (1956) found that in-laws were the greatest listed cause of break-ups during the first year of marriage. The wife's in-laws, or

the husband's parents, were the cause of the problems 48 percent of the time, while the husband's in-laws caused problems 38 percent of the time. The wife's mother caused problems 44 percent of the time, while the husband's mother caused problems 46 percent of the time. Sussman (1955) disagreed in saying that the wife's parents are more frequently the cause of conflicts than the husband's parents. Later, after examining 20 books he concluded no one knows whose in-laws are more troublesome.

Adams (1970) declared that husbands are more likely to have contact with their in-laws--but more conflicts will arise with his kin, even though he sees them less because his wife is more sensitive to such things as rejection, neglect, and interference of kin. Barber (1939) supports this view. The reasoning he gave was that conflicts between mother and daughter-in-law are due to unconscious jealousies related to the son's affection.

Two-thirds of the in-law problems are created by the maternal mother-in-law, according to Koos (1953). This data differs from Barbers and Adams. Koos, however, adds a note of caution stating that there has been little research carried out so any findings reported would need to be verified. Of 544 students, the husbands said, "Forty-two percent of their mothers-in-law caused more problems than other in-laws while 15 percent of the in-law trouble was caused by fathers-in-law." The wives reported 50 percent of the mothers-in-law were troublesome. This data shows the mothers-in-law to be more difficult than the fathers-in-law. No test of significance was mentioned but the importance appears obvious.

In studying 604 couples, Byrd (1959) reports 8 percent of the husbands and 60 percent of the wives regarded their mothers-in-law highly. This data may lend support to the idea that the paternal mothers-in-law are more difficult to get along with. The tendency is, from this data, for husbands to have a more difficult time with parents-in-law than wives.

Kieren, Kenton and Marotz (1975) state why they believe husbands parents are the most troublesome. Their theory surfaced the idea that achieving independence in a new couple's marriage is necessary but while girls are growing up they are protected more and are not allowed to be as independent as boys. As a result, when they are married and expected to be independent, they are still emotionally tied to their family. Their emotional closeness is shown by making frequent visits, phone calls and writing letters to their family. Their emotional closeness is also shown when parents turn more often to their daughters than sons for assistance after the children have left home and are married. The daughter has received the same types of socialization as her mother and when the daughter marries, the life style within the "new home" is similar to the life style that the daughter grew up with. Because of their familiar background, there is a tendency for the mother and daughter to be comfortable with one another and their styles and procedures.

Another reason given for more conflicts with the husband's mother is that there is competition for the husband's affection. The mother and daughter-in-law seem to compete for the affection of the same person. The wife may feel insecure because of her inexperience. One example, his mother probably knows more about how he likes his food

cooked. His wife can cook an apple pie using the exact same recipe his mother uses but somehow it is not like "Mom's."

Another fact that cannot be overlooked is the fact that mother has been caring for her children since birth. The son respects her as the central person in his life. Mother watched him grow and mature and wishes to remain a favored person in her son's life. Consequently, ". . . very often it is not the daughter-in-law as a person who is resented but her role as the usurper of the mother's place in her own son's life (Kieren, Henton and Marotz, 1975)."

While it is known that the mother-in-law is the most troublesome, it is believed that the wife's mother-in-law, or the husband's mother, is the most difficult. An assumption that Riemer (1970) made is that a large critical factor causing in-law conflicts is immaturity. Sometimes the husband and wife are not mature and independent enough to leave home, neither have their parents matured enough to let them go."

Nimkoff (1947) states two reasons why he believes mothers-in-law in general are most troublesome: (a) Parents are reluctant to relinquish the control over their children after years of training, and (b) the father's occupation has taken him out of the home, and he has other interests to occupy his time; whereas, the mother-in-law has spent most of her time day and night teaching and training her children. After analyzing responses from 3,683 individuals, Duvall (1954) found 77 percent of them felt their mother-in-law was the most troublesome of all their in-laws.

Nye and Berardo (1973), Blood (1962) and Reiss (1962) support Kieren, Henton and Marotz's (1975) theory by crediting the female for

making more contact with relatives. Anspach and Rosenberg (1972) studied white husbands and wives ages 45-79. They found that from 1,596 respondents the wives were more active in keeping kinship ties stronger because 65 percent of the wives saw their families while only 54 percent of the husbands saw their kin even when they were close by. The wives' kin were still seen more often. Rogers and Leichter (1964) also found that there was more activity with the wife's kin than the husband's but that his family was more often involved in the cause of marital discord. The reason given was similar to Adams (1970). The wife is more sensitive than the husband and feels rejected and neglected more easily.

Stryker (1955) clears up the controversy somewhat when he studied attachment and dependency in 51 males and 53 females living in university housing at Indiana University. Their ages ranged from 21 to 42 and had been married 1 to 12 years. His conclusions were that females were significantly more dependent upon their mothers than males. Also, the greater the wife's dependency on her parents, the more likely her husband would have in-law conflicts. However, if the wife was dependent on her father, her husband was better adjusted to his father-in-law. When the wife was dominant or neutral in her relationship with her parents, the husband was better adjusted to his mother-in-law. From the literature previously cited, women are closer to their kin than men. More research is needed to verify the existing literature.

#### Children

According to Kelly (1974) new parents focus more attention on their newborn child, and exclude the new grandparents. Kelly also believes



that it is highly possible that a young couple could be so completely involved in their new arrival that the grandparents are not given the opportunity to get to know their new grandchild. These statements that Kelly makes are plausible considerations that need to be dealt with in more depth. This paper will deal with the effects children have on the relationship between their parents and grandparents.

Adams (1971) believes that presence of children in the home of their offspring will improve the in-law relationship. It seems especially true if children are valued by the grandparents. If the grandparents do not consider their in-law as a capable parent, it may change the picture. These variables have not been studied except that Landis and Landis (as reported by Klemer, 1970) stated that families with children have a better relationship with their in-laws than families without children.

Couples with children, according to Stryker (1955), were better adjusted to both parents-in-law than those without children. It could be that the new parents' understanding had increased since they discovered the circumstances of their parents previous situation. They also may have gained more maturity and understanding through their years of married life.

Despite relationships that may have been previously negative, adding the new role of grandparenting can improve the relationship. Cavan (1959) says, grandparents are proud of their new role.

The arrival of a "new addition" generally brings out positive comments, "Ooh's" and "Aah's" and provides someone for a grandparent to show affection that is socially approved; more so than sons and

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daughters-in-law. With a new arrival, it is not considered a weakness to hug and cuddle the little infant. It is very socially approved. If a grandparent does not want to hold or cuddle the grandchild, the question raises as to "What is wrong with the grandparent?" Our society seems to generalize the fact that it is pretty hard not to love a tiny child.

Generally, grandparents are proud of their role. One can hear a person say, "I'm a Grandma!" more often than is heard the remark, "I'm a Mother-in-law!" Sussman (1953) mentioned grandparents can enjoy their role as grandparents without the worries and fears of rearing them themselves. Grandparenting was completing their life-cycle.

According to Sussman and Burchinal (1962) in their research with students, where the husband and the wife had both been working. Parents of the couple often step in and help with finances in addition to what the husband could bring home working a part-time job. Grandparents can give their sign of approval of a couple's marriage by giving financial assistance which is accelerated at the birth of a baby.

To allow parents to be grandparents is allowing them to fulfill their role according to Neugarton and Weinstein (1964). They go on to mention the importance given to the role of grandparenting:

- (a) Provides a biological renewal, (b) carries on the family line,
- (c) provides organization of time to spend with grandchildren, and
- (d) provided the challenge of accomplishing vicariously, through grandchildren, their ideals. In short, grandparenting can be a very rewarding role.

### Education

What has education of the son or daughter-in-law to do with in-laws? Nye and Berardo (1973) state that a person who has completed his education is more likely to be established and is thereby more mature and independent of his parents and in-laws. They also believe that the less dependent married couples are to parents-in-law, the less chance for friction.

In relating education to in-law relationships, Komorousky (1964) found if the husband married a more educated wife, one-third experienced more of a strain in his in-law relations as compared to those whose husband and wife were equal in education. The less educated husband seemed to be more tolerant of his wife's ties to her mother. One can not say that the husband's educational status made him more tolerant of his wife's family but perhaps, a more educated husband expected privacy in his marriage and thus, at the same time, demanded independence.

Education does have a relevant place in a study of in-law relationships from the limited research cited above. The basic premise for all research educationally related to in-laws is that a better educated person will be less dependent and more independent of his or her parents and their in-laws. As a result, they will have less of a possibility for conflict. An interesting study would include conflicts with in-laws while obtaining an education.

Kirkpatrick (1955) believes there is a striking lack of research in all areas of in-law relationships. In-laws rate from first to third in marriage difficulties depending on who is studied and their age. Mothers-in-law are reported the most difficult in all cases.

In-lawing may be the reciprocal of a lack of patience, ungratefulness, and intolerance on both sides. According to Jordan (1942) the problem could also be that both parties are immature. Couples and parents-in-law can easily blame each other for the cause of their own problems. Much has been said regarding the mother-in-law as the vagabond of in-law relationships. Consider, however, her situation--the countless hours spent within the walls of her home in loving and rearing her sons and daughters. Carol Bessent Hayman has arranged into a few lines of poetry a sentimental summary of emotion and feelings that put a soft touch to the inner feelings of a mother-in-law:

The Gift of Love

To a Future Daughter-In-Law

Speak softly of your love,  
There will be time for passion  
When you know his quiet hours.

Mark the gentleness of his hands.  
The wonder in his eyes at the sight of you.

Hold to the sound of his voice  
Speaking words of love, of future plans.  
Remember his face, the line of his mouth,  
The stubborn chin.

Memorize the warmth of his embrace,  
Keep silent for a space and hear  
The music of his soul attuned to yours  
And pledged to yours forever.

I give him to you proudly, young in love,  
And pray God's blessings on your wedding day.  
(Daughter of mine to be, here is my son!)

### Summary

Generally, there has been a striking lack of research in all areas of in-law relationships. It is known that in-laws are a potential source of trouble and that parents-in-law can influence a marriage of their sons and daughters-in-law for good or bad.

Age of the son or daughter-in-law is mentioned to be a factor in in-law relationships. The younger the individual, the greater the chance of immaturity, and therefore there is a greater likelihood for in-law conflicts to arise.

Sex of the in-law is believed to be a factor. Females feel closer to their kin and are also more sensitive to such feelings as rejection and being neglected than males.

Generally, the consensus is, children in the son or daughter-in-law's family of procreation increases, the likelihood for a more positive relationship between parents-in-law and sons and daughters-in-law.

Allowing parents to be grandparents is allowing them to fulfill their role and is completing their life cycle.

Education is another facet of in-law relationships that is felt to have an effect. Increased education of the son or daughter-in-law allows them to be more independent of the parents-in-law. Greater independence minimizes the opportunities for conflict and maximizes the possibilities for a positive in-law relationship.

### Hypotheses

After a careful review of the existing literature on in-law relationships it was determined that the following hypothesis should

be tested to further clarify and add to the literature on in-law relationships.

1. As the age of the son or daughter-in-law increases, the chances for a more positive relationship with parents-in-law and sons and daughters-in-law increases significantly.

2. Females feel significantly closer to their parents-in-law than males.

3. As the number of children of the sons and daughters-in-law increases, the quality of their relationship increases significantly with their parents-in-law.

4. The higher the educational level of the son or daughter-in-law the greater the quality of their relationship with their mother or father-in-law.

## PROCEDURE AND METHODOLOGY

The population from which the sample was taken consisted of all those persons living in the Married Student Housing complex (M.S.H.C.) and the student trailer court, Spring Quarter 1977 at Utah State University. A random sample of 320 persons were selected from which to collect the data. This random sample was taken proportionate to the total number of persons living in the housing units. Thirty out of 39 buildings were selected to sample. For the male population the apartments A, F, I and J of the M.S.H.C. and the odd numbers of the trailer court were selected. The female population consisted of the females living in apartments G, H, K and L of the M.S.H.C. and the even numbers of the trailer court. All selections were made by pulling numbers out of a container.

It was assumed that all those living in the M.S.H.C. were married or had been married. If it was discovered that anyone participant of the sample population had never been married, they were passed by, not being considered as part of the sample. If one apartment was vacant, the researcher went on to the next scheduled apartment.

The population described was selected primarily because of convenience to the researcher (he lived in the M.S.H.C. also), and the density and accessibility of the subjects.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections: (a) Section I--the demographic data, (b) Section II--the in-law section with questions regarding the in-laws of their most recent or current marriage, and

(c) Section III--for persons who had been married more than once with information to fill out in connection with previous in-laws (see Appendix A). The questionnaire which consisted mostly of Likert type questions with some open-ended questions was originally created by Dr. Glen Jenson of Utah State University. It was revised by the author for this study.

The independent variables used in the study were: (a) Sex of the son and daughter-in-law, (b) the number of children in the son and daughter-in-law's family of procreation, (c) the current age of the son and daughter-in-law, and (d) the educational level of the son and daughter-in-law. These were chosen because the existing literature mentioned these variables most often and sometimes contained conflicting results. These independent variables were studied with dependent variables such as, how troublesome the respondents mother and father-in-law had been to their marital relationship, the type of help received, how they perceived their parents-in-law, how emotionally close they felt to their parents-in-law, and how acceptable they felt to their parents-in-law. Open-ended questions asked participants to respond to the most beneficial things, common problems, likeable traits and unlikeable traits of each parent-in-law.

Questionnaires were delivered personally to individuals living in married student housing at Utah State University. All who received the questionnaire were either presently married or had been previously married. They were asked to respond in terms of their present or most recent marriage.



The questionnaire asked respondents to answer how they felt towards their parents-in-law--feelings of closeness towards them; titles used to address them; how troublesome they were perceived to be; the type of help received from them, and how their parents-in-law compared to other parents-in-law. The questionnaire also included questions dealing with the type and amount of change in the relationship that had taken place in the last five years. A question was asked in regards to the failing health of parents-in-law--who would they live with if they needed constant care? Open-ended questions were asked to ascertain the most beneficial thing, the most common problem, and most likeable and unlikeable trait of each parent-in-law. The final questions asked for suggestions to other couples that would help them improve their relationships with their parents-in-law.

A special section on the questionnaire was included with questions for those who had been previously married. This section asked if in-laws contributed to their separation or divorce, if they had contact with those parents-in-law now, how emotionally close they felt to them and if they had children from their previous marriage.

All of the questions were included on one sheet of paper. Two indexes were derived from the collected data, a closeness and a problematic index (see Appendix B). The closeness index consisted of questions 6, 7, 17, 20 of section II and the problematic index comprised of questions 1, 2, 4 and 5 of the same section. These were used to help ascertain how close or distant the sons and daughters-in-law were to their parents-in-law.

After selecting the addresses of the sample, the researcher personally took a questionnaire to each home. A legal size envelope and a letter (see Appendix C), accompanied each questionnaire explaining the purpose of the research. In brief, the letter consisted of asking the participant for their assistance, assuring them of anonymity in filling it out, thanking them for their help and offering them a copy of the results, if they so desired by leaving their address on a separate piece of paper in the envelope. The questionnaire was not left unless the researcher was able to talk to the husband or the wife. For example, if the sample participant was a male, the dialogue would go something like this: "I am a graduate student collecting research on in-laws. I have a questionnaire that I need your help in filling out. Would you be willing to help me?" If there was a positive indication that he would, the researcher would then show him the questionnaire saying, "This is a brief letter explaining the purpose of the questionnaire and here is the questionnaire." The researcher then told the respondent the day and the approximate time (afternoon, evening, etc.) when he would be back to pick up the questionnaire. After filling out the questionnaire he asked him if they would put the questionnaire in the envelope provided and tape it to the door. This would make it more convenient and quicker to pick up the data. Occasionally, the wife would be home and the husband absent when contact was made for the husband to fill out the questionnaire (or vice-versa). Instructions would be given in the same way as previously mentioned to the wife making sure she understood that the questionnaire was intended for her husband and she could not fill it out for him.

If the questionnaire was not taped to the door when the researcher returned to collect it, he would knock to see if they had it ready to be collected. If no one was found at home, the researcher returned at another time until the questionnaire could be obtained. Sometimes this required returning as many as seven or eight times to obtain a questionnaire. If the questionnaire was not obtained by the end of Spring Quarter 1977, all follow-up was discontinued.

The questionnaire method was used in contrast to the interview method because of the greater amount of time and money involved in the interview method. It would have taken several months and a greater amount of money to have used the interview method. To deliver the questionnaire personally did take a great deal of time but it was felt that was a large reason for an unusually high return rate of 91 percent.

A total number of 320 addresses were chosen for the sample, from a possible of 688 apartments in the housing complex. Some addresses that were selected to be contacted to obtain questionnaires were deleted from the study for several reasons: Vacant apartments and trailers, residents being away for an indefinite period of time (that information obtained from neighbors or spouses), and no parents-in-law involved. There were 59 such apartments in the complex which were excluded from the same along with three apartments housing single people who had never been married. That left a total of 258 apartments sampled and of those 24 refused to fill out the questionnaire or the questionnaire was lost. The weather kept the researcher from returning at the specified time to several addresses and as a result, four of the

24 were lost. Some questionnaires were not completely filled out but the data on them were still utilized.

A majority of the respondents to the questionnaire were students or student spouses with some faculty and other employees of the university. The majority were American Caucasian, some were Negoid, some South American, some Oriental and some from the Middle East. The independent variables studied were age, sex, number of children and education. A more detailed explanation of the independent and dependent variable is contained earlier.

The section to be filled out by those persons who had a previous marriage asked for information on their previous in-law relationships. The section was only completed by eight persons so it was deleted and not analyzed at all for the purpose of this study.

Each question was coded to be typed on cards for tabulation by the computer. The questions in the problematic and closeness indexes were also coded so the most negative responses received the lowest number (1) and the most positive received the highest number (4). This was used in totaling the closeness and problematic index.

A Chi Square test was used to determine if there was a significant difference among relationships. Rank ordering was used where applicable. The only accepted level of significance was at the .05 level or below. However, trends were noted and they were mentioned for further research possibilities.

Closeness and problematic indexes were tabulated by mean scores and F ratios for each of the independent variables mentioned.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Age Data

A directional hypothesis was used which stated that as age increases, the chances for a more positive relationship with parents-in-law and sons and daughters-in-law increases significantly. Three age categories were studied: (a) age 24 and under (younger), (b) age 25-29 (middle), and (c) age 30 and above (older).

Three different questions were found to be significant at the .05 level due to age. In Table 1 it is noted that there were significantly more respondents who were 30 years of age and older that indicated their fathers-in-law to be less troublesome to their marriage than those in the 25-29 age group. One hundred percent of those age 30 and over did not believe their fathers-in-law were troublesome while 87 percent of those 25-29 felt that same way.

Respondents who were in the older group, as illustrated by Table 2, perceived their mothers-in-law more favorably than those in the middle age group. Ninety percent of those that were in the older age group felt emotionally closer (significant at the .05 level) to their mothers-in-law than those in the middle age group. Seventy-three percent of the middle group felt close to their mothers-in-law. These findings were significant at the .05 level. There was not a significant difference between the older and young age group.

Eighty-seven percent of those 30 years of age and older felt closer to their mothers-in-law compared to 65 percent of the 24 and under age group and 61 percent of those in the 25-29 age category.

Table 1  
 Association of Age and Troublesomeness of  
 Fathers-in-law to Their Sons and Daughters-in-law

	Age 25-29	Percent	Age 30 and Above	Percent	Total
Troublesome	10	12.99	0	0.0	10
Not					
Troublesome	67	87.01	28	100	95
TOTAL	77		28		105

1 degree of freedom =  $p < .05$       Chi-squared value = 4.02

Table 2  
 Sons and Daughters-in-law Perception of  
 Their Mothers-in-law

	Age 25-29	Percent	Age 30 and Above	Percent	Total
Poor or Average	22	27.50	3	9.68	25
Good or Very Good	58	72.50	28	90.32	86
TOTAL	80		31		111

1 degree of freedom =  $p = < .05$       Chi-square = 4.07

These data are illustrated in Table 3 and were significant at the .05 level. There was not a significant difference between the younger and middle age groups in the way they perceived their mothers-in-law. Those 30 and above felt closer significantly than the youngest age group in how emotionally close they felt to their mothers-in-law.

Table 3  
 Felt Association of Sons and Daughters-in-law  
 To Their Mothers-in-law

	Age 24 and Under	Percent	Age 25-29	Percent	Age 30 and Above	Percent	Total
Emotionally Distant	41	37.74	32	39.51	4	12.91	77
Emotionally Close	77	65.26	49	60.50	27	87.09	153
TOTAL	<u>118</u>		<u>81</u>		<u>31</u>		<u>230</u>

2 degrees of freedom =  $p < .05$       Chi-square = 7.30

It needs to be noted that there were very few persons in their teens who filled out the questionnaire. A larger sample not housed near a university would include more married couples in their teens which might reveal other differences. There may be a greater difference between the younger persons married in their teens and those age 20-24.

These findings are congruent with the findings and statements of Landis and Landis (1977), Nye and Berardo (1973), and Duvall (1957)

who stated that a person becomes more mature with age and with that the probability of in-law conflicts decreases.

### Indexes

The questions that comprised the closeness and problematic indexes were weighted. The most positive answer received the highest score. This visually is projected in Figure 2. The indexes were tabulated from the mean scores by age were significant. The closeness index was significant the .02 level as displayed in Table 4. Those respondents who were age 30 and above felt the closest to their parents-in-law, as shown in Table 5 (and illustrated in Figure 2). Those 24 and under were second in closeness and those 25-29 felt the most distant of the three groups.

Table 4  
Mean Scores of Closeness and Problematic  
Indexes According to Age

Age	Problematic Index Mean Scores	Closeness Index Mean Scores
30 and above	3.21875	3.15625
25-29	2.93675	2.86988
24 and under	3.25521	3.05546
	F Score = 4.764 p < .05	F Score = 3.605 p < .02



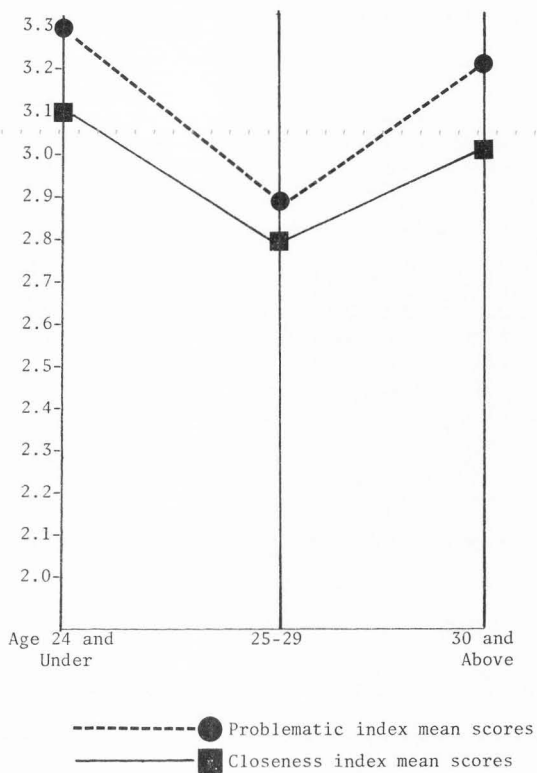


Figure 2. Age and the mean scores of the closeness and problematic indexes.

Table 5  
Age of Sons and Daughters-in-law as Related to  
Emotional Closeness/Distance to Fathers-in-law

	Age 24 and Under	Percent	Age 25-29	Percent	Age 30 and Above	Percent	Total
Emotionally Distant	48	41.74	37	48.68	7	25.0	92
Emotionally Close	67	58.26	39	51.31	21	75.0	127
TOTAL	115		76		28		119
Non significant data							

These findings verify the findings cited earlier on age. The 30 years of age and older group felt the closest while those 25-29 felt the most distant from their parents-in-law. Why that is the case is not certain. One possible answer might be that grandparents may disagree how their grandchildren are being raised. Whereas, they (those 30 years of age and above) become more accepting with their in-laws as time goes on.

There was a trend that appeared over several questions that may need to be studied in the future. When asking how troublesome in-laws had been, how they perceived them and how close they felt to their in-laws--in almost every case the younger age group (24 and under) believed their relationship was more positive than those 25-29. In Table 5 is shown a trend for those 30 and above to have a closer feeling

towards parents-in-law than in the youngest age group. The middle age group viewed their relationship as more problematic while the 30 years of age and older group viewed their relationship as the least problematic. It was interesting to note that no matter how troublesome their in-laws had been in their relationship, when asked how acceptable they felt towards their in-laws, they viewed the relationship as a positive one. Ninety-four percent and above in every age group expressed a feeling that the relationship was positive. This is illustrated in Table 6. Whether this is due to the immaturity of youth or the lack of communication in their relationship it is not known. Further research needs to verify why those 30 years of age and over feel closer to their parents-in-law, and why the 25 to 29 age group feels the most distant. A possible answer might be that young couples (those 24 and under) are immature and need help, as a result, they readily accept the assistance from their parents and/or parents-in-law. Those 25 to 29 have become more independent and assistance in the form of money and/or other goods causes an emotional separation. While those 30 years of age and above have resolved their differences and are letting the grandparents back in the relationship. An interesting study would be to see how their parents-in-law viewed the sons and daughters-in-law.

The hypothesis, as age increases the chances for a more positive relationship with parents-in-law and sons and daughters-in-law increases significantly, can be accepted. Those 30 years of age and over perceived themselves as being emotionally closer to their mothers-in-law than those 25-29 years of age. They also indicated their

Table 6  
Felt Acceptability on Sons and Daughters-in-law  
To Their Parents-in-law

	Age 24 and Under	Percent	Age 25-29	Percent	Age 30 and Above	Percent	Total
Not Acceptable	4	4.20	5	6.02	0	0.0	9
Acceptable	114	95.80	78	93.97	31	100.0	223
TOTAL	118		83		31		232
	Non significant data						

mothers-in-law than those 25-29 years of age. They also indicated their mothers-in-law were better than other mothers-in-law in comparing them with other mothers-in-law. Those in that age group also indicated their fathers-in-law were less troublesome than the two younger groups. It can be stated that those 30 years of age and over tend to feel emotionally closer to their mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law than those 25-29 years of age.

#### Analysis of Data by Sex

Only two questions were significant when analyzed by sex and both questions found the females significantly more positive than the males, these findings are illustrated in Tables 7 and 8. Males and females each answered how emotionally close they felt to their mothers-in-law. The females reported they felt closer to their mothers-in-law than males. This difference is significant at the .02 level. There

Table 7  
Emotional Closeness of Sons and Daughters-in-law  
To Their Mothers-in-law

	Sex				Total
	Male	Percent	Female	Percent	
Emotionally Distant	45	41.29	29	26.13	74
Emotionally Close	64	58.71	82	73.88	146
TOTAL	109		111		220
1 degree of freedom = $p < .02$		Chi-square = 5.66			

Table 8  
Title Daughters-in-law Used to  
Address Their Fathers-in-law

	Male	Percent	Female	Percent	Total
Father or Dad	36	35.29	52	50.0	88
Other	66	64.70	52	50.0	118
TOTAL	102		104		206
1 degree of freedom = $p < .05$		Chi-square = 4.55			

was no significant difference, between the sexes, when asked how close they felt to their fathers-in-law.

When comparing the titles used in addressing their parents-in-law, the females called their fathers-in-law by "Father" or "Dad" significantly more often than the males as shown in Table 8. No research has been reported on titling of parents-in-law, but to be called "Father" or "Dad" can be assumed to be more warm and positive than by his first name. On occasion there was a nickname used or a title that may have had a more personal meaning than "Father" or "Dad," but for the most part to be addressed as "Father" or "Dad" was most affectionate. Females led out in addressing their fathers-in-law in a more warm and personal manner. Nye and Berardo (1975), Blood (1962) and Reiss (1962) all gave the female credit for making more contact with relatives thus indicating that she feels closer. It was explained by Kieren, Henton and Marotz (1975) that the female is socialized into being more dependent on her family and that is why she makes more contact with her relatives. This data would support those findings because in both instances the females felt closer to their in-laws than the males.

### Index

When the closeness and problematic indexes were analyzed according to sex there were no significant differences. Figure 3 shows the mean scores on the problematic index as: (a) males 3.15 and (b) females 3.14. The closeness index mean scores were males 2.98 and females 3.03. Duvall (1956), strongly suggests the female is closer to her in-laws than the males are to theirs, as does Kieren, Henton,

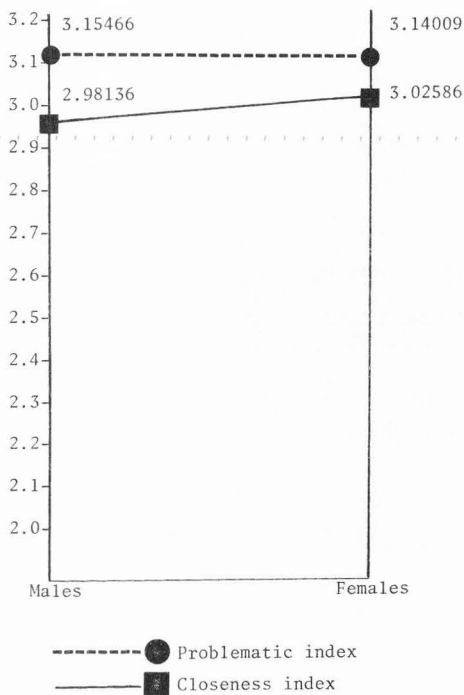


Figure 3. Closeness and problematic index scores according to sex of the respondent.

and Marotz (1975). These data does not support their findings or theory.

The hypothesis stated that females feel significantly closer to their parents-in-law than males, can not be accepted due to the conflicting results. This raises a serious question as to whether females are actually closer to their in-laws than males.

#### Number of Children

Only one item was statistically significant in regards to the data with the number of children in the son and daughter-in-laws family. Those sons and daughters-in-law who had one child were significantly closer to their mothers-in-law than those with two or three and no children, as shown in Table 9. The trend was the same with fathers-in-law. However, it was not significant. The presence of children in the home, according to Adams (1971), improved the son and daughter-in-laws relationship with their parents-in-law. Adams did not state specifically how many children and it could be that a large part of his sample population had one child. Stryker (1955) believed that couples with children were better adjusted to their in-laws. This study measured closeness not adjustments in marriage which might explain the difference.

Another explanation why those with one child might be closer to their mothers-in-law is that grandparents possibly get more excited over the first grandchild more so than the second or third. The new parents might be somewhat unsure of what to expect with their first child and may call on their parents or parents-in-law for help. With their second and third child, they have experienced it before, and



Table 9  
 Number of Children and Emotional Closeness of the  
 Sons and Daughters-in-law to Their Mothers-in-law

Number of Children					
	1	Percent	2	Percent	Total
Emotionally Distant	18	21.96	21	46.67	39
Emotionally Close	64	78.04	24	53.34	88
TOTAL	82		45		127
1 degree of freedom = $p < .01$			Chi-square = 8.34		
-----					
	1	Percent	3 or More	Percent	Total
Emotionally Distant	18	21.96	9	45	27
Emotionally Close	64	78.04	11	55	75
TOTAL	82		20		102
1 degree of freedom = $p < .05$			Chi-square = 4.39		
-----					
	1	Percent	No Children	Percent	Total
Emotionally Distant	18	21.96	32	38.35	50
Emotionally Close	64	78.04	51	61.45	115
TOTAL	82		83		165
1 degree of freedom = $p < .05$			Chi-square = 5.38		

may not need or require as much assistance. A new mother and father tend to rely more on their parents for assistance when the first baby is born. The informal practical services that Cavan (1969) writes about seems to bring them all closer together as they anticipate and prepare and finally receive the new baby into the home.

The hypothesis that was stated, "As the number of children in the home of the son or daughter-in-law increases, the quality of their relationship increases significantly with their parents-in-law," is not accepted. One child significantly increased the quality of the relationship but two or more did not.

#### Analysis of Education Data

An interesting finding was that those with a high school or less education felt significantly closer to their mothers-in-law than those with some college education as shown in Table 10. They were not significantly closer than those who had a B.S. or M.S. degree or above but this was near the .05 level of significance. The hypothesis stated was the higher the education of the son or daughter-in-law does have a positive effect on the quality of the relationship with their parents-in-law. According to the data just reported, education has a negative effect. Those who had some college, had a more negative relationship than those who had not attended college at all. Therefore, the hypothesis was not accepted.

The explanation given by Nye and Berardo (1973) seems logical that a more educated person will be more independent and less reliant on his/her parents; therefore, the chances for friction are less and a better relationship will result unless your in-laws want you to be

dependent and reliant. This is in opposition to the findings just reported. It may be because those with a high school or less education are more reliant on their in-laws for help and the giving strengthens the kinship ties as Cavan (1969) stated. The education of the spouse in Cavan's study is not known, that may influence the results, which could be another factor. The person responding could be working and supporting his or her spouse to get their education and yet that person has only completed high school.

Table 10  
Educational Level of the Son or Daughter-in-law and  
Felt Association with Mothers-in-law Emotionally

	Education				Total
	High School or Less	Percent	Some College	Percent	
Emotionally Distant	5	17.24	38	37.25	43
Emotionally Close	24	82.76	64	62.74	88
TOTAL	29		102		131

1 degree of freedom =  $p < .05$                       Chi-square = 4.10

#### Rank Order Analysis of Help Received

When responding to the type of help received from their parents-in-law, advice and counsel were reported as occurring most often. It occurred most often when considering all the independent variables of

education, the number of children in the son or daughter-in-laws family of procreation, and age and sex of the son or daughter-in-law.

Those with a high school or less education, those age 24 and under, and those with one child reported financial assistance as the type of help received in the last six months (as shown in Table 11). In the latter two categories, those age 24 and under and those respondents with one child, financial assistance occurred only one more time than did advice and counsel. Male and female respondents with some college, a bachelors and masters degree and above as well as those age 25 and above, those with two or more children and no children all reported receiving advice and counsel as the type of help they had received in the last six months. Because those respondents who are younger (24 and under) received more help, 77 percent of those had some college or less and only one child received more financial assistance is support for Nye and Berardo (1973) who state that with increased age comes independence. In further support to Nye and Berardo's belief, the oldest group in the study reported they received no help from their in-laws as their second highest choice of where assistance was coming from. Financial assistance was third. For those who had a high school or less education parents were willing to help their children with some initial expenses, i.e., their first baby and/or to gain an education. Another reason for the aid might be that parents have not psychologically given up their role as providers, and therefore, continue to give financial assistance.

Table 11

## Help Received from Parents-in-law:

According to Age, Education, Sex and Number of Children

Age			
24 and Under	25-29	30 and Above	
Financial	Advice and Counsel	Advice and Counsel	
Advice and Counsel	Financial	None	
None	None	Financial	
Child Care	Child Care	Child Care	

---

Education			
High School or Less	Some College	B.S.	M.S. or Above
Financial	Advice and Counsel	Advice	Advice
Advice and Counsel	Financial	Financial	None
None	None	None	Financial
Child Care	Child Care	Child Care	Child Care and Other

---

Sex	
Male	Female
Advice	Advice
Financial	Financial
Child Care	None
None	Child Care

---

Number of Children			
One Child	Two Children	Three or More	No Children
Financial	Advice	Advice	Advice
Advice	Financial	Financial	Financial
None	Child Care	None	None
Child Care	None	Child Care	Living Quarters

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The literature of Landis and Landis (1977), Nye and Berardo (1973) and Duvall (1957) was supported because those who were 30 years of age and above perceived their fathers-in-law as less troublesome, mothers-in-law more favorably and they also felt closer to their mothers-in-law.

The trend was that those age 30 and above felt the closest to their in-laws, next was the 24 and under age group followed by the 25-29 age group. This was verified according to the closeness and problematic index at the .02 level of significance. Three other questions were also significant. Those 30 years of age and above felt their fathers-in-law were less troublesome, perceived their mothers-in-law more favorably and felt closer to their mothers-in-law than those 25-29.

Females felt significantly closer emotionally to their mothers-in-law than the males. Females also showed they felt closer to their fathers-in-law by addressing them as father or dad significantly more often than the males did their fathers-in-law. No research has reported on the titling of in-laws, but to be called "father" or "dad" can be assumed to be more warm and positive than to be called by the first name.

When the mean scores were totaled for the closeness and problematic index, according to sex, there was not a significant difference. The literature according to Kairen, et al. (1975), Duvall (1956) suggested

there would be. According to specific questions there was a difference but not when all the scores were totaled and analyzed according to an F ratio.

Another finding was that those with one child felt significantly closer emotionally to their mothers-in-law than those with two, three or more or no children. This seemed to be different from what the literature suggests. The literature did not mention the number of children in each family merely that children improved the relationship. This may be that for the first child, the parents-in-law were willing to help more as well as their sons and daughters-in-law may have needed more help, especially because it was their first child.

Education did not significantly improve the in-law relationship. The reverse seemed to be true. Those who had a high school or less education felt closer to their mothers-in-law than those with some college. This was contrary to Nye and Berardo (1973) who believed that the more educated person would be more independent, and therefore, less reliant and the chances for friction would be less. But it appears that with dependence upon one another, dependence binds those who provide the service and those receiving it together, as Cavan (1969) believes.

Those who were age 30 and above, females, those with one child and a high school or less education, all felt the closest to their parents-in-law. There is a need for more research to test the findings cited and to find out the why's in each case. The main purpose of this research was of an exploratory nature not to ascertain the whys in each case, but to test the hypothesis mentioned and to gain a more defined direction for further research.

### Conclusions

It is difficult to generalize from this study. The population was composed of university students, most of whom were members of one religious group. In addition, the findings of the study were contradictory to those of earlier studies of in-law relationships, as related to education, number of children, and sex. The findings regarding age, however, were consistent with the results of other studies, and it appears that the consistency of this finding supports the conclusion that age or maturation appears to contribute to improvement in in-law relationships. A second and, perhaps, more provocative conclusion is that the problem of in-law relationships appear to be more complex than often has been thought, and most of the current knowledge about such relationships may best be regarded as tentative pending further research.



## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings and conclusions that have been made must be viewed as being tentative, considering that the population was a university sample of whom most were students, a few faculty, and some employees of the university.

The majority of the sample were the younger married yet with very few teenage couples, with approximately half of the sample being 24 years of age and under.

The sample was heavily weighted religiously, with these of the L.D.S. (commonly referred to as the Mormons) religion comprising 63 percent of the sample. There were also many foreign students who responded, but their nationality was not asked, only their religion.

This study was also an exploratory study to get a feeling where further research should be directed. It was not intended to analyze each variable in complete detail, but to generate new ideas for research.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

1. Why do sons and daughters-in-law over 30 years of age feel closer to their parents-in-law than those 25-29?
2. How do married people in their teens perceive their parents-in-law in comparison to those people who are in other age cohorts?
3. Why do a majority of the respondents wish to care for their parents-in-law themselves?
4. What percentage actually do provide care and keep for their parents-in-law when they need constant care?
5. Is the trend that those sons and daughters-in-law age 25-29 view their relationship with their parents-in-law as the most troublesome consistent with other populations?
6. Is there a trend that sons and daughters-in-law view themselves as being more acceptable to their parents-in-law than their parents-in-law are to them?

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## APPENDICES

Appendix A  
Questionnaire

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY & CHILD DEVELOPMENT  
U. M. C. 29  
LOGAN, UTAH 84322

## IN-LAWS

Section I - General Information

1. Your current age as of your last birthday: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Your sex: \_\_\_\_\_ male \_\_\_\_\_ female.
3. Number of children you now have: \_\_\_\_\_
4. When your first child was born how did that effect your in-law relationships:
- \_\_\_\_\_ It made your relationship better  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Your relationship stayed about the same  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Your relationship deteriorated
5. My religious affiliation is:
- \_\_\_\_\_ Catholic  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Protestant  
 \_\_\_\_\_ L.D.S.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify)
6. My highest level of educational attainment is \_\_\_\_\_
7. Your present marital status:
- \_\_\_\_\_ married \_\_\_\_\_ separated  
 \_\_\_\_\_ divorced \_\_\_\_\_ remarried  
 \_\_\_\_\_ widow or widower
8. Length of present marriage: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Length of previous marriage: \_\_\_\_\_

Section II - In-Law Section

Answer this section according to your current or most recent marriage. Only answer this section if you have or had parents-in-law. If the in-law being discussed is deceased, please answer the questions to the best of your remembrance of how that person behaved.

1. My mother-in-law has been very troublesome to our marital relationship.
- \_\_\_\_\_ strongly agree \_\_\_\_\_ disagree  
 \_\_\_\_\_ mildly agree \_\_\_\_\_ strongly disagree





11. How has the quality of your relationship changed with your father-in-law in the last 5 years?
- |       |                              |       |                       |
|-------|------------------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| _____ | emotionally, much closer     | _____ | stayed about the same |
| _____ | emotionally, a little closer | _____ | more distant          |
12. Name the most beneficial thing your mother-in-law does for you?
- \_\_\_\_\_
13. Name the most common problem you have with your mother-in-law?
- \_\_\_\_\_
14. Name the most beneficial thing your father-in-law does for you?
- \_\_\_\_\_
15. Name the most common problem you have with your father-in-law?
- \_\_\_\_\_
16. Geographically how close do you live to your spouses parents?
- |       |                  |       |                  |
|-------|------------------|-------|------------------|
| _____ | less than 1 mile | _____ | 100 to 200 miles |
| _____ | 1 to 20 miles    | _____ | 200 to 500 miles |
| _____ | 20 to 100 miles  | _____ | 500 miles        |
17. How acceptable do you feel to your spouse's parents?
- |       |                 |       |                      |
|-------|-----------------|-------|----------------------|
| _____ | very acceptable | _____ | very unacceptable    |
| _____ | acceptable      | _____ | less than acceptable |
18. Should your spouse's parents need constant care in the near future, which of the following would you prefer?
- |       |                       |       |   |
|-------|-----------------------|-------|---|
| _____ | live with you         | _____ | live with spouse's brothers and sisters |
| _____ | other, please specify |       |   |
19. How do you think your mother-in-law rates you as a person?
- |       |              |       |                |
|-------|--------------|-------|----------------|
| _____ | very capable | _____ | incapable      |
| _____ | capable      | _____ | very incapable |
20. How do you think your father-in-law rates you as a person?
- |       |              |       |                |
|-------|--------------|-------|----------------|
| _____ | very capable | _____ | incapable      |
| _____ | capable      | _____ | very incapable |
21. What is the most likeable trait you see your mother-in-law having?
- \_\_\_\_\_
22. What is the most unlikeable trait you see your mother-in-law having?
- \_\_\_\_\_

23. What is the most likeable trait you see your father-in-law having?  
\_\_\_\_\_
24. What is the most unlikeable trait you see your father-in-law having?  
\_\_\_\_\_
25. What are some things you would suggest other couples do to strengthen their relationship with their in-laws?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Section III - "Previous In-Laws"

(Answer this section only if you have been previously married.)

1. Did your in-laws contribute to your separation?  
\_\_\_\_\_ completely      \_\_\_\_\_ partially      \_\_\_\_\_ not at all
2. Do you have contact with your previous in-laws now?  
\_\_\_\_\_ very often      \_\_\_\_\_ seldom  
\_\_\_\_\_ quite often      \_\_\_\_\_ never
3. How emotionally close do you feel to your former parents-in-law?  
\_\_\_\_\_ very close      \_\_\_\_\_ not very close  
\_\_\_\_\_ close      \_\_\_\_\_ very distant
4. Did you have any children from your previous marriage?  
\_\_\_\_\_ yes      \_\_\_\_\_ no

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Appendix B  
Weighting of Indexes

Section II

Closeness Index

6. How emotionally close do you feel to your father-in-law?

4 Very close  
3 Close

2 Not very close  
1 Very distant

7. How emotionally close do you feel to your Mother-in-law?

4 Very close  
3 Close

2 Not very close  
1 Very distant

17. How acceptable do you feel to your spouse's parents?

4 Very acceptable  
3 Acceptable

2 Very unacceptable  
1 Less than acceptable

19. How do you think your Mother-in-law rates you as a person?

4 Very capable  
3 Capable

2 Incapable  
1 Very incapable

20. How do you think your father-in-law rates you as a person?

4 Very capable  
3 Capable

2 Incapable  
1 Very incapable

Problematic Index

1. My mother-in-law has been very troublesome to our marital relationship.

1 Strongly agree  
2 Mildly agree

3 Disagree  
4 Strongly disagree

2. My father-in-law has been very troublesome to our marital relationship.

1 Strongly agree  
2 Mildly agree

3 Disagree  
4 Strongly disagree

4. How would you perceive your mother-in-law in comparison to other mothers-in-law?

4 A very good mother-in-law  
3 A good mother-in-law

2 An average mother-in-law  
1 A poor mother-in-law

5. How would you perceive your father-in-law in comparison to other fathers-in-law?

4 A very good father-in-law  
3 A good father-in-law

2 An average father-in-law  
1 A poor father-in-law

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Appendix C  
Letter Attached to Questionnaire

Carlos F. Watkins  
38 A USU Apts.  
Logan, Utah 84321

Dear Sir,

I am a graduate student at USU in the department of Family and Human Development conducting research regarding in-laws. The research will focus on a comparison between female and male responses to in-law relationships. Your help in filling out this questionnaire to obtain data in this much talked about, joked about but "little known" area would be appreciated very much. We are very interested in your experiences as a male.

You can be assured of anonymity in filling out this questionnaire. If you would like to receive a copy of the results please place on a separate piece of paper your name and address when you return the questionnaire. Please fill this out privately and place in sealed envelope as soon as completed.

Thank you very much for your time and effort. Someone will be by in a day or so to pick up the questionnaire.

Sincerely,



Carlos F. Watkins

CFW/jnw