

The Intergenerational Family Relationships of Grandparents and GLBQ Grandchildren

by

Kristin S. Scherrer

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Ruth E. Dunkle, Co-Chair
Professor Karin A. Martin, Co-Chair
Professor Berit Ingersoll-Dayton
Associate Professor Renee Anspach
Assistant Professor Michael R. Woodford

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In memory of my grandmothers
Lila Scherrer and Grace Voth

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Table of Contents

Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
List of Tables.....	ix
Abstract.....	x
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer Grandchildren’s Disclosure Process with Grandparents.....	20
Chapter Three: “That’s fine that and dandy that you’re gay, but don’t plaster it all over Facebook ”: Grandparents respond to learning that a grandchild is Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Queer.....	70
Chapter Four: “If anything, you love them more. They need you more”: How the discovery of a grandchild’s GLBQ sexuality shapes grandparent-grandchild relationships	119
Chapter Five: Social Work Implications.....	181
Chapter Six: Conclusions.....	192
Appendix: Data Collection Materials.....	214

List of Tables

Table 2.1 Grandchildren’s Demographics.....	60
Table 3.1 Grandparents’ Demographics.....	111
Table 4.1 Relationship Matrix.....	141
Table 4.2 Recruitment of Sample.....	172
Table 4.3 Demographics.....	173
Table 4.4 Participant’s Class Status.....	174

Abstract

In this dissertation I examined how the discovery of a Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Queer (GLBQ) grandchild's sexual identity shapes the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. I draw from dyadic qualitative data from 60 in-depth interviews with 28 GLBQ grandchildren and their 32 grandparents from 25 different families. I present findings about grandchildren's experiences coming out, grandparents' responses to this discovery, and subsequent grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships in three distinct empirical chapters.

In the first empirical chapter (Chapter Two) I utilize data from 28 grandchildren to examine their disclosure experiences to contextualize motivations of disclosure and disclosure strategies of GLBQ grandchildren. I find that grandchildren's disclosures of their sexual orientation to grandparents rely closely on other family relationships, and further, that broader social structural factors shape family systems, perhaps particularly during crisis or disruptive moments. In the second empirical chapter (Chapter Three), I draw from data from 32 grandparents to analyze how they respond to this discovery. Utilizing intergenerational ambivalence perspective, I find that grandparents' understandings of GLBQ sexualities are shaped by their social and historical experiences with homosexuality. These generationally-specific understandings of sexuality as private and personal enable surprisingly supportive interpersonal responses toward

grandchildren. However, they do not necessarily extend to more public or political contexts.

In the third empirical chapter (Chapter Four), I conduct dyadic analyses using data from all 60 grandparents and grandchildren to examine how these relationships were shaped by a grandchild coming out. I find that their relationships are shaped by their relationship histories as well as their subsequent interactions, and these have implications for their intergenerational stake in one another. I then turn to how this research informs social work practice (Chapter Five), particularly direct practice strategies with GLBQ individuals and their families. I conclude (Chapter Six) by summarizing and synthesizing the main findings of this research, outlining its limitations, and providing recommendations for future scholarship in the areas of sexualities, gerontology, and families.

Chapter One

Introduction

This cultural divide [between those who normalize GLBQ identities and those who do not] is not between gays and straights or even among the various stripes of gay people. Neither is it between lesbian and gay men, blacks and whites, rich and poor, or urban and rural. Rather, ...it is between generations. (Savin-Williams, 2005, p. 12-13)

As Ritch Savin-Williams indicates here, age and generation are often thought of as constituting critical divisions between those who understand gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer (GLBQ¹) identities as normative and those who do not. In my own professional experiences working with GLBTQ individuals, age and generational context were often factors that came up in our conversations. One particularly poignant example of this emerged when I was co-facilitating a coming-out group several years ago for individuals seeking support for their emergent gender or sexual identities, particularly as it shaped their relationships with others. One of the participants was struggling with wanting to tell her grandmother, with whom she was very close, about her sexual orientation and her same-sex partner. This elicited quite a strong reaction from the rest of the group, myself included, as our own stereotypes about older adults' likely responses surfaced. When she returned a few weeks later and told us that she had spoken with her grandmother, we were surprised to learn that her grandmother was very supportive. The importance of

¹ In this dissertation, I examine gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer identities to inclusively reflect the wide range of language that contemporary emerging adults are using to describe their sexual identities (Savin-Williams, 2005). This acronym commonly includes transgender identities, and while understandings of GLBQ sexualities are often intertwined with gender identity and expression, for the sake of parsimony, I separate them and hereafter use "GLBQ" only in this dissertation to focus on how families understand sexual orientation.

grandparents in GLBQ individuals' lives and the often unexpected responses of grandparents --like the grandmother in this story--motivated me to pursue this research. In this dissertation, I investigate: *How does the discovery of a grandchild's GLBQ sexual identity shape the intergenerational relationships of grandparents and their grandchild?* In this introduction I describe some of the empirical and theoretical scholarship that has guided this project, alongside a discussion of the significance of this research. I then outline the layout of the dissertation.

Contemporary U.S. Families

For many, families are a foundational and life-long source of economic, educational, social, and emotional support. Family members often provide for each other in times of need and positive family relationships are important for one's overall sense of health and happiness (Acock & Demo, 1994; House, Umberson, & Landis, 1988). But just as families routinely perform many of these functions, just as importantly, family forms are also extremely varied (Allen, 2000; Stacey, 1991). While the term "family" often conjures up nostalgic images of a "nuclear household unit composed of a male breadwinner, his full-time homemaker wife, and their dependant children" (Stacey, 1991, p. 7), contemporary families are mercurial and multifarious. The shifting roles of older generations in families illustrates this, as older family members are now living longer (Bengtson, 2001) and, thus, able to play critical roles in their grandchildren's lives often into the latter's adulthood (Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008; Kemp, 2004). Sexual orientation is another component of family life that is still largely absent from family scholarship (Allen & Demo, 1995), as heternormative assumptions have rendered queer sexualities

largely invisible in family scholarship. If social research is to accurately reflect extant family configurations, it *must* attend to the diversity present in contemporary families.

Coming Out in Families

One issue that has emerged for contemporary families is having a family member “come out”² as homosexual,³ gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer (GLBQ). Americans’ ideas about what homosexuality is, who GLBQ people are, and how (or, indeed, whether) various social and family-related policies should include individuals in same-sex relationships have shifted greatly over the past forty years as Americans are becoming generally more accepting of same-sex relationships and GLBQ individuals (Loftus, 2001; Yang 1997). Yet older adults are one demographic group that is consistently found to be more negative toward homosexuality than their socio-demographic counterparts (Herek, 1988, 2002; Herek & Capitano, 1995; Loftus, 2001; Yang, 1997). As such, older family members such as grandparents may be particularly likely to have negative ideas about homosexuality.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were a turning point for cultural understandings of gay and lesbian identities (Cohler, 2004; Seidman, 2002). Whereas, historically, gay and lesbian individuals have often been excluded from the families in which they were raised (i.e., by being kicked out or by choosing to leave) (Seidman, 2002; Weston, 1991), the

² “Coming out” refers to the process whereby a person discloses their sexual identity to others. As the phrase suggests, the process is often described in dichotomous terms, suggesting that a person is either “in” or “out” of the “closet” usually regarding their sexual identity. For a more complete discussion of the phrase, see Seidman (2002).

³ In this dissertation, I use the term homosexual somewhat interchangeably with the acronym GLBQ as a term to describe individuals who form relationships with individuals of the same-sex. Though the term is often acknowledged to be problematic because of its associations with the pathologization of same-sex desires and relationships, I utilize it here a term that accurately reflects the historical context and terminology of the older adults discussed in this study—many of whom have lived significant periods of their lives in a social context where homosexual was the appropriate term for individuals with same-sex desires or relationships.

contemporary moment is marked by a *disclosure imperative*, whereby GLBQ individuals, particularly emerging adults, are generally open about their sexual orientations and increasingly likely to demand inclusion in their families of origin (LaSala, 2010; Savin-Williams, 2001; 2005; Seidman, 2002). Emerging adulthood is a useful concept for this project, as it describes a historically recent developmental category for 18-25 year olds in contemporary U.S. society (Arnett, 2000). This shift from understanding same-sex desires and behaviors as negative and stigmatized, to imagining gay and lesbian individuals as deserving of the same rights and privileges as their heterosexual counterparts has considerable implications for intergenerational family relationships.

The combination of a disclosure imperative and family members' (potentially) negative understandings about homosexuality can make coming out to family members a tumultuous experience. Many scholars describe the "crisis" experience that is brought about following sexual identity disclosure: "nearly all families go through some type of conflict or crisis when it becomes known that a child is GLB" (Morrow, 2000, p. 95); "disclosure of a sexual identity to parents often promotes a family crisis" (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003, p. 429); and, "the revelation [of identity] crisis is clearly the most severe and direct effect on the family of having a homosexual member" (Strommen, 1990, p. 23). Even coming out experiences that are not characterized by crisis are described as problematic in other ways, as post-coming out family relationships are characterized as, "cordial and somewhat formal, lacking the openness, trust, and emotional closeness that we look for in families" (Seidman, 2002, p. 96), "difficult and stressful" (Rostosky et al., 2004, p. 43), or emotionally distant (Herdt & Koff, 2000; LaSala, 2010). Further, research indicates that a family's response when GLBQ

individuals come out has health and mental health implications for GLBQ individuals (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009; Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010), with more negative family reactions associated with negative health outcomes, such as depression, illegal drug use, and unprotected sexual behaviors.

Thus, despite dramatic changes in relationships between families and GLBQ individuals, the decision to disclose is still a difficult one. For many, the anticipation of possible negative reactions, loss of love and support, or fear of violence makes the decision to disclose one's sexual orientation emotionally fraught. As such, understanding GLBQ individuals' disclosure processes—their decisions regarding who to tell, how to tell them, and why to tell them—are often carefully thought out, and can help to illuminate broader family dynamics as well as social constructions of concepts such as family, sexuality, or age.

Grandparents as Potential Allies

Research on coming out to families is largely myopic in its focus on parents' responses to a GLBQ child. This research often focuses on GLBQ individuals who are young or emerging adults (Arnett, 2000), as it is this demographic group which most exemplifies the cultural shift in GLBQ individuals' relationships with their families of origin. Further, GLBQ individuals are coming out earlier in life, often in their early teens, when they are developmentally still deeply embedded in families (Savin-Williams, 2001; Seidman, 2002). While the decision to disclose to parents is critical for many GLBQ children, extant research largely overlooks relationships with non-parental family members. Other extended family members have been found to be likely to know about the sexual orientation of their GLBQ family member (Boxer, Cook & Herdt, 1991; Mays

et al., 1998). Indeed, they may even be the first person(s) to whom some gay or lesbian individuals disclose their identity (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993), and these family members often have more positive responses than do parents (Beals & Peplau, 2006). Yet, existing empirical data tells us little about gay or lesbian individuals' disclosure decisions vis-à-vis non-parental family members or the subsequent effects for those extended familial relationships.

Grandparents are increasingly relevant to contemporary family life given recent demographic shifts as older adults live longer, healthier lives and, thus, are able to remain active family members for much longer (Bengtson, 2001; Uhlenberg & Kirby, 1998). As such, adult grandchildren are increasingly likely to have at least one living grandparent (Uhlenberg & Kirby, 1998) with whom they interact frequently (Pecchioni & Croghan, 2002; Silverstein & Long, 1998), supporting the notion that grandparents are increasingly important family members for emerging adults. In addition to these demographic shifts that motivate grandparents' increasing relevance in contemporary families, grandparents also play important protective roles within family systems, often monitoring for stressful or challenging events, ready to step in with financial, emotional or instrumental resources (Kemp, 2004; Kornhaber & Woodward, 1985; Roberto, Allen & Blieszner, 2001; Troll, 1983). Beyond providing support during particularly stressful moments, research indicates that grandparents also generally provide a great deal of financial, emotional and instrumental support for adult grandchildren (Kemp, 2004; Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008; Silverstein & Marenco, 2001).

Research on GLBQ family relationships has identified grandparents as a potentially underutilized resource when young adults come out, and identified the need

for more research in this area (Herdt & Koff, 2000; Mallon, 1999; Savin-Williams, 2001; Scherrer, 2010; Strommen, 1989).

Members of the family of origin who have not been studied and whose reactions are of interest are grandparents. Do homosexuals disclose to grandparents? Are grandparents told when the discovery of a homosexual family member is made?... Grandparent reactions, as well as considerations of disclosure to grandparents by homosexual family members, is a topic that is in need of research. (Strommen, 1989, p. 21)

As Strommen notes here, scholars have long speculated that grandparents are likely important family members for GLBQ individuals, and wondered about grandparents' responses. Given that grandchildren are increasingly likely to come out at young ages, grandparents are likely to play an increasingly prominent role in GLBQ individuals' lives. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, no study has explicitly explored grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships.

Theoretical Contributions

Sociological scholarship on sexualities has largely overlooked the potentially important roles that older adults play in families, and similarly, gerontological research has only more recently attended to how sexual orientation shapes the health, well-being and social relationships of older adults. This gap constitutes fertile ground for cultivating more sophisticated understandings of how age, generational context, sexual orientation, and family relationships reproduce, mediate, and ameliorate extant social inequalities. In this research I utilize theoretical frameworks from several disciplinary fields including sociology, developmental psychology, family studies, and gerontology. In doing so, I aim not only to extend knowledge about these theories individually, but to bridge theoretical insights from different disciplinary fields and fill important empirical gaps in these

substantive areas. Here I briefly describe the main theoretical perspectives I utilize in this dissertation, specifying how this dissertation engages with and extends these frameworks.

In this project I utilize empirical data with grandparents and GLBQ grandchildren to examine how the disclosure experiences of GLBQ grandchildren illuminates how grandparent-grandchild relationships are situated vis-à-vis other family relationships, how family members influence each other during disruptive or crisis moments, and how coming out may be best understood as an issue for the whole family. Family systems theories highlight the ways in which individuals (or dyads) are complexly embedded in a broader family context, and argue that individuals (or dyadic relationships) are best understood within this context (Bowen, 1978; Cox & Paley, 1997; 2003). Further, although family systems theory is necessarily engaged with how social structures shape family relationships, in this dissertation I engage more directly with these sociological elements, illuminating how families, and family relationships, are embedded in a broader social and cultural context. I analyze how social context shapes family members' interactions with, and experiences of, each other particularly during disruptive moments, such as having a family member come out, as families draw on broader cultural markers and signals to interpret what (if anything) may change in their family relationships. Cultural markers do not necessarily provide clear answers for how to make sense of these changes, potentially resulting in feelings of ambivalence that are managed in a family context.

Sexuality scholarship that has examined older adults' understandings of sexual orientation has found that older adults have more negative conceptions about homosexuality. These conclusions leave little theoretical space for examining how these

understandings of sexuality may be more nuanced, how change may happen, or how structural factors may contextualize these findings. Intergenerational ambivalence is a theoretical perspective rooted in gerontology and family scholarship, that illuminates how ambivalence, or simultaneously-held contradictory feelings or beliefs, emerge in intergenerational relationships (Luescher & Pillemer, 1998; Connidis & McMullin, 2002a). Although ambivalence is often employed in psychological frameworks, sociologists approach the concept by examining how social structures contribute to individuals' expectations of themselves and one another (Connidis & McMullin, 2002a). An intergenerational ambivalence perspective provides a unique lens for analyzing how social structural factors shape older adults' views about social issues, such as homosexuality, how these attitudes may be more nuanced than previously supposed, or how these views may change over time.

Perhaps partially because research indicates that older adults' have more negative views about homosexuality, sexuality scholarship has been silent about grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships. Yet gerontological research suggests that grandparents are often deeply invested in grandchildren and family cohesion. Intergenerational stake perspective, a theory for understanding later-life family relationships, posits that an individual's life is linked to social others and shaped by his/her social, historical context (Elder, 1998). Thus "intergenerational stake" refers to one's level of investment in relationships between generations, something which is strongly affected by the degree of attitudinal differences on social issues (Bengtson, Giarrusso, Mabry & Silverstein, 2002; Crosnoe & Elder, 2004), where older generations underestimate differences of opinion and see themselves as more similar to younger generations, where younger generations

are more centrally concerned with establishing their autonomy and differentiating themselves from older family members (Harwood, 2001). In this dissertation I engage with an intergenerational stake perspective to analyze how grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships illuminate the process whereby these stakes are created in intergenerational relationships, an under-theorized component of intergenerational stake perspective. Further, these data also enable an analysis of the potential role that conflicts or disruptive moments, such as having a family member come out, may play in shaping family members' intergenerational stakes in one another.

Methodology

I describe my methodology and sample briefly here, although further details are embedded in Chapters Two, Three and Four of this dissertation. I conducted 60 in-depth, semi-structured, qualitative interviews with grandparents and their GLBQ grandchild(ren) from the same families. I elected a qualitative, interpretive approach to examine this unexplored and complex topic. This approach enables an interrogation of the meanings that grandparents and GLBQ grandchildren have of their relationships and interactions (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; LaSala, 2007; NSF, 2003), and operate under the assumption that, “the social world is constantly being constructed through group interactions, and thus, social reality can be understood via the perspectives of social actors enmeshed in meaning-making activities” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 6). Thus, the meanings that participants have of their relationships with one another are central to this analysis.

I utilized multiple sampling strategies to recruit this hard to reach minority population (Martin & Knox, 2000; Meezan & Martin, 2009) seeking GLBQ individuals

and their grandparents who knew about their sexual orientation. I recruited participants by directly contacting GLBQ grandchildren and the grandparents of GLBQ individuals. I also indirectly recruited participants through the parents of GLBQ children. I recruited participants from the Midwestern U.S. using flyers, emails, Internet postings, and in-person announcements with organizations that work with these populations. The final sample includes 28 grandchildren and 32 grandparents from 25 different families. Other demographic characteristics of the final sample are described in Chapters Two, Three and Four.

Data collection occurred at locations convenient to participants, often in their home. Most were conducted individually and in person and they ranged in length from 50 minutes to 4 hours, averaging 105 minutes. Participants were compensated twenty dollars for their time and interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Participants provided demographic information, responded to a brief questionnaire on relationship quality, and responded to semi-structured interview questions as described in the Appendix.

Data were entered into NVIVO software for data management and analysis. Demographic data were tallied to create a description of the sample's demographic background in regards to race, gender, class, religion, and other relevant characteristics. Data were analyzed utilizing open and focused coding methods (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Great efforts were taken to protect participants' anonymity. Quotes were edited for readability and, unless otherwise noted, are representative of the data.

Outline of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of three empirical chapters, each of which addresses a sub-question of my broader research question regarding how the discovery of a grandchild's GLBQ sexual identity shape the intergenerational relationships of grandparents and their grandchild.

In Chapter Two, I investigate how GLBQ grandchildren manage the disclosure of their sexual orientation to their grandparents. Utilizing a family systems approach, I analyze how grandchildren experience the disclosure of their sexual orientation to grandparents. The chapter draws on in-depth, qualitative interviews with 28 GLBQ grandchildren whose grandparents know about their sexual orientation. The decision of grandchildren to disclose their sexual orientation to grandparents is motivated by a variety of factors, including emotional closeness, grandparent's religious and political beliefs, and grandparent's relationships with other GLBQ individuals—but, importantly, all these factors are situated in a broader family context. Other family members and family functions are central to the disclosure and grandparents' discovery of their grandchild's sexual orientation is deeply embedded in family context. A close examination of grandchildren's experiences of disclosure to grandparents reveals, first, the importance of grandparents when GLBQ grandchildren come out, and second, how coming out may be usefully conceptualized as a whole family experience.

In Chapter Three, I approach the issue from the opposite perspective by analyzing how grandparents respond to the discovery that a grandchild is gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer (GLBQ). Here, I draw on in-depth, qualitative interviews with 32 grandparents who know about their GLBQ grandchild's sexual orientation. Utilizing intergenerational

ambivalence theory, I find that grandparents' understandings of GLBQ sexualities are shaped by their social and historical experiences with homosexuality. These generationally-specific understandings of sexuality as private and personal enable surprisingly supportive interpersonal responses toward grandchildren. However, these supportive responses do not necessarily extend to more public or political contexts.

In Chapter Four, I employ dyadic data from 32 grandparents and 28 GLBQ grandchildren in order to explore how grandparent-grandchild relationships are shaped by the grandparent's discovery of a grandchild's GLBQ sexuality. An intergenerational stake perspective guides this analysis as I find that grandparent-grandchild relationships were generally unaffected, or improved, after grandchildren came out. I then examine how their previous relationship quality and their interactions after coming out shaped their mutual expectations of one another, and their stake in their relationship. Although all grandparent-grandchild dyads remained invested in each other, some relationships experienced increasingly close relationships that were facilitated by the grandchild coming out.

Each of the above chapters concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings for future research, but these implications are most fully explored in Chapter Five, when I turn specifically to how the findings from this research inform social work practice, particularly interventions with GLBQ individuals and their families. Then, in the conclusion, Chapter Six, I summarize and synthesize the main findings of the research, review its limitations, and make recommendations for future scholarship in the areas of sexualities, gerontology, and families.

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Chapter Two

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer Grandchildren's Disclosure Process with Grandparents

INTRODUCTION

Younger gays who had come out to their parents sometimes hesitated to disclose their sexual identity to grandparents, despite the feelings of affection and closeness that often characterize those relationships. (Weston, 1991, p. 54)

Disclosing one's sexual orientation to others is often an emotionally fraught decision, although as Weston indicates here, some disclosure decisions may be particularly difficult. Disclosing to grandparents is one such decision, as research indicates that gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer (GLBQ) grandchildren, and their parents, are often conflicted about *if* and *how* to come out to grandparents (Herdt & Koff, 2000; Savin-Williams & Esterberg, 2000; Weston, 1991). While there are many reasons why this disclosure is difficult, one of these factors has to do with how grandparents (and grandparent-grandchild relationships) are situated in a broader family system. As such, disclosure of one's sexual orientation may illuminate family dynamics as information is managed across various family members, alliances are created, and patterns of interaction shift.

Although scholars have long theorized about grandparents' role in the coming out process (Mallon, 1999; Savin-Williams, 2001; Strommen, 1989), to the best of my knowledge there has not yet been empirical research that has examined grandchildren's experiences disclosing their sexual orientation to grandparents. In this study, I examine

grandchildren's experiences with coming out to their grandparents, utilizing in-depth interviews with 28 GLBQ grandchildren who are out to their grandparents. Guided by family systems theory, I find that grandchildren's motivations to disclose their sexual orientation generally mirrors findings about disclosure motivations to other family members (e.g., having a close relationship, having less traditional/conservative values), although they also reveal that other family members and the family system more generally are woven into these decisions. Further, grandchildren's intentional and unintentional disclosure strategies are deeply embedded in a family context, as disclosure is often mediated by, or happens alongside, other family members. Taken together, these data illuminate how understanding coming out to grandparents has implications beyond the dyad.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This chapter utilizes a family systems theoretical lens to examine how GLBQ grandchild-grandparent relationships are embedded in a complex family structure. Family systems approaches illuminate how an individual (or dyadic family relationship) may be best understood as situated in a complex web of family dynamics, where "individual family members are necessarily interdependent, exerting a continuous and reciprocal influence on one another" (Cox & Paley, 1997, p. 246). Thus family systems theoretical approaches posit that families have their own boundaries, rules and roles that guide social interactions and provide predictability and balance in these relationships (Baptist & Allen, 2008; Bowen, 1978; Cox & Paley, 1997, 2003; Heatherington & Lavner, 2008; Silverstein, Giarrusso & Bengtson, 2003). These patterns of interaction are constructed

and reproduced in social encounters, and respond dynamically to change—as when something happens to one member of a family, for example, and the whole family adapts to regain equilibrium. Although family systems theory is most frequently employed in developmental psychology or family therapy (Bowen, 1978; Cox & Paley, 1997, 2003; Heatherington & Lavner, 2008), a more sociological analysis, like this one, draws attention to how family systems are shaped by the broader social context (Baptist & Allen, 2008; Silverstein, Giarrusso & Bengtson, 2003).

There are several foundational concepts of family systems theory relevant to this analysis. One of these is that families are composed of many *subsystems* (e.g., parents, siblings, grandparent-parent), which are embedded in other larger social systems (e.g., community, religious community, the state). Interactions occur within and between each of these systems as changing environments may trigger change in family relationships (Cox & Paley, 1997). Family *boundaries* allow for differentiation between these subsystems, as patterned interactions are guided by social expectations of each other based on family roles (Minuchin, 1985). More therapeutically-oriented family systems approaches emphasize that a family's health is indicated by the degree to which an individual can *differentiate* or separate one's own functioning from other family members, or fails to do so and is, thus, *enmeshed* or unable to separate one's own thoughts and feelings from those of other family members (Bowen, 1978). Within families, *coalitions* may occur as two members may align together against another member, creating relationship *triangles* (Bowen, 1978; Cox & Paley, 1997).

The issue of how family systems adapt to change is critical when GLBQ individuals come out in families, as this disclosure often prompts changes in family

dynamics. GLBQ individuals, for example, may withdraw or become emotionally distant from their family members in anticipation of possible negative responses (Seidman, 2002); or preexisting coalitions and alliances between family members may shift as some respond positively while others do not (Herdt & Koff, 2000), or as GLBQ individuals and their family members manage the flow of information to other family members (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993). “The coming out process [is] a ‘whole’ family experience” (Baptist & Allen, 2008, p. 92). Thus, the discovery of a family member’s GLBQ sexuality shapes family dynamics such as communication patterns, family cohesion, or triangulation among family members, as well as social factors like relationships with community organizations, or political activism.

Further, although individuals and dyadic relationships have received some attention in research on coming out in families, “The change in the whole family system is another essential feature that has not received significant attention in the literature” (Baptist & Allen, 2008, p. 94). In this chapter, I respond to calls to employ a family systems approach to better understand GLBQ family relationships (Baptist & Allen, 2008; Savin-Williams, 1998), as well as to better understand grandparent-grandchild relationships (Cox & Paley, 1997; Minuchin, 1985; Silverstein, Giarrusso & Bengtson, 2003).

Grandparenting in the Family System

Contemporary U.S. families are increasingly connected across generations as older adults live longer, healthier lives (Bengtson, 2001). As a result, grandchildren have been able to maintain connections with their grandparents well into adulthood (Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008; Silverstein & Marenco, 2001; Uhlenberg & Kirby, 1998). Adult

grandchildren have varied relationships with their grandparents (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1992; Kemp, 2004; 2005) that are shaped by many factors, such as gender (Mills, 1999; Hodgson, 1992; Silverstein & Marengo, 2001), race (Kivett, 1993; Silverstein & Ruiz, 2006) and grandparenting styles (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1992). Further, grandparents are often important sources of support for their adult grandchildren, providing support such as mentorship or advice, financial gifts, or emotional support (Kemp, 2004; Silverstein & Marengo, 2001).

In addition to grandparents' one-on-one support to adult grandchildren, grandparents also often provide valuable safety nets for their families more generally. For instance, grandparents often silently monitor the well-being of the family like a "watchdog" (Troll, 1983) or a "family national guard" (Hagestad, 1985), ready to intervene and provide support as needed. In addition, grandparents promote cohesion in families as they are deeply invested in maintaining relationships with their kin (Carstensen, 1991; 1992). Indeed, the protective role that grandparents play when crises emerge in families are well-documented (Kennedy, 1990; Tomlin, 1998; Troll, 1983), and having a family member come out has been characterized as just such a family "crisis" (Morrow, 2000; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003; Strommen, 1989). Although grandparents are largely absent from literature on coming out in families, anecdotal evidence suggests that GLBQ individuals often have ambivalent feelings about coming out to grandparents; grandchildren both fear the negative responses, yet yearn for open, honest relationships with their grandparents (Scherrer, 2010; Weston, 1991).

Disclosure in Families

GLBQ individuals are coming out in a social moment characterized by a “disclosure imperative,” in which disclosing ones’ sexual orientation to friends and family, or coming out, is expected of the healthy, well-adjusted GLBQ individual (McLean, 2007; Seidman, 2002). As a result, GLBQ individuals are increasingly likely to disclose their sexual orientations to parents and other family members (Seidman, 2002; Savin-Williams, 2001; 2005). While coming out in families can have devastating consequences for GLBQ individuals, such as experiences of physical violence or negative health and mental health outcomes (D’Augelli, Pilkington & Hershberger, 2002; Ryan, Huebner, Diaz & Sanchez, 2009; Wright & Perry, 2006), it can also be positive, as in cases when disclosure enables GLBQ individuals to integrate the multiple dimensions of their lives and find social support (Hunter, 2007; Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010). As such, GLBQ individuals are often strategic in their disclosure to family members regarding who in the family they tell or how the disclosure happens.

Examining motivations for and strategies of disclosure is conceptually useful for understanding GLBQ individuals’ experiences with their families of origin. Disclosure is often a pivotal moment, as it marks a reciprocal change in understandings of each other and the relationship (Ben-Ari, 1995; Martin, Hutson, Kazyak, & Scherrer, 2010), and has been theorized as a moment that often challenges notions of families as characterized by unconditional love and acceptance (Weston, 1991). Further, understanding the disclosure process also illuminates family dynamics and patterns of interaction, for instance as parents may mediate disclosure in grandparent-grandchild relationships. More psychologically, disclosure can be interpreted as a moment of differentiation as GLBQ

individuals assert their own identities, desires and relationships, and establish their own definitions of self and relationships independent of their family of origin. An examination of the disclosure process also reveals broader cultural constructions of GLBQ sexualities and of generational attitudes within families; grandchildren, for example, may articulate ageist stereotypes of older adults as too physically or emotionally frail to handle the news that a grandchild is GLBQ (Lopata & Lopata, 2003).

Previous research has focused primarily on disclosure of sexual orientation to parents and found that disclosure is associated with socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, race, age) (Dubé & Savin-Williams, 1999; Grov, Bimbi, Nanin, & Parsons, 2006; Mays, Chatters, Cochran, & Mackness, 1998; Rossi, 2010; Savin-Williams, 2001), family's political/religious views (Aveline, 2006; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993), previous relationship quality (Boxer et al., 1991; Waldner & Magruder, 1999), and exposure to other GLBQ individuals (BenAri, 1995; Schope, 2002). The research indicates that parents often initially experience feelings of crisis, as they struggle to reconcile their knowledge about their child with (negative) stereotypes about GLBQ individuals (Fields, 2001; Martin, Hutson, Kazyak, & Scherrer, 2010).

Parents often feel responsible for socially or biologically “causing” their child's sexual orientation, feel ashamed to tell others, and experience grief as they imagine how their child's life and their own will now be different (e.g., no longer having grandchildren, fear of AIDS) (Ben-Ari, 1995; LaSala, 2010; Savin-Williams & Dubé, 1998), although relationships often improve over time (Baptist & Allen, 2008; Ben-Ari, 1995; Herdt & Koff, 2000). Further, disclosure happens in a variety of ways. GLBQ individuals may purposefully disclose their sexual orientation face-to-face, write letters,

or ask other family members to do the disclosure; in other cases, disclosure is not intentional, as one's sexual orientation is discovered or disclosed without one's consent (Beals and Peplau, 2006; BenAri, 1995; Rossi, 2010).

Although scholars have made advances in knowledge about disclosure of sexual orientation to parents, little is known about GLBQ individuals' motivations and disclosure decisions when it comes to non-parental family members, leaving a wide gap for understanding GLBQ individuals' disclosure experiences with grandparents. In this chapter I address this gap, asking: *How do GLBQ grandchildren approach the disclosure of their sexual orientation to their grandparents?* And more specifically, *what factors motivate disclosure, and how does disclosure happen?*

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this study, I utilize in-depth, semi-structured, qualitative interviews with 28 GLBQ grandchildren who are out to their grandparents. To investigate this previously unexplored, complex topic, I utilize an interpretive approach, which assumes, "that the social world is constantly being constructed through group interactions, and thus, social reality can be understood via the perspectives of social actors enmeshed in meaning-making activities" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 6). As such, the meanings that GLBQ grandchildren have of their relationships and their social interactions are privileged in this analysis. The inclusion criteria for participation in this study was that the grandchild: 1) be out as GLBQ, 2) be over the age of 18 (or 16 with parental permission), 3) have a grandparent who definitely knows about their sexual orientation, although the grandchild

need not have told the grandparent(s) directly,⁴ and 4) have a grandparent who was also willing to participate in an interview.⁵

Recruitment

Given the well-documented challenges of recruiting hidden populations such as GLBTQ individuals and their family members (Martin & Knox, 2000; Meezan & Martin, 2009), I utilized multiple strategies. I recruited from multiple locations in the Midwestern U.S. to identify GLBQ grandchildren and the grandparents of GLBQ individuals, as well as more indirectly through the parents of GLBQ persons. Participants were recruited using a variety of strategies that included posting flyers at locations such as senior centers and GLBTQ service organizations, sending e-mails and mailings to members of social organizations that work with each of these target groups.

I also presented information about the study at a variety of gatherings, after soliciting permission from group leaders, including PFLAG meetings, GLBTQ youth group meetings, senior centers, and college classrooms. These in-person presentations provided a means to identify potential participants, as well as to employ social network sampling strategies (Patton, 1990; Pfeffer, 2010) as I asked participants if they knew of others who met the inclusion criteria. In-person presentations were also ideal for promoting the Facebook website for this research project. The Facebook website provided a simple mechanism for those interested in the project to inform others (who

⁴ Indeed, as findings indicate, grandparents who know about their grandchild's sexual orientation find out in many ways—whether from the grandchild's parents or other family members, through a direct disclosure from the grandchild, or from the introduction of a same-sex partner.

⁵ Participants are part of a broader study that examines how grandparent-grandchild relationships are shaped by the discovery of a grandchild's sexual orientation. That study draws upon interviews with 60 participants from 25 families, including 28 grandchildren and 32 grandparents. In this chapter, I focus on data from the 28 grandchildren only, although additional details about the data are described in Chapters Three and Four.

were potentially eligible for participation). This website had more than 130 “fans” whose own Facebook profiles linked members of their social networks to information about this research project. This proved to be an unexpectedly fruitful recruitment strategy.

Although I attempted to recruit through less GLBQ affirming organizations as well (e.g., Parent and Friends of Ex-Gays), this strategy was unsuccessful.

For a variety of reasons, I had the most success recruiting dyads through GLBQ grandchildren, rather than through parents of GLBQ individuals or grandparents themselves. It may be that my own social identities, as youthful in appearance, as a person in a same-sex relationship, or as someone who shared a “student” status, may have made GLBQ grandchildren particularly eager to participate in this research. Further my own personal and professional networks with GLBTQ individuals were invaluable for disseminating information about this research project to a wide range of potential participants. When asked why they decided to participate in this research, grandchildren frequently commented that they were motivated by their interest in contributing to a topic that they saw as important and under-represented. Recruiting participants for this project was a time-consuming, challenging task that happened over an eight-month period.

Sample

The sample includes 28 GLBQ grandchildren from 25 families; in some families, I spoke with more than one out GLBQ grandchild. Grandchildren’s ages ranged from 16-39, averaging 28 years old. As Table 2.1 indicates, 14 grandchildren identified as women and 14 identified as men. Regarding sexual orientation, grandchildren identified as gay (n

=10), lesbian (n = 8), bisexual (n = 3), queer (n = 4), pansexual⁶ (n =1), gay/bisexual (n =1) and bisexual/queer (n =1). Three participants also identified as transgender or gender queer. Although most grandchildren identified as white or Caucasian (n = 24), two identified as Hispanic or Latino and two identified as multiracial. Grandchildren's class statuses ranged somewhat, although most were middle class (n = 13), and grandchildren described a range of religious affiliations, although most described faith traditions that did not fit easily into standard categories (e.g., other pantheist, and Other: Unitarian Universalist).

Data Collection

In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted at locations convenient to the participants, often in their home or in a mutually acceptable public location. Interviews ranged in length from 50 minutes to 4 hours and averaged 92 minutes. Most interviews were conducted in person (n = 21), although seven were conducted over the phone due to geographic distance. Interviews were primarily conducted individually, except by participants' request. Before beginning the in-depth interview, participants provided demographic information and responded to a brief questionnaire on relationship quality.

In-depth interviews were semi-structured to allow for the emergence of unforeseen aspects of grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships, although some questions were asked in all interviews. Interviews included questions such as: "Did you want to come out to your grandparent? Why or why not?" and "How did your grandparent learn about your sexuality?" Occasionally grandchildren also spoke about

⁶ Although these interviews did not include in-depth discussion of what this identity meant to them, pansexual is generally understood to mean sexual attraction and desire for individuals of all gender identities.

their relationships with other grandparents who did not participate in this study, for instance grandparents who did not know about their sexual orientation or grandparents who knew about their sexual orientation but could not participate in this study for issues unrelated to the research content (e.g. they were deceased, they had dementia). These accounts are also included in this analysis as relevant. Interviews were digitally recorded with permission and participants were compensated twenty dollars for their participation.

Data Analysis

Demographic data were tallied to describe participant's race, gender, class, religion, and other relevant characteristics. Digital recordings were professionally transcribed and data were managed using NVIVO software. Data were analyzed utilizing open and focused coding methods (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995), where during the open coding process, any and all codes are identified in line-by-line coding of data, as codes are developed inductively (e.g., "grandparents as frail," "other queer family members"). In the focused coding phase, inductive themes were refined and synthesized (e.g., synthesizing "parents asking grandchild not to tell grandparents," and "parents disclosing to grandparents without consent" to form a broader theme of "parents mediating disclosure"). At the same time, theoretically relevant themes were deductively identified (e.g., parents as mediators, emotional closeness). Data were also analyzed for disconfirming evidence. These themes were used to craft "initial" and then "integrative memos" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) to push these empirical findings toward analytical insights. Integrative memos "elaborate ideas and begin to link or tie codes and bits of data together" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 162), and were latter revised to

form segments of this manuscript. Quotations were edited minimally for readability and, unless otherwise noted, are representative of the data.

Preserving participants' confidentiality and anonymity is a particular challenge with dyadic data (Allmark et al., 2009; Forbat & Henderson, 2003), as was the case for the broader study of which this research is a part. I have taken several steps to preserve participants' confidentiality, as both grandchildren and grandparent participants know of each other's participation. First, participants were given pseudonyms. Second, I changed identifying components of stories. For instance, if a grandchild mentioned a grandparent's profession as a teacher, I might have changed it to a similar type of profession, such as a nurse or social worker, in order to preserve the meaning the participant was trying to convey (e.g., that a grandparent was caring, giving, worked with youth), while making the description less identifiable. Third, I occasionally changed the gender of family members referred to in participants' stories, especially when a story was unique. Although this changed the content of participants' accounts slightly, I have taken every care to retain participants' own language and characteristics whenever possible, leaving the meanings of the stories intact, while privileging the goal of preserving participants' anonymity. Lastly, given how few transgender/gender queer participants and participants of color there were in this sample, I felt that including this in the text would reveal their identities to their family members. As a result, I have elected not to identify them as such, despite my own conflicted feelings about erasing these already marginalized identities from this analysis.

Limitations

There are several notable limitations of this study. First, I include here only

grandchildren who: 1) are “out” to grandparents, and 2) whose grandparents were also willing to participate in the project. Although this sample has many strengths, such as examining grandchildren’s experiences of being out to grandparents, it also has limitations. For instance, the perspectives of grandchildren whose grandparents do not *know* about their sexual orientation, and grandchildren who are out but did not feel comfortable asking their grandparents to participate or those whose grandparents who did not agree to participate are not included here. The first group (grandchildren who are not out to grandparents) limits our understandings of the motivations of grandchildren who are not out to grandparents, perhaps a group that is more likely to have more negative responses. The second group (grandchildren who are out to grandparents, but the grandparents were not asked or declined to participate) is also an important limitation, as this study is perhaps more likely to include the perspectives of GLBQ grandchildren with close relationships with grandparents, more accepting grandparents, and younger, healthier grandparents.

Second, this project was unsuccessful at recruiting a racially-diverse sample, a well-documented challenge in research on GLBTQ populations (DeBlaere, Brewster, Sarkees, & Moradi, 2010; Huang et al., 2010; Wheeler, 2003) making the transferability of findings to families of color unknown. Third, this project was more successful in recruiting female grandparents, similar to other related research projects (Kemp, 2005), thus limiting a more comprehensive analysis of gender differences between grandfathers and grandmothers. Despite these notable limitations, this study is the first to my knowledge to examine GLBQ grandchildren’s perceptions about disclosing their sexual orientation to grandparents.

FINDINGS

I present findings in two main sections to analyze grandchildren's experiences coming out to grandparents. First, I describe grandchildren's motivations for disclosure (or nondisclosure) to grandparents. I find that, similar to coming out to parents, grandchildren are motivated to disclose by factors they associate with the anticipated response—for example, the closeness of their relationship, the grandparent's religious or political views, and grandparent's relationships with GLBTQ persons. Importantly, however, the data reveals that, rather than being isolated, all of these factors are situated within a family system. I conclude this section by discussing the family context in more detail, as a motivation in and of itself for disclosure.

Second, I analyze grandchildren's disclosure strategies with grandparents, examining intentional and non-intentional disclosures, and finding that grandchildren are creative in their disclosure strategies. These varied disclosure strategies further illuminate how grandparent-grandchild relationships occur in a family system, for instance as parents mediate disclosure to grandparents. Taken together, these findings indicate that coming out to grandparents, like coming out to parents or other family members, may be usefully conceptualized as a family systems issue.

Motivations of Disclosure

Grandchildren in this study generally described a thoughtful process of evaluating their grandparent's likely response to learning about their sexual orientation, indicating that a variety of factors that pushed and pulled their interest in telling their grandparents about their sexual orientation. As I discuss further in the second section, grandchildren's motivations to come out to grandparents were sometimes irrelevant to how the disclosure

actually happened, as their identities were sometimes disclosed without their consent. I first discuss several of the most prominent motivating factors (relationship closeness, grandchildren's assessment of grandparent's likely responses) alongside a discussion of how these factors are situated in a family system. In general, grandchildren's narratives reveal how closely they monitor grandparent's words and actions for signs of their possible response (Thorne, 2001), illuminating the often-overlooked labor that GLBQ individuals perform as they constantly monitor and then interpret signs of acceptance from family members.

Closeness to Grandparents

Grandchildren's preexisting relationship with their grandparents was frequently mentioned as a motivating factor for grandchildren's interest in disclosing their sexual identity. Some grandchildren described very emotionally close relationships with their grandparents, which motivated their interest in disclosing their sexual orientation. Emotional closeness motivated Vincent's disclosure: "I came out [first] to those that I was closest to. So I started with my mom... About a year later I came out to my dad." The next person Vincent came out to was his grandmother. As Sydney echoed, "I feel better not feeling like I'm hiding a big part of myself from someone that I'm so close with." Similarly, Erica described herself as "closer to my Grandmother than [my parents] because I spent most of my childhood at my grandmother's house. So I grew up telling my grandmother everything. I don't think I had any secrets from her." As such, Erica's grandmother was one of the first people whom she told about her sexual orientation. One of the reasons Erica spent so much time with her grandmother was because she did not get along well with her mother. Indeed parents and other family members often played

important roles in shaping grandchildren's emotional closeness with their grandparents. This motivation to disclose to grandparents because of a pre-existing close relationships mirrors similar findings on GLBQ individual's motivations to disclose their sexual orientations to parents (Boxer et al., 1991; Waldner & Magruder, 1999).

Although emotional closeness motivated many grandchildren to tell their grandparents about their sexual orientation, some who had emotionally close relationships with their grandchildren did not feel similarly motivated. For example, Corey said that he and his maternal grandmother are close, but he explained, "I don't [feel like] I have to tell her before she dies. Because my sexuality is one piece of who I am but there are so many other aspects of who I am." For Corey, disclosing his sexual orientation was not necessary for having a close relationship with his grandmother. Rather, Corey wanted his mother to talk to her mother (his grandmother) about his sexual orientation, as he hoped that this conversation would be a "learning moment" for his mother, allowing her to develop her own comfort with his sexual orientation. Corey's story illustrates how complex grandchildren's motivations to disclose are. There are several subsystems of family relationships at play here, as Corey imagines using a familiar sub-system (parent-child relationship) to strengthen a coalition between himself and his mother, changing her comfort in talking about his sexual orientation with the hope that this will also affect how his grandmother interprets or understands his sexual orientation. Thus, his disclosure motivation is rooted in his interest in changing family dynamics, more broadly, rather than just dynamics between himself and his grandmother.

Grandchildren who have close relationships with their grandparents were generally not fearful that their grandparent would reject them because of their sexual

orientation. Edgar, for example, said that his grandmother, with whom he currently lives, “is one of my best friends.” Yet, when it came to imagining talking with his grandmother about his sexual orientation, he explained: “I was nervous about it. But not to the point where I was like, ‘Oh my God, she’s going to kick me out of the house.’ I figured she would be shocked and she would come to terms with it. I didn’t think it would be a huge deal in the long run.” Many other grandchildren in this study echoed Edgar’s sentiments, reporting that they were concerned about their grandparents’ immediate reactions, and did not necessarily expect their grandparent to entirely embrace the fact that they were GLBQ, but they did not expect outright rejection. This expectation motivated grandchildren’s interest in disclosure as they could imagine that they would not lose this relationship, and, indeed, they could imagine how disclosure might even “bring us closer... in the long run” (Edgar).

Although many of the grandchildren who participated in this project describe close relationships with their grandparents, this was not universally the case. For example, Mason said that he was not very close to his grandparents whom he visited once every couple of years growing up. He said, “If I was going to continue to invest in [my grandparents], they needed to accept me for who I was. Otherwise I didn’t want to invest time in them.” For Mason, this lack of a relationship with his grandparents actually made him more interested in disclosing his sexual orientation, as he evaluated what kind of relationship they would have in the future. Randall also described a distant relationship with his grandmother, but in his case, the result was that talking to his grandmother about his sexuality “just wasn’t a top priority. I guess I would just want her to know like I want *everyone* to know.” Unlike Mason, Randall’s distant relationship with his grandmother

made disclosing to her feel relatively unimportant, although not something he was averse to. This emotional distance from their grandparents may have made it easier for grandchildren like Mason and Randall to differentiate their own thoughts and feelings about claiming a GLBQ identity from their grandparents' thoughts and feelings about GLBQ sexualities.

In short, grandchildren's narratives do not provide simple accounts of emotional closeness motivating grandchildren's interest in disclosure. While grandchildren frequently reported that they wanted their grandparents to "know who I am" or that they wanted to "be able to share my life with my grandparents," they also wanted to protect their grandparents or their relationships with them. For instance, grandchildren described not wanting their grandparents to find out about their sexual orientation so that their grandparents wouldn't worry about them, to shield them from emotional pain, to keep them from feeling uncomfortable, or to protect their grandparent's image of them. These concerns indicate grandchildren's investment in their grandparents, and the tensions between their own self-differentiation as a GLBQ person and their investment in their family relationships. As such, grandchildren with close relationships were generally more invested in protecting their grandparents and/or their relationships with their grandparents from the perceived repercussions of disclosure.

Grandchildren's Assessment of Grandparent's Likely Responses

While grandchildren's relationships with their grandparents motivated disclosure, this relationship also provided grandchildren insights into how they imagined their grandparent would respond. Religious backgrounds, political views and connections to

GLBQ people were several of the most prominent strategies grandchildren described using to assess their grandparent's likely response.

Although sometimes described separately, religion and political views were often coupled in grandchildren's narratives, as illustrated by Nate as he described his motivation to talk with his grandparents about his sexual orientation. He said that his parents "didn't think that my grandparents would be accepting, because they were staunchly Christian and Republicans." Similarly, Gabriella said, "my grandpa is so liberal, like so left of left. But he's also from a very, very puritanical religious household." This coupling of religious and political views reflects a broader, culturally assumed overlap of conservative religious views with conservative political views (Layman, 1997), indicating how culture shapes grandchildren's interpretations of their grandparent's likely responses.

To the extent that grandchildren were familiar with their grandparent's religious views, they generally saw strong religious beliefs as likely to lead to more negative responses, thereby decreasing their interest in disclosure. When Jake was considering coming out to his grandparents, he said that religion was a major consideration for him: "[My grandparents] were so religious growing up, [and I learned from their church] that being gay's wrong and that it's bad and that it's a sin and you're going to hell. So I didn't really know how they felt about those things." Like Jake, Keli was also concerned about her grandfather's reaction. "My mother did say, 'Please don't tell your grandfather.' My grandfather was living with us at the time. And he was blind and Catholic and older and kind of confused."

Keli's motivations for disclosure were shaped by broader social constructions of older adults, as she described how age and potential declining physical and cognitive functioning were used as a rationale for non-disclosure. Keli's narrative also illuminates how parents frequently attempted to control if, and how, grandparents learned about grandchildren's sexuality, mediating grandchildren's motivations for disclosure to grandparents. Here Keli's mother, perhaps reflects a broader family boundary between family subsystems, as she enacts a relationship triangle, attempting to align with Keli in keeping this information from Keli's grandfather. This example also highlights how parents often helped grandchildren to assess grandparent's likely responses, using their personal knowledge of the grandparent to predict their response.

In contrast, having a lack of religious views was more often associated with an interest in disclosure. As Isabelle said, "I didn't expect any negative fallout. I think because I knew she was okay with [my gay uncle] and she's not religious." Isabelle indicates here that a lack of religiosity motivated her comfort with disclosure to her grandmother, as did her grandmother's knowledge of other GLBQ individuals, a factor that I address later.

Like religion, grandparents' political views also shaped grandchildren's interests in disclosure. For instance, Drew said of his grandparents: "They are very liberal, understanding people. So I just assumed that [my being gay] would be cool." For Drew and others, liberal political views are associated with more accepting attitudes toward GLBQ persons, although more conservative views, predictably, did the opposite. Mason described his grandfather as "fairly conservative, politically" and said that this meant that he did not necessarily expect a warm response from his grandfather. However, Parker

illuminates the complexity of this dichotomous construction of liberal views as more accepting and conservative views as less supportive. He described his grandparents as politically conservative, but also noted that, “they have been able to embrace a lot of unconventional means of existing and not necessarily adhering to the standards of [mainstream] society.” He noted this by observing their responses to other family members, several of whom he consulted when considering coming out to his grandparents. So, although Parker was concerned about their reactions based on their political views, he was simultaneously comforted in learning how they valued other family members with less conventional ways of being, illustrating how the messages that grandchildren received from grandparents were not entirely straightforward.

Grandchildren described knowing about their grandparents’ views on GLBTQ specific policies as particularly illuminating. Brent said, “My grandma’s pretty open [politically]. I remember we watched some rally when Hillary Clinton was speaking. And she was like, ‘Oh, I like her.’ But more recently I remember her saying, that she’s okay with same-sex marriage.” Similarly, when describing why she felt comfortable telling her grandmother about her sexual orientation, Maya said that she remembered that during a family dinner, “I believe that I had heard my grandmother say, ‘Why shouldn’t [gay people] be able to get married if they want to?’ before I came out.” Given the fact that issues of sexuality do not often emerge in conversation within many families, religion and political views are often proxies that GLBQ grandchildren use to imagine how their grandparents are likely to respond. Policies with direct implications for GLBQ individuals or same-sex relationships (e.g., same-sex marriage, the military’s “Don’t ask, Don’t tell” policy) were thus interpreted as especially revealing. In this way, broader cultural

discourses about families or relationships were taken up in families, as they provided an interpretive lens for GLBQ grandchildren and their family members to imagine how coming out might change existing family dynamics.

As grandchildren's narratives have already indicated, grandchildren frequently described that knowing a grandparent's attitudes toward GLBQ persons often motivated their interest in disclosing their identity to that grandparent. Many grandchildren described how having a grandparent mention their comfort with gay or lesbian celebrities, such as Ellen DeGeneres, was comforting as they considered coming out. As Gabriella said, "I just remember my grandma really liking lesbian celebrities like Ellen, and thinking, 'Oh, she likes Ellen. That's cool.' And my grandma told me about her gym teacher being a lesbian with the school nurse. And nobody talked about it, but they weren't very attractive women." For Gabriella and others, hearing a grandparent talk about appreciating GLBQ celebrities and knowing other GLBQ individuals motivated disclosure, even when statements such as these were also accompanied by other more negatively charged remarks, such as stereotypes about lesbians not being physically attractive. The cultural availability of mainstream, out GLBQ celebrities is a relatively recent phenomenon, and shapes families abilities to predict how grandparents (or other family members) may respond to learning about a GLBQ family member.

Knowing that a grandparent had/has a GLBQ friend often further motivated interests in disclosure, as grandchildren watched how the grandparent reacted to that person's sexual orientation. As Sydney said:

[My grandmother] has a very close friend [who is lesbian.] This elderly woman has been with her partner for years and years and she goes to visit her in the nursing home every week, even though her partner doesn't recognize her anymore. She still goes to visit her every week and brings her flowers. And my grandma said, "You know Sydney, if that isn't love, then I don't know what love is." And so I guess that made me think, "OK, so she must not think that being gay is wrong."

For Sydney, hearing her grandmother's reflections about her friend's same-sex relationship helped Sydney feel that her grandmother had a supporting attitude toward GLBQ persons, and motivated her interest in disclosure.

Having other family members who were out was also particularly motivating for grandchildren, as Isabelle's narrative already indicated. Sarah similarly described how having an aunt who had come out many years earlier made her feel like she knew what to expect in her grandparents' response. The vast majority of grandchildren in this study who had other GLBQ family members described witnessing primarily positive responses from grandparents, which supported their interests in disclosure. Even when grandchildren did witness negative responses from grandparents to other family members coming out, they largely attributed these responses to factors specific to the out individual (e.g., my aunt's partner was crazy, my brother was on drugs at the time). In contrast, grandchildren imagined that the unique circumstances of their own relationships with their grandparents would mediate the latter's response (e.g., we have an especially close relationship, they like my partner). In making this assessment, grandchildren illustrate how they experienced contradicting pieces of information about their grandparent's potential response, which they then interpreted using other information, often gathered from other family members.

These themes illustrate how GLBQ grandchildren carefully monitor their grandparents for clues about their possible response. Grandchildren's interpretations of these signs are socially informed, as the meanings of queer sexualities, family relationships, religious teachings, or political views are socially and historically situated (Thorne, 2001). For instance, the relatively recent availability of celebrities, such as Ellen DeGeneres, whose sexual orientation is a key dimension of their fame, has enabled grandchildren to interpret grandparent's acceptance of these celebrities as potential acceptance of other GLBQ people.⁷ Further, grandchildren rely on other family members, such as parents, to supplement this information, and to aid in interpretation of these signs (e.g., Keli's mother telling her not to tell her grandfather because of his political views), illustrating the importance of the family system in shaping grandchildren's perceptions about grandparents' likely responses.

The Family System

In addition to grandchildren's feelings of closeness to grandparents or perceptions about grandparents' responses, grandchildren's interest (or non-interest) in disclosure could also be described as related to relationships with other family members, in and of themselves. For instance, similar to the example from Corey described earlier, Mason used disclosure to his grandparents as a way to learn more about his father's views:

My dad's really bad about [my sexual orientation], so I tend to like to force his hand. I'm guessing my dad felt like, if [my grandparents had] reject[ed] me, then that puts him in a hard place. You know? Are his parents going to blame him for this as another failure on his part? Or is he going to have to choose to side with his parents, or side with me?

⁷ The cultural availability of known queer celebrities may also give grandparents a way of signifying their acceptance to GLBQ grandchildren, especially when they suspect but do not know about their grandchild's sexual orientation.

Here Mason coordinates a triangular relationship between his father and his grandparents, hoping that his father will choose to align with him, rather than his grandparents in a coalition. For Mason and Corey, disclosing to grandparents was secondary to their relationships with their parents, and grandchildren saw grandparents as a way of learning more about their parents' views or helping a parent become a more active ally. In this example, disclosure to grandparents served as a mechanism for Mason to learn more about his father's views about his sexuality.

Other grandchildren said that they were motivated to tell a grandparent because they did not want to ask other family members to maintain this secret. As Sydney put it:

I didn't want my parents to have to know and hide that from my grandma. And I knew that if I told my grandma, I would need to tell my aunts and uncles and vice versa. [Because] they're very close. And my aunt and grandma talk all the time on the phone, and I knew that if either one of them knew and couldn't talk about it with the other, it would just drive them nuts.

Like other grandchildren, Sydney knew that her family members would not like colluding in keeping this secret from others in the family, and further, would appreciate the chance to process this information with other family members. Indeed, in situations such as these, the challenges associated with managing awareness may provide additional incentive for disclosing to grandparents. "That certain family members know and others are unaware (to varying degrees) creates a complex, unstable situation in the family" (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993, p. 443). Disclosure may serve to alleviate this "complex, unstable situation in the family."

In having the whole family know about a grandchild's sexual orientation, family members may not only be able seek support from one another, but grandchildren may also use grandparents to learn more about other family member's possible responses. As

Corey said, “I felt comfortable approaching my grandmother to get a feeling of what the family would think. Because she is pretty much the center of our family, [and] she would know best how certain people would think of it.” For Corey, his grandmother’s position as the center of the family motivated his disclosure to her as they could then work together in the interpretive project of assessing other family members’ likely responses. Like other family boundaries, Corey’s grandmother was a central figure in their family, making her a potential resource for coming out to others.

Other family members not only motivated interest in disclosure, but also non-disclosure. For example, Helena described having a close relationship with her grandfather, but she was reluctant to tell him about her sexual orientation.

I was always concerned that my aunt would be homophobic. So I thought, “I could tell Grandpa and I think it would be fine. But what if my aunt is not fine with it? And then he either has to defend queer people and think of me or actively not defend queer people and think of me?” And so I decided not to tell him because of that. Because I live thousands of miles away from him. And I don’t have to deal with my aunt on a daily basis, whereas he does.

As Helena illuminates, her interest in talking with her grandfather was influenced by her impressions of his social context, specifically his close relationship with Helena’s aunt. Helena’s disinterest in disclosure was her way of protecting her grandfather from the homophobic comments and the emotional turmoil that she imagined would accompany her disclosure. Helena’s narrative demonstrates how grandchildren not only attend to grandparents’ possible responses, but also to the responses of others within the grandparents’ subsystems (in this case, an aunt), as they look for signs of how this disclosure will shape other family relationships.

Grandchildren own family definitions and celebrations (e.g., adopting a child, marriage) also motivated their interests in disclosure to family in general, and to

grandparents in particular. For instance, when grandchildren brought a significant other to family events, many described wanting to be recognized as a couple by grandparents as well as other family members. Brent said that knowing that he would be inviting his long-term partner to a family gathering motivated him to talk with his grandmother about his sexual orientation. Keli eloquently reflected on this tendency to disclose to others in the context of a relationship saying, “It’s much easier to say, ‘I have a girlfriend.’ Do you know what I mean? [It’s much easier than saying], ‘I am *something* and I am sitting here thinking about it alone.’” As Keli alludes to here, having a partner provided the language to help guide the disclosure and mitigate feelings of awkwardness. Introductions to partners also occasionally shifted family patterns of interactions, as in keeping with family rules and roles, the introduction of an outsider into the family system sometimes encouraged families to adopt more formal, tolerant tones with their GLBQ kin than they might have otherwise.

Marriage or commitment ceremonies also motivated disclosure, for instance as grandchildren wanted to invite grandparents to attend. As Richard said, he was motivated to come out to his grandmother “when my partner and I chose to get married. I can’t recall if I called her up, or if I sent her an invitation to the wedding. But it was quite apparent that, you know, I was getting married to a man and that I was gay.” For another participant, it was not his relationship, but his decision to have children with his partner that motivated his interest in disclosure. In creating their own family, GLBQ grandchildren differentiated themselves from their families of origin.

Grandchildren’s desire to build families of their own that would be recognized by their grandparents, and by their families of origin more generally, emerged as a critical

motivation of disclosure—although somewhat more frequently in interviews with older grandchildren. It may be that GLBQ individuals with spouses, those who participated in a commitment ceremony, and/or those who either considered parenting or were actively parenting, were particularly motivated to disclose their sexual orientation to their grandparents, and that older grandchildren were also more developmentally likely to be actively forming or considering forming their own families.

Several of the prominent factors associated with disclosure to parents (emotional closeness, religious/political attitudes, having GLBQ friends/family) are relevant for disclosing to grandparents as well. Emotional closeness to grandparents often motivated grandchildren's interest in disclosure, but not always. For instance, having a close relationship might mean that grandchildren were more invested in maintaining their existing relationship or that grandchildren knew more about factors that they associated with negative responses. Further, when assessing grandparent's likely responses, grandchildren carefully monitored their grandparents for issues like political and religious attitudes, or relationships with GLBQ individuals, as clues to how grandparents might respond to a disclosure of a GLBQ sexual orientation (Thorne, 2001). In this way, social structural factors, such as media representations of gay and lesbian people, or public policy debates on relevant issues, shaped GLBQ grandchildren's interpretations and understandings of their grandparent's likely responses. These findings suggest further sociological analyses that examine how family systems are shaped by broader social structural factors.

Across all of these factors, the family system emerged frequently as family members often provided grandchildren additional information about grandparents' likely

responses, or helped them to interpret these signs. Additionally, grandchildren also imagined that disclosure to grandparents could be strategically useful for their subsequent disclosures to other family members. Grandchildren's disclosure decisions were informed by their relationships with other family members, as their parents' discovery process, their family formations, and the family dynamics surrounding the maintenance of this secret, all contributed to grandchildren's motivation to disclose their sexual orientation to grandparents. Taken together these motivations suggest that future scholarship on GLBQ family relationships should examine how disclosure motivations are embedded in a complex family system.

How Disclosure Happens

Grandparent's pathways to discovery of their grandchild's sexual orientation were as various as the grandchildren's motivations that brought them there. About half of the grandchildren in this study acted intentionally to let their grandparent(s) know about their sexual orientation, while the remainder did not, most often as they simply did not have the opportunity. Although I have divided disclosure into two discreet groups here for analysis (unintentional and intentional disclosures), these were not always simple distinctions. These disclosure experiences further illustrate how grandchildren's coming out process may be best understood as a whole family issue.

Unintentional Disclosures

Thirteen participants did not choose to disclose their sexual orientations to grandparents, most often because they had not yet had the opportunity to decide if (or how) they would like to tell their grandparent. Most often this was because parents or other family members acted as disclosers with grandparents. For instance, Corey said

that, “the power of Facebook allowed my sibling to quickly find out who I was,” and she subsequently told their grandparents. Social media was frequently mentioned as an (un)intentional⁸ disclosure mechanism, as younger family members in particular often discovered the presence of significant others or sexual identities through social media.

Although siblings (or cousins, aunts, uncles, etc.) were occasionally the source of the disclosure, parents were most frequently the disclosing family member. For example, when I asked Jaclyn how her grandparents learned about her sexual orientation, she said that, “the thing is I didn’t even really come out to my grandma. What happened was I came out to my mom. I don’t even know what happened, but all my aunts and my grandma were just like, ‘Jaclyn, it doesn’t matter. We love you.’” Jaclyn and others reported knowing only that disclosure to their grandparents happened, but not necessarily knowing *how* it happened. Similarly, for Peter:

Peter: Well, I didn’t come out to my grandmother. My mother covered coming out to everyone. She told my father when she was mad at me. She told everyone. So I didn’t officially have to tell anyone.

Kristin: Wow. Did you experience that as a good thing or a bad thing?

Peter: Well, there were parts that were bad. I wasn’t necessarily ready to tell my father at the time. I don’t know in terms of [other family members]. I guess I didn’t really care.

Jaclyn and Peter illustrate a trend as parents most frequently spoke with grandparents about the grand/child’s sexual orientation. Peter’s story also illuminates how coming out is situated within already complex family dynamics where parents’ motivations to

⁸ Although I have elected to categorize Corey’s disclosure as unintentional, as he did not intend for his grandparents to find out about his sexual orientation after posting it on the Internet, one could also argue that his decision to post his sexual orientation in a public setting indicates his intent to be generally open about his sexual orientation. This example is an excellent indication of how blurry the boundaries can be between intentional and unintentional disclosure acts.

disclose may stem from unrelated issues. In Peter's case, his mother used disclosing her son's sexual orientation as a way to exact revenge in an angry moment, as she attempted to create coalitions with other family members and triangulate against her son. Several grandchildren said that they were not sure how their grandparents learned about their sexual orientation, but offered educated guesses about which family member did the disclosure; they frequently suspected parents—most often, mothers or aunts.

A couple of grandchildren said that they never directly disclosed their sexual orientation to their grandparents and that they strongly suspected that no other family member spoke with them either. Nonetheless, they said that their grandparent(s) obviously knew about their same-sex relationship and/or sexual orientation. For example, Amelia said:

When [my partner] and I started dating [we went] to all the family functions. My grandpa had a tradition that he would buy all his grandchildren lottery tickets. That would be his gift. So for ten years she was part of that. I mean she was invited to everything. So I knew they knew. But it's not like I went over there and sat down and said, "We decided that we were in love and we are going to try to make this work."

While this type of indirect disclosure was less common in this sample, the few examples reveal how forming partnerships and families, and integrating these relationships with families of origin, occasionally resulted in a level of implicit knowledge about a grandchild's sexual orientation. Thus, family rules about appropriate topics of discussion and patterns of interaction amongst family members shaped the disclosure process, as families sought to maintain equilibrium and adapt to changing conceptions of their GLBQ family member. As Amelia's narrative demonstrates, occasionally, maintaining equilibrium was relatively simple as the whole family sought to ignore or minimize changes that emerged when grandchildren came out. As with other modes of disclosure,

these instances centered on the broader family system, as it was often family functions, such as holiday celebrations, that did the work of the disclosure.

Some grandchildren in this study did not intentionally disclose their sexual orientations to their grandparents. Yet their grandparents were still an important part of their coming out process. In particular, grandparents emerged as important figures in the family system, for instance as other family members confided in them, or as grandparents colluded in ignoring the grandchild's sexual orientation at family gatherings. Thus, even for grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships where grandchildren did not intentionally disclose their sexual orientation to grandparents, grandparents were nonetheless involved as they came out to their families.

Intentional Disclosures

About half of the grandchildren in this study ($n = 15$) acted intentionally in coming out to their grandparents. While this research was somewhat more successful in recruiting grandchildren who had positive relationships histories with their grandparents, it is nonetheless notable that half of the grandchildren in this sample purposefully disclosed their identities to grandparents. This lends further support to the claim that grandparents are important family members for GLBQ grandchildren as they come out to their families.

A few grandchildren elected strategies that involved one-on-one disclosure to a grandparent directly, saying that it was important to them to tell their grandparents in person. For instance, although Vincent mailed letters to many other extended family members to tell them about his sexual orientation, he made a special trip out to visit with

his grandmother so he could speak with her in person. In Sydney's case, writing her grandmother a letter was actually what she chose as a direct disclosure strategy:

I think it's easier [to write a letter] because you can write down everything you're thinking and feeling and make sure that you don't miss anything. You can anticipate questions or comments that they might have and it's not that awkward, face-to-face, potentially explosive interaction, which is good.

Although both Vincent and Sydney describe disclosure strategies motivated by their individual relationships with their grandparents, these relationships were still situated in a broader family context. For instance, Sydney described wanting her grandmother to know so that other family members could turn to one another for support, as she strategically sought to utilize her family's patterns of interaction and expectations of one another to facilitate a more positive coming out process for her whole family.

Indeed, other family members played prominent roles in intentional disclosures as well. For example, Nate came out to his grandparents alongside his entire extended family. He had recently participated in a gay pride parade and knew that there were pictures of him published in a local paper. He said:

I remember the Fourth of July at my grandparents' house was maybe a week after all this had happened. I took the paper and put it on the dining room table with all my cousins and aunts and uncles around the table. I thought this would be a way, so that I knew [that] everyone knew [about my sexual orientation]. I didn't want to have the thing where everyone talked about it. Also, by embracing it and being confident, it helped my parents.

Nate's disclosure strategy was motivated by his interest in helping his parents feel comfortable with his sexual orientation, and by a desire to make it clear that his sexual orientation was not a secret. Nate sought to maintain equilibrium amongst his family members by disclosing to everyone at the same time and making sure everyone had the same information. Similarly, Jake said that he talked with his grandmother "while [we

were] out at dinner. I think my mom brought up gay issues to ease me into it. And then I came out to my grandma.” Nate and Jake and others not quoted here utilized parents and other family members to support their disclosure to grandparents, sometimes explicitly saying that they wanted parents to be available to support the grandparents, if needed.

Not all grandchildren who purposively disclosed their identities to grandparents elected strategies as straightforward as those of Vincent, Jake, Nate and Sydney. For example, Keli came out to her grandmother by inviting a girlfriend to her grandmother’s house for Passover dinner.

I had this feeling that maybe we had to do something to sort of like make it clear that—like, “better act like a couple.” [After we left] I said to my mom, “Do you think that anybody knew that we were a couple?” and my mother said, “Keli, you were all over each other. I think that everyone knew that you were a couple.”

Although Keli elected a strategy that did not require explicitly talking about her sexual orientation or her relationship status, she acted purposively to disclose her same-sex relationship through her behavior at a family event. Similar to Keli, Ryan tried to use rainbow clothing to signify his sexual orientation without having to have a conversation about it. Although his grandparents missed this cue, his parents used his clothing to start a conversation with his grandparents and other family members who were present. This example further illustrates how grandchildren use cultural markers, in this instance a rainbow, not only to understand their grandparent’s attitude or views, but also to signal their identity to grandparents and other family members, and as with previous examples, family members were used to help interpret these culturally informed signals.

A common disclosure strategy for grandchildren was to ask parents or other family members to do the disclosing for them. Parker and his mother discussed if and how he should come out to his grandparents. He said, “[my mother] was like, ‘Yeah, I

think they'll be alright.' ... but she was definitely the go-between." She later spoke with Parker's grandparents at his request. Parents frequently acted as a "go-between" with grandparents for the disclosure moment and beyond, mirroring other literature on grandparent-grandchild relationships (Hodgson, 1992; 1998; Monserud, 2008). In these instances grandchildren often sought to utilize their parents' influence over grandparents to reach a more favorable outcome. Not all parents were as supportive as these examples, as in several instances, grandchildren reported that their parents were ashamed of their sexual orientation or fearful of how a grandparent would respond and subsequently parents requested that this information be kept from the grandparent.

For grandchildren who intentionally disclosed their identities to grandparents, the family context emerged as they frequently enlisted other family members be "in the room" to support grandparents, to do the disclosure, or to make sure that everyone in the family knew about their sexual orientation. These dynamics between family sub-systems (parent-child, grandparent-parent, or immediate-extended family) came up frequently in interviews as the members of a sub-system would strategize about how to disclose to grandparents, and disclosure itself often involved relying on patterns of interactions between other family members. For instance, when it is common practice to have parents relay information about grandchildren to grandparents in a family, using that system to relay information about sexual orientation makes sense. Thus, for grandchildren who intentionally or unintentionally disclosed their sexual orientations to grandparents, other family relationships were critical in the disclosure process, further indicating how GLBQ grandchildren's disclosure experiences with their grandparents are embedded in a family system.

CONCLUSIONS

Grandchildren's motivations to disclose their sexual identities to grandparents and their disclosure experiences illustrate how coming out happens in a family system and illuminate preexisting intergenerational patterns of interaction. Grandchildren relied on other family members, particularly parents, to gather and interpret signs of a grandparent's likely response, as well as to strategize about disclosure, or tell grandparents about their sexual orientation (Thorne, 2001). The central roles that parents and other family members played in grandchildren's disclosure process indicates that scholarship on coming out experiences may usefully be examined as an issue that affects the whole family system. This study supports claims that coming out may be best understood as an event that shapes the whole family system (Baptist & Allen, 2008; Heatherington & Lavner, 2008).

These data also illuminate GLBQ individual's thoughtful approaches when disclosing their sexual orientation to family members, particularly in regards to intergenerational family dynamics and managing information within families. Keeping secrets from loved ones can be stressful, sometimes creating a "complex, unstable situation in the family" (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993, p. 443). Further, constantly monitoring language or stories is an arduous task, not only for GLBQ individuals, but also for others who know about their sexual orientation. Future research may usefully investigate how GLBQ individuals seek to minimize the deleterious effects of managing one's sexual orientation amongst family members, or how managing disclosure affects health and mental health.

Although the social context has shifted, increasingly enabling GLBQ individuals to demand inclusion in their families of origin (Savin-Williams, 2001; 2005; Seidman, 2002), these changes come with a new set of challenges. Coming out may create a “crisis” or minimally, disrupt previous understandings of one’s family members, which forces family members to seek out information and resources to make meaning of this change. Broader social contexts, such as policy debates, the media, or advice books, provide resources to GLBQ individuals and their families as they seek to interpret signals from interactions and make meaning of their relationship.

These changing social conditions also shape the kinds of signs that GLBQ individuals may seek from family members, particularly as policy debates have direct relevance to same-sex relationships or as queer celebrities continue to occupy a normative mainstream presence. Future research could examine the various kinds of signs that GLBQ individuals look for in their family members, and how these signs may be shaped by other social identities, (e.g., race, class, gender, age). Research should also explore the strategies that GLBQ individuals utilize as they interpret these signs, for instance by consulting other family members or professionals, such as pastors or social workers. These findings also highlight the ways that family systems are embedded in a broader social context, and that more sociologically informed analyses illuminate how cultural messages, on social issues such as sexual orientation, are taken up and disseminated in families.

Existing research, including the present study, is often limited in scope given the tendency to examine dyadic relationships (e.g., parent-child), or occasionally, other nuclear family relationships (e.g., parent-child-sibling) when GLBQ individuals come out

in families. Yet, as these findings indicate, examining dyadic family relationships without contextualizing them within a family system ignores the interconnectedness of these relationships. Future research could usefully attend to how fear of grandparents' discovery of a grandchild's sexual orientation may strain intergenerational family relationships between multiple generations of family members, or how grandchildren may use disclosure to grandparents (or other family members) to facilitate support for parents. Integrating grandparents into understandings of coming out in families will strengthen our knowledge about GLBQ family relationships.

Overall, these findings indicate that grandparents are important family members when young adults come out. Many grandchildren described close relationships with grandparents, before and after disclosure, and their relationships with grandparents were an important component of their coming out process. However, even those grandchildren who were not particularly close to their grandparents or who had fears about how their grandparents would respond, still articulated that grandparents were important to their coming out experience with other family members. Although this sample is likely biased toward grandchildren who expected and received more positive responses from their grandparents, accounts from grandchildren with more negative or ambivalent expectations indicate that the grandparents are still important family members given their centrality within the family, and vis-à-vis parents in particular. Thus, future research could usefully examine the extent to which grandparents are influential figures for families when GLBQ individuals come out.

Future research may usefully address some of the limitations of this study, notably by incorporating grandchildren who are not "out" to grandparents, or who are out

to grandparents (but without a requirement that grandparents also be willing to speak with a researcher). Additionally, it is a considerable limitation that these findings are based on a largely white sample, thus enabling this study to add little to the body of knowledge about the disclosure experiences of GLBQ individuals of color. Given the critical roles that grandparents and other extended family members often play in families of color (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; King & Elder, 1998; Lawton, Silverstein, & Bengtson, 1994), family systems approaches could be particularly informative for understanding the coming out experiences of GLBQ individuals of color.

Table 2.1. Grandchildren's Demographics

Gender	N
Female	14
Male	14
Age	
16-18	2
19-25	7
26-30	10
31-39	9
Race	
White	24
Hispanic	2
Multiracial	2
Sexual Orientation	
Gay	10
Lesbian	8
Bisexual	3
Queer	4
Other	3
Faith Tradition	
Catholic	2
Protestant Christian	3
Jewish	2
Atheist	4
Agnostic	2
Other: Christian	7
Other	5
None	3
Class Status	
Working class	6
Middle class	13
Upper-middle class	5
Upper class	4

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Chapter Three

“That’s fine and dandy that you’re gay, but don’t plaster it all over Facebook!”: Grandparents Respond to Learning that a Grandchild is Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Queer

INTRODUCTION

“We can’t tell Grandpa (Grandma), it would kill him (her)” (Lopata & Lopata, 2003). This sentiment from an advice book to the family members of lesbian and gay individuals addresses grandparents only briefly, yet it eloquently reflects a broader cultural discourse about grandparents’ likely responses upon learning that a grandchild is lesbian or gay. This idea is supported by research that shows that older adults have comparatively less positive views about homosexuality or policies that affirm same-sex relationships (Loftus, 2001; Yang 1997). Yet, there is currently no empirical research that investigates how grandparents may respond to learning about a gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer (GLBQ) grandchild.

Research shows that family relationships often suffer when someone discloses a GLBQ sexual orientation, as parents struggle with understanding same-sex desires or relationships (Cohler, 2004; Fields, 2001; Morrow, 2000; Saltzburg, 2004; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003). Emerging adults, a historically recent developmental category that describes 18-25 year old individuals (Arnett, 2000), are increasingly likely to “come out” and demand inclusion in families of origin (LaSala, 2009; McLean, 2007; Savin-Williams, 2005; Seidman, 2002). At the same time, older adults are living longer,

enabling new relationships between grandparents and their emerging adult grandchildren (Bengtson, 2001; Kemp, 2004, 2005). Intergenerational ambivalence theory illuminates how grandparents may have conflicting feelings about learning that a grandchild is GLBQ, which have been largely ignored in scholarship on coming out within families.

In this chapter, I utilize data from in-depth qualitative interviews with grandparents and their “out” GLBQ grandchildren to answer the question: *How do grandparents respond to the discovery of their GLBQ grandchild’s sexuality?* Drawing on intergenerational ambivalence perspective, I find that grandparents’ understandings of GLBQ sexualities are shaped by their social and historical experiences with “homosexuality.” These generationally-specific understandings of sexuality as private and personal enable surprisingly supportive interpersonal responses toward grandchildren. However, these supportive responses do not always extend to more public or political contexts. The chapter extends knowledge about intergenerational ambivalence, generationally-specific understandings of GLBQ sexualities, and grandparents’ responses to learning about a GLBQ grandchild.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sexual Orientation in Families

Contemporary U.S. families are diverse on a number of facets, yet one aspect of diversity that has received limited attention in social science research is that of GLBQ⁹

⁹ I use the terms lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer, to describe grandchildren’s sexual identities. Although there is no universally agreed upon definition of these terms, I use them as identity labels that young adults have applied to themselves to make sense of their sexual desires and intimate relationships. Queer is also used in this chapter as an umbrella term to describe GLBTQ communities and life (Gamson, 1995). I use the term homosexual, here and throughout the chapter, as this term is widely used in survey research and by older adults (Loftus, 2001; Rosenfeld, 1999; Yang 1997), although I also recognize its limitations as a term primarily connected to the pathologization of same-sex desires.

sexualities (Allen, 2000; Allen & Demo, 1995). Research about the intergenerational relationships between parents and their lesbian or gay child has illuminated some ways that “coming out” influences these relationships. Families often experience *crisis* when someone comes out, as “nearly all families go through some type of conflict or crisis when it becomes known that a child is GLB” (Morrow, 2000, p. 95). This initial crisis is spurred by contradictions between conceptions about who lesbian and gay people are (e.g., mentally ill, sexually promiscuous, or childless) and parents’ specific knowledge of their child (Cohen, 2004; Martin, Hutson, Kazyak, & Scherrer, 2010).

When gay and lesbian individuals come out to parents, “kin ties often became cordial and somewhat formal, lacking the openness, trust, and emotional closeness that we look for in families” (Seidman, 2002, p. 96). Although little is known about how this particular stress may impact the health or well-being of family members, research does suggest that the health or well-being of GLB individuals is negatively impacted by negative reactions from family members (Ryan et al., 2009). Therefore, understanding the “coming out” experiences of GLBQ individuals is critical for the well-being of GLBQ individuals and their families.

Parents’ responses often change over time as they reconcile their contradictory notions about lesbian and gay sexualities and their child by conceptualizing their child (and their child’s sexuality) as normal and discarding previous negative notions of lesbian and gay individuals (Baptist & Allen, 2008; Fields, 2001). These studies reveal that some of the challenges parents face in learning about a GLBQ child may be specific to their role *as a parent*, such as mourning the loss of being grandparents as they imagine that their child will no longer pursue parenting, or feeling guilt or shame at having “caused”

their child's non-heterosexuality (Cohler, 2004). While research shows that parents' responses can change over time and that parents are able to resolve the contradictory notions they have about having a GLBQ child, scholarship remains limited as little is known about how other family members, such as grandparents, may respond to this discovery (Mallon, 1999; Savin-Williams, 2001; Strommen, 1989).

The little research that is available about non-parental family members' suggests that extended family members may be particularly important for understanding GLBQ family relationships as they are likely to know about the sexual orientation of their GLBQ family member (Boxer, Cook & Herdt, 1991; Mays et al., 1998), may sometimes be the first person to whom a gay or lesbian person discloses their identity (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993), and may have more positive responses than parents (Beals & Peplau, 2006). Although parent-gay/lesbian child relationships constitute the vast bulk of research on "coming out" in families, findings often indicate that incorporating extended family members is an important goal for future research (D'Augelli, 2005). As Savin-Williams notes:

Neglected are studies that explore sexual-minority youths' relationships with siblings, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins...Although some individuals report that they will never be fully out until their grandparents are dead, they may be relinquishing potential sources of guidance from grandparents who could assume an intermediary role in salvaging the integrity and coherency of the family. (2001, p. 257)

Research often concludes that grandparents, in particular, may be important in the family lives of emerging adult GLBQ individuals (Mallon, 1999; Savin-Williams, 2001; Strommen, 1989).

Grandparents and “Homosexuality”

Older adults are living longer, healthier lives, enabling an increasing number of rewarding relationships between grandparents and emerging adult grandchildren (Bengtson, 2001; Kemp, 2004; 2005). Grandparents play myriad important roles in families that benefit grandchildren, for example as they educate, act as caregivers, or monitor the family as silent protectors (Kemp, 2004; 2005; Kornhaber & Woodward, 1985; Troll, 1983). These roles likely extend to GLBQ emerging adult grandchildren, as they mediate relationships with parents following disclosure, or provide emotional and instrumental support (Scherrer, 2010). Yet, the perspectives and experiences of grandparents themselves, and to a lesser extent the perspectives of grandchildren, are entirely missing from this literature.

Although grandparents have been theorized to be important family members for GLBQ emerging adults, other research demonstrates that older adults have generally less positive views about homosexuality or same-sex relationships than younger cohorts (Loftus, 2001; Yang, 1997). Older adults’ unique social history contributes to their understandings of homosexuality, as gay and lesbian individuals have historically been excluded from the families in which they were raised (e.g., by being kicked out or by choosing to leave) (Seidman, 2002; Weston, 1991). Those who were not excluded often remained with their families through “closeting,” whereby individuals understood themselves as lesbian, gay or homosexual, yet “managed a public heterosexual identity” (Seidman, 2002, p. 21), particularly for their family members. These early life experiences with and understandings of homosexuality have left lasting impressions on

older adults' attitudes about GLBQ sexualities, although these conceptions are by no means static.

The Stonewall Rebellion of 1969, and the removal of homosexuality as a mental health disorder from the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) in 1973 are often described as turning points for cultural understandings of gay and lesbian identities (Armstrong, 2002; Cohler, 2004; Seidman, 2002), marking recent and radical shifts in social and cultural understandings of lesbian and gay sexualities. Whereas previous historical moments have demanded secrecy and closeting, the contemporary moment is marked by a disclosure imperative (LaSala, 2009; McLean, 2007; Seidman, 2002), where GLBQ individuals are generally open about their sexual orientations with family and friends.¹⁰ This disclosure imperative makes "coming out a virtual ethical duty—"to be true to oneself" (Seidman, 2002, p. 62) making family members – including grandparents – increasingly likely to learn about the sexual orientation of their GLBQ grandchild. Further, GLBQ identities are also increasingly politicized as they are connected with political issues such as same-sex marriage or the U.S. military's "Don't ask, Don't tell" policy (Armstrong, 2002; Seidman, 2003).

Intergenerational Ambivalence Theory

I utilize intergenerational ambivalence theory to better understand intergenerational family relationships in which someone "comes out" as GLBQ. Intergenerational ambivalence occurs as generationally-specific differences in social and historical experiences lead to generationally-specific expectations of others. Thus, ambivalence is structurally created, but individually experienced in people's interpersonal relations

¹⁰ I include bisexual and queer individuals alongside gay and lesbian identities to accommodate findings that younger adults are increasingly likely to utilize such language to describe their sexual orientations.

(Connidis & McMullin, 2002). Previous research indicates that parents frequently report contradictory expectations of GLBQ children (ambivalence), (Cohler, 2004; Martin et al., 2010) which arise out of specific social and historical contexts. For example, as parents hope for a “normal” life for their child that includes marriage or parenting, yet because of social constructions about GLBQ sexualities, they also fear that their child’s sexual orientation will render their child uninterested or unable to partake in these normative family expectations. In grandparent-GLBQ grandchild intergenerational relationships, ambivalence is likely to emerge when/if grandparents have disapproving perspectives of GLBQ identities and relationships, yet continue to love and support their grandchild.

Families are particularly important social institutions for examining ambivalence as they facilitate intergenerational interactions. Further, given the characteristic loyalty, trust and dedication family members have for each other, families provide fertile conditions to “breed” ambivalence (Cohler, 2004). Ambivalence may be particularly likely to emerge with emergent adults as this age group is characterized by seeking “independence from social roles and from normative expectations” (Arnett, 2000, p. 469). Indeed, emergent adults are uniquely located vis-à-vis this familiar ambivalence: they have established enough independence to risk the disclosure of their sexuality, yet they also enjoy and seek to retain the affection and commitment of their families. Hence, “coming out” to one’s family is fraught with ambivalence -- and potentially even more so in the case of grandchildren coming out to grandparents, given the contradictory expectations for the latter to be both disapproving, yet supportive.

In literature on intergenerational ambivalence, there is contention about if and how ambivalence may be resolved (Connidis & McMullin, 2002; Luescher & Pillemer,

1998). Resolution is a key concept for intergenerational ambivalence theory, in part, as it is resolution that potentially impacts social-structures and creates change. Connidis and McMullin (2002) argue that “social actors regularly attempt to reconcile ambivalence or risk living in a constant state of inaction” (p. 563). Rather than living in inaction, “contending with ambivalence *requires* taking action of some kind, including the decision to take no action” (Connidis and McMullin, 2002, p. 563, emphasis added). In this conceptualization then, ambivalence is resolved socially, even through inaction.

This project engages with intergenerational ambivalence theory, and the concept of resolution, as I explore how ambivalence emerges for grandparents, in their relationship with their GLBQ grandchildren, and examine how this ambivalence may (or may not) be resolved, as grandparents encounter ambivalence in their family lives. In this chapter I ask: *How do grandparents respond to the discovery of their GLBQ grandchild’s sexuality?*

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

To answer this question, I conducted 32 in-depth, semi-structured, qualitative interviews with grandparents who know about the sexual orientation of their GLBQ grandchild(ren).¹¹ Qualitative methods are ideal for this topic as the area is previously unknown, family relationships are complex, and such methods enable an understanding of the meanings that grandparents and GLBQ grandchildren have of their relationships and interactions (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; LaSala, 2007; NSF, 2003). I utilize an

¹¹ Participants are part of a broader study that examines how grandparent-grandchild relationships are shaped by the discovery of a grandchild’s sexual orientation. That study draws upon interviews with 60 participants from 25 families, including 28 grandchildren and 32 grandparents. In this chapter, I focus on data from the 32 grandparents only, although additional details about the data are described in Chapters Two and Four.

interpretivist approach in this project that “assumes that the social world is constantly being constructed through group interactions, and thus, social reality can be understood via the perspectives of social actors enmeshed in meaning-making activities” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 6). As such, the meanings that grandparents give to GLBQ sexualities and their relationships with grandchildren and other family members are central to this project.

Recruitment

I utilized multiple sampling strategies for this study given the well-documented challenges associated with recruiting hard to reach minority populations, such as GLBTQ individuals and their family members (Martin & Knox, 2000; Meezan & Martin, 2009). In a study such as this one, where much is unknown about the topic area, a random sample is not necessary as the goals of this study are not to generalize to a population, but rather to understand the meanings that grandparents make of their relationships with GLBQ grandchildren, in order to identify key concepts and issues and build a foundation for future research.

I recruited from multiple locations in the Midwestern U.S., targeting GLBQ grandchildren and grandparents of GLBQ individuals. More indirectly, I also targeted the parents of GLBQ children. To publicize the study and recruit participants, I utilized flyers, in-person announcements, emails, and Internet postings. Recruiting through multiple generations and multiple types of community organizations enabled me to cast the broadest net possible to garner a maximally diverse sample on a number of characteristics, including race, gender, geography, religiosity, age, time since disclosure, and degree of acceptance. I also employed social network sampling strategies (Patton,

1990; Pfeffer, 2010) by asking participants if they knew of others who met inclusion criteria for this study.

Sample

The final sample includes 32 grandparents from 25 families. In some instances, I interviewed more than one grandparent from the same family. As Table 3.1 indicates, of the 32 total grandparents, 8 are male and 23 are female. All grandparents identified as white or Caucasian, except for one grandmother who identified as Hispanic.

Grandparents' ages ranged from 62 to 97 with an average of 80 years. All grandparents identified as straight and were living independently. Grandparents described a range of religious and faith traditions, including Roman Catholic (n = 8), Protestant Christian (n = 12), Jewish (n = 3), Agnostic (n = 2), no religion or faith tradition (n = 5), and Other (n = 2) described as ("non-denominational Christian" and "believes in God"), and nineteen indicated that their religion or faith tradition was "very important" to them.

The sample may be self-selected toward younger, healthier grandparents, as grandparents were generally healthy, although several had recent or current health issues, such as a recent heart attack, arthritis, diabetes, breast cancer, "chronic challenges" or recently lost a spouse. Most grandparents were retired (n = 26), almost all had other grandchildren (n = 29), and several reported living with their GLBQ grandchild for a short period of time in their lives (n = 7). Grandparents knew about their grandchild's sexual orientation for a range of time, from about 3 months to 19 years, with most having known for more than 4 years (n = 19). In some families there was more than one out family member (n = 17).

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted at locations convenient to the participants, often in their home or in a local restaurant. Interviews ranged in length from 50 minutes to 4 hours; those with grandparents lasted an average of 106 minutes. Most interviews were conducted in person, although 19 were conducted over the phone due to geographic constraints. Most interviews were conducted individually, but at the participant's request a few were conducted in tandem with a spouse (n=4) or with others in the room (n=3).

Participants provided demographic information via a brief written questionnaire on relationship quality before beginning the in-depth interviews.¹² Interviews were semi-structured to allow for the emergence of any unforeseen aspects of grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships, but some questions were standard across all interviews. The interviews included questions such as, "How did you learn about your grandchild's sexuality?," "What did you do when you found out?," and "What has happened since then?" These questions helped to illuminate grandparent-grandchild interactions and the grandparents' thoughts and feelings about having a GLBQ grandchild (Matthews, 2005). Participants were compensated twenty dollars for their participation.

Data Analysis

Interviews were digitally recorded with permission and transcribed in full by professional transcriptionists. Demographic data were tallied to create a description of the sample's demographic background with regard to race, gender, class, religion, and other relevant characteristics. Data were entered into NVIVO software for data management and analysis. Data were analyzed utilizing open and focused coding methods (Emerson,

¹² Data collection materials are included in the Appendix of this dissertation.

Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). During the open coding process, any and all codes are identified in line-by-line coding of data, as codes are developed inductively (much like in the practice of grounded theory). During the focused coding, inductive themes are refined and synthesized, while theoretically relevant themes are deductively identified. For example, I coded the grandparents' understanding of what it means to be gay or lesbian, and feelings of ambivalence this way. Data were also analyzed for disconfirming evidence.

I used these themes to craft "initial memos" and, later, "integrative memos" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) to push these empirical findings toward theoretical insights. These integrative memos "elaborate ideas and begin to link or tie codes and bits of data together" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 162) and were later revised to form segments of this manuscript. Trustworthiness of data (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) was assessed through member checking, peer debriefing, and data triangulation. All participants were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity, while personalizing the data. To further protect participants' anonymity, other minor identifiable aspects of their identities and stories have been altered. Quotes were edited for readability and unless otherwise noted, quotes used here are representative of the data.

Limitations

This study has several notable limitations. First, I was largely unsuccessful at recruiting a racially-diverse sample, making the transferability of findings to families of color unknown, a well-documented challenge in research on GLBTQ populations (DeBlaere, Brewster, Sarkees, & Moradi, 2010; Huang et al., 2010; Wheeler, 2003). Despite targeted efforts to recruit participants of color, including posting study materials and making announcements to racially diverse groups, and promising initial contacts with

potential participants of color, the final sample is primarily White. My inclusion criteria, that a grandchild be “out” to grandparents, may have inadvertently filtered out participants of color. In particular, “outness” may look different in families/communities of color, as sexual orientation or same-sex relationships may be more likely to be known but not spoken about, and disclosure moments may be less explicit than in many white families (Groves et al., 2006; Merighi & Grimes, 2000; Moradi et al., 2010). This hypothesis is offered cautiously, however, given the paucity of literature about GLBQ individuals of color and their families, which reflects the broader challenge of recruiting GLBQ individuals of color and their families in social research.

Second, this project was more successful in recruiting female grandparents, similar to other related research projects (Kemp, 2005), limiting a more comprehensive analysis of gender differences between grandfathers and grandmothers. In addition, the ages of participants in this project ranged greatly (62-97 for grandparents and 16-39 for grandchildren), limiting a more precise analysis of cohort or age. This project is also potentially limited in terms of the diversity of “acceptance” responses amongst grandparents, given that grandparents who “rejected” their grandchildren or those with more negative responses were less likely to speak with a researcher on the topic. That said, as data indicate, participating grandparents exhibited a range of positive and negative responses, both presently and in their own histories, reflecting a diversity of responses. Despite these limitations, as the first to examine grandparent’s responses to learning about their grandchild’s GLBQ sexual orientation, this study makes a valuable contribution to the literature.

FINDINGS

I present three main themes that illuminate how grandparents respond to the discovery of their GLBQ grandchild's sexuality. First, I describe how living through myriad changes in cultural understandings of GLBQ sexualities have shaped grandparents' understandings of homosexuality in general, and of their GLBQ grandchild more specifically. Second, I describe how grandparents' understandings of sexuality as deeply private and personal facilitate accepting responses toward GLBQ grandchildren. Last, I describe how intra- and interpersonal acceptance does not necessarily translate to public settings, such as social interactions in the public sphere or in political behavior, drawing attention to the complexities of defining acceptance and making political advances for GLBQ rights.

Living Through Dramatic Changes in Homosexuality

Grandparents in this project describe living through dramatic changes in the cultural climate for homosexuality. Noting these changes was one of the main ways that grandparents sought to contextualize how they currently understood their grandchild's sexuality. Their personal and social histories often reflected relatively negative understandings of homosexuality as a silent, private matter, an aspect of the self that should be altered through medical intervention, or as a trait that is incompatible with family life. In this section, I describe the grandparents' social landscape relative to homosexuality. This, in turn, will serve as a backdrop for understanding how these "generationally-specific understandings" shape their ambivalence about having a GLBQ grandchild.

For most grandparents, the topic of social and historical changes in understandings of homosexuality emerged when they described the shift towards GLBQ individuals “coming out,” as opposed to living a closeted life. Janette, for example, noted that “it’s more and more [that] people are not keeping things like that secret so much and living a secret life.” Similarly, Susan says that “the whole thing is much more well known and talked about now. People didn’t used to talk about that. That was a no-no.” Not only do grandparents describe gay/lesbian people as doing less to keep their sexuality a secret, but grandparents also recognize that the broader social context has changed. “Things have changed. Because I hear about so many gay people now. And it never came out when I was younger. *They* didn’t come out. Now they feel they can. Which they really can—in most places” (Lilly). As Lilly alludes to here, grandparents see that “in most places” younger GLBQ individuals “really can” construct lives for themselves as an out person—something that contrasts markedly from their previous understanding of queer life as something that did not have a place in mainstream society.¹³ This change from secrecy and silence to a post-closet era (Seidman, 2002) is not new, but these shifts have been lived through and witnessed by grandparents and other older adults, who have seen changes in how they (and others) understand GLBQ sexualities. Growing up and living much of their lives in a society in which “*they* [gays and lesbians] didn’t come out” provides an important backdrop and potential source of ambivalence for grandparents with an out grandchild.

¹³ It is important to note that grandparents did not see every place as equally safe, for example as cities were considered more safe than rural spaces. Most grandparents described some fears for the physical safety of their “out” grandchild.

Grandparents have also witnessed dramatic changes in how family members of origin respond when individuals come out. Historically, homosexual individuals were forced to choose between living a closeted heterosexual life or leaving their families of origin (Seidman, 2002). This trope remains poignant for grandparents, for instance, as they mentioned that coming out in families was likely to result in being disowned. “There’s a lot of parents who kind of disown gay children – I suppose” (Pam). Not only could GLBQ individuals be disowned, but some grandparents said that their grandchild felt that they had to move away because of their sexuality. For example, Ned reflected on his grandson’s residence in a major city about 6 hours away from the rest of the family: “It’d be nice if he could get something here in [town]. But that would be unusual for a gay [person] to come back home because they normally move away and don’t come back.” Ned’s words suggest that the trend of migration to urban areas for GLBQ individuals—and, in this case, away from family—perhaps has not changed as much as he would like.

Grandparents also noted that, historically, homosexual individuals felt as though they had to live heterosexual lives. Robin said, “Out of my children’s generation, there were many mistakes when gays married to women and had families. And then later on they discovered it wasn’t right.” While Robin and other grandparents noted that this trend was changing, and felt as though this was a positive change for families, they nevertheless described being an out GLBQ individual and having close family ties as incongruent.

Grandparents also described how social institutions, such as medicine, education, the media, or religion, have responded to issues of homosexuality. The relationship to

medical institutions was articulated frequently, as several grandparents spoke about how homosexuality is no longer treated as a mental illness that can and should be cured through psychological intervention. For Edwina, this issue emerged as she spoke about her son who came out to her in the 1970s. She tried to force him to visit a psychiatrist to “cure” his homosexuality, which she now sees as a mistake. “I thought that just take him to the psychiatrist and he'd get over it! But, you know, who knew about homosexuality in those days? I didn't.” Here, Edwina reflects not only that homosexuality used to be cured through psychiatric intervention, but that she has noticed a change in how she and others understand the need to diagnose and cure sexual orientation.

This example also illustrates how homosexuality was historically defined as a problem that should be silenced through medical treatment, and that the family was the context in which this issue should be addressed, thus enlisting families in the task of maintaining silence. In addition to medicine, grandparents also noted changes in other social institutions, such as education, the media, and the government, all of which have become largely accepting of GLBQ sexualities. Although grandparents generally describe their own attitudes as changing alongside these institutions, their experiences of living through these shifts have also created lasting expectations regarding the acceptability of GLBQ sexualities in social spaces.

Religion is a particularly salient institution for grandparents coming to terms with what it means to have GLBQ kin—a finding consistent with other research (Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Oswald, 2001). Nearly all grandparents, even those who described themselves as not religious, mentioned the role of religion or faith tradition, in shaping

their responses or the responses of other close family members. Janette saw the relationship between her religious tradition and homosexuality as in conflict:

I have always felt that a sign of the end of times is men will be lovers of men. And so that's always been a little question for me. That's why I have not believed that it was the right way to live. But like I say, when you meet so many people, [like] a little boy who's growing up...and he's just living...I don't think I can accept that religious view of it as much anymore. I guess, here's how I really feel—there are certain things that we can't judge because the real answer, we have to die to find out. So, I have evolved in that thinking.

Janette's narrative reflects a tension around reconciling religious frameworks and accepting a GLBQ family member. Although Janette described reaching a solution for herself, as she reserves judgment on GLBQ individuals' lives, she reflects a broader social tension between sexuality and religion that is far from resolved socially.

Not all grandparents described their religion or faith tradition as in conflict with GLBQ identities and relationships. For instance, Beatrice describes herself as Protestant, and says, "We are who we are and I think, we are in God's image. And if you're gay, you're gay. Nothing made you gay. You're just gay." For Grace, a self-identified spiritual grandmother, "As far as I'm concerned, that's their business, that's their life. God gave them their life to live the way they want it. That's my spirituality." For both Grace and Beatrice, their spiritual/religious understandings facilitated their acceptance of their GLBQ grandchild. For the smaller number of grandparents who describe themselves as not-religious, religions are most often described as being negative toward GLBQ people.

A minority of grandparents strongly disagreed with how their churches were talking about homosexuality. Maryanne, for example, said that she disagreed with her church's stance on homosexuality:

I mean they talk about it [homosexuality] right in church. It doesn't even faze me. I just close up my ears and say, "I don't even hear you!" And I love my religion. But I say, "Who are you to criticize and look at someone like that?" It's awful for me to say this, but he's not going to stand up there and preach to me and try to shove something down my throat. That doesn't make me any less Catholic.

Like Maryanne, Luella also described frustration with her church—frustration complicated by the fact that the church provided her with care and social interaction during a recent illness. "The ministers from the church spent a lot of time coming by and visiting me, and I have shown them pictures of my kids and grandkids, and Lou is *obviously* [gay]. And they told me that he wouldn't be welcome in their church." Because she relied on her church for care and support, Luella felt that she could not leave the congregation or disagree with their stance on homosexuality. For these grandparents, their religious institutions' stances have not changed much regarding homosexuality, unlike some of their individual members. Yet, these grandparents still greatly value their churches, religious traditions and faith communities.

Religion is a powerful institution for grandparents in shaping their understanding of GLBQ sexualities, although grandparents vary in their interpretations of their spiritual or religious teachings. The range of views that grandparents express about their religion or spirituality reflects how "unsettled" religion is regarding homosexuality, relative to other social institutions (Swidler, 1986). Although grandparents described dramatic changes during their lifetime in how most of these institutions understood GLBQ sexualities, religion remains particularly salient and enduring for grandparents as they seek to understand what it means to have a GLBQ grandchild. Religion, medicine, education, and the media, have all shaped how grandparents think about GLBQ

sexualities, and grandparents draw on these various institutional stances as they bring meaning to their interactions with their GLBQ grandchild.

Where once sexual orientation was a silent, private issue, for GLBQ individuals, in social institutions and in families, *the social climate has changed*. While the changes themselves are notable, living through these changes has left its mark on how grandparents understand GLBQ sexualities. The historical legacy of the privacy, secrecy, and silence of homosexuality has left an indelible mark on how grandparents understand GLBQ sexualities, and given the wide range of changes in a short period of time, it is reasonable to expect intergenerational ambivalence in grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships. Importantly, although these formative early-life experiences shaped grandparents' understandings of homosexuality, these conceptions were by no means static. Rather, these early understandings about homosexuality were a conceptual starting point as participants' later life experiences provided opportunities to adapt, strengthen, discard, or otherwise, reinterpret these early life conceptions of homosexuality. In the next two findings sections, I analyze how notions of public and private shape grandparents' interpersonal and public responses to homosexuality.

Interpersonal Responses

In this section, I analyze how generationally-specific notions about the privacy and individuality of sexual orientation shape grandparents' responses to learning about their GLBQ grandchild. I demonstrate that privacy norms facilitate accepting responses toward grandchildren, as their sexualities are interpreted as “none of our business,” as “not important” for who they really are, and as something that they “couldn't change anyways.” Although few grandparents described entirely positive internal reactions to

learning that a grandchild was GLBQ, the social expression of their reaction was generally—and unexpectedly—accepting.

“It’s none of our business!”

The privacy of sexuality came up frequently in interviews with grandparents, most often in the form of a declaration that their grandchild’s sexuality is “none of my/our business.” As Audrey said, “It’s none of our business! So that’s my idea. That this is your life and nobody else can really put their nose into it. Live your life and let everybody else live theirs.” Later, when reflecting on what she and her husband said to her granddaughter when they first learned about her sexuality, she said, “‘If this is what you feel is right for you, then you go ahead and do it and we’ll back you on whatever you do.’ That was where we left it with her.” Audrey’s story illustrates several common themes in my conversations with grandparents. First, that their grandchild’s sexuality is, in the words of another grandparent, “their own business” (Robert). Secondly, this private notion of sexuality meant that, in interactions with their grandchildren, grandparents generally offered supportive words and demonstrated an accepting attitude.

The privacy of the grandchild’s sexuality also emerged when grandparents spoke about how they did, or more frequently, did not bring up the topic with others. For example, when Alma found out about her granddaughter’s sexual orientation, she “discovered it and...kept it quiet. I was not going to question her. I didn’t want to make her feel embarrassed about her business” (Alma). For many of the grandparents with whom I spoke, I was the first person they had ever spoken to about this topic, other than perhaps a spouse or close relative, illustrating the strong feelings of privacy and secrecy many grandparents shoulder when learning about a GLBQ grandchild. Similarly, when I

spoke with Darren about how he and his (now deceased) wife responded to their grandchild coming out, he described to me why he has chosen to never again mention it to his grandchild.

It's something that, for his sense of privacy, we felt it was unfair for us to discuss it with other family members in general. We thought he can discuss it, any time, any way that he wishes—but that we shouldn't be the ones to [bring it up]. That doesn't mean disapproval. It means just to respect his privacy and his individuality.

Darren's story is an excellent example of how grandparents' respect for their grandchild's privacy about their sexuality “doesn't [necessarily] mean disapproval.”

Although his decision to not ask his grandson about his sexual orientation or dating life could be interpreted as “unaccepting,” Darren's intention is to demonstrate respect, and in this instance, this is how his grandson interprets this decision. This example illustrates how grandparents' respect for the privacy of their grandchild's sexuality can facilitate an approving experience for grandchildren who have come out.

In this particular case, Darren's intention to demonstrate respect for his grandson is not misinterpreted by his grandson; however, it is important to note that this example also illuminates a potential issue in intergenerational family relationships. As emerging adults experience a disclosure imperative, see their sexuality as an important component of who they are and wish to have this recognized in their interpersonal relationships, grandchildren may expect that their sexual orientation or romantic relationships be recognized more explicitly by their grandparents or other family members. These varied ways of communicating acceptance are based in generationally-specific understandings about sexuality that may not be shared across generations and are a potential source of ambivalence in grandparents-GLBQ grandchild relationships.

“It’s not important”

Grandparents also articulated how relatively unimportant they thought that their grandchild’s sexual orientation was for their understanding of their grandchild or their relationship with their grandchild. This emerged frequently as I asked grandparents about their relationships with grandchildren, and they would often answer as Robert did: “I don’t really think the gayness had anything to do with it.” Robert, like several other grandparents, had a hard time seeing how their grandchild’s sexuality was relevant to their relationship. Not only is their grandchild’s sexuality, “none of their business,” but it was described as relatively unimportant for helping the grandparent understand their grandchild.

This issue emerged most poignantly when I sat down with Jacob at his kitchen table—the same table that he sat at with his granddaughter when she came out to him a little more than six years ago.

Jacob: She sat right here and said, “I’m gay.” And I says, “Well, I’m old and bald, you want to trade?” you know? Pretty much it doesn’t matter to me.

Kristin: It didn’t faze you at all?

Jacob: No, no, no... it’s not important.

As I spoke with Jacob, he made it clear that his granddaughter’s sexuality just isn’t a meaningful component of who she is – at least, not in his eyes. Jacob later said, “It’s not important to me what people do in their bedrooms. You know? I’m more interested in the person.” For Jacob, being gay is *primarily* about “what people do in their bedrooms,” and not about who his granddaughter is as a person. This has meant that, in this family, Jacob has consistently been one of the only family members’ to invite his granddaughter and her partner to family events, and to defend her sexual orientation as non-pathological to

other family members. For Jacob and others, understanding a grandchild's sexuality as unimportant facilitated there being little or no change in their relationship following the discovery of the grandchild's sexual orientation.

Yet, Jacob's acceptance of his granddaughter, as he explains it, is largely based on his belief that, "It's not a big deal... That's not who you are. That's got nothing to do with who you are." Jacob's understanding of queer sexuality is that it can be boiled down to a "bedroom activity" and is not at all connected to a person's sense of self. This kind of understanding of queer sexuality as all about sexual behavior is generationally-specific, as it is only more recently that queer sexualities have been culturally constructed as identities that are a core component of the self (Rosenfeld, 1999; Seidman, 2002).

This differs from findings with parents of GLBQ children who describe needing to reconceptualize GLBQ sexualities as "normative" (Fields, 2001; Martin et al., 2010). It may be that parents' family role as parents, require them to reconcile and integrate their various assumptions and expectations, as their relationships to GLBQ (grand)children are closer or as more is expected of them. It may also be that differences in social and historical experiences between a parent or grandparent generation contribute to slightly different understandings of homosexuality, where grandparents are more likely to see it as personal, private and unconnected to a core sense of self. These discordant assumptions about the importance (or non-importance) of sexual orientation based on generational context may lead to ambivalence in grandparents' understandings of their GLBQ grandchild, as they imagine that it will be a silent, private component of their grandchild's life that will not change their relationship.

“You’re not going to change them”

Grandparents generally understand their grandchild’s sexuality as something out of their power and control to change. As Janette explained: “You aren’t going to change somebody’s life because you don’t maybe want that life for them. So why do it? Why do that to the person? Why do it to yourself?” Janette illustrates here the ambivalence that grandparents may feel as they may wish that their grandchild were not GLBQ, but do not see that any good would come from trying to change that. While some grandparents understood their grandchild’s sexuality as biologically or genetically determined, many grandparents struggled with this deterministic view of their grandchild’s sexuality and described possible causes of their grandchild’s sexual orientation (e.g., being too close to a mother, child sexual abuse). This understanding of sexuality as malleable is largely generationally-specific, as the widespread cultural notion that sexual orientation is a genetic, immutable aspect of an individual is a relatively new notion, as previous generations were more likely to see sexual orientation as something that could, and should, be altered.

While grandparents might understand their grandchild’s sexuality as malleable, they also generally felt as though it was not in their best interest to intervene on this issue. “You’re not going to change it” (Sam). This “non-interference” in their grandchild’s life is likely motivated by their family role *as a grandparent* (Kemp, 2004), as grandparents express a desire to respect their grandchild’s autonomy and to ensure the grandparent-grandchild relationship is maintained. When I sat down with Sam and Sadie together in their living room, I asked if they had advice for other grandparents. They said:

Sam: If you don’t accept it...

Sadie: You lose them.

Sam: You're going to hurt the whole family really.

Sadie: Yeah, you lose them.

As this exchange illustrates, Sam and Sadie see that the most likely outcome of trying to change a grandchild's sexuality is losing them from your life and hurting the family.

Luella expressed similar ideas: "I mean, if you don't approve, if you don't approve of their lifestyle, then you're losing your grandkids. And, it's just too high a cost...I'd like to be part of their life. I want them to be a part of mine, but I'd like to be part of their life." These grandparents illustrate their ambivalence as they do not necessarily "approve" of homosexuality, yet cannot imagine losing their relationship with their grandchild. This fear is potentially unique to the grandparent generation as parents may be less likely to imagine that their relationship with their child would be severed.

Many grandparents said that they would not have wished this life for their grandchild, as they viewed homosexuality as something that would make their grandchild's life more difficult. For example, Gil said, "My reaction... had something to do with the fact that it's going to be hard on her and stuff. She has gone through enough already." This belief that life will be hard for a GLBQ individual is not unfounded given the well-documented experiences of discrimination that GLBQ individuals experience on a daily basis in contemporary U.S. society (Harper & Schneider, 2003). However, it is also likely that given grandparents' social history, they may have even greater fears about how GLBQ individuals will be treated on a daily basis.

The difficulty in deciding how to respond to a GLBQ grandchild emerged as Janette described the changes she has noticed in herself since her granddaughter came out.

[I've gone] from strongly opposed to that [homosexuality], religiously probably, and seeing people and having children of friends that came out and realizing that, 'Well, you just have to be who you are.' You can't reject people in a real way... and then so, with [my grandchild] it's like, 'Ok. How strongly do I feel against it? Am I going to...' I would *never* reject her. Never. So, it makes you think about it. I don't have to live her life. So I want her to be happy if that's the life she [wants].

This quote illustrates how grandparents may be conflicted in their understandings of homosexuality itself, but are forced into deciding how to behave in social situations because of their interest in maintaining the relationship with their grandchild. For Janette, this has meant inviting her granddaughter's female partner to family events and protecting her from the negative comments of other family members.

Grandparents most often imagine two possible responses to learning about a GLBQ grandchild: acceptance/keeping their grandchild in their life or rejection/losing their grandchild. This dichotomous view of the options available to the families of GLBQ individuals is likely informed by older adults' historical context, as previously homosexuality was not something one saw integrated with family life, and represents another potential difference between a grandparent and a parent generation. As these excerpts illustrate, grandparents are likely to imagine that if they do not accept and support their grandchild, they will lose them—an option that no grandparent who participated in this project was willing to imagine. Thus, while grandparents may wish that their grandchild were not GLBQ, and may even see this as changeable, they were disinterested in intervening for fear of losing their grandchild.

Taken together, this section analyzes how grandparents generationally-specific views about homosexuality as private, as an unimportant aspect of their grandchild, as malleable, or as something that is either accepted or rejected, often facilitates acceptance and support from grandparents. Yet, as I argue in this section, grandparents' acceptance is not necessarily based on positive conceptions about GLBQ life or identity, but rather may be motivated by other factors, like norms of non-interference for grandparents (Kemp, 2004) or fear of losing a grandchild. These data illustrate how grandparents' often demonstrate ambivalence internally in their understandings about having a GLBQ grandchild, yet their generationally-specific understandings of sexuality, and grandparenting norms enable grandparents to behave supportively to GLBQ grandchildren. These contradictions between intrapersonal understandings of GLBQ sexualities and supportive interpersonal interactions impact how grandparents' acceptance translates to other dimensions of social life, like social interactions in public spaces or political attitudes.

Public Responses

In this last section, I analyze how grandparents' understandings about sexual orientation impact public interactions like grandchildren's outness in public spaces or in grandparents' political beliefs and behaviors. Here, I describe how a grandchild's sexual orientation emerges in public spheres, and how grandparents interpret these interactions.

Being publicly out

Since grandparents see sexual orientation as very private and personal, most of the grandparents with whom I spoke were uncomfortable with how publicly out their grandchild was. One of the ways this emerged was when I asked grandparents how they

found out about their grandchild's sexual orientation. For instance, Edith (62), one of the youngest grandparents who participated in this project, explained how her granddaughter came out on Facebook, a social networking website:

Edith: So, I see her post, "I've decided to come halfway out of the closet – I'm bisexual." I'm like, "What?" And so I text her and I said, "Your Facebook..." and she goes, "It's true." I'm like, "Okay." So I wrote back, "It's okay if it's true, but [to] come out on Facebook?" You know, I don't know if she was doing it for the shock purpose. She never really said why. So that was the most shocking was like, everybody that reads my Facebook reads it.

Kristin: Very public?

Edith: Yes! I keep telling [her] "why do you put this crap on Facebook?" You know? It's stupid. It's a lot of personal information to have on the Internet.

Edith later describes how glad she is to know about her granddaughter's sexual orientation and how much she loves and supports her grandchild. She said, "That's fine and dandy [that] you're gay, or whatever, but don't plaster it all over Facebook!" indicating that her main problem with her granddaughter's sexual orientation is with how public it is.

Public displays of affection were another contentious point for grandparents as they described how uncomfortable they were with their grandchild expressing physical affection to a significant other. For example, Lilly made a special effort to schedule fun activities for her granddaughter when she came into town, but was upset by parts of the actual experience:

I would take her [to get] a facial, and we'd spend time together that way. And then she and her girlfriend and I would all get facials. But it upset me when she, when they, held hands and kissed. A spa is, you know—where everybody is looking and everybody's talking. And I just couldn't say anything because I figured she wouldn't go with me again.

As Lilly says here, she was uncomfortable with the affection that she saw between her granddaughter and her granddaughter's partner in the public venue of the spa. It may also be that because this was a place that Lilly frequented and was known in, as Edith is known on her Facebook page, that this was a particularly vulnerable place for her to be outed by association.

It may be that grandparents were particularly uncomfortable with their grandchild's public displays of affection because this act publically marked their grandchild's homosexuality in ways that might not have been otherwise visibly identifiable (especially if the grandchild was gender conforming, or did not, for example, wear a rainbow button). These grandparents reported not saying anything to their grandchildren about their discomfort—something most frequently interpreted by grandchildren as evidence of acceptance of their sexual orientation. However, as these data indicate, grandparents' "accepting" behaviors may not be motivated by acceptance of GLBQ sexualities per se, but by generational norms regarding the privacy of sexuality, and fears about the prospects of losing the relationship.

This discomfort with public outness also emerged as Darren described seeing a bumper sticker that used the word "queer" on the motorcycle of one of his grandson's friends. "I saw this sticker on the motorcycle of a person I knew who visited here—and I thought, "Why is she putting this sticker on the motorcycle? I mean, it's sort of inviting antagonism." For Darren, proclaiming your sexual orientation so publicly, such as on your car, was dangerous. Luella was similarly uncomfortable with her grandson's gender presentation, as she had very short hair and often "dressed like a boy." Like Darren, Luella expressed fear for her granddaughter's safety. Being out in public makes

grandparents uncomfortable, perhaps in part because of grandparents' fears for the social repercussions against homosexuality. Violent acts against those who are, or who appear to be, GLBQ are still all too common. However, grandparents' fears likely reflect their own social and historical experiences living much of their life when "hate-crimes" against GLBQ people were not a social problem, as it has been constructed to be today (Comstock, 1991). Thus fears about violence, as a result of being recognizably homosexual, was another potential source of ambivalence for grandparents.

Most of the grandparents with whom I spoke gave me at least one example, like those discussed above, relating how the public display of their grandchild's sexuality made them uncomfortable. While grandparents rarely said anything to their GLBQ grandchild about their discomfort or concerns, these interpretations of their grandchild's behaviors further demonstrate their generationally-specific understandings of GLBQ sexualities as deeply personal, private, and normatively limited to the bedroom. In contrast, announcing ones' sexual orientation over the Internet, showing affection with a partner in public, having a gender non-normative gender presentation, or sporting a visibly queer bumper sticker, were cited as examples of behaviors that are inappropriate for the public sphere and potentially dangerous.

Political beliefs and behaviors

While political aspects of GLBQ sexualities, such as same-sex marriage, adoption, or the military's "Don't ask, Don't tell" policy were not issues that I asked about initially, such issues emerged as important in one of my first grandparent interviews. In my conversation with Ned, he said that he appreciated how smart and successful his grandson is, and described how proud he was to help his grandson

celebrate his wedding in Massachusetts, “when they had that [same-sex] marriage thing and everybody got married.” Even though some of the family decided not to join the celebration, Ned and his (now deceased) wife both attended to demonstrate that, “We were very accepting of their relationship.” Like Ned, other grandparents articulated similarly positive and accepting stories of how they helped their GLBQ grandchild celebrate their marriage or commitment, often even when other family members made a stance in electing not to attend. This support, however, was in stark contrast to Ned’s remarks a moment later when he told me:

I don’t have a problem with a partnership, but marriage is between a man and a woman, in my estimation. I think they could have another category, ok, fine. They can call it whatever they want to call it. Pick a name. [laughs] But I think marriage is a sacred bond.

Ned later told me that he and his daughter, who is now very politically active in GLBTQ causes, argue frequently about same-sex marriage. For Ned, he doesn’t have to vote for same-sex marriage policies to support his grandson’s relationship. These beliefs may seem incongruous to younger adults (or even those in a parent generation) who have lived primarily in a cultural context that sees an inextricable connection between the personal and political aspects of gay life. But for Ned, the acceptance of his gay grandson and his marriage is seen as private family business that does not translate to a political dimension. While this de-linking of personal and political beliefs makes sense for Ned, it seems likely that a younger parent generation is more likely embedded in the more politicized understanding of gay identities.

After this interview, I asked most grandparents about their views on these topics, in order to get a better sense of how grandparents’ acceptance of their GLBQ grandchild extended to public policy issues that pertained to GLBQ individuals. Same-sex marriage

polices emerged early in my conversation with Marty, as he brought up how vocal his grandson has been about same-sex marriage:

I wish he could have children and have a normal life and that's not possible. Of course he is wishing to somehow change it. He's pushing hard, on the marriage issue. He strongly is pushing that idea and I'm perfectly supportive of partnerships. But I just can't go the next step because I think marriage as an institution is under enough threat. But we haven't, we haven't hashed that out. He probably knows how I feel. [But] I'm very supporting of him in every way, intellectually and emotionally, [and] financially for that matter.

As this excerpt indicates, though he wishes that his grandson could have “a normal life,” Marty doesn’t see that as a possibility. For Marty, a normal life is one that involves (heterosexual) marriage and children, in addition to succeeding with one’s career goals or financial security. Marty’s acceptance of his grandson involves supporting of his grandson “in every way,” but he still understands his grandson’s life as outside of the scope of “normal life.” Marty’s belief is not based in a religious or faith tradition, as he describes himself as “not religious,” thus complicating simple arguments that religion is the most important factor for accepting/rejecting stances toward GLBQ kin.

Same-sex parenting and adoption were also contentious issues for the grandparents with whom I spoke. For example, Nora believes that GLBQ persons should not parent. “[I] don’t think that children should be given to... that foster children shouldn’t be given to gay people. It should be a man and a wife.” This issue also emerged when I spoke with Robin, a grandmother with two out grandchildren. When I asked her if she had an opinion about same-sex parenting, she said, “I do have a definite opinion about that. I disapprove” (Robin). She went on to explain that she had an extended family member who was lesbian who had adopted a little boy.

She has the little boy now, so he *still* doesn’t have a normal family. I just feel sorry for a child that gets involved in that. He’s left with just one parent. And

that's an adopted parent. And then those that go through artificial insemination... If they want to have a child, [they should] certainly adopt one, because that's a child they might be helping. But to bring a child into the world without even knowing the father. That I don't like.

Here, Robin argues that same-sex parents cannot give children a “normal family” and that the children will be disadvantaged by their upbringing by homosexual parent(s). Robin does distinguish between adoption and biological parenting, however, by saying that adoption could potentially be permitted for same-sex parents, perhaps because that child is already disadvantaged as they are already cut off from their biological parents. Robin, like Nora, also expresses that it is important for her that children have a male and female parent, a quality that is unlikely to be met for GLBQ individuals.

These understandings about ideal parenting as requiring a parent of each sex are generationally-informed, as norms around idealized family structure, the use of reproductive technology, single parenting, or adoption have changed dramatically in older adults' lifespan (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). These generationally-informed conceptions of “normal” family life shape, in turn, what kind of life older adults may wish for their grandchildren, or for others more generally, and may limit their ability to celebrate GLBQ grandchildren's families. Robin, Nora, Marty, Ned, and other grandparents not quoted here, all describe attitudes about same-sex affirming policies that do not fit contemporary understandings of what it means to be accepting of GLBQ individuals. Yet, as noted here and elsewhere, this incongruency is not troubling to them, illuminating the need to examine how acceptance of GLBQ individuals does (or does not) transfer to public domains.

It is important to note that not all grandparents were unsupportive of policies that affirm GLBQ identities. For example, when I asked Pam if she has an opinion about

same-sex parenting, she said, “Do I have a problem with it? Absolutely not, I’m anxious for it.... But that is not my business, that is theirs.” Similarly, when I posed the same question to Jacob, he told me, “I think anybody should be able to marry anybody they want to.... You know, and I think ‘Don’t ask, Don’t tell,’ that’s a stupid law. I don’t get it. It’s not...that’s not who you are. That’s got nothing to do with who you are” (Jacob). For both Pam and Jacob, generationally-specific understandings of sexuality as “none of my business” or as “not important for who you are” facilitated their support for GLBQ-affirming policies like same-sex marriage or repealing “Don’t ask, Don’t tell.” Nonetheless, as the examples from other grandparents illustrate, supporting GLBQ-affirming policies was not a given for grandparents.

These data demonstrate that having a supportive stance toward a GLBQ grandchild does not necessarily mean that grandparents will be supportive of GLBQ-affirming policies like same-sex marriage or same-sex adoption. Rather, grandparents in this study expressed a wide range of opinions about same-sex marriage, same-sex adoption, and “Don’t ask, Don’t tell” —thus supporting the notion that grandparents views of, and behaviors toward, their GLBQ grandchild do not necessarily relate to how they experience or think about GLBQ issues in the public sphere.

DISCUSSION

Grandparents respond to their discovery of their grandchildren’s sexuality through a cultural framework that is informed by their generationally-specific social and historical context. Generational understandings of sexuality as private, unimportant, or as unlikely to change in response to intervention facilitated grandparents’ accepting behaviors toward GLBQ grandchildren. Grandparents in this study celebrated same-sex marriages, babysat

for great grandchildren, invited grandchildren and their same-sex partners over for holidays, and explicitly told grandchildren that they loved and accepted them for who they are. Although it is not the topic of the current chapter, data from the grandchildren of these grandparents indicate that this acceptance is being successfully conveyed to and interpreted by the receiving grandchildren (Chapter Four). Despite other research that demonstrates that older adults tend to have more negative understandings of GLBQ sexualities and same-sex relationships (Loftus, 2001; Yang 1997), and widespread assumptions that grandparents may be likely to have adverse reactions to learning about a GLBQ grandchild (Scherrer, 2010), the grandparents in this study demonstrate a great deal of acceptance toward their GLBQ grandchild. Thus, findings from this study suggest that grandparents may be unexpected allies for GLBQ young adults in families, an issue explored in greater detail elsewhere (Chapter Four).

Not only may generationally-specific understandings of sexuality facilitate positive responses from grandparents, but several additional factors likely contribute to this finding. First, socio-emotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1987; 1991; 1992) posits that older adults “strategically and adaptively cultivate their social networks to maximize social and emotional gains and minimize social and emotional risks” (1992, p. 331) and are likely to overlook flaws in family members in the interest of maintaining individual relationships and family cohesion. Second, grandparents generally adopt norms of non-interference with their adult grandchildren, as they are expected to be unassuming and supportive (Kemp, 2004). Third, unlike parents who may feel responsible for having a GLBQ child, grandparents are less likely to feel personally accountable (Scherrer, 2010). Fourth, grandparents, and grandmothers more specifically, generally act as “watchdogs”

in families as they “monitor the state of the family functioning and step in only when...needed” (Troll, 1983, p. 64). Taken together, these factors indicate that grandparents’ support may be motivated more by their interest in family cohesion, than by acceptance of GLBQ sexualities themselves.

Similarly, despite their relatively accepting responses toward GLBQ grandchildren, grandparents did not necessarily connect the acceptance of an individual family member to more public forms of acceptance. As GLBQ identities have been increasingly politicized within recent years, notions of acceptance have become synonymous with public comfort with public displays of affection between individuals of the same gender, and support (or, even more ideally, advocacy) for GLBQ-inclusive and -friendly policies. But this study demonstrates that individual acceptance acts, such as demonstrating support and love for an individual GLBQ grandchild, and also often their partner, do not necessarily correspond with broader cultural acceptance as we might expect.

As such, these findings encourage interrogation of the term “acceptance” and other related terms that are often employed in social research on this topic, such as “tolerance” or “accommodation” (Martin et al., 2010). While findings indicate that grandparents demonstrate supportive responses to grandchildren interpersonally, and in a family context, this support does not necessarily translate to more public forums. Further, while grandparents described a range of supportive behaviors, these behaviors may or may not be interpreted as accepting by GLBQ grandchildren, and may or may not be motivated by positive understandings of GLBQ sexualities. In addition, GLBQ kin may have different expectations of what acceptance looks like from different family members

based on their family role (e.g., grandparent, parent, sibling, aunt), their generational context (e.g., age, cohort) or other factors.

Yet, relatively little attention has been paid to what acceptance (or tolerance or accommodation) looks like to GLBQ individuals (or family members), how expectations with respect to acceptance may vary for different social relationships, what motivates different types of accepting behaviors (e.g., fear of losing grandchild, positive understanding of gay identities), how acceptance might look different based on age, race, gender or geographical context, or what discrepancies might exist between what a family member is trying to portray and how those actions are perceived by the GLBQ individual. Understanding “acceptance” is a next step in building knowledge about the intergenerational family relationships of GLBQ individuals and their families of origin.

Theoretical Implications

Like family members in other studies (Cohler, 2004), grandparents describe conflicting feelings and beliefs about GLBQ sexualities that arise from their unique social and historical experiences with homosexuality. These data reveal the complicated ways that any particular issue, in this case GLBQ sexualities, span multiple arenas, including intrapersonal, dyadic, family level, public interactions, and political attitudes. As data from grandparents highlight, it is possible, and even likely, that ambivalence may be resolved in one arena (e.g., between an individual grandparent and grandchild), but not in other arenas (e.g., intrapersonally, as grandparents continue to wrestle with how to make sense of religious discourses and ideas about homosexuality versus their own feelings toward their GLBQ grandchild). Future research that employs intergenerational

ambivalence theory may usefully examine the multiple arenas that any particular issue may span.

Not only might an individual experience resolution in some arenas but potentially not in others, but it is also possible that the type of resolution itself may vary across arenas. This emerged in this study as grandparents displayed support and acceptance to their GLBQ grandchild, as they “resolved” their ambivalence socially in their interpersonal interactions in their support of their GLBQ grandchild. Yet, at the same time, grandparents expressed unequivocal opposition to queer affirming policies, like same-sex marriage, indicating that in the political domain they were also “resolved” however, in a less supporting direction. Thus, the way that ambivalence is resolved may not necessarily match across social arenas.

Rather than being either resolved, or not, intergenerational ambivalence may be more usefully understood as being constantly negotiated. In social (in)action, actors resolve their ambivalence. However, the resolution of ambivalence may vary depending on the arena, may be incongruent with other closely related social actions, and may shift over time. As our social landscape is not static, individuals’ perceptions and expectations of one another change, enabling structural shifts in how ambivalence may be resolved in social relationships from moment to moment. Future research may usefully consider the many ways that ambivalence is managed in interpersonal relationships, as ambivalence is both resolved in social interaction, yet still unresolved as ambivalence continues to emerge in different arenas and at different moments.

This research also highlights another important component of utilizing an intergenerational ambivalence perspective—namely, the challenge of defining

ambivalence. As findings from this project highlight, it is possible for a researcher to interpret ambivalence in a participant's story that may not feel like ambivalence to the participant her/himself. The case of Ned is an excellent illustration of this. Recall that Ned attended his grandson's same-sex wedding, yet does not favor same-sex marriage policies. It would be easy to categorize this participant as demonstrating general ambivalence about his grandson's sexuality, yet in my conversation with him, he did not seem conflicted at all. Rather, for Ned, these two seemingly dissonant positions were understood as relatively unrelated.

How should researchers decide if a participant experiences ambivalence about a topic or situation? Not only should scholars be nuanced in their reading of ambivalence across multiple contexts (and at multiple moments in time), but researchers should also be clear in their definition and use of ambivalence. Ambivalence may be conceptualized deductively using researchers' own frameworks about what beliefs or behaviors are discordant, or ambivalence may be conceptualized more inductively by privileging participants' own perceptions, feelings, and interpretations. Utilizing an interpretivist approach in this project illuminated how participants' own meanings and interpretations of their beliefs and behaviors did not necessarily match my own interpretation of these beliefs, thereby extending knowledge about how researchers' operationalization of the concept of ambivalence shapes when and how we identify and interpret it in social research.

CONCLUSION

This chapter addresses the glaring absence of research into how grandparents respond to the discovery that a grandchild is GLBQ. Data presented here largely

contradict cultural stereotypes of grandparents, and older adults more generally, as physically or emotionally unable to deal with the news that a family member is homosexual. Further, findings fit with other research that demonstrates the supportive and protective roles that grandparents play for grandchildren in a range of contexts. These data indicate that grandparents are often accepting and supportive in their interpersonal relationships with GLBQ grandchildren, although this acceptance may not be motivated by acceptance of GLBQ sexualities themselves. As a result, accepting behaviors by grandparents in interpersonal relationships with GLBQ grandchildren may not extend to other domains, such as attitudes about political issues relevant to same-sex relationships, or comfort with public displays of one's sexual orientation.

Table 3.1. Grandparents' Demographics

Gender	N
Female	23
Male	9
Age	
62-69	3
70-79	11
80-89	16
90-97	2
Race	
White	31
Hispanic	1
Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual	32
Faith Tradition	
Catholic	8
Protestant Christian	12
Jewish	3
Other	2
None	5
Class Status	
Working class	9
Middle class	11
Upper-middle class	7
Upper class	5

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Chapter Four

“If anything, you love them more. They need you more”: How the discovery of a grandchild’s GLBQ sexuality shapes grandparent- grandchild relationships

INTRODUCTION

Recent demographic shifts have afforded young people the opportunity to cultivate relationships with their grandparents well into adulthood (Bengston, 2001). These intergenerational relationships are often reciprocal sources of social, emotional, and financial support for grandparents and grandchildren (Fruhauf & Orel, 2008; Hodgson, 1998; Kemp, 2004; Kornhaber & Woodward, 1985; Langer, 1990; Roberto, Allen & Blieszner, 2001; Szinovacz, 2003) and the importance of grandparent-grandchild relationships is likely to increase (Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008). But while grandparent-grandchild relationships are most frequently characterized positively (Kemp, 2004; Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008), less is known about what conflicts may emerge in these relationships, or how such conflicts may be resolved.

Coming out as gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer (GLBQ)¹⁴ is one such issue that has profound consequences on relationships with one’s family of origin (Seidman, 2002;

¹⁴ This acronym commonly includes transgender identities, however, in this chapter I will be focusing on how sexual orientation shapes grandparent-grandchild relationships, rather than the relationship between sexual identity and gender identity or expression. I include queer identities—an identity term added more recently to this acronym—in order to reflect an inclusive understanding of the emerging range of sexual identities that contemporary young adults are adopting (Savin-Williams, 2005).

Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001; Weston, 1991) as, “nearly all families go through some type of conflict or crisis when it becomes known that a child is GLB” (Morrow, 2000, p. 95). Anecdotal evidence indicates that grandparent-grandchild relationships may be particularly likely to be damaged when grandchildren come out. Older adults, for example, are sometimes characterized as too physically or emotionally fragile to handle this news; or grandparents are imagined as likely to reject or disown GLBQ grandchildren because of their sexual orientation (Herdt & Koff, 2000; Lopata & Lopata, 2003).

Yet, little is actually known about grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships, as the majority of research on GLBQ family relationships examines parent-GLBQ child relationships. This chapter addresses this gap by investigating how grandparent-grandchild relationships are impacted by the discovery of a grandchild’s sexual orientation. Findings are conceptually informed by intergenerational stake perspective and utilize 60 in-depth, qualitative interviews with grandparent-GLBQ grandchild dyads. I find that grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships are relatively robust— indeed, that in some cases they are even *enhanced* by the disclosure of the grandchild’s sexual identity. This effect is explained by a range of factors, including grandchildren’s assumptions about their grandparents’ attitudes, both parties’ respective “stakes” or levels of investment in the relationship, and the familial embeddedness of grandparent-grandchild interactions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Grandparent-Grandchild Relationships

Dominant cultural constructions of grandparent-grandchild relationships are primarily positive (Beland & Mills, 2001; Kemp, 2004; Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008), as captured by the adage, “If I had known grandchildren were this much fun, I would have had them first.” Research on grandparent-grandchild relationships, however, complicates this image by indicating that grandparents actually have a variety of interaction styles with their grandchildren, including detached, passive, supportive, authoritative or influential (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1985). Further, grandparents play numerous roles in their grandchildren’s lives—from sometimes providing direct care for grandchildren, to other times unobtrusively monitoring the family, ready to provide assistance if needed (Fruhauf, Jarrott, & Allen, 2006; Kemp, 2004; Kornhaber & Woodward, 1985; Troll, 1983). Although much of this research focuses on grandparents’ relationships with young children, more recently researchers have started attending to how grandparent-grandchild relationships shift as grandchildren reach adulthood (Harwood, 2001; Kemp, 2004; Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008).

As grandchildren reach adulthood, grandparent-grandchild relationships shift as parents no longer control contact. Research suggests that grandparent-grandchild relationships often become more meaningful and significant as grandchildren reach adulthood, (Hodgson, 1992; Kemp, 2005), and that grandparents often provide instrumental support to grandchildren through, for example, monetary gifts or mentorship and advice (Kemp, 2004; Roberto, Allen, & Blieszner, 2001). Research also finds that grandchildren, in turn, provide important support for grandparents in the form of care work or performing household chores (Fruhauf, Jarrott, & Allen, 2006; Kemp, 2004). These findings emphasize the positive characteristics of grandparent-adult grandchild

relationships, although this may be overstated given methodological issues in most studies on grandparent-grandchild relationships.¹⁵ As a result, studies that examine how “stressful events or life transitions” impact these relationships are lacking (Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008, p. 106). Further, previous studies often rely on data from only one source (e.g., grandparents or grandchildren), thus making it necessary to triangulate these perspectives, when possible, through dyadic data collection (Harwood, 2001).

Although parents may no longer *determine* if or how grandparent-adult grandchild relationships can occur, they and other family members can still play mediating roles in grandparent-grandchild relationships (Geurts, Poortman van Tilburg, & Dykstra, 2009; Hodgson, 1992; Kemp, 2007; Mills et al., 2001). Indeed, the family system is critical for understanding the context of grandparent-grandchild relationships, as grandparents’ investment in maintaining harmony and cohesion in families (Carstensen, 1991) may motivate generationally unique approaches to conflict resolution. Further, changes in the cultural conditions for adulthood have made it more difficult for those who are chronologically “adults” (ages 18-25) to claim “long-term adult roles”; more aptly described as “*emerging adults*,” individuals in this age group continue to rely on their parents and families to support their continued growth and personal development (Arnett, 2004). As a result, parents may frequently remain mediators of intra-familial relationships even for adult grandchildren.

How Disclosure Shapes Family Relationships

Having a family member “come out,” or disclose their identity as a GLBQ individual, can be a significant challenge for families. Research indicates that families

¹⁵ See Kemp (2004) or Sheehan and Petrovic (2008) for a more in-depth discussion of this bias.

often experience *crisis* initially: “disclosure of a sexual identity to parents often promotes a family crisis” (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003, p. 429), and “crisis is clearly the most severe and direct effect on the family of having a homosexual member” (Strommen, 1989, p. 23). Disclosure practices have also changed dramatically in older adults’ lifespan. While in previous historical periods, homosexual¹⁶ individuals lived secret, closeted lives, the current moment is characterized by a disclosure imperative, whereby GLBQ individuals are expected to be open about their sexual orientation with their families (Seidman, 2002).

As coming out to families becomes increasingly common, research has investigated how sexual orientation impacts these relationships, although most works focus primarily on parents’ relationships with their lesbian or gay child. Research with parents of lesbian and gay children indicates that if/when disclosure does prompt a crisis, the crisis is usually spurred by contradictions between parents’ conceptions about who lesbian and gay people are (e.g., mentally ill, sexually promiscuous, or childless) and parents’ specific knowledge of their child (Cohen, 2004; Oswald, 2000; Martin, Hutson, Kazyak, & Scherrer, 2010). But while initial reactions are often marked by crisis and relationship strain, research also indicates that parents’ responses often change over time (Aveline, 2006; Baptist & Allen, 2008; Fields, 2001). Some parents reconcile their

¹⁶ In this dissertation, I use the term homosexual somewhat interchangeably with the acronym GLBQ as a term to describe individuals who form relationships with individuals of the same-sex. Though the term is often acknowledged to be problematic because of its associations with the pathologization of same-sex desires and relationships, I utilize it here a term that accurately reflects the historical context and terminology of the older adults discussed in this study—many of whom have lived significant periods of their lives in a social context where homosexual was the appropriate term for individuals with same-sex desires or relationships.

contradictory notions about lesbian and gay sexualities and their child by conceptualizing the latter as normal and discarding previous negative notions of lesbian and gay individuals (Baptist & Allen, 2008; Fields, 2001). These studies also indicate that some of the challenges parents face in learning about a GLBQ child may be specific to their role *as parents*—for example, mourning the [presumed] lost prospect of being grandparents as parents imagine that their child will no longer pursue parenting; or feeling guilt or shame at having “caused” their child’s non-heterosexuality (Cohler, 2004).

While these studies usefully indicate that parents’ responses can change over time and that parents are able to resolve the contradictory notions they have about having a GLBQ child, we know little about how relationships with other family members, such as grandparents, are shaped by this disclosure. “Grandparent reactions, as well as considerations of disclosure to grandparents by homosexual family members, is a topic that is in need of research” (Strommen, 1989, p. 21). Additionally, the existing research relies primarily on accounts from GLBQ individuals *or* their parents, and thus cannot compare how the parties in these relationships see one another. As we broaden our research to include other family members, seeking out dyadic data in addition promises to provide a much richer and more nuanced perspective on how families and family relationships are shaped by the discovery of a family member’s GLBQ sexual orientation.

Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I engage conceptually with the intergenerational stake perspective, a component of lifecourse theory. Lifecourse theories generally posit that individuals have unique trajectories based on their social context (Elder, 1998). These trajectories are

altered by life transitions, or the behaviors that shape our life's direction, such as marriage or quitting work to care for a parent. These trajectories are shaped by social and historical context, as individuals are "embedded in and shaped by the historical times and places they experience over their lifetime" (Elder, 1998, p.3). An individual's pathway is also shaped by her/his relationships with social others, such as family members, with whom their lives are linked. The intergenerational stake perspective is a component of lifecourse theory that extends our understanding of *how* generations are linked together within families.

The intergenerational stake perspective (also known as "generational stake" or "developmental stake" perspective) has been used to examine how relationships between generations in families are shaped, particularly when attitudes differ on social issues such as politics or life philosophy (Bengston et al., 2002; Crosnoe & Elder, 2004; Elder, 1998). The intergenerational stake perspective posits that older generations have a "stake" in younger generations, which makes the former more inclined to interpret attitudes across the generations as similar. On the other hand, younger adults are more developmentally invested in differentiating themselves from their family and establishing themselves as independent, leading young adults to overestimate the differences between themselves and older family members.

Although much of this research has focused on the different stakes that parents and adult children have in their relationships, recent work has compared the stakes that grandparents and adult grandchildren have in their relationships (Bengston et al., 2002; Crosnoe & Elder, 2004; Harwood, 2001; Silverstein & Chen, 1999), and found that, "grandparents perceive their relationship with their grandchildren to be considerably

closer than their grandchildren perceive the relationship” (Harwood, 2001, p. 195). This uneven investment in the relationship may have implications when potentially disruptive issues emerge, such as a grandchild’s coming out. In this chapter, I investigate: *How are grandparent-grandchild relationships affected when grandchildren come out as gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer?*

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study draws on in-depth qualitative interviews with 60 grandparents and grandchildren from the same families. I utilize an interpretive approach that prioritizes participants’ experiences and interpretations of these experiences in order to understand grandparent-grandchild relationships. The dyadic nature of the data is particularly valuable, as it provides multiple perspectives on some of the same interactions and people. By interviewing both grandparents and grandchildren, I am responding to Harwood’s call to “gain dyadic data wherever possible” (2001, p. 205), in order to better understand grandparent-grandchild relationships. Because this dyadic approach was a main component of this research design, only grandparent-grandchild dyads were able to participate. The sample also includes only grandparents who know about their grandchild’s sexuality; those who were not aware or who only suspected their grandchild’s non-heterosexual identity were not interviewed. All grandchildren were at least 18 years old, or 16-17 with a parent’s permission.

Recruitment

I utilized multiple recruitment strategies to address the well-documented challenge of recruiting GLBTQ individuals and their family members (Martin & Knox, 2000; Meezan & Martin, 2009). These strategies included recruiting in multiple locations

in the Midwestern U.S. for: 1) GLBQ grandchildren, 2) the grandparents of GLBQ individuals and, 3) the parents of GLBQ children. With help from social organizations that work with each of these target groups, I used flyers, mailings, in-person announcements, e-mails, Internet postings and a Facebook site to advertise the study and recruit participants. I also used snowball sampling by asking participants if they knew of others who met the inclusion criteria. As Table 4.2 indicates, recruitment was most successful through the grandchild generation. Additional details about this study's methodology are described in Chapters Two and Three.

Sample

The sample includes 32 grandparents and 28 grandchildren from 25 families. In some families, more than one grandparent or more than one "out" GLBQ grandchild was willing to participate, resulting in 35 unique grandparent-grandchild dyads. As Table 4.3 indicates, most grandparents were female (n = 23) and white (n = 31), while half of the grandchildren participants were female (n = 14) and most were white (n = 24), although two identified as multiracial, and two identified as Hispanic/Latino. Grandparents' ages ranged from 62 to 97, with an average age of 80 years, while the average age of grandchildren was 28, ranging from 16 to 39 years. Regarding sexual orientation grandchildren identified as gay (n = 10), lesbian (n = 8), bisexual (n = 3), queer (n = 4), pansexual (n = 1), gay/bisexual (n = 1) and bisexual/queer (n = 1), while all grandparents identified as heterosexual. Three grandchildren also identified as transgender or gender queer.

I used three different items to assess class status, as illustrated in Table 4.4. Most grandparents (n = 23) and grandchildren (n = 21) described themselves as middle class,

upper-middle class, or upper class, while nine grandparents and six grandchildren self-identified as working class (or, as one grandchild wrote in: “under all these” categories). Income was difficult to assess as several grandchildren were full-time students (n = 12), several were unemployed (n = 3), and many grandparents were retired (n = 26). Many grandchildren were still in school (high school, college and graduate programs), and overall they were a well-educated group for their respective ages. Grandparents’ level of education varied somewhat more, but unfortunately the data do not differentiate the “type” of educational background, and arguably a graduate degree in social work or law, for example, would offer very different skills to grandparents learning about their grandchild’s sexual orientation.

Several grandchildren had only one living grandparent (n = 13), and most grandparents had other grandchildren (n = 29), although the number of other grandchildren (and great grandchildren) ranged greatly from one to sixty-two. Several grandchildren reported living with their grandparents for a short period of time in their lives (n = 7). The length of time that grandparents “knew” about their grandchild’s sexual orientation ranged between 3 months and 19 years, with most having known for more than 4 years (n = 19). In some families, there was more than one out family member (n = 17); indeed, in three cases, additional out grandchildren in the same family participated in the project after the original dyad (n = 3). As I explain later, there were also many “types” of grandparent-grandchild relationships: grandparents who raised their grandchild, grandparents who have lived down the block from their grandchildren their whole life, grandparents who were forbidden from having contact with grandchildren

until the latter were adults, grandchildren who see their grandparent(s) once a year, and those with relatively little contact.

Data Collection

In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted at locations convenient to the participants, and lasted an average of 105 minutes, ranging from 50 minutes to 4 hours. Before being interviewed, participants provided demographic information and responded to a brief questionnaire on relationship quality.¹⁷ Specifically, and of particular relevance to this study, the questionnaire asked three questions regarding relationship quality:

For grandparents:

1. Our relationship has suffered since I learned about my grandchild's sexual orientation. *(1-5; agree, somewhat agree, neither agree or disagree, somewhat disagree, disagree)*
2. Before you learned about your grandchild's sexuality, how would you describe your overall relationship with your grandchild? *(1-5; poor, fair, good, very good and excellent)*
3. During the last month how would you describe your overall relationship with your grandchild? *(1-5; poor, fair, good, very good and excellent)*

For grandchildren:

1. Our relationship has suffered since my grandparent learned about my sexual orientation. *(1-5; agree, somewhat agree, neither agree or disagree, somewhat disagree, disagree)*
2. Before your grandparent learned about your sexuality, how would you describe your overall relationship with your grandparent? *(1-5; poor, fair, good, very good and excellent)*

¹⁷ This questionnaire is included in the Appendix in its entirety alongside other data collection materials. Items assessing family acceptance were piloted in this study, although they were informed by other similar studies (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009; Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010). Items regarding grandparent-adult grandchild relationship quality were adapted from other similar research studies (Fingerman, 2004; Harwood, 2001; King et al., 2003; Whitebeck, Hoyt & Huck, 1993).

3. During the last month how would you describe your overall relationship with your grandparent? (1-5; *poor, fair, good, very good and excellent*)

In-depth interviews were semi-structured to allow for emergent themes, although some questions were standard across all interviews. Some of the questions that were standard across all interviews were , “How did you learn about your grandchild’s sexuality?” “What did your grandparent do when they found out?” and “How/has your relationship changed since then?” Interviews were digitally recorded with participants’ permission and transcribed in full by professional transcriptionists.

Data Analysis

Demographic data were tallied to describe participants in terms of race, gender, age, class, and other relevant characteristics. I first examined trends regarding the item asking whether “the relationship suffered” after the grandchild came out. To determine whether/if overall relationship quality changed and in what direction, I examined each participant’s response and assessed whether they reported positive change, negative change, or no change.

Qualitative data were managed using NVIVO software and analyzed utilizing open and focused coding methods (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). In the open coding process, any and all codes were identified in line-by-line coding of data, as codes were developed inductively (e.g., “grandparents as frail,” “sexuality as silent topic”). Then, in the focused coding phase, inductive themes were refined and synthesized (e.g., synthesizing “grandparents as frail,” and “grandparents as sheltered” to form a broader theme of “ageist stereotypes about grandparents”). At the same time, theoretically relevant themes were deductively identified based on related scholarship (e.g., parents as mediators, changes in relationship). Data was also analyzed for disconfirming evidence.

These themes were used to craft “initial” and then “integrative memos” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) to push these findings toward analytical insights. Integrative memos, which “elaborate ideas and begin to link or tie codes and bits of data together” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 162), were later revised to form segments of this manuscript.

Quotes were edited minimally for readability and, unless otherwise noted, are representative of the data. Preserving participants’ confidentiality was critically important in this project, as both grandchildren and grandparent participants knew that their family member(s) had also participated. As they have shared histories and social networks, I have taken a number of steps to make sure that participants will not be able to recognize each other here, including giving participants pseudonyms and changing identifying characteristics of stories. For a more in-depth discussion of this issue, see Chapter Two.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this study. First, I was largely unsuccessful at recruiting a racially diverse sample, making the transferability of findings to families of color unknown. Secondly, this project was more successful in recruiting female grandparents, similar to other related research projects (Kemp, 2005), thus limiting a more comprehensive analysis of gender differences between grandfathers and grandmothers. In addition, the wide age range of participants in this project (62-97 for grandparents and 16-39 for grandchildren) limits a more precise analysis of cohort or age. Although class status of participants varied (see Table 4.4), the sample is skewed toward those with class privilege, financial means, and high degrees of education. This class bias may mean that participants are more likely to have relatively liberal attitudes toward

sexuality (Treas, 2002), or may have educational or financial means to “escape” negative family situations.

This sample is also limited in terms of the diversity of “acceptance” amongst grandparents, as grandparents who “rejected” their grandchild or had other strongly negative responses were likely less willing to speak with a researcher on the topic. That said, data indicate that participating grandparents exhibited a range of positive and negative responses, both presently and in their own histories. This mirrors other recent research about GLBQ individual’s relationships with families of origin, as families often have “tolerant” or “accommodating” responses (Martin, et al. 2010; Seidman, 2002), which can be understood as neither entirely positive, nor entirely negative. It is also possible that dyads are more likely to have better relationships overall, given their willingness to participate in this project; this remains an issue with research on grandparent-grandchild relationships in general (Kemp, 2004; Sheehan & Petrovic, 2008).

I took several steps to mitigate these selection effects. For instance, when speaking with grandchildren, I asked them about other grandparents in an attempt to assess possible differences between them and the participating grandparent(s), how their rationale around coming out may have varied, and how coming out (or not) may have also shaped those relationships. The vast majority of non-participating grandparents were unavailable due to factors related to death, difficulty hearing, or illness. Some grandparents were unaware of their grandchild’s sexual orientation, to the best of the grandchild’s knowledge. Three grandparents who were not members of the original

grandparent-grandchild dyad, but who otherwise met criteria for participation, also agreed to participate, as did an additional three GLBQ grandchildren.

Lastly, this sample may also be self-selected toward those whose family relationships were stable enough to facilitate dyadic participation in the study. The in/stability of the family context in general has implications for family member's responses, as having a family member come out may add additional stress to already strained family relationships, making supportive responses potentially more difficult. Alternately, it is also possible that in families where there is more crisis and instability, a family member's sexual orientation is a relatively unimportant issue relative to the day-to-day survival needs of the family. This person may be needed to help manage daily tasks and thus their sexual orientation may not emerge as an issue. Data indicates that although some participants in this study had experienced significant instability in their family in the past (e.g., high-conflict divorces, homelessness, deaths of family members, mental illness, violence), none described this crisis as present in their lives during the interview. Thus, although participants described how prior events contributed to their current or previous relationship/family dynamics, participants were not actively in crisis and so this study cannot account for how broader family stability might impact the findings. Notwithstanding these limitations, this study is the first to examine grandparent's responses to learning about their grandchild's GLBQ sexual orientation and thus fills an important lacuna.

FINDINGS

In this section, I present results from survey items and qualitative data examining the impact of grandchildren's disclosure of a GLBQ sexual identity on grandparent-

grandchild relationships. Findings indicate that grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships often either improve or remain the same following disclosure—a surprising finding given popular and anecdotal stereotypes that these relationships would likely be irreparably damaged. To make sense of this finding, I use qualitative dyadic data to examine four variations of grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships and analyze how grandparents' and grandchildren's intergenerational stakes are shaped by their previous relationship quality and their interactions since grandchildren came out.

Impact on Grandparent-GLBQ Grandchild Relationship

Both qualitative and quantitative data shed light on grandparents and grandchildren's assessment of their relationship. Qualitative data indicate that grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships were either unaffected or improved after the discovery of a grandchild's sexual orientation. For instance, when I asked Ruby how coming out shaped her relationship with her grandmother, she said, "There was no negative reaction except maybe feeling awkward about telling her. If I hadn't come out to her, it would be hard to share my life with her." Similarly, Corey said that his disclosure really facilitated his relationship with his grandparents: "I feel like this has given me a reason to become closer to them again and to reconnect with my grandparents. Because if they weren't accepting then it would sort of push me away. But I knew right away that they were there for me. So, it allowed me to become closer to them." The same sentiments were expressed by grandparents, such as Ned, who said that his relationship with his grandson has, "gotten even better. It's very good, very good. I mean he's been a very, very good grandson. He surprises me." Although not all grandparents or grandchildren described their relationship as emotionally close, *all* participants described

their relationship as either unaffected or improved after the discovery of the grandchild's sexual orientation.

Quantitative data regarding relationship quality supports these qualitative findings. For instance, when asked if their relationship had suffered since their grandchild came out, grandparents were unanimous in responding that they disagreed. One wrote “no never” on the form, and others stopped writing to verbally report their disagreement with this statement. Like grandparents, when grandchildren responded to the statement, “Our relationship has suffered since my grandparent learned about my sexual orientation” *all* grandchildren “disagreed” indicating their that they did not perceive the relationship as suffering as a result of their coming out. Regarding how overall relationship quality has changed from “before coming out” to the past month, the most frequent response for both grandchildren (n = 27) and grandparents (n = 24) was that there was either improvement or no change in their relationship quality.¹⁸

Variations of Grandparent-GLBQ Grandchild Relationships

To examine *how* grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships remain generally positive or unchanged, I categorized previous relationship quality as primarily close or distant, and interactions since coming out as more or less accommodating, creating a matrix of grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships. Here, I first briefly describe

¹⁸ A small subset of grandchildren (n = 4) and grandparents (n = 8) said that their relationship quality had decreased. In looking more closely at those participants who reported that their relationship quality had decreased, several participants noted, either on their questionnaire or verbally during the interview, that the decrease in the relationship was related to another factor. For instance, Edwina told me that their relationship had been strained recently because of financial issues that “had nothing to do with the sexuality.” Others with lower responses wrote in that they hadn't spoken in the past month, and thus their relationship “during the past month” could not have been as high. Although some of these reported decreases in relationship quality may be explained by issues with the measure, it is also telling that grandparents more frequently reported a decrease in relationship quality indicating that grandchildren may be less affected than grandparents following discovery.

factors that contributed to previous relationship quality and interactions since coming out, and then describe how I made inclusionary decisions regarding these categories. I then use these categories to analyze how this (potential) crisis moment has shaped grandparents' and grandchildren's stakes in their relationships.

Previous Relationship Quality

A number of factors influenced previous relationship quality, many of which have been well-established by previous research on grandparent-adult grandchild relationships. I review these factors briefly here, although examples emerge later in relationship to these four typologies. Gender emerged as salient, as female grandchildren generally had closer relationships with their grandparents, and grandmothers tended to have closer relationships with their grandchild than grandfathers. The influence of parents was also an important mediating factor in previous relationship quality, as those with more positive relationship histories tended to have parents who were close with the grandparent generation, and facilitated interactions between grandparents and grandchildren. Geographic distance also affected relationship quality as dyads that lived for longer periods in close proximity tended to have closer relationships.

Previous relationship quality was also influenced by how much these individuals needed each other. For instance, several participants had experienced significant instability in their family in the past (e.g., high-conflict divorces, homelessness, deaths of family members, mental illness, violence). For these participants, these instabilities often made grandparents and grandchildren closer, as grandparents stepped into parenting roles or housed grandchildren and their parents. However, in other cases, these family crises led to distance between grandparents and grandchildren, for example, when parents'

divorces sometimes strained grandparent-grandchild relationships. Additionally, class status complicated this somewhat as wealthier families had more ability to cope with these stressful events on their own, whereas families with fewer financial resources tended to rely on each other more during these crisis moments. Previous relationships also shaped their interactions after a grandchild came out.

To characterize these relationships as closer or more distant, I examined qualitative data from both grandparents and grandchildren, relying primarily on their response to the question, “What was your relationship like growing up?”¹⁹ Grandparents and grandchildren who both described their relationship using the following two criteria were categorized as more distant: 1) narratives alluded to their relationship as “distant,” “not close,” or “strained,” and 2) reported seeing one another infrequently both as grandchildren were “growing up” and currently. Nine dyads met these criteria. Grandparents and grandchildren who both described their relationship using the following two criteria were categorized as closer: 1) qualitative narratives emphasized how close, inter-reliant, communicative, and harmonious their relationships were, and 2) reported seeing each other relatively frequently, growing up or in the recent past. Twenty-three dyads were categorized as distant using these criteria.

In three cases the grandparent and grandchild differed somewhat in their descriptions of their previous relationship, or met only one of these criteria. In these cases I revisited the transcripts in their entirety, searching specifically for examples that

¹⁹ Using quantitative data to categorize relationships was impossible given the generally positive characterizations of relationship quality. Only four dyads reported relationships that were not either “very good” or “excellent” on the quantitative survey. However, this challenge also highlights a strength of mixed methods approaches, such as this one, as the in-depth descriptions of their relationships illuminated the meanings that participants give to these categories, as well as the variations amongst these categories.

indicated that these individuals had specialized knowledge of one another. Using this criterion two dyads were categorized as closer, and one as more distant. Although relationships were categorized as either close or distant, there was nonetheless a great deal of variation within each of these categories. Thus, these categories are analytically useful to this analysis, but they also highlight the challenges of imposing categories onto complex concepts such as relationship quality.

Post-coming out interactions

Grandparents' and grandchildren's post-coming out interactions were characterized as more or less accommodating. I use the term "accommodating" as few relationships could be categorized as exclusively accepting or rejecting; rather, most interactions were somewhere in between these extremes, along a continuum of what could more accurately be called accommodation (Martin et al., 2010). Although accommodating behaviors were primarily enacted by grandparents, grandchildren's comfort with and interest in fostering the relationship played a big role in these interactions. Grandchildren's expectations of their grandparents were central. Some grandchildren expected very little from their grandparents, largely due to ageist stereotypes of older adults, and subsequently created few opportunities for accommodating interactions to occur. On the other hand, some grandchildren and grandparents expected that their relationship would involve sharing about grandchildren's romantic relationships or processing experiences of discrimination, which provided greater opportunities for demonstrating more accommodation, but also more opportunities for less accommodating interactions.

These interactions were shaped by the family context more generally. In some families, for example, negative responses from parents or other family members prompted grandparents to defend their GLBQ grandchild, providing an opportunity to demonstrate support. In other families, a general family norm of cohesion and support encouraged even those with more negative views about homosexuality to accommodate GLBQ grandchildren. Subsequent interactions were also shaped by their previous relationships, as some relied on each other for social, emotional or instrumental support—for example, grandchildren who performed weekly household chores for their grandparents. In general, there were few demographic differences between these groups except as noted.

To characterize post coming-out interactions as more or less accommodating, I utilized qualitative data from both grandparents and grandchildren. Interactions were categorized as more accommodating when both the grandparent and grandchild described at least three distinct instances where the grandparent demonstrated support of their GLBQ grandchild's sexual orientation. Accommodating behaviors included actions such as inquiring about a grandchild's same-sex partner, inviting partners to family events, defending grandchildren as non-pathological to others, or otherwise conveying their acceptance of a grandchild's sexual orientation. As I could not always assess how an action was interpreted by the grandchild, when grandparents offered accounts that they intended as inclusive of their grandchild's sexual orientation, I counted this as a more accommodating interaction.

Interactions were categorized as less accommodating when both the grandparent and grandchild described at least three distinct instances where the grandparent

demonstrated a lack of support of their GLBQ grandchild's sexual orientation. Less accommodating behaviors included arguing with grandchildren or other family members about their "choices," vocalizing a stance against same-sex marriage to their grandchild, introducing a grandchild's same-sex spouse as a "friend," as well as other actions that conveyed their disapproval or discomfort with their grandchild's sexual orientation.

Several dyads did not meet these criteria, for instance as they gave two examples of more accommodating interactions and one example of less accommodating behaviors. In these instances I categorized the dyad based on whichever type of interaction was most prevalent in their mutual accounts of their relationship. Although dyads' subsequent interactions were categorized as more or less accommodating, there was a great deal of variation within these categories. For example, one of the more accommodating dyads described eleven distinct more accommodating interactions and none that were less accommodating, while another had three distinct accommodating interactions as well as two that were less accommodating. This further illustrates the complexity of concepts such as acceptance or accommodation and the challenges researchers face in trying to parsimoniously examine issues such as grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships.

In the following sections, I describe four relationship types: 1) distant and less accommodating, 2) close and less accommodating, 3) distant and more accommodating, and, 4) close and more accommodating, as illustrated in Table 4.1. In doing so, I describe key qualities and characteristics of these relationships, analyze how their relationship has been shaped by the grandchild coming out, and conclude by theorizing about how grandchildren's and grandparents' stake in each other have been shaped by this "crisis" or conflict moment.

Table 4.1. Relationship Matrix

		Previous relationship quality	
		close	distant
Post-coming out interactions	less accommodating	N = 10	N = 6
	more accommodating	N = 15	N = 4

Distant-less accommodating

As Table 4.1 indicates, fewer participants in this study had distant relationships before grandchildren came out (n = 6). This illustrates some of the biases in this sample, and in grandparenting research more generally, as well as potential differences in grandchildren’s motivations to disclose their sexual orientations to grandparents with whom they have more distant relationships, as I discuss further in Chapter Two. Participants in the distant pre-existing relationship group were some of the least enthusiastic, most difficult to recruit, and reluctant to schedule interviews. I suspect that the participants in this group who did participate did so primarily because other family member(s) had already done so. Of the six dyads in this group, five included male grandchildren and two included male grandparents. Grandparents in this quadrant tended to have several other grandchildren (and great-grandchildren)—some had as many as forty—but all had at least five other grandchildren. This suggests there simply may have been practical difficulties involved in having close relationships with every grandchild.

Most of these dyads lived far apart when grandchildren were growing up and, in all of these dyads, grandchildren moved away from their families of origin when they

reached adulthood, often to attend college. This geographic distance often stood metaphorically for emotional closeness in their minds. For instance, when I asked Peter, a grandchild, about his overall relationship with his grandparents, he said, “I don’t see them a whole lot so, I guess that’s maybe a benefit of living far away.” Similarly, when I asked Ned, a grandfather, about his relationship with his grandson, he mentioned that gay people often moved away from their families, and that, “they normally move away and don’t come back.” In other words, these participants generally expected that they would have emotionally and geographically distant relationships.

Grandchildren in this quadrant articulated generally low expectations of their grandparents’ from their post-coming out interactions. For instance, Richard (grandson) anticipated a negative response from his grandmother because she was “quite socially conservative” and a “die-hard Republican”; he explained: “...so I turned my back on [this] relationship. [Well, maybe] not, “turned my back,” but just...didn’t [try to] connect anymore.” Richard came out to his grandmother by mailing her an invitation to his wedding to person of the same gender. Given their distant relationship and her disinterest in traveling great distances, he was not surprised when she did not come to the wedding, and he this was fine for him.

The low expectations that grandchildren in this group had of grandparents were also illustrated by Laura, who said that her grandmother used the term “friend” to describe Laura’s partner of many years, much to Laura’s annoyance. “I don’t want her to say ‘friend.’ I want her to say girlfriend, or partner, or significant other.” Despite her strong feelings about this, Laura decided not to say anything because she did not think it would change her grandmother’s behavior and it was not “worth it.” Laura’s expectations

of her grandmother were informed, in part, by ageist stereotypes about older adults. She described, for example, wanting her mother to talk to her grandmother about her (Laura's) sexual orientation, she said: "I wanted someone to tell her in person, in case she had questions. Just in case, I don't know, she had some sort of really adverse reaction. She could have a heart attack or something, you know." These worries about the emotional (and physical) fragility of grandparents upon the discovery of a grandchild's sexual orientation are reinforced by other cultural narratives that "telling the grandparents may be 'too much for them to handle'" (Herdt & Koff, 2000, p. 6), or that, "We can't tell Grandpa (Grandma), it would kill him (her)" (Lopata & Lopata, 2003, p. 42). Perhaps because grandchildren in this group already had distant relationships with their grandparents, ageist stereotypes were relatively unchallenged by their own personal relationships with older adults.

Grandparents in this group had relatively negative stereotypes about homosexuality or the homosexual "lifestyle" that shaped their expectations of their GLBQ grandchild. One grandfather said that he was glad that his grandson was married, because his stereotypes about the gay male lifestyle included images of sexual promiscuity and HIV/AIDS: "So now we know they're clean and healthy and will remain so." Grandparents were also likely to say that they were uncomfortable or ashamed when talking with others about their grandchild's sexual orientation, and both grandparents and grandchildren said that sexual orientation was a topic that almost never came up in their (infrequent) conversations.

Many grandparents in this group "admitted" early in our interview that they had problems with homosexuality. For example, Lilly told me that when her granddaughter

came out to her, “I still loved her and it was OK with me and—all that stuff.” But then she said, “I have to say, I have to tell you this one thing though...,” and went on to tell me how uncomfortable she is with her granddaughter’s recognizable queerness.

Similarly, when I spoke with Marty, one of the first things he said about his relationship with his grandson was that they strongly disagreed on the issue of same-sex marriage.

Throughout the interview he referred to how having his grandson come out was “harder for me than for my wife.” Both Marty and Lilly described making efforts to hide their negative views about same-sex marriage or discomfort with their grandchild’s queer appearance from their grandchild.

Grandparents were often successful with this, as grandchildren in this group were generally unaware of their grandparents’ negative views about same-sex marriage, gay adoption, feelings of shame discussing their grandchild’s sexual orientation with others, or negative stereotypes about GLBQ people. Perhaps their relative distance emotionally and geographically, and their mutual reluctance to discuss these issues directly, shielded grandchildren from learning these more specific views about homosexuality. Thus, many grandchildren imagined that their grandparents were more accommodating and respectful of their sexual orientation than their grandparents revealed during their interview.

In describing how their relationships changed after grandchildren came out, grandparents and grandchildren in this category both tended to characterize the relationships as not changing much. They were previously relatively distant, and remained relatively cordial and formal after grandchildren came out. Dyadic data reveal that grandparents and grandchildren had different perceptions of the relationship, where grandparents had more negative views about homosexuality but grandchildren were

relatively unaware of this. In this way, conflict or differences in attitudes on social issues may not necessarily shift grandparents or grandchildren's stakes in each other when the relationship was distant and their views are discordant.

Grandparent-grandchild dyads in this group fit with how the intergenerational stake perspective characterizes these different generations' investments in each other, as coming out only encouraged grandchildren to see differences between themselves and their grandparent, and pursue their autonomous lives. Grandparents, on the other hand, were still generally invested in their grandchildren as they sought to keep less accommodating views from grandchildren. However, given the distance in their previous relationship, largely negative views about homosexuality, and few opportunities for meaningful interactions, grandparents' generally distant investment in their grandchild was maintained. As such, for these grandparents and grandchildren, this potential crisis moment was relatively uneventful in their relationship and left their mutual stakes in one another unchanged.

Close-less accommodating

Nine grandparent-GLBQ grandchild dyads in this study had relationships that were previously close, but which were characterized by less accommodating responses after the grandchild's coming out. Four of the grandchildren in this group were male, as were two of the grandparents. Three grandparents in this group reported having lived with their grandchild for a period of time.

Unlike the grandparents and grandchildren in the previous group, these dyads were more likely to have lived in close proximity, and they described frequent visits and interactions as continuing to characterize their relationships. As Nora said, she has a great

relationship with her grandson, “because I call him and he calls me all the time.”

Grandchildren also described how close their relationship was; for instance, Amelia (grandchild) told me that her family has always been very close. This is similar to Darren and his grandson, who have always lived in the same town. They both described spending time on activities they enjoyed together, such as making dinner, playing card games, and watching basketball. Several grandparents and grandchildren in this group described difficult events early in their lives and relationships that brought them close together, often as the grandparent filled a valuable social need for the grandchild/parent, such as housing or child-care. For instance, one of the dyads in this group lived together for several months after a grandson’s father died of cancer.

These close relationships informed grandparents’ and grandchildren’s expectations of each other after the grandchild came out. As with the previous group, grandchildren’s expectations were strongly informed by stereotypes about older adults. Lou described his grandmother as “very kind of rigid in her thinking, in a way. Well, maybe not rigid in her thinking. I don’t know how to say it exactly.... So I’m more empathetic to hearing what she has to say and [try] not take it as seriously.” Lou has a hard time pinning down *how* exactly his grandmother’s thinking is “rigid,” but he still describes her this way. Further, his perception of her as rigid-thinking shapes his approach to her more generally—specifically, he doesn’t take what she says “so seriously.” This rigid thinking was interpreted as problematic by grandchildren as they imagined that their grandparent would not be able to understand or come to terms with their grandchild’s sexual orientation. In describing her grandmother, Helena said:

Oh, Grandma wants to be really cool and is actually fairly forward-thinking. But she slips up and says things like ‘Oriental’ when she talks about my Asian friends. But I think for the most part she is far more advanced than most 90-year olds are.

Although she describes her grandmother here as “forward-thinking” and “far more advanced than most 90-year olds,” at the same time, it is clear that, in Helena’s opinion, her grandmother fails at achieving “coolness.” And, indeed, by framing her grandmother as “more advanced” than her contemporaries, Helena reifies the idea that older adults are generally more conservative.

As these examples also illustrate, when articulating ageist stereotypes of older adults, grandchildren in this group were more likely to tell a story or give an example of their grandparent’s behavior, as opposed to a more general example of ageist stereotypes. Grandchildren’s closer relationships to their grandparents likely gave them more knowledge about their grandparent’s views or attitudes, than those with more distant relationships. This close relationship history may also have given grandchildren a somewhat more accurate perspective about their grandparent’s views about homosexuality, or other social issues that grandchildren perceived to be connected to sexuality.

Although grandchildren’s expectations of their grandparents still drew on ageist stereotypes of older adults, grandchildren in this group did more work to compare and contrast these stereotypes with their own experiences of their grandparent. For instance Parker described his grandfather saying, “It’s kind of cool, for somebody who’s lived so long, to not be set in your ways.” Although Parker engages with the stereotype that older adults are rigid thinkers, Parker saw his grandfather as an exception, in large part because of his own personal experiences with his grandfather.

Grandparents in this group also had expectations of their grandchildren, most frequently that their grandchild's sexual orientation would be an invisible part of their family life and interactions. For instance, Alma (grandmother) said that she thought it was inappropriate for her granddaughter to bring up her romantic relationships at family events, "because of the children. You don't want the children to be exposed to that." Grandparents also expressed discomfort if their grandchildren looked or acted in ways that marked their sexual orientation, such as gender non-conforming appearance or holding hands with a same-sex partner at family events.

Like grandparents in the previous group, grandparents in this group used terms like "reluctant," "uncomfortable" or "embarrassed" in describing their feeling about talking with others about their grandchild's sexual orientation. In their relationships with their grandchildren, as well as with others, grandparents in this group generally said that they very rarely or never had explicit conversations about their grandchild's sexual orientation. As one grandmother told me, "I've never talked about this before. Not even to my daughter [my grandchild's mother]." Similarly, Darren told me that, "I think each of us knows, what the other one's attitude is on it, but I do not expect or try to persuade her in one way or another. So conversationally, it has not been a subject. And it's a very difficult subject." Although similar to grandparents in the group with distant relationships, grandparents in this group describe more conflicted or ambivalent feelings about keeping this topic silent, or in addressing their own discomfort with their grandchild's sexual orientation.

Although grandparents in this group tended to have negative ideas about homosexuality itself, their general approach in their social interactions with their

grandchildren was to try to be inclusive (although not necessarily of their sexual orientation). As Nora (grandparent) explained, even if you don't agree with their sexual orientation, "You don't have to be nasty to people. That's ridiculous. They're human beings just like anyone else." This willingness to overlook their negative views about homosexuality and to act inclusively of their grandchildren was largely founded in a view that their grandchild was a good person. Patrick, for example, explained his feelings toward his granddaughter: "I feel very strongly about her, that she is excellent, just a very, very good person." Similarly, when Janette recalled a recent conversation with another family member who suggested that gay people like her granddaughter were sexual predators, she said:

I mean deciding that you're gay is a personal thing. That doesn't mean you have decided to be a [sex] offender. Because that's a violent act. And she's a very sweet, precious girl. Loving, sensitive and, [just thinking] that she would come onto a little kid!

Grandparents like Janette and Patrick did not reject negative stereotypes and conceptions of GLBQ individuals, but rather, imagined that their grandchild did not fit those stereotypes because they are a good person.

This interest in accommodating the GLBQ grandchild in the family, without necessarily having positive views about homosexuality, meant that in grandparent-grandchild social interactions, the latter's sexuality was an invisible quality, or something that was excused or ignored by grandparents. As Alma (a grandparent) said, "nobody in the family has turned around [and] said don't come to our family [events] because of the way you are. Are they happy about it? Probably not. But everybody has respect for her, because they know how close she is to her grandmother." Although Alma has never spoken with her granddaughter about the latter's sexual orientation, and does not "agree

with it,” she still includes her granddaughter in family events. Further, Alma articulates here that, out of deference to her, others in the family treat her granddaughter respectfully because Alma passively advocates for her granddaughter’s acceptance within the family.

In general, grandchildren in this group were happy with their post-coming out interactions and relationships with their grandparents. Grandchildren felt included at family events and supported in their romantic relationships, even if they knew that their grandparent(s) did not “agree with” their sexual orientation. Yet, they voiced their discomfort with knowing that a grandparent was politically conservative or held the religious belief that, for example, GLBQ individuals would go to hell. As Nate said of his grandfather, “I don’t always get how he can navigate the things that are so negative against his own family.” Indeed, because of the norms of silence around issues of sexuality, grandchildren often wondered how their grandparent reconciled these frameworks and understood their grandchild’s sexual orientation.

Grandparent-grandchild dyads in this group generally described their close relationships as continuing after coming out, albeit perhaps more tentative than before. Grandchildren were somewhat unsure of their grandparent’s exact views about their sexual orientation, although they often assumed that their grandparent’s silence implied that they were uncomfortable talking about it, not necessarily that they had negative views about their sexual orientation. Although grandchildren described wishing that their relationship would not change, they also described carefully choosing their words in their conversations and feeling that they had to monitor their actions so as not to offend their grandparents.

Grandparents were particularly adamant that their grandchildren were good people, whom they (the grandparents) were invested in supporting. This support occurred despite often negative understandings of who GLBQ people are. Thus, their relationship remained relatively unmarred, despite very different attitudes about sexual orientation. Grandparents stressed the continuity and commonalities between them, while ignoring or minimizing their differences, particular those around the grandchild's sexual orientation. For grandparent-grandchild dyads in this group, coming out was a small turning point in their relationship as the relationship remained basically as it was, although grandparents now did more work seeking to minimize their differences.

Distant-more accommodating

The four grandparent-grandchild dyads that constitute this group had similar relationship histories to those in the first group, as they were often geographically or emotionally distant early in their relationship and currently. All grandparents had at least four other grandchildren and none had ever lived with the grandchild in this study. Three of the grandchildren were male, and all of the grandparents were female.

Perhaps because of their more distant relationships, grandchildren in this group described having low expectations of their grandparents. As Keli (a grandchild) said, "I was not so afraid of offending and freaking out people a little bit," indicating that Keli expected that her grandmother would be offended, but did not care. Grandchildren described being more invested in developing their identities and lives, and less centrally concerned with maintaining family ties. As Mason said, "If I was going to continue to invest in [my grandparents], they needed to accept me for who I was. Otherwise I didn't want to invest time in them." Having distant relationship histories with their grandparents

likely contributed to these grandchildren's low expectations of their grandparents' responses, and reflects their generally low intergenerational stake in the relationship, at least prior to coming out.

Grandparents' expectations of their grandchildren were often shaped by stereotypes and myths about GLBQ sexualities. For instance, Ida described her granddaughter's sexuality as "her choice" many times in our interview, referencing stereotypes that sexual orientation is something that is chosen and that could potentially be changed if the GLBQ person would only "choose" to do so. Other grandparents referenced stereotypes about GLBQ people as gender non-normative, as they reflected on their suspicions about their grandchild's sexual orientation because of their gender non-conforming behaviors. Although these stereotypes were certainly not as negative as some of the stereotypes described by less accommodating grandparents, they may have shaped grandparents' expectations of their GLBQ grandchild. For example, some grandparents may have expected that their grandchild would conform to stereotypes about GLBQ persons and had little personal knowledge of their grandchild to counteract these assumptions.

Unlike dyads in the first group, grandparents in this group had more accommodating responses to their grandchildren. One of the ways that these accommodating responses emerged in their social interactions was in relationships with other family members, most frequently with parents. As I describe more fully elsewhere (Chapter Two), parents often aided with disclosure to grandparents, for example by explicitly telling them about their grandchild's sexual orientation, creating a safe situation where a grandchild could come out to a grandparent, strategizing with grandchildren

about how to do the disclosure, bringing grandparents to PFLAG meetings, or purchasing books or educational materials. Although parents sometimes advocated for acceptance from grandparents in all four groups, grandchildren and grandparents in this group both reported that grandparents would often help parents come to more accepting responses.

For instance, in talking about her grandson's parents' responses, Beatrice said, "As far as I know, his mother was okay with it. It was my son who wasn't." Beatrice spoke on the phone with her son shortly after her grandson came out to both of them.

[When we spoke] He said "[my son] is gay and I just can't accept it." And so we had a conversation, like "it's okay" and "he is who he is" and "he is still your son" and "you know you don't want to do this, you don't want to be angry about it because you will cheat yourself with your relationship with your son forever, for the rest of both your lives."

Here, like other grandparents, Beatrice promotes cohesion within the family by reasoning with her son that he does not want to lose his relationship with his son.

Mae's situation was similar when her grandson came out and her son (her grandson's father) had a hard time dealing with it. She described spending many hours talking with her son about it and feeling deeply empathic of his pain. She said that she tried to help her son come to a more accepting viewpoint by telling him that, "I don't think he can help being who he is. He deserves our love and he has it." These examples indicate that perhaps when parents (or other family members) have negative responses, this creates a space for grandparents to step in with supporting, accommodating responses to maintain family cohesion and provide love and support for their grandchild in this turbulent moment. It suggests, too, that given grandparents' role within families more generally, their desire to promote cohesion might lead them to have even more accommodating responses to their grandchild's disclosure than they might have had

otherwise. In other words, for grandparents, their response may be developed not only in response to grandchildren directly, but also in a more triangulated fashion which takes into account the responses of other family members.

Accommodating interactions between grandparents and grandchildren also emerged when grandchildren experienced harassment and discrimination. For instance, although Ruby did not have a particularly close with her grandmother, she remembered one evening when she was very upset about a discriminatory action from her partner's place of employment. She recalled that her grandmother sat down with her and told her a story about another relative who had a similar conflict that was resolved in a positive way. More accounts of grandparents' supportive and protective roles emerge again in the next section, but as these examples indicate, grandparents in this group generally did not seek out this accommodating position. Rather, it emerged when their relationships with parents or witnessing their grandchild's hardships provided an opening that enabled them to demonstrate their accommodation of their grandchild's sexual orientation.

Grandchildren in this group described being surprised and pleased with their grandparents' responses and their subsequent interactions. Grandchildren said that their relationships had generally improved, and that they felt comfortable bringing significant others to family events or talking about issues relating to their sexual orientation as they fit naturally into conversations. As Keli, a grandchild, explained:

In some ways I think that coming out was sort of the process of becoming an adult with my grandmother. Like, "I am an adult. We have a relationship." I think that was extremely helpful in our relationship. There was already this difficult communication between us. And she had accepted me and so I think the relationship was built on top of that. So every conversation we had after that was stronger. I mean if I hadn't come out to her, I don't think she would be able to be a part of my life.

As Keli articulates here, coming out to her grandmother was a turning point in their relationship. Because she interpreted her grandmother's responses as positive, Keli saw this as a starting point for their adult relationship, and further, without this positive response, she could not imagine how they could have continued to have any relationship at all.

Despite these feelings of support and accommodation, grandchildren (and grandparents) also acknowledged that their relationships were still primarily distant. This continued distance meant that both grandparents and grandchildren were somewhat uncertain about their relationship, even though the interactions they described were primarily positive. For instance, when reflecting on how their relationship had changed since her grandson came out, Mae said, "I'm just happy that he feels free to talk with me," suggesting that she did not take their relationship as a given. In wondering about what her grandmother thought about her upcoming wedding to a same-sex partner, Ruby said:

I guess I don't care that much about it. It's weird. I can't believe it—I think it's a—closeness thing or something. Like people that I don't have a relationship with, I guess it doesn't feel as important [what she believes about same-sex marriage]. I feel weird saying that but yeah, that's true.

As Ruby's account indicates, grandparents and grandchildren's distant relationship history may present a barrier to establishing open communication and trust, even with positive interactions and displays of support.

Grandchildren in this group described having a renewed commitment to their grandparents and an appreciation for their supportive, accommodating efforts in their lives. Several grandchildren saw their coming out as a turning point in their relationship, and that because of their grandparent's supportive response, they had a renewed

investment in learning about their grandparent and maintaining a relationship with them as adults. Particularly when parents responded negatively, grandparents emerged as a source of family connectedness and continuity. As these few cases indicate, engaging in a tense, disruptive issue may facilitate grandchildren's stake in their grandparents, particularly when/if the issue is divisive with other family members. But even when grandchildren's level of investment in their relationship with their grandparents increased, they still acknowledged a baseline level of distance.

Grandparents in this group remained invested in their grandchildren. Thinking about or witnessing the hardships that GLBQ individuals face because of their sexual orientation enabled grandparents in this group to step in and demonstrate their support of, and investment in, their GLBQ grandchildren. Perhaps because their relationships with their grandchildren were previously more tenuous, grandparents' motivations in this group to intervene in support of grandchildren may have been guided more by their interest in family cohesion more generally, or a more general commitment to justice and equality. Yet, for both grandparents and grandchildren, this conflict moment resulted in a renewed interest in maintaining and fostering the relationship, even if not to the extent as those in the next group.

Close-more accommodating

The vast majority of grandparent-grandchild dyads who participated in this study were in this group: those with close relationship histories who described largely accommodating interactions since the grandchild came out (n = 15). Like other grandparents and grandchildren with close relationship histories, dyads in this group were often geographically close for substantial portions of their relationship, and some even

lived together for short periods of time (n = 4). Grandparents in this group were the most likely to have other GLBQ kin (n = 8).

As with other groups, ageist stereotypes also shaped what grandchildren in this group expected of their grandparents. As one grandchild, Corey, put it:

...with my grandparents' age, I had the mentality that as an older person, you can't really do a lot to change the world around you. You just have to go with it. So at their age I assumed that they really couldn't do a lot to show disgust or to do things otherwise [to change my sexual orientation]. I mean, in their older age, they have to go with the flow.

Corey explained that he sees older age as limiting ones' ability to "change the world around you." In his case, this meant that he expected that his grandparents would not try to change his sexual orientation and would actually be more accepting. But for others, this image of older adults as ineffectual had the opposite effect, leading grandchildren to have lower expectations of acceptance.

Grandchildren's expectations of their grandparents also emerged as grandchildren described how their relationship with their grandparent was shaped by their coming out. For instance, Maya, who identifies as a queer woman, described a recent incident in which she corrected her uncle when he referred to her as lesbian. When asked whether there are other family members she would *not* similarly correct, she explained:

Well, my grandmother. I don't think she refers to me in any way. I don't know that she's ever really said "lesbian" or "gay" or anything but I guess [if] she did imply something about me only liking women, I might not correct it. I might reason that, she's 86 years old. She understood the gay part. That's pretty good. She doesn't know what queer is and I'm not sure that it matters that much that she can conceptualize that.

Content with the fact that her grandmother understood "the gay part," Maya was not as concerned that her grandmother be familiar with queer identity as a distinct phenomenon. Even though she described correcting other family members, Maya's ageist stereotypes

lead her to expect less from her grandmother than from others in her family. She describes putting less importance on (and less confidence in) her grandmother's ability to understand the complexities of sexual identities, in contrast to her expectations of other, younger family members.

Grandchildren also described being less concerned with the language used to describe their significant others in the case of their grandparents, than in the case of other family members. Grandparents used a range of terms to describe their grandchildren's significant others—from partner, buddy, girl/boyfriend, wife/husband, fiancé, his/her “person,” to gay married friend. But by far the most frequent term that grandparents used was “friend.” And though many grandchildren described how they corrected other family members when they used a term like “friend,” instead of a term like, “boyfriend,” “wife” or “partner” (as appropriate), several mentioned that they would not necessarily correct their grandparent. According to Jake, his grandmother consistently refers to his partner as his friend:

I mean, it kind of initially irked me, but then I think of who she is and just how fortunate I am for everything that's occurred.... I don't feel like it's fair for me to expect anything more than what she gives me. For her age and the level of support that she has given me, that, if that's what she feels comfortable saying, then that's what she feels comfortable saying. I'm not going to have a conversation with her to get her to try and change that.

For Jake, even though he did not appreciate hearing his grandmother refer to his partner as his “friend,” he decided that it was not worth the energy to try to change her behavior—perhaps as a result of the stereotype, noted earlier, that older adults are rigid thinkers.

Although all of these examples illustrate how ageist stereotypes shape grandchildren's expectations of their grandparents, and in many instances, lead

grandchildren to expect little from their grandparents, examples from grandchildren in this group are unique as they all pertain to specific aspects of their sexual identities or relationships. Without their close relationship history and accommodating interactions since coming out, these types of conversations would be less likely. Their close relationship perhaps created the conditions for these types of dilemmas to emerge. Taken together grandchildren's expectations of their grandparents were still shaped by social constructions of older adults as rigid thinkers, conservative or ineffectual, although these were tempered by their specific knowledge of their grandparents.

Grandparents also had expectations about their grandchildren and what it means to have a GLBQ grandchild. Grandparents in this group expected that their relationship would continue to be close, and described a strong commitment to their grandchild's well-being and a high level of investment in their relationship with their grandchild. For instance, as Maryanne said, "we love her, and that's what makes a family. That's all. Otherwise you don't have a family anymore. Do you know what I mean? And I don't want that. I don't want to lose her." Maryanne and other grandparents were deeply invested in maintaining their relationships with their grandchildren, and above all, they did not want to lose these relationships. As this quote also implies, grandparents might imagine that losing a grandchild may also mean losing other valued family relationships.

Like grandparents in other groups, grandparents in this group had stereotypes about GLBQ people and queer life. Some referenced stereotypes about GLBQ persons as "flamboyant" or gender non-conforming, particularly when they mentioned how happy they were that their grandchild (or grandchild's partner) did not meet those stereotypes. Some grandparents wondered, as Susan did, whether their grandchild's sexuality "may

not be permanent. This might be a phase.” Although grandparents articulated a range of stereotypes about GLBQ persons or queer life, these stereotypes primarily emerged when grandparents described wanting their grandchild to have a “normal life” which they saw as generally incompatible with their perceptions of “queer life.”

This was particularly clear when grandparents expressed worry or fear that their grandchild would experience sexuality-based discrimination or violence. As one grandparent, Edith, said, “I know how many people out there do bad things to people that are gay and lesbian. So I worry for her safety.” In addition to violence, grandparents expressed concern that GLBQ grandchildren would be discriminated against in their employment, that they wouldn’t be able to parent, and generally that “life would be hard.” Grandparents also acknowledged how their grandchild’s sexual orientation might negatively impact their relationships with other family members with whom they had not yet disclosed their sexuality. As Vivian said of her grandson: “I really feel very sad that he can't share this [part of himself] with his [other] grandparents.” As these examples indicate, grandparents in this group were more likely to express conceptions of GLBQ people and queer life as a difficult life for GLBQ persons, a concern that shaped their interactions with their GLBQ grandchildren and others.

Several grandparents in this group described having strong religious or spiritual beliefs that gave them comfort and bolstered their interests in accommodating their GLBQ grandchild, for instance as they described their grandchild as being made by God just as they are. This religious or spiritual connection was also something grandparents wanted their grandchildren to have. As Beatrice said, “I find happiness in my belief. I wish that for everybody. You know, to have a close relationship with God and be able to

pray in faith and expectation.” Although grandparents noted that this was likely difficult for GLBQ people because of policies of exclusion from several prominent faith traditions, they still wanted their grandchild to have access to this, and several of them took tremendous efforts to change these policies in their own faith communities. The expectation that their grandchild would be included in their faith tradition proved to be a powerful point of motivation for grandparents in this group to advocate for their GLBQ grandchild.

These fears about the possible consequences of GLBQ identities shaped grandparent-grandchild interactions after grandchildren came out. Several grandparents said that they would intervene or had intervened when/if they saw these issues emerge for their grandchild. For instance, Robert said, “If there has been any discrimination against [my grandson] Ryan, it’s pretty well covered. He’s family. We’ve got a strong family.” Similarly Gil said, “No one would make it a moral issue out of it, at least around Grace [her grandmother] and me. Grace is very protective of [our granddaughter], and I am, too.” As both Robert and Gil illustrate here, grandparents’ investment in their grandchildren facilitated a protective response that extended to their GLBQ identities.

The protective role that grandparents play for GLBQ grandchildren emerged poignantly in my conversation with Edwina as she described learning about her grandson’s break up with his ex-partner:

I said, “Tell me about it.” He was reluctant. I said, “I want you to tell me exactly what happened.” So he said, “Well, he was choking me and, see this?” So I says, “Okay.” And he had bruises all over here [on his torso], I could see he had gotten kicked and things like that. And so we got in the car and I says, “Is this what he did to you?” He was all bruised up. So I said, “I’m going to go over there and kill that motherfucker.” And [he said], “Grandma, you can’t do that.” I say, “Oh yes I can,” because I knew exactly where he worked. I said, “Nobody is going to touch

my grandchild like this and, and live to talk about it. I'm going to kill that motherfucker.”

While Edwina is particularly graphic in her protective instincts, her account illustrates a common theme in my interviews with grandparents *and* grandchildren as grandparents sought to protect their grandchild from harm.

For some grandparents, imagining that their grandchild was experiencing discrimination further motivated their investment in the relationship. Sadie's eyes were teary as she described her relationship with her granddaughter: “If anything, you love them more. They need you more.” Examples like these emerged in nearly every family as both grandparents and grandchildren reported that grandparents were frequently supportive and protective. Grandchildren reported that witnessing this protective response from grandparents made them feel supported and accepted, and that it further motivated their investment in their relationship with their grandparents.

Grandparents were not the only ones to describe interactions like these; so did grandchildren. In my interview with Jake, he described feeling supported by his grandmother when he brought his long-term partner to his brother's wedding:

I was looking melancholy and it [same-sex marriage] obviously, wasn't legal or recognized by the church at the time. But she's like, ‘We're going to do this for you, don't worry. We'll have a ceremony. We'll have family.’ She saw that I was worried about it and made the point to tell me that [the family] would recognize it and that the whole family will be there to support it.

Jake was moved by his grandmother's response and this facilitated his interest in a close relationship with her. Similarly, Sydney said, “I think that if anyone else in my family were to give me a hard time at all, I think my grandma would freak out at them. She would do it in a nice way. She's pretty diplomatic. But she would stick up for me.”

Family events, such as weddings, funerals, holiday dinners, or reunions were the

occasions when grandchildren and grandparents most often reported interacting and, thus, these kinds of positive interactions often happened in the context of other family relationships.

As previous examples illustrate, however, not all interactions between grandparents and grandchildren in this group were entirely positive. For example, one might recall that Jake and Maya did not necessarily feel as though their respective grandparents understood their relationship or their identity. Similarly, Edgar said that his grandmother “had a lot of preconceived notions about me [regarding his sexual promiscuity] and I was like, ‘Whoa, back up.’ ‘I’m not like that at all.’ Like, ‘you can’t generalize that to me.’” Likewise, Vincent relates the following: “My grandma sat down with [my boyfriend and I] after we got back from lunch. And [she] said, ‘I’m so glad [he] has you. You watch out for him and be careful. I don’t want him to get AIDS.’ So the assumption is because I am gay, that I will get AIDS and I will have unprotected sex.” Vincent went on to describe how he, his boyfriend and his grandmother had a long discussion about his values and the stereotypes about gay men and HIV/AIDS.

One finding unique to this group is that when specific conflicts arose in their interactions, these grandparents and grandchildren generally addressed it directly, illustrating the openness, honesty and commitment that characterized their relationships. Grandparents’ and grandchildren’s relationship history and baseline of accommodation laid a strong foundation for them to engage with each other in a meaningful way on topics that were much more sensitive and controversial in other grandparent-grandchild dyads. As such, grandparent-grandchild dyads in this group described a great deal of confidence in their relationship and on-going commitment to one another. Although they

had strong relationships before the grandchild came out, dealing with this issue provided another mechanism to help them get to know each other, pushed them to talk about difficult topics, and solidified their confidence in their relationship.

Another quality that was largely unique to this group was grandchildren's descriptions of their protectiveness and support of their grandparents. As Vincent said, "she's the only grandparent I have left and she is 92 and she's kind of weird sometimes. But I am the one who sticks up for her and I think that makes us closer. I feel this all has made us closer." Grandchildren in this group described being very invested in their grandparents. Perhaps their close relationships prior to coming out, and their grandparent's accommodating response, enabled grandchildren in this group to focus on their commonalities with their grandparent, and to have a strong investment in their grandparent. This dedication to one's grandparent, and commitment to one another has implications for intergenerational stake perspective, as it may be that conflict moments like this one can facilitate great investment from grandchildren.

DISCUSSION

Findings indicate that the discovery of a grandchild's sexual orientation not only may have no effect on grandparent-grandchild relationships, but may, in fact, impact such relationships positively—in marked contrast to broader cultural discourses that suggest grandparents would be unlikely to continue relationships with GLBQ kin. In this sample, both grandparents and grandchildren reported that their relationships either did not change or improved after the latter came out. Yet the reasons for this are complicated.

This research has revealed several factors that shape grandparent-grandchild relationships when grandchildren come out. One such factor is the silent, but salient role

that sexual orientation plays in their relationships. Most grandparent-grandchild dyads said that sexual orientation was something that was not explicitly discussed. With some exceptions, grandparent-grandchild dyads generally worked hard to avoid sexually laden topics and otherwise avoid alluding to the grandchild's sexual orientation. This made for occasionally uncomfortable conversations, both when the topic was avoided and when it did come up.

One of the main ways that a grandchild's sexuality emerged in their relationships with grandparents was in experiences of harassment or discrimination. In general, grandparents were protective and supportive in response to actual or potential discriminatory acts against their grandchild, and this shaped their relationship with their grandchild in a positive way. However, these responses may have been motivated by their investment in their grandchild and family cohesion, rather than their attitude toward their grandchild's sexual orientation. Although there were many contexts in which grandchildren's sexual orientation was relevant, grandparents and grandchildren were generally reluctant to bring sexual orientation up as a topic of conversation, rendering sexuality a virtual lavender elephant in the family room.

Other family members and the broader family context also played important roles in shaping grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships. The reactions of other family members, parents in particular, made a grandchild's sexual orientation salient as parents and grandparents often found comfort in talking with each other, often as grandparents encouraged parents to be more accepting toward their child. In this way, parents and other family members provided opportunities for grandparents to demonstrate accommodation to their GLBQ grandchildren. And because grandparents often play a

symbolic role as heads of their families, their own responses and their advice to other family members carried weight.

Broader family events elicited the salience of grandchildren's sexuality, as grandparents were invested in grandchildren's inclusion in family rituals such as wedding or holiday dinners. For some grandparent-grandchild dyads, their relationship was so contextualized in a broader family system (i.e., they only saw each other during big family events) that the importance of coming out or having an accommodating response from a grandparent was secondary to other family relationships. Yet, even for these dyads, maintaining a relationship was an important component of family cohesion, thus indicating that even for more distant grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships, sexual orientation remains an important component of these relationships.

Expectations that grandparents and grandchildren had of one another were revealing of the cultural constructions of older adults and of GLBQ people that shaped grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships. These expectations were mediated in large part by their previous relationships with one another, as this personal knowledge enabled them to challenge the relevance of these stereotypes for their own family member. Future research may wish to expand on these findings about how grandparents and adult grandchildren's expectations of one another are shaped in crisis or conflict moments.

Findings from this research indicate several promising areas for future inquiry. First, although this issue is not discussed here, future research could explore how older adults understand gender identity, gender expression, and transgender individuals, with a specific focus on how this plays out in intergenerational family relationships. The few examples in this data indicate that non-normative gender identity and gender transition on

the part of family members may be challenging for grandparents. Second, given the limitations of this sample regarding race, future research may usefully explore grandparents' relationships with grandchildren who are out in families and communities of color, especially given the important role that grandparents often play in non-white families (Cherlin & Furstenberg 1986; King & Elder 1998; Lawton, Silverstein & Bengston, 1994). Lastly, future research may usefully explore grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships where grandparents had more overtly negative responses or purposively seek out grandparent-grandchild dyads where the relationship was decidedly non-positive before disclosure.

Theoretical Implications

These findings have implications for the intergenerational stake perspective, particularly in examining how conflict or disruptive moments shape grandparents' and grandchildren's investments in one another. Coming out is just such a disruptive moment as it challenges a grandparent's perception of what kind of person their grandchild is, and potentially makes it more challenging for grandparents to imagine continuity and similarity between their generations. Coming out also disrupts grandchildren's stake in their grandparents, particularly if they imagine, as common cultural narratives would suggest, that their grandparents are likely to reject them because of their sexual orientation.

In general, grandparents in all groups remained invested in their grandchildren, but the process by which this investment was maintained was unique depending on their

relationship histories and their subsequent interactions. For grandparents who had more negative understandings of homosexuality and less accommodating behaviors, paired with a previously close relationship with their grandchild, they were able to use their personal knowledge of their grandchild to explain away perceived differences between them after their grandchild came out. Similarly, for grandparents with more accommodating interactions and positive relationship histories, their personal knowledge about their GLBQ grandchild facilitated their continued closeness and investment in their grandchild.

Grandparents' personal knowledge about their grandchild's life enabled them to personally identify with their grandchild's adversities and to establish a need for their support and investment. As one grandparent said, "If anything, you love them more. They need you more." In this way, personal knowledge of the grandchild brought about by close relationship histories enabled grandparents to see the need for their continued investment and to use their knowledge about their grandchild to minimize the differences between them and emphasize the continuity in their relationship.

For grandparents who had a more distant previous relationship with their grandchild, coming out was a turning point in their relationship. For those who had less accommodating interactions, grandparents had enough of a stake in their grandchild to avoid the topic of the conflict, but generally not enough personal knowledge about their grandchild to easily minimize differences between them. Grandparents who had more accommodating interactions after their grandchild's coming out, but a distant previous relationship, their investment in their grandchild was sometimes strengthened by their

grandchild's renewed interest in them, often because of the supportive protective functions they play for GLBQ grandchildren.

Unlike grandparents, grandchildren's stakes in their relationship with their grandparent(s) were more varied. Grandchildren's relationship histories and subsequent interactions with their grandparents shaped the process by which their stake in the relationship was constructed and maintained, and illuminates how conflict moments may be turning points in grandparent-adult grandchild relationships. Grandchildren who had more distant relationships with their grandparents generally had low expectations of their grandparents when coming out and potentially contributed to a lesser investment in their relationship with their grandparent. When grandparents had less accommodating responses, this low stake was confirmed, leaving the relationship, and the grandchild's stake in their grandparent, unchanged. When their subsequent interactions with grandparents were more accommodating, the coming out "conflict" was a turning point, as it provided a point of connection and a starting point for developing a more engaged relationship. Although their previously distant relationship provided a tenuous foundation, this disruptive moment actually provided a mechanism for grandchildren to see the similarities and continuity between the generations, prompting their increased investment in their relationship with their grandparent.

For grandchildren who had close relationship histories with their grandparents, the former's expectations varied greatly, as their personal knowledge of their grandparents may have given them a more accurate perception of how coming out would shape their relationship. Grandchildren who experienced less accommodating responses were often invested in their relationship with their grandparent as a person, and often

colluded in minimizing the salience of their sexual orientation in social interactions. In this way, grandchildren maintained their investment in the relationship with their grandparent by minimizing differences between them, often at the expense of having their sexual orientation more explicitly recognized.

Grandchildren who experienced more accommodating responses from grandparents had several motivations then for their increased investment in their relationship with their grandparent. For this group, coming out facilitated their continued emotional closeness and enabled grandchildren to emphasize the similarity and continuity of their relationship. Grandchildren in this group had high expectations of their relationship with their grandparents—expectations that were confirmed in their subsequent interactions, which supported their increased investment in their grandparent(s).

Although grandchildren's stakes in their grandparents were all shaped by their previous relationships, their expectations of one another and their subsequent interactions, their investments in their grandparents varied. This indicates that conflict may sometimes facilitate grandchildren's investment in their relationships with their grandparents. Similarly, grandparents from each group remained invested in their grandchild, however the process by which this investment was maintained was unique. Future research utilizing intergenerational stake perspective may analyze how different types of conflict or disruption may shape generation's stakes in one another, for instance by focusing on disruptions that originate with grandparents, or a disruption that may be easier for grandparents and grandchildren to discuss.

CONCLUSION

Qualitative interviews with grandparents and their GLBQ grandchildren reveal that having a grandchild come out may have little impact on their overall relationship although this is strongly shaped by their relationship histories and subsequent interactions. For some grandparent-grandchild dyads, having a grandchild come out created an opportunity for increased closeness or a chance to reconnect. This research highlights the important roles that grandparents may play for GLBQ young adults and indicates an important issue for future scholarship on GLBQ family relationships.

Table 4.2. Recruitment of Sample

Generation	N
Grandchild	22
Parent	1
Grandparent	2
Approach	
In-person announcements	5
Internet postings, emails or flyers	3
Network or snowball sampling	10
Facebook	7

Table 4.3. Demographics

Grandparents (N = 32)		Grandchildren (N = 28)	
Gender	N	Gender	N
Female	23	Female	14
Male	9	Male	14
Age		Age	
62-69	3	16-18	2
70-79	11	19-25	7
80-89	16	26-30	10
90-97	2	31-39	9
Race		Race	
White	31	White	24
Hispanic	1	Hispanic	2
		Multiracial	2
Sexual Orientation		Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual	32	Gay	10
Faith Tradition		Lesbian	8
Catholic	8	Bisexual	3
Protestant Christian	12	Queer	4
Jewish	3	Other	3
Other	2	Faith Tradition	
None	5	Catholic	2
		Protestant Christian	3
		Jewish	2
		Atheist	4
		Agnostic	2
		Other: Christian	7
		Other	5
		None	3

Table 4.4. Participant's Class Status

	Grandparents	Grandchildren
Self-identified class status		
Working class	9	6
Middle class	11	13
Upper-middle class	7	5
Upper class	5	4
Income		
0-\$15,000	3	4
\$15,001-30,000	7	6
\$30,001-45,000	3	6
\$45,001-60,000	3	5
\$60,000-100,000	8	5
\$100,000+	3	2
Educational Backgrounds		
Grade school	1	0
Some high school	1	2
High school graduate	4	0
Some college	11	7
Bachelors degree	4	8
Graduate degree	10	11

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Chapter Five

Social Work Implications

Social work has a unique disciplinary stance as a field that promotes social justice and equality in research, theory, and practice. Sexuality is one domain in which social inequalities are perpetuated. These inequalities persist in contemporary U.S. society, and it is the goal of social work research—including this dissertation—to inform both academic scholarship and social work practice. These implications contribute to a broader social justice agenda and inform clinical practice with GLBQ individuals, their grandparents and their families more broadly, with the goals of improving relationship quality and well-being for GLBQ individuals and their families. Although social work practice is broad, often including public and organizational policy, management, community organizing and advocacy, in this Chapter, I focus on direct practice implications with grandparents and other family members, GLBQ individuals, family systems, and social work education.

Practice with Grandparents and Other Family Members

Findings indicate that GLBQ individuals carefully seek out signs or clues to assess their family members' possible responses. At the same time, family members may suspect or guess that they have a GLBQ family member. For instance, several grandparents described suspecting for many years that their grandchild was GLBQ, without having it explicitly confirmed. As such, social work professionals may usefully

help family members to develop ways of actively, if implicitly, signifying their views on (potentially) having a GLBQ family member to their kin. Findings from this dissertation also reveal that the meanings GLBQ grandchildren and grandparents (as well as other family members) may assign to different signs (e.g., supporting same-sex marriage, comfort with public displays of affection) are socially and historically situated. Thus, social work professionals could also help clients to think about these meanings and how they might use them as signs in interactions with their own kin.

Findings from this study indicate that grandparents may be unexpected allies for GLBQ kin in families. Although grandparents' understandings of homosexuality itself were not necessarily positive, grandparents often played supportive roles for their grandchildren in familial social interactions. Other research indicates that having others with whom they can share their emotions and experiences is key to the positive adjustment of parents of GLBQ children (LaSala, 2010). For this reason, interventions with the family members of GLBQ individuals could potentially incorporate grandparents as sources of support for various family members during this crisis moment. Although this is not likely appropriate for all families, practitioners could use assessments of grandparents' role within the family (e.g., family guard) and previous relationship history with the GLBQ grandchild as indicators of their potential utility in this disruptive moment.

Adopting a generational lens will help the client to see how social and historical contexts have shaped their family members' understandings of GLBQ sexualities. This will be important not only for helping families understand their GLBQ kin, but also for other intergenerational relationships, such as helping parents to analyze grandparents'

responses. For example, when working with older family members such as grandparents, it might be helpful to explain how and why younger generations place importance on coming out and leading an out gay life, or to help grandparents' make the connections between the personal and political aspects of queer identities. Although cultivating a generational lens to better understand one's family will be particularly useful with GLBQ sexualities, it likely has clinical applications to other issues as well – as, indeed, expectations of others and understandings of social issues are always shaped by one's social and historical context.

Grandparents' fears of losing a grandchild from their life was a central theme in this research. Many grandparents made tremendous efforts and reexamined their own beliefs when they saw this as necessary to maintaining a relationship with a grandchild, as well as with other family members. This fear of loss of a relationship with one's GLBQ kin is an under-examined aspect of coming out in families, and may be unique to grandparents or older adults given their unique social histories. Social workers should remember that when grandparents (or other family members) have negative responses to an individual's coming out, it is likely that they have a much more complicated internal response than simple homophobia. Family members may also be fearful or anxious about finding *the right way*, to respond, to satisfy their own moral compass, their GLBQ family member, as well as other family members. Data indicate that grandparents (and likely other family members) have many simultaneously operating goals that they balance as they respond when grandchildren come out.

A complicating aspect of these recommendations for practice is the silence regarding sexuality in grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships. Given generational

norms around the private and personal nature of sexuality, this may be a challenging issue for grandparents to talk about. Social work practitioners would do well to cultivate a level of comfort in communicating about issues of sexual orientation and discussing culturally competent language choices with clients. As data from both grandparents and grandchildren indicate, terms such as “partner,” “friend,” “queer,” or “homosexual” have changed greatly in meaning and use in older adults’ (and many younger adults’) lives. A frank discussion of these will not only cultivate comfort talking about issues of sexuality, but give grandparents and other family members entrée into discussions with GLBQ kin. Although silence regarding issues of sexuality was characteristic of many of the grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships in this study, many participants told me that they wished they could talk more openly with each other. Several grandparent and grandchild participants hoped that their participation in this project would open doors to future conversations. This indicates that although sexuality has been a relatively silent issue in their relationships thus far, they do not necessarily want it to remain that way.

Practice with GLBQ Individuals

Findings from this study indicate that grandparents often play supportive and protective roles in families, even (or perhaps even *especially*) when a family member comes out. When working with GLBQ individuals, practitioners may usefully help clients examine their own ageist assumptions about a grandparent’s possible response. It may help clients considering coming out to know that grandparents are often very invested in maintaining individual relationships and promoting family cohesion. Although this sample is potentially skewed toward more accepting grandparents, it is nonetheless telling that, before coming out, grandchildren generally had low expectations

of their grandparents' responses, even when their pre-existing relationships were close, and even when those responses turned out to be positive. Social work professionals can help GLBQ individuals think through their expectations of their family members, and examine how these expectations may be informed by (ageist) stereotypes.

Social work practitioners could also help GLBQ individuals to cultivate a generational lens to examine how their family member's understanding of sexuality is shaped by their social history. For instance, when working with younger GLBQ individuals, social workers could usefully contextualize a grandparent's seeming reluctance to discuss their sexual orientation as part of a broader generational norm around privacy and silence on issues of sexuality. As one grandchild in this study, Gabrielle, explained:

Remember that it's a generation thing. There is a generation gap, and it's real and it's valid, and it doesn't mean that your grandparents are ashamed of you and that they don't love you and that they disapprove. They just don't know how to talk about it. They don't know the language. They're learning. Your grandparents are learning. And if you otherwise have a good relationship with them, you know, be patient. If you want them to be patient with you, be patient with them.

As Gabrielle counsels here, young adults could benefit from remembering that generational differences shape their grandparents' views—just as, indeed, they shape the grandchildren's views—and it would be all too easy to misinterpret these differences and miss the opportunity to have a good relationship.

GLBQ individuals carefully assess their family members' possible responses, often spending a great deal of time and energy imagining how their disclosure will shape family relationships and dynamics. As such, social work practitioners may usefully help GLBQ individuals to interpret and assess family members' possible responses, and to

make plans for how they, themselves, will respond depending on what those reactions are. Clinicians could also normalize and acknowledge the time and emotional energy that GLBQ individuals spend on the coming out process, and affirm that the motivation for this well thought-out process is often to protect their relationships with the people they love. Clinicians could also help GLBQ individuals use cultural markers to assess their family member's responses (e.g., by telling family that a friend is gay or bringing up a relevant political issue like same-sex marriage).

Practice with Families

Findings from this dissertation highlight some of the disjuncture that can exist between GLBQ individuals' perceptions of acceptance and their grandparents' (or other family members') actual feelings about their GLBQ kin and their sexual orientation. This discrepancy suggests that changing family members' attitude about GLBQ sexualities may *not* be the most important goal of social work interventions. Rather, finding ways to help family members communicate their love and support for their GLBQ family member may be a more primary goal. Importantly, the potential benefits of this extend to *all* parties involved, not just the individual coming out. Other research indicates that having a good relationship with one's out kin, during and after the coming out process, was helpful for parents as they processed the information (LaSala, 2010).

Practitioners often suggest that working together with the family as a whole is not advisable immediately after GLBQ kin comes out as families are particularly volatile and distressed family members may dump their "hurt and anger" onto others (LaSala, 2010). Rather, practitioners suggest that starting with separate sessions with a psycho-educational emphasis will be most useful for both GLBQ individuals and their kin

(LaSala, 2010). However, data from this study indicate that attitudes about GLBQ sexualities may not be the most important dimension determining the quality of family relationships before and after disclosure. A potential starting place when working with families and GLBQ kin, may be assessing the relationship quality prior to coming out, and finding mechanisms for strengthening this relationship. While this is not a substitute for educational components, it may be that maintaining positive relationships after a family member comes out will, in the long term, also help to change attitudes about GLBQ persons (Herek & Capitano, 1996).

I propose that narrative therapeutic and life-review interventions are potentially useful models for maintaining and strengthening intergenerational familial relationships when someone comes out. Narrative therapeutic techniques offer families the chance to re-author their stories through their understandings of themselves, their family members, and the problem(s) in question (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Long, Bonomo, Andrews & Brown, 2006; Saltzburg, 2007; White & Epston, 1990). Having a family member come out disrupts the family's narrative about who that individual is and who they are likely to be in the future. In addressing these changes and inviting the family to actively reconstruct their histories, expectations of one another, and clarify their aspirations for the future, the family can strengthen their relationships with one another and cope with this disruptive event. This approach also offers the opportunity to integrate educational components as well as practitioners are encouraged to help families "externalize" the problem on heterosexist/homophobic social conditions.

Life-review interventions, rooted in clinical gerontology, help clients cope with difficult life events and find meaning in their accomplishments (Butler, 1963; Haight &

Webster, 1995). Life-review approaches share some similar components as narrative therapy, as they both involve creating opportunities to reminisce about events in their histories and make new meanings of their social relationships. Unlike narrative approaches, life-review approaches tend to be more structured in form, and thus have an advantage for replication and evaluation, a considerable strength for novel social work practice strategies. Combining elements of these two approaches may create conditions for families to reminisce about shared positive events in their pasts, externalize and reinterpret the issues they are experiencing due to a family member's coming out, and, ultimately, reconnect to and re-author the story of their relationships with one another.

In addition to its utility as a social theory, family systems may also be a useful practice approach for practitioners working with the family members of GLBQ individuals. As findings from this dissertation indicate, coming out to one's family often involves the *whole* family, whether directly or indirectly. If the client is having difficulty accepting their GLBQ family member, it may be useful to use genograms to identify supportive people in the family that could be a resource for questions or issues as they emerge. On the other hand, if the client is seeking support to deal with the negative attitudes of other family members, practitioners may counsel their clients to address that issue directly, to avoid triangulation. Further, family systems approaches enable practitioners to help clients address underlying communication issues and seek balance between enmeshment and differentiation of the self (Bowen, 1978) in the family system. Indeed, having a family member come out may be a presenting issue that provides an opportunity to address a much broader range of issues in family dynamics.

Training Social Work Practitioners

Social work education must attend broadly to issues of sexuality and to sexual orientation more specifically. As data from this dissertation indicate, the tendency toward silence around issues of sexuality can make talking about sexual orientation, and related topics such as sexual health or sexual activities, difficult for clients. This discomfort around issues of sexuality extends to social work professionals, as students and even seasoned practitioners are often uncomfortable and feel underprepared to address issues of sexuality and sexual orientation (Hicks, 2009; Leech & Trotter, 2005; Trotter, Brogatzki, Duggan, Foster & Levie, 2006). In order to address the issues relevant to clients' lives, as well as social inequalities more broadly, social workers must be knowledgeable and comfortable in their abilities to help clients, and social work education should reflect these competencies.

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Chapter Six

Conclusions

The goal of this dissertation has been to examine how grandparent-grandchild relationships are shaped when grandparents learn about their grandchild's gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer sexual orientation. I utilized qualitative data collected from 32 grandparents and 28 out GLBQ grandchildren from the same 25 families in order to investigate three related sub-questions:

1. How do GLBQ grandchildren manage the disclosure of their sexual orientation to their grandparents?
2. How do grandparents respond to the discovery that a grandchild is gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer?
3. How are grandparent-grandchild relationships affected when grandchildren come out as gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer?

This research has addressed a glaring empirical gap in family and sexuality scholarship regarding GLBQ individuals' relationships with their grandparents, as well a gap in gerontological literature regarding older adult's attitudes about having GLBQ family.

More broadly, this dissertation has examined how grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships illuminate social constructions of age, gender, sexuality, and families, and findings from this dissertation have implications for multiple bodies of literature including scholarship on the family, sociology of sexualities, gerontology, and social work practice.

In this chapter, I first summarize the main findings of this dissertation from the three empirical chapters. This is followed by a discussion of how the limitations of this study provide fruitful directions for future research. Last, I turn to a broader discussion of the main contributions of this dissertation, both substantively and theoretically, as I outline implications for future scholarship.

Summary of Main Findings

In Chapter Two, I analyzed grandchildren's motivations for disclosure to their grandparents using data from 28 grandchildren who are out to their grandparents. Data was interpreted using a family systems perspective as I presented two main themes: grandchildren's motivations for disclosure, and how disclosure actually happened. In the first section, I found that, similar to other literature on coming out to family, grandchildren's interest in disclosing their sexual orientation to grandparents is motivated by factors they associate with the latter's likely response—factors such as, the closeness of their relationship, grandparent's religious or political views, and grandparent's relationships with GLBTQ persons. However, these data also indicate that all of these factors are situated in a family system, as other family members and family interactions provide grandchildren with additional clues regarding their grandparents' responses, and help grandchildren interpret these signs.

I then analyzed grandchildren's disclosure strategies with grandparents, examining both non-intentional and intentional disclosures. I found that grandchildren who did not intentionally disclose their identities were often outed by other family members, as parents or other family members often talked to grandparents about the grandchild's sexual orientation or same-sex relationship. Grandchildren who intentionally

disclosed their sexual orientations were often creative in their disclosure strategies, writing letters, for example, or asking other family members to do the disclosure. These varied disclosure strategies further illuminate how grandparent-grandchild relationships occur in a family system, an important finding given researchers' tendencies to examine relationships dyadically. Taken together, these findings indicate that coming out to grandparents, like coming out to parents or other family members, may be usefully conceptualized as a family systems issue, as other family members play central roles in the disclosure process.

In Chapter Three, I examined how grandparents responded to the news that their grandchild is gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer, drawing from in-depth qualitative interviews with 32 grandparents who have out GLBQ grandchildren. Utilizing intergenerational ambivalence theory, I found that grandparents' understandings of GLBQ sexualities (as private, personal, unimportant, or unlikely to change) are shaped by their social and historical experiences with homosexuality. These generationally-specific understandings of sexuality enabled surprisingly supportive responses toward grandchildren in interpersonal interactions. However, these supportive responses toward grandchildren did not necessarily translate into positive understandings of homosexuality itself. Rather, these responses were motivated by other factors, such as grandparents' fears of losing the relationship altogether if they did not accept and support their grandchild.

This compartmentalization by grandparents of their grandchild's sexuality had implications for more public, institutional contexts, as grandparents' supportive attitude toward their GLBQ grandchild did not necessarily extend to other contexts. Otherwise

positively-responding grandparents, for example, still expressed discomfort with recognizably queer appearance or behavior in public spaces, or voiced opposition to queer-affirming policies like same-sex marriage. Indeed, grandparents sometimes described attitudes about queer-affirming policies that did not fit contemporary understandings of what it means to be accepting of GLBQ individuals—but, at the same time, they did not always necessarily see this as conflicting with their feelings towards their specific GLBQ grandchildren. This illuminates the need to examine how everyday acceptance acts toward GLBQ individuals or family members transfers (or does not transfer) to more public domains.

In Chapter Four, I utilized data from 60 grandparents and grandchildren from the same 25 families to examine how the grandparent-grandchild relationship is impacted when grandparents learn about their grandchild's sexual orientation. Data from both grandparents and grandchildren indicates that relationship quality often improves, or at least remains the same—a surprising finding given popular stereotypes that would predict grandparent-grandchild relationships to suffer or even dissolve completely once grandparents learn about a grandchild's GLBQ sexuality. To better understand the factors that shaped this finding, I examined how two factors (previous relationship histories and post-coming out interactions) shaped these relationships. I find that the personal knowledge that grandparents and grandchildren have of one another provide a means to minimize the impact of this potentially disruptive disclosure. Further, when subsequent interactions are more accommodating of the GLBQ grandchild's sexual orientation or romantic relationships, this sometimes provides unique opportunities for grandparents and grandchildren to become more close or establish new relationships. Addressing this

challenge has implications for their stake in one another, as both generations remain generally similarly invested in one another. However, in some circumstances this challenge provided a unique opportunity for grandchildren to experience a renewed investment in their relationship with their grandparent(s).

Limitations and Future Research

As discussed in greater detail in the Chapters Two, Three, and Four, this study had several notable limitations, such as only including the perspectives of grandchildren who are out to grandparents, or grandparents who know about their GLBQ grandchild. Additionally, the sample is likely biased toward including grandparents and grandchildren with more positive relationships, and grandparents with more accommodating or supportive responses. There are also demographical limitations of the data given the limited variation in race, ethnicity, class status, level of education, gender of grandparent, and grandchildren who identify as transgender. Rather than simply being problems, however, these limitations highlight avenues for future research.

Future research may fruitfully examine how grandchildren who choose not to come out to grandparents arrive at that decision, as well as how being out may take different forms, for instance as grandchildren assume that grandparents know or trust other family members to do disclosure for them. Individuals' assumptions about their own family systems shape their disclosure decisions, and future research on disclosure decisions in families could shed light not only on GLBQ family relationships, but on how families deal with "crises" or conflict moments. It would also be illuminating to examine how not being out to grandparents shapes grandparent-GLBQ grandchild, and other family, relationships, as grandchildren and other family members manage this secret.

Assessing grandparents who know about their grandchild's sexual orientation but do not necessarily have close relationships or more positive, accommodating responses is another challenge for future research on this topic. Non-dyadic data collection will help to include the perspective of those with less positive relationships, as would surveying parents or other family members about their experiences with non-accommodating grandparents. Future research may also examine how positive (or negative) grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships may shape their mutual well-being, health and mental health. Given the documented roles that families play in GLBQ emerging adult's health and mental health outcomes (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009; Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010), and the impact of positive relationships with family on one's health and well-being (Acock & Demo, 1994; House, Umberson, & Landis, 1998), future scholarship could examine how having a grandchild come out affects the health and well-being of these unique, intergenerational relationships.

Demographically, little is known about how many grandchildren are out to grandparents. A next step in understanding the importance of grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships would be to try to gauge how prevalent disclosure is, and what demographic factors may be associated with disclosure to grandparents. Further, it might be helpful to distinguish among those grandchildren who suspect that their grandparents may know, those who know their grandparents know but still elect not to disclose their sexual orientation, and those who purposefully disclosed their sexual orientation to their grandparents. In this dissertation, I have uncovered several factors that could be incorporated into such future research, such as previous relationship quality, ageist stereotypes, or factors relating to mediating parents.

Future research on grandparent-grandchild relationships could also usefully supplement this study by specifically assessing negatively-valenced grandparent-grandchild relationships, which would be a contribution more generally to grandparenting literature given its general focus on positive grandparent-grandchild relationships. It would be useful to know more about how families respond to having a family member come out in the midst of other crises or instabilities, or how this may shape relationships in the long term. An examination of how other types of conflicts, crises or disruptions in expectations shape grandparent-grandchild relationships would also contribute to gerontological literature, as little is known about how grandparents and adult grandchildren deal with issues in their relationships.

To address the limitations of this sample, regarding race and ethnicity, future researchers might usefully pursue participatory action research strategies to better understand issues that are of interest to GLBQ individuals and families of color, as well as to represent the voices and experiences of participants of color in social research. Given the important roles that grandparents and other extended family members often play in families of color (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; King & Elder, 1998; Lawton, Silverstein, & Bengston, 1994), future research on the relationships of GLBQ people of color with their families of origin would likely benefit from incorporating grandparents. Future research should also examine the extent to which key concepts, such as disclosure, outness, and acceptance, may vary based on race, ethnicity or cultural context.

Given the important role that financial resources or educational background may play in shaping intergenerational relationships and attitudes toward GLBQ persons, future research may also make class status a more central component of analysis. Further,

class status shapes not only attitudes, but also the levels and kinds of resources available to individuals as they assess the significance of family relationships and, conversely, their own embeddedness within or possible autonomy from them. In assessing whether and how to come out to family members, or how to respond when a family member comes out, individuals consider the social, emotional and practical—including economic—dimensions of their familial relationships.

The role of gender in grandparents-GLBQ grandchild relationships will be an important area of inquiry for future research. Findings from this study suggest that grandfathers may have had a more difficult time accepting or supporting a GLBQ grandchild, especially when incorporating accounts of grandparents who were deceased or unable to participate, corroborating other research that shows that other male family members often have a harder time with this news (Ben-Ari, 1995; D'Augelli, 1998; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993). Future research should further attend to gender differences between grandmothers and grandfathers regarding their responses to a grandchild's sexual orientation, and the types of accommodating responses that may happen in families, as well as how gender may shape disclosure decisions to grandparents.

Additionally, the gender identities, gender expressions and, in some instances, gender transitions that grandchildren described as central to their identities and experiences have been attended to briefly here, although they warrant additional attention and analysis. Findings indicate that grandchildren's non-normative gender presentation may be quite difficult for grandparents to understand or accept, and future research should incorporate gender presentation as a factor that may shape family members'

responses to out members' sexual orientation. In the few instances when gender identity or gender transitions emerged in interviews, grandparents often described this as a totally unique experience from learning about their grandchild's sexual orientation, and brought up a unique set of concerns and issues. For anonymity and brevity, I have not written more about this here, but future research could usefully compare and contrast the similarities and differences between coming out in terms of gender identity and sexual orientation.

Methodologically, this research was challenging given the well-documented issues associated with recruiting marginalized populations such as GLBQ individuals or their family members. However, I experienced great success in recruiting a relatively large sample of GLBQ grandchildren and grandparents that was diverse on a number of dimensions. I attribute these successes to several factors. First, my own personal and professional networks were invaluable recruitment mechanisms for GLBQ grandchildren. Second, the social networking powers of Facebook also likely facilitated the dissemination of information about this project, as it enabled me to reach a broad audience of possible participants. The "Grandparent-GLBQ Grandchild Research Project" Facebook page quickly attracted the attention of those interested in the topic and provided a simple way for helpful individuals to tell others in their social networks about the project that required minimal time or energy. Third, once I had entrée into a dyad or family, I consistently asked if there were others who also qualified, who I might also solicit as possible participants. Taking on the role of asking the family member directly was often a successful strategy as it enabled me to clearly explain the boundaries of

participation, assure participants of their anonymity, and gave me access to additional perspectives from the same family.

Several lessons may be learned from my methodological successes (and shortcomings) in this research. First, the value of having, maintaining, and utilizing a large and diverse social network cannot be underestimated. Future research on hard to reach populations like this one would benefit from harnessing “weak ties” in their many forms. Future research may benefit from targeting a diverse group of “key informants” to help disseminate information about the research project to their own social networks (Balsam & Fieland, 2010). Second, the value of face-to-face, over the phone, personalized email communication, or other personal connections proved a valuable strategy for educating participants about the merits of the research, reassuring them about anonymity standards, and giving participants a sense of what the interview process would be like.

Third, although the quantitative measures of relationship quality and feelings of acceptance provided some valuable information and often prompted interesting dialogues, further development of survey questions of both of these topics would help to capture the complexity of these relationships. Fourth, to my surprise, several participants requested to be interviewed alongside other family members (e.g., significant others, parents, grandchildren). Data from these interviews illuminated not only the topic at hand, but was also revealing about other aspects of family dynamics and communication patterns. Focus group like qualitative interviews with subsystems of families, or with families themselves, may be a comforting data collection technique for qualitative

researchers interested in family issues, and may prove to be a fruitful method for future research.

Contributions and Future Research

In contrast to popular cultural discourse that portrays grandparents as likely to reject GLBQ grandchildren, as religiously and politically conservative, emotionally and physically frail, and/or as generally uninvolved in or irrelevant to a younger generation's coming out process, findings from this dissertation indicate that grandparents are often very important family members when grandchildren come out. Scholarship on GLBQ family relationships has been remiss in its exclusion of grandparents as "unimportant" to the coming out process, as data from this dissertation indicates that they are indeed important relationships for GLBQ grandchildren when they come out and, additionally, that grandparents' frequent role as "heads of the family" may bolster their importance as they influence the responses of other family members as well. The relevance of this relationship will only become more important in future years, given that GLBQ persons are coming out at younger ages (Seidman, 2002) and older adults are living longer, healthier lives (Bengtson, 2001).

This research also addresses important gaps in gerontological scholarship as it extends our understandings of how social and historical context has shaped how older adults understand sexual orientation, how grandparent-adult grandchild relationships are shaped by conflict, and how social constructions of older adults shape the expectations that younger adults have of them (and vice versa). Although scholarship has examined older adults' sexual behaviors, attitudes about sexuality, and sexual orientation there remains a paucity of gerontological research on these issues (Fredricksen-Goldsen &

Muraco, 2010; Scherrer, 2009). It may be that grandparents' own sexual identities or sexual experiences inform their understandings of their GLBQ grandchildren, motivating a need for future research that centralizes grandparents' own sexual stories as a component of their current understandings of GLBQ sexualities. This study is the first of my knowledge to empirically examine grandparent-GLBQ grandchild relationships.

This dissertation has engaged several different theoretical, analytical lenses as I have drawn from sociological, psychological, gerontological and family approaches to interpret findings from this research. Putting these disparate fields in dialogue with one another is a unique contribution in and of itself. In Chapter Two, I argued that a sociologically informed, family systems approach was illuminating not only for examining how grandparent-grandchild relationships are situated in a family context, but for understanding how GLBQ grandchildren employ broader cultural markers to make meaning of their family relationships. Although family systems approaches are employed more frequently in family therapy, developmental psychology and family studies, here I highlight the uniquely sociological elements of family systems approaches, as they illuminate how social context shapes family members' interactions with, and experiences of, each other. Disruptive moments, such as having a family member come out, are particularly illuminating as families draw on broader cultural markers and signals to interpret and understand how their family relationships may change.

In Chapter Three, I engaged more particularly with intergenerational ambivalence perspective, in order to examining how ambivalence in a relationship may (or may not) be resolved. I argue that ambivalence may be appropriately understood as resolved in social interactions, as grandparents' supportive behaviors toward their GLBQ

grandchild illustrate. These actions shape social structure, as they may help shift other family members' responses, and otherwise rewrite broader cultural narratives about grandparents' understandings of queer sexualities. Yet, ambivalence is not simply resolved or unresolved as it emerges in many contexts and at many different times. Further, bringing a sociological lens to this framework highlights how structural changes (e.g., changes in public policy, in family member's identities, in social relationships) shape the cultural availability of different types of resolution, as culture is shaped by the actions of its individual members, and reciprocally shapes the options that are available to its members.

In Chapter Four, I employed intergenerational stake perspective to better understand how grandparents and grandchildren are invested in one another. This study is unique in its analysis of how a conflict or disruption of social expectations (having a grandchild coming out) shapes intergenerational relationships, and it reveals the process by which these intergenerational stakes are created and shaped. I find that conflict or disruption is often formative for grandparents and grandchildren's stakes in one another, as weathering issues such as having a grandchild come out may provide unique opportunities for both grandparents and grandchildren to support one another, have meaningful dialogues, and come to deeper understandings of the roles that they play in one another's lives.

Future research that examines how sexual orientation shapes family relationships would benefit from a more inclusive view of family, and family systems, that incorporates (or even focuses on) extended family members, such as grandparents. More generally, this research indicates that family scholarship could benefit from more explicit

discussions about the challenges of narrowly focusing on dyadic relationships and contextualizing that relationship in a broader family (or cultural) context. As I argue in Chapters Two and Four, in order to understand the process of coming out to grandparents and the impact of this for grandparents-GLBQ grandchild relationships, we must take into account the broader family context and a dense network of triangulated and further multi-nodal relationships. As Parker said (Chapter 2), his mother was the “go-between” in his relationship with his grandparents, as she helped him figure out whether and, then, how to do the disclosure. Although the focus of this study has been on grandparents and GLBQ grandchildren, these findings suggest that other family sub-systems (parent-child, sibling-sibling) may also be shaped by family contexts and that coming out is likely, as Baptist and Allen suggested, “a ‘whole’ family experience” (2008, p. 92).

To extend this further, future research may usefully examine other kinds of disclosures that happen in families to examine how the disclosure process, or family dynamics more generally, might be shaped by the substantive topic. For instance, how might disclosing that one is in an interracial relationship or that one had an abortion shape grandparent-grandchild relationships? How might other types of disclosures like these, that (potentially) disrupt dominant normative expectations, change grandparents’ perceptions of their grandchildren, children or change those relationships? And, indeed, how might grandparents’ unexpected disclosures of their own be received by other family members? What about news that has less of a negative valence, but is nonetheless a dramatic disruption to family members’ social expectations of one another? What factors might shape these responses and how do families find resolution to these issues, forge

meaningful relationships, and utilize and shape cultural constructions of families, age, and difference?

Findings from Chapters Two and Four also suggest that GLBQ individuals do a great deal of work to manage their sexual identity in their families. They seek information from and about their family members in order to assess their possible responses. They also work to interpret these signs, sometimes with help from other family members, as well as broader cultural markers, and they actively manage information between various family members. Other family members also engage in the work of managing grandchildren's sexual orientation in families, making disclosure (or lack thereof) a multi-faceted, often even collaborative project.²⁰ Data from this study indicate that parents, grandparents, siblings and others all actively participated in this project. Although the shifting social context has facilitated relationships between GLBQ individuals and their families of origin, much is still unknown about how this shapes interactions and relationships beyond the disclosure moment. Future research should attend to these "complex, unstable situation[s] in the family," (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993, p. 443), in order to mitigate possible negative outcomes.

In Chapters Three and Four, I discussed the meanings of acceptance, and other related concepts, such as tolerance or accommodation, as both grandparents and grandchildren reflected on how accepting behaviors emerged in their interactions. Findings indicate that GLBQ individuals' interpretations of acceptance may depend on factors other than the behaviors themselves. For instance, grandchildren may have lower expectations of grandparents than of other family members to use the "appropriate"

²⁰ Disclosure is not always a collaborative project however, as some examples illustrate how grandchildren's sexual identities are occasionally disclosed without their knowledge or consent.

language to describe same-sex significant others. As such, family role (e.g., grandparent, parent, sibling) and generational context (e.g., age, cohort) may be under-examined dimensions of these interactions that shape interpretations of accepting behaviors. Further, accepting behaviors may have a variety of motivations, some of which stem from positive understandings of GLBQ individuals, others of which do not. This indicates a need to better understand the motivations and meanings behind family members' responses, not just the responses themselves.

Across all of the chapters, policies like same-sex marriage and "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" have emerged as having significance in these participants' lives. In Chapter Two, grandchildren described using informal family conversations about such policies to assess their family member's responses to different sexual orientations. Policy emerged in Chapter Three, when grandparents described participating in same-sex weddings or babysitting great-grandchildren, yet did not necessarily support policies affirming these families. In Chapter Four, a grandmother consoled her grandson by saying that he would have a wedding just like his heterosexual sibling. Although this analysis has not focused on how broader social policies shape GLBQ individuals' relationships with their kin, future research might usefully examine how queer-affirming policies shape family members' understandings of GLBQ sexualities, shape the coming out process, and ultimately, GLBQ individuals' acceptance and well-being in families.

There are clear gaps in gerontological literature regarding issues of sexuality (Fredricksen-Goldsen & Muraco, 2010; Scherrer, 2009), reflecting perhaps researchers' own assumptions about the non-salience of sexuality in older adults' lives. Yet, as this dissertation demonstrates, sexual orientation plays an important role in shaping

grandparents' relationships with their grandchildren, as well as with other friends and family members. In some grandparent-grandchild dyads, for example, having a grandchild come out strengthened the relationship or provided a foundation for building a new relationship. Findings from this dissertation indicate that although efforts are often taken to silence sexual orientation in social interactions, it is nevertheless an important way that individuals make meaning of themselves, their family members, and it shapes family members' expectations of one another.

Findings also indicate the need for additional inquiry into how older adults understand what it means to be homosexual, or how grandparents respond to the sexual orientation of *other* family members. Although grandparents in this study have relatively positive and supportive interactions with their GLBQ grandchildren, it remains unknown to what extent this stems from their unique relationship as grandparents, and may not extend to other GLBQ kin, such as adult children or siblings. Additionally, as GLBQ individuals are particularly likely to provide care for older adult relatives (Cahill, Ellen, & Tobias, 2002; Cohen & Murray, 2007; Fredrickson, 1999; Fruhauf & Orel, 2008), future research may usefully explore how these care decisions are made, or how this may affect the care relationship. Further, future research may fruitfully attend to how sexual orientation might shape older adults' relationships with others, like helping professionals (e.g., nurses, social workers, care workers), colleagues, or peers at long-term care facilities or independent living communities. A better understanding of how older adults understand homosexuality, and of the roles of sexual orientation in their lives and social relationships, will expand our knowledge of how generation, age and cohort shape our

understandings of sexualities with implications for social relationships in a variety of arenas.

The variety of grandparent-adult grandchild relationships (e.g., grandparents who raised their grandchild, grandparents who lived down the block from their grandchildren their whole life, grandchildren who saw their grandparent(s) once a year, grandparents who were forbidden from having contact with grandchildren until the latter were adults, and those with relatively little contact) was a strength of this sample. Future research may wish to expand on this by investigating some of the differences between these types. For instance, do grandparents who raise grandchildren have responses that are more similar to parents? How do relationship histories shape grandparent-grandchild dynamics when conflict or crises emerge in families? How might this shape their mutual intergenerational stakes in each other?

In this research, I have focused on how a grandchild's sexual orientation shapes grandparent-grandchild relationships, but my data indicates that other aspects of human sexuality may also be important, under-examined aspects of family relationships. Some grandparents, for example, mentioned their fears about a grandchild contracting HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases; others talked about feeling the need to educate their grandchild about sexual health. Thus, other dimensions of sexuality, such as sexual health, sexual education, or reproduction may also be important components of some grandparent-grandchild relationships and future research could usefully consider how sexual education happens in a family system or how grandparents' stake in their grandchild might lead them to consider sexual education as one of their responsibilities as grandparents. Given the often silent, salient role that sexuality occupies in families, future

research that examines these sensitive issues, that are critical for one's health and well-being, could have broad implications.

In this dissertation I have focused on how people make meaning of their social relationships. Meaning-making is a critical component of social research, as it is through one's "subjective" experiences that individuals interpret and understand themselves and each other. Further, this is a profoundly social process. Although statistics on how many young adults are out, to which family members, or how supported they feel, are critically important for helping social researchers understand this experience, it is just as important to understand how social actors interpret and make meaning of these behaviors and experiences in their social relationships. As data from this dissertation highlight, the meaning of "coming out," the motivation to come out, or the meaning of a close relationship with a grandparent, all vary greatly. Yet this meaning-making is a critical component for a complex and nuanced understanding of how sexuality and sexual orientation shape intergenerational family relationships. Future research must attend to the meaning and interpretations that people bring to themselves, their social relationships and their social world, if it is to accurately capture the human experience.

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Appendix. Data Collection Materials

Demographic Questionnaire

This form will give me a little more background information about you. Please let me know if you have questions or comments about any of these questions.

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Other: _____

What is your race?

- White or Caucasian
- African-American or Black
- Latino/Latina or Hispanic
- Asian-American or Asian Pacific Islander
- Native American or American Indian
- Bi- or Multi-racial: _____
- Other: _____

What is your current age? _____

What is your religion or faith tradition, if any?

- Protestant Christian
- Evangelical Christian
- Roman Catholic
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Hindu
- Buddhist
- Atheist
- None
- Other: _____

How important is your religion or faith to you?

- Very Important
- Somewhat Important
- Not very important
- Not important at all

Which of the following best describes the area you live?

- Urban
- Rural
- Suburban

Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

- Straight or Heterosexual
- Gay
- Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Queer
- Other: _____

What is your current living situation?

- Living independently by self
- Living independently with spouse, partner, or roommate(s)
- Assisted Living
- Nursing Home or Residential Care
- Other: _____

What is your current occupation?

How is your health currently?

What is the highest level of education you completed?

- Some high school
- High school graduate
- Some college
- Associate degree
- Bachelor degree
- Masters degree
- PhD

What is your current annual household income?

- 0-\$15,000
- \$15,001-\$30,000
- \$30,001-\$45,000
- \$45,001-\$60,000
- \$60,001-\$100,000
- \$100,000+

What would you say best describes your class status?

- working class
- middle class
- upper-middle class
- upper class
- Other: _____

How many grandchildren (or living grandparents) do you have?

Has the grandchild in this study ever lived with the grandparent in this study?

- No
- Yes: How long?: _____

How long has the grandparent in this study known about the grandchild's sexual orientation?

- Less than 3 months
- Between 3 months and 1 year
- Between 1 year and 2 years
- Between 2 years and 4 years
- More than 4 years
- Other: _____

For these next two questions, please answer without using names of other family members to preserve their confidentiality on this form.

Are there any other family members who have “come out” as not straight?

- No
- Yes: If yes, what relationship is this person to you? (sibling, aunt)

How long ago did you learn this?: _____

Is there anything else that you think it would be important for me to know about your background?

Thank you!

Grandparent's Assessment of the Relationship

For the following questions, please mark the number that best captures your response to the question.

1. Before you learned about your grandchild's sexuality, how would you describe your overall relationship with your grandchild?

1	2	3	4	5
poor	fair	good	very good	excellent

2. Before you learned about your grandchild's sexuality, how emotionally close would you say your relationship was?

1	2	3	4	5
poor	fair	good	very good	excellent

3. Before you learned about your grandchild's sexuality, how supported would you say you felt by your grandchild?

1	2	3	4	5
poor	fair	good	very good	excellent

4. During the last month how would you describe your overall relationship with your grandchild?

1	2	3	4	5
poor	fair	good	very good	excellent

5. During the last month how emotionally close have you felt with your grandchild?

1	2	3	4	5
poor	fair	good	very good	excellent

6. During the last month how supported have you felt by your grandchild?

1	2	3	4	5
poor	fair	good	very good	excellent

*Items adapted from Fingerman 2004; Harwood, 2001; King et al., 2003; Whitebeck, Hoyt & Huck, 1993

In these next items, please mark the number that best captures how much you agree or disagree with the following statement.

7. My grandchild should feel totally comfortable being themselves around me.

1	2	3	4	5
Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree

8. It is inappropriate for my grandchild to bring up their romantic relationships in family conversations.

1	2	3	4	5
Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree

9. My grandchild is just as welcome to bring a significant other to a family event as any other member of this family.

1	2	3	4	5
Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree

10. I wish I knew more about my grandchild's sexual orientation and dating life.

1	2	3	4	5
Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree

11. My grandchild knows how I feel about their sexual orientation.

1	2	3	4	5
Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree

12. I have felt ashamed to talk to others about my grandchild's sexual orientation.

1	2	3	4	5
Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree

13. Our relationship has suffered since I learned about my grandchild's sexual orientation.

1	2	3	4	5
Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree

*Items informed by Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009; Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010

Grandchild's Assessment of the Relationship

For the following questions, please mark the number that best captures your response to the question.

1. Before your grandparent learned about your sexuality, how would you describe your overall relationship with your grandparent?

1	2	3	4	5
poor	fair	good	very good	excellent

2. Before your grandparent learned about your sexuality, how emotionally close would you say your relationship was?

1	2	3	4	5
poor	fair	good	very good	excellent

3. Before your grandparent learned about your sexuality, how supported would you say you felt by your grandparent?

1	2	3	4	5
poor	fair	good	very good	excellent

4. During the last month how would you describe your overall relationship with your grandparent?

1	2	3	4	5
poor	fair	good	very good	excellent

5. During the last month how emotionally close have you felt with your grandparent?

1	2	3	4	5
poor	fair	good	very good	excellent

6. During the last month how supported have you felt by your grandparent?

1	2	3	4	5
poor	fair	good	very good	excellent

*Items adapted from Fingerman 2004; Harwood, 2001; King et al., 2003; Whitebeck, Hoyt & Huck, 1993

In these next items, please mark the number that best captures how much you agree or disagree with the following statement.

7. I feel totally comfortable being myself around my grandparent.
- | | | | | |
|----------|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Agree | Somewhat
agree | Neither agree or
disagree | Somewhat
disagree | Disagree |
8. I do not feel comfortable bringing up my romantic relationship in family conversations.
- | | | | | |
|----------|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Agree | Somewhat
agree | Neither agree or
disagree | Somewhat
disagree | Disagree |
9. I am just as welcome to bring a significant other to a family event as any other member of this family.
- | | | | | |
|----------|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Agree | Somewhat
agree | Neither agree or
disagree | Somewhat
disagree | Disagree |
10. I wish my grandparent knew more about my sexual orientation and dating life.
- | | | | | |
|----------|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Agree | Somewhat
agree | Neither agree or
disagree | Somewhat
disagree | Disagree |
11. I know how my grandparent feels about my sexual orientation.
- | | | | | |
|----------|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Agree | Somewhat
agree | Neither agree or
disagree | Somewhat
disagree | Disagree |
12. My grandparent seems comfortable talking with others about my sexual orientation.
- | | | | | |
|----------|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Agree | Somewhat
agree | Neither agree or
disagree | Somewhat
disagree | Disagree |
13. Our relationship has suffered since my grandparent learned about my sexual orientation.
- | | | | | |
|----------|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Agree | Somewhat
agree | Neither agree or
disagree | Somewhat
disagree | Disagree |

*Items informed by Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009; Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: Grandparent

The following interview schedule is meant to be a semi-structured, open-ended guide for the interview with grandparents of GLBQ individuals. The questions listed within each topic area represent the types of questions I will ask, although every question may not be asked of every participant and the order in which I ask them will vary. However, I will make sure that at least some information is gathered about each of these main topic areas. Constructing a flexible interview schedule will allow me to follow the conversation wherever it is heading and ask probing questions for additional information.

How did you hear about this research project?

Section 1: Previous Relationship

REMINDER: This is just another reminder that you may choose to stop the interview at any time. Additionally, if there is any question that you don't feel comfortable answering, feel free to say pass. Also, even though I will be taking out all identifying information from these transcripts, I do ask that you not use others' names to preserve their confidentiality.

As long as you are comfortable telling me, I'd like to hear a little bit about your relationship with your grandchild before you learned about your grandchild's sexuality.

What was your grandchild like growing up?

What is your relationship like with your grandchild's parents?

How have things been since your grandchild has been older?

What did you think it would be like being a grandparent?

What did you expect from your grandchild(ren)?

Section 2: Out!

How did you discover your grandchild's sexuality? (found out from grandchild, found out from parents, found out from other family member, found out from items/hints)

Was it verbal, in a letter, over dinner, long distance, etc.?

What do you see as the benefits of how you were told? Draw backs?

What did they tell you about their sexual orientation?

Section 3: Response

Still going ok? This is just another reminder that you may choose to stop the interview at any time. Additionally, if there is any question that you don't feel comfortable answering, feel free to say pass. Also, even though I will be taking out all identifying information from these transcripts, I do ask that you not use others' names to preserve their confidentiality.

What was your initial reaction to this news about your child's sexuality like?

What were some of the things you worried about?

What did you think this meant (about your grandchild)?

Why do you think you responded this way?

How has that changed?

Tell me about the first time you saw your grandchild/parent after you learned about his/her sexuality.

What about the next time?

What was your most recent interaction with your grandchild like?

Does his/her sexuality come up ever in conversation? How?

What are family gatherings like?

How has this information (or knowledge) impacted your relationship with your grandchild?

Would you say it has gotten better or worse? How?

What has changed in your relationship since he/she came out?

Would you say you have some of the same hopes and dreams for your grandchild? What about fears?

How has this whole process been for you? Emotionally, physically, socially, spiritually...

Still going ok? This is just another reminder that even though I will be taking out all identifying information from these transcripts, I do ask that you not use others' names to preserve their confidentiality.

Section 4: Other Family Members

How have other family members shaped your relationship with your grandchild?

Has your grandchild ever spoken with another family member about his/her sexuality that you know of?

Do you know what that conversation was like?

Do other family members talk to you about your grandchild's sexuality?

What do they say? Are they critical? Supportive?

How has this whole process been for you?

Emotionally, physically, socially...

Section 5: Conclusion

If you were giving advice to other young people who wanted to come out to their grandparents, what would you tell them? OR Is there anything you wish others knew about what it is like to be a grandparent of a lesbian/gay grandchild?

What do you think might have been helpful to you when you were feeling most poorly about your relationship with your grandchild?

After doing this interview, do you have any questions about this project?

If you know of anyone else who might be interested in this project, would you mind giving them one of my flyers.

Thank you very much for speaking with me.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: Grandchild

The following interview schedule is meant to be a semi-structured, open-ended guide for the interview with GLBQ grandchildren. The questions listed within each topic area represent the types of questions I will ask, although every question may not be asked of every participant and the order in which I ask them may vary. However, I will make sure that at least some information is gathered about each of these main topic areas. Constructing a flexible interview schedule will allow me to follow the conversation wherever it is heading and ask probing questions for additional information.

How did you hear about this project?

Section 1: Previous Relationship

REMINDER: This is just a reminder that you may choose to stop the interview at any time. Additionally, if there is any question that you don't feel comfortable answering, feel free to say pass. Also, even though I will be taking out all identifying information from these transcripts, I do ask that you try not use others' names to preserve their confidentiality.

As long as you are comfortable telling me, I'd like to hear a little bit about your relationship with your grandmother (father) before your grandparent found out about your sexuality.

What was your grandparent like when you were growing up?

How have things been since you have been older?

What kinds of things did you expect from your grandparent?

Section 2: Deciding to be out

Did you want to come out to your grandparent? Why or why not?

What did you think would happen? Fear? Hope?

Did you have any conflicting ideas about why you should or shouldn't come out?

Did you have any conflicting ideas about what might happen?

How did you decide to come out to your grandparents?

What did you think were some of the positive aspects of coming out?

What did you think were some of the negative aspects of coming out?

Were there any parts of your sexual orientation that you felt uncomfortable sharing with your grandparent?

Section 3: Out!

Still going ok?

How did your grandparent learn about your sexuality? (found out from grandchild, found out from parents, found out from other family member, found out from items/hints)
Was it verbal, in a letter, over dinner, long distance, etc.?

*What do you see as the benefits of how you came out? Draw backs?
If you could do it differently, what would you change?*

Section 4: Response

What was your grandparent's initial reactions to learning about your sexuality like?

What did they say?

How has that changed?

Did you ever hear anything from other family members about your grandparent's response?

Why do you think they responded this way?

Tell me about the first time you saw your grandparent after they learned about your sexuality.

Did anything feel different? Did they say anything about it?

What about the next time?

What was your most recent interaction like?

Does his/her sexuality come up ever in conversation? How?

What are family gatherings like?

Do you ever bring home significant others or friends?

How does your grandparent respond to this?

How has coming out impacted your relationship with your grandparent?

Would you say it has gotten better or worse? How?

What has changed in your relationship since you came out? Is it closer or more distant?

How has this whole process been for you?

Emotionally, physically, socially, spiritually...

Still going ok? This is just another reminder that even though I will be taking out all identifying information from these transcripts, I do ask that you try not use others' names to preserve their confidentiality.

Section 5: Other Family Members

How have other family members shaped your relationship with your grandparent?

Has your grandparent ever spoken with another family member about your sexuality that you know of?

Do you know what that conversation was like?

Do other family members talk to you about your grandparent's reaction to your sexuality?

What do they say? Are they critical? Supportive?

Section 6: Conclusion

If you were giving advice to other young people who wanted to come out to their grandparents, what would you tell them?

What do you think might have been helpful to you when you were feeling most poorly about your relationship with your grandparent?

After doing this interview, do you have any questions about this project?

If you know of anyone else who might be interested in this project, would you mind giving them one of my flyers.

Thank you very much for speaking with me.