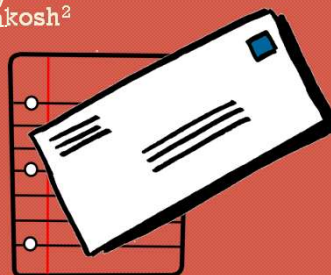


# Letters to My Grandparent: The Silver Lining of a Dementia Diagnosis in Grandchildren- Grandparent Relationships

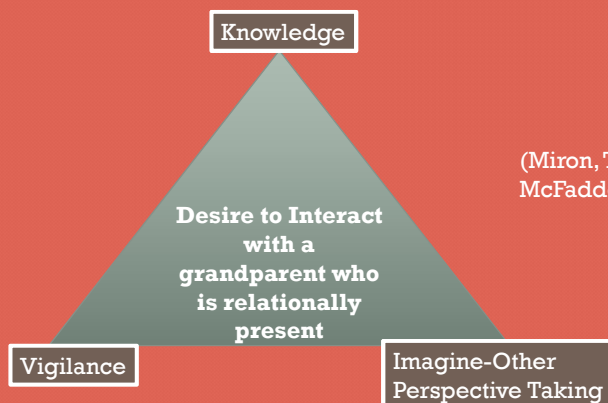
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## Grandchildren-Grandparent Relationships in the context of a dementia diagnosis

- Grandchildren utilize specific verbal and non-verbal interaction strategies



(Miron, Thompson, Ebert, & McFadden, 2017a)

## Imagine-Other Perspective Taking

- **Increased empathic concern for the other**
  - (Batson, 2011; Batson, Eklund, Chermok, Hoyt, & Ortiz, 2007)
- **Increased solidarity**
  - (Kemp, 2005; Miron et al., 2017a)
- **Increased desired sensory approach**
  - (Miron, Rowley, Melotik, Bagley, & Anderson, 2017; Miron, Wicklund, Diestelmann, Moore, & Schroeder, 2015)

## Perspective Taking Orientation Towards Persons with Dementia

- **Witnessing the progression of negative symptoms can lead to:**
  - Avoidance and fear of mortality
    - (O'Connor & McFadden, 2012)
  - Fear of interacting
    - (Miron, McFadden, Hermus, Beulow, Nazario, & Seelman, 2017)
- **However, greater severity of dementia symptoms predicts higher levels of perspective taking**
  - (Miron, Rowley, Melotik, Bagley, & Anderson, 2017)

## The Present Study

- Examine differences in ***other-focused perspective taking*** between young adults with **grandparents who have dementia (DD)** and those with **grandparents without dementia (ND)** using Bertacco and Deponete (2005)'s letter-writing task
  - Explored differences in perspective-taking outcomes (***solidarity, empathic concern, and desired sensory approach***)

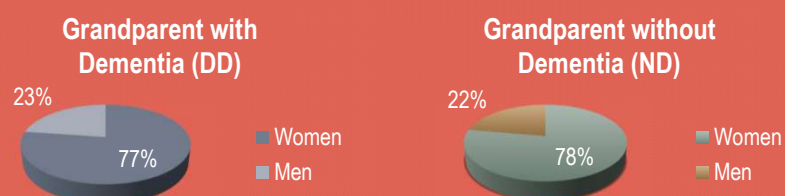
## Predictions

1. Differential perspective-taking levels in these two groups (ND and DD)
2. Empathic concern, solidarity, and desired sensory approach would be significantly higher in one group than in the other

## Methods

## Participants

- Students ( $N = 66$ ) with a grandparent diagnosed with dementia (DD group;  $N = 21$ ) or a grandparent without dementia (ND group;  $N = 45$ )



## Experimental Task 1

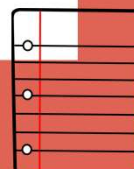
- (1) **15-minute letter-writing task**, in which participants wrote a letter to a designated grandparent

### Letter Writing Instructions

Now, we would like you to write a letter to your [grandparent who has dementia / grandmother / grandfather]. There are really no rules about what you should be writing about in this letter so we will leave that up to you. For example, is there something that you would like to tell your grandparent that perhaps you have not had the time to or could not tell them before?

Please spend the next 15 minutes writing the letter and use the next blank page to do so. Just assume that you will send the letter to your grandparent, but do not worry about the address.

The Research Assistant will come back in 15 minutes to give you the next questionnaire.



## Experimental Task 2

- **Untimed questionnaire** containing the perspective taking orientation index, desired sensory approach index, and grandparent and personal demographic measures

## Measures: Number of Second- Person Pronouns

- The number of times the grandchildren used “you,” “your,” or “yours” in their letter to their grandparent
  - *Reflects a focus on the other person*

(Miron, Kulibert, Saltigerald, & Petrouske, 2017)

## Measures: Number of Shared Memories/Experiences

- The sum of all shared memories included in the letter, which could be:
  - **Positive** (“I enjoyed making cookies before Christmas”)
  - **Negative** (“I remember when we got into a car accident”)
  - **Self-oriented** (“I remember playing house in your basement as a kid”)
  - **Other-oriented** (“I remember that time that you danced in the kitchen”)

(Bertacco & Deponete, 2005)

## Measures: Empathic Concern

- Mentions or statements that express feelings of compassion, softheartedness, warmth, sympathy, and moved
  - Situations of current need
- Coded as yes (present in letter) or no (not present in letter)

(Batson, 2011)

## Measures: Solidarity

- Explicit/implicit mentions of love, longing/missing, gratitude, etc.
- Emphasizes the importance/value of the grandparent in their life; talks about grandparent as if they are a role model; shares “secret knowledge” or inside jokes; talks about hugs/kisses
- Sum of all mentions throughout letter

(Bengston, Giarrusso, Mabry, & Silverstein, 2002; Bussoni & Boon, 1998; Mansson, Myers, & Turner, 2010; Kemp, 2005)

## Measures: Perspective Taking Orientation Index ( $\alpha = .90$ )

- Five questions
- **Examples:**
  - “How often do you think of your relative’s situation and his/her life as he or she is experiencing symptoms of dementia?”
  - “To what extent do you focus on the difficulties your relative is experiencing when you interact with that person?”
- 0 (Never) to 7 (Very often)

(Miron, Thompson, Anderson, Bagley, Melotik, & Rowley, 2017)

## Measures: Desired Sensory Approach ( $\alpha = .96$ )

- Participants were asked to imagine that their grandparent was having a hard day and was upset, then responded to 15 statements
- **Examples:**
  - Touch (e.g., “I would like to hold this person’s hand”)
  - Sound (e.g., “I would like to listen to this person”)
  - Sight (e.g., “I would like to see his/her face”)
  - Substitute channel (e.g., “I would like to have a photo of him/her in my room”)
- 0 (Not at all) to 9 (Very much)

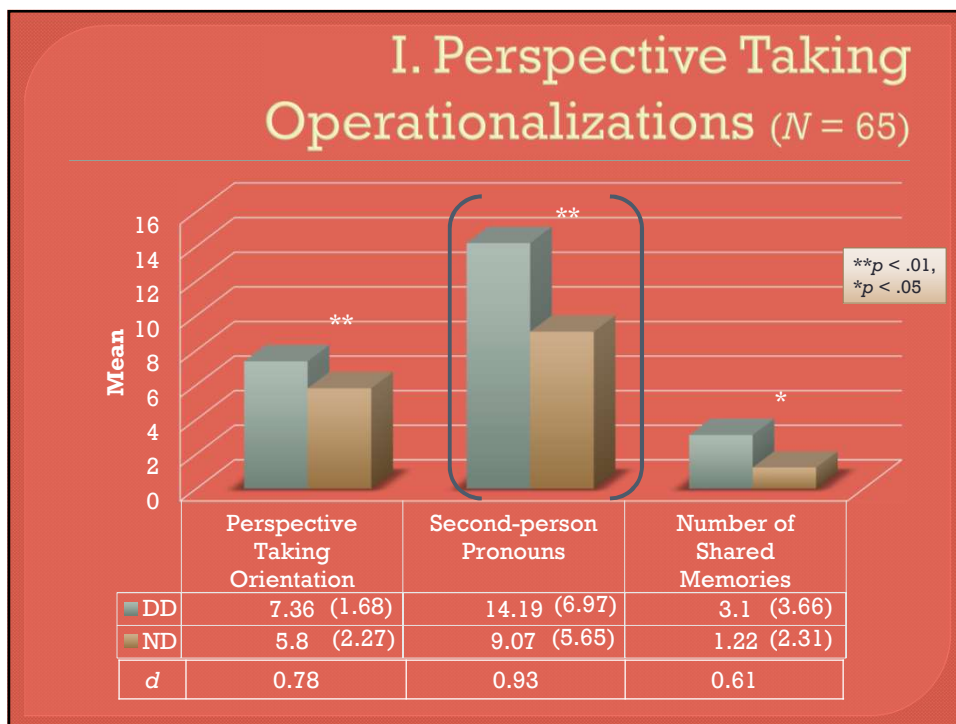
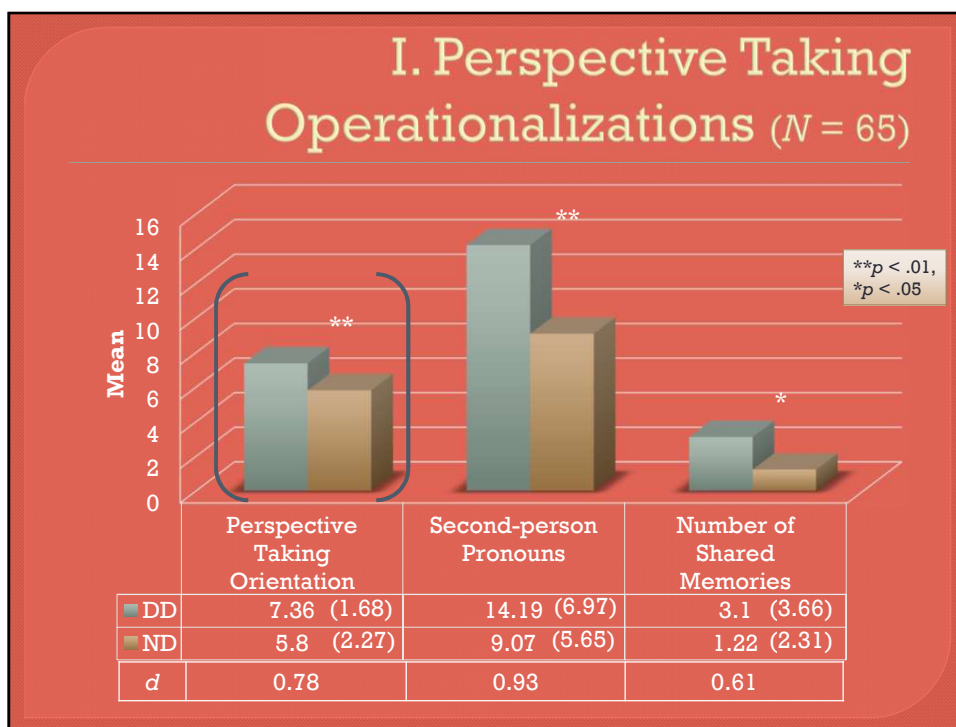
(adapted after Miron et al., 2012; 2015)

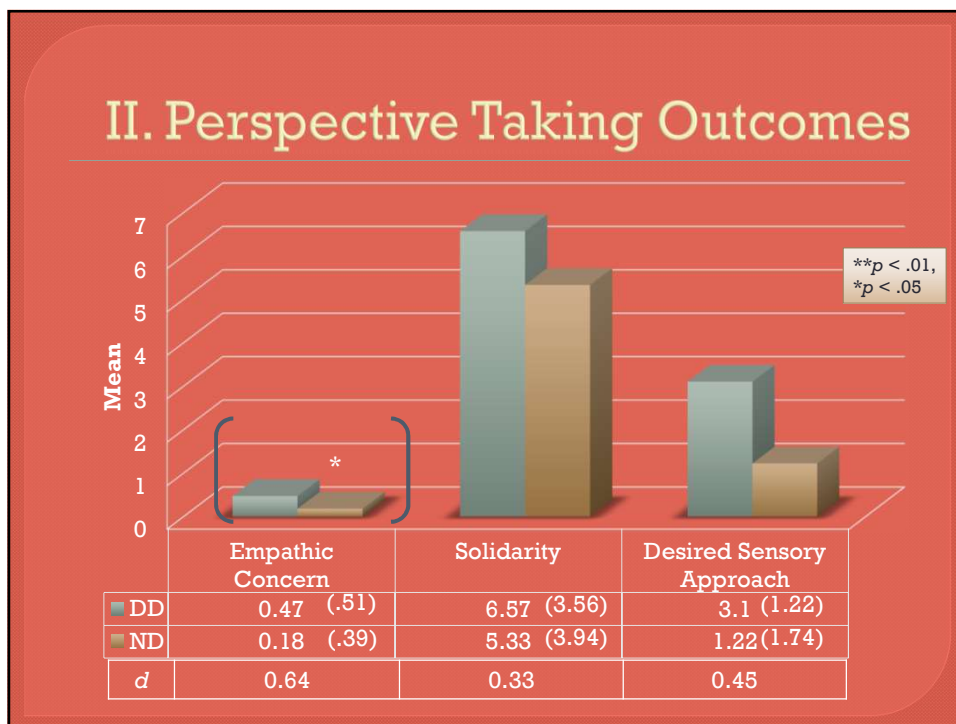
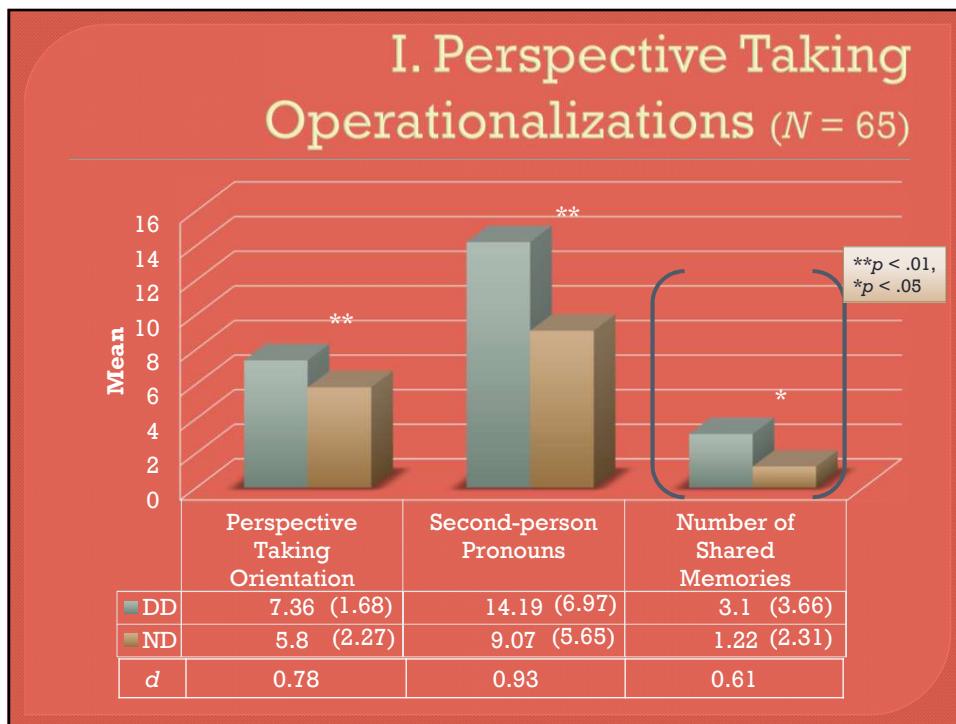


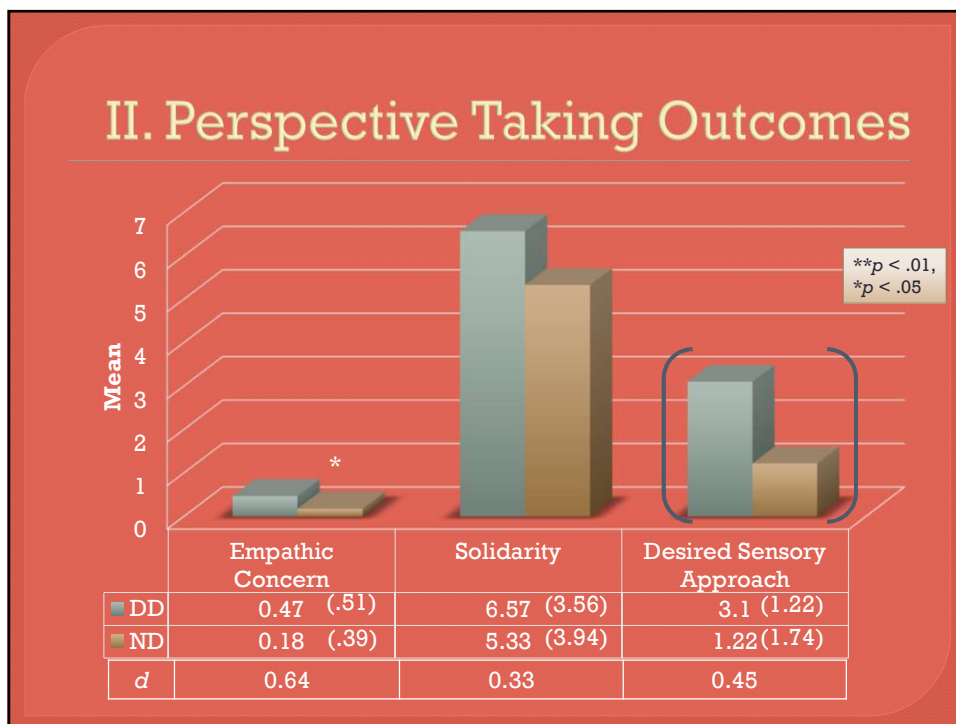
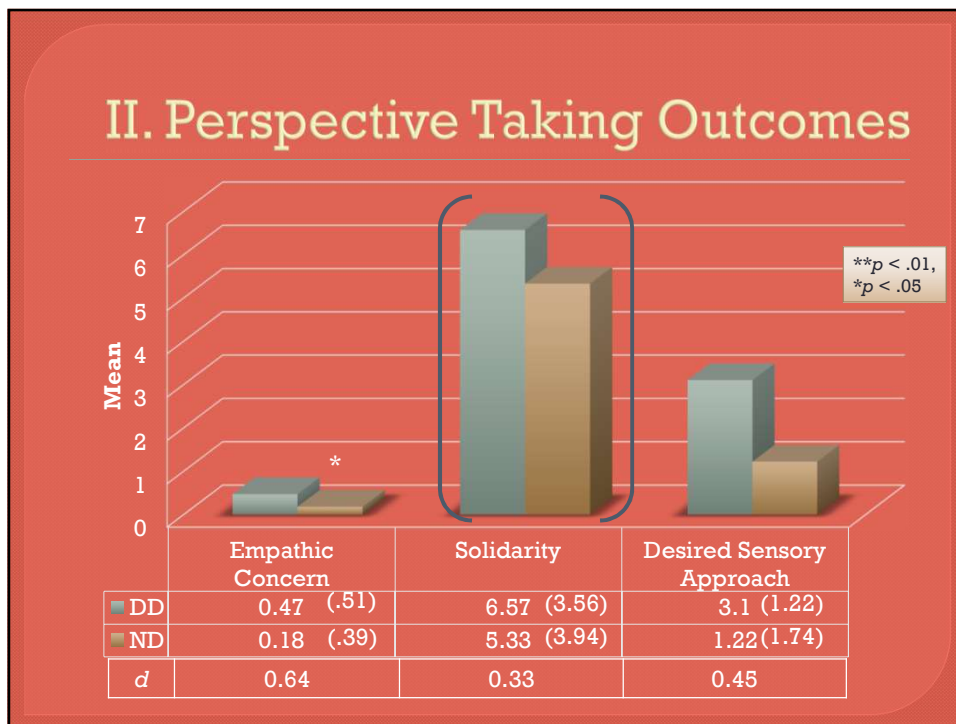
## Results and Discussion

### Testing for Group Differences

- I. Perspective Taking Operationalizations
  - Perspective Taking Orientation
  - Second Person Pronouns
  - Number of Shared Memories
- II. Perspective Taking Outcomes
  - Empathic Concern
  - Solidarity
  - Desired Sensory Approach
- Outliers ( $N = 1$ ) excluded from analyses







## Summary of Findings

- Young adults of grandparents with dementia engage in more perspective taking and showed more empathic concern in their letters to their grandparent
  - Consistent with Miron, Thompson, McFadden, and Ebert (2017)

## Methodological Strengths & Future Directions

- Novel in use and validation of multi-measurement of perspective taking through a letter-writing task
- Distinct operationalizations of perspective taking that can be used in future research
- Replicate perspective taking differences and improve measurement of solidarity and desired sensory approach

## Implications

- Relational interventions among close others should capitalize on higher orientation toward taking the perspective of the family member with dementia



Questions?