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**SOCI 4395-1**  
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## **Abuelos y Abuelas: the Role of Grandparents in the Lives of Latino LGBTQ+ Youth**

### **Introduction**

Studies on LGBTQ+ youth have predominantly focused on how queer youth and their parents negotiate non-normative gender identities and sexualities. While the parent-child relationship is important in understanding the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth, there are a plethora of sociological lenses through which to gather a more comprehensive sense of the life of LGBTQ+ youth. Racial/ethnic identity and age, for instance, play an essential role in one's experience of the world. This study provides new insight into queer studies through the exploration of relationships between LGBTQ+ youth and extended family members, particularly grandparents, and analyzes these relationships through the context of racial/ethnic and intergenerational relations. Throughout this paper, we seek to understand how Latino LGBTQ+ youth understand and engage with perceived generational differences, racial/ethnic identity, and family norms in their relationships with their grandparents. We delve into this question using qualitative interviews conducted in the summer of 2022 with LGBTQ+ youth ages 16-19 in the South Texas and Inland Empire regions.

Although there are strong stereotypes that would suggest that older relatives in Latino families would have strenuous relationships with their LGBTQ+ family members, this is not in line with our findings. Families of racial/ethnic minorities are often assumed to be more predisposed to homophobia and transphobia due in part to assumed traditional political views and need to avoid other minoritized identities. [Older folks' relationships with LGBTQ]. When discussing these relationships, however, Latino LGBTQ+ youth describe their grandparents as genuinely supportive figures in their lives. Existing research about the relationships between LGBTQ+ youth and their grandparents has overlooked how these experiences can be influenced by racial/ethnic identity and vice versa; this study seeks to fill some of those gaps in understanding the experiences of Latinos, the largest racial/ethnic minority population in the US (Nadeem 2022). Our research demonstrates that a great deal of Latino grandparents are able and willing to face social conflicts in order to care for their grandchildren. The Latino LGBTQ+ youth in our study interpret their grandparents' support as unconditional love through emotional closeness, comfort in their presence, domestic care, and attempts at support of their LGBTQ+ identity.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Generational Differences**

As the primary source of socialization, care, and support in a person's life, the social sciences have long been concerned with the family as a site of research. In the United States, the normative family model is that of the nuclear family – a married, heterosexual couple and their dependent children (Gerstel 2011). Although the nuclear model remains the standard, since the 1960s an ever-increasing number of Americans live in distinct configurations (U.S. Census Bureau 2022) or maintain integral relationships with extended family members. More than half

of Americans live within an hour of extended family (Hurst 2022), and more than one third of American children live with extended family members (Banerjee 2019). Although scholarship and the American public generally tend to understand families in terms of parents and children, grandparents have arisen as a significant source of care, support, and cohesion in the last century. As life expectancy has increased substantially from the twentieth to the twenty-first century, people are more likely to have living grandparents than ever before (Montoro-Rodriguez and Ramsey 2019). This heightened longevity has increased the involvement of grandparents in their grandchildren's lives. Previous research on the effects of grandparent involvement in their grandchildren's lives shows mixed results due to methodological discrepancies and heterogeneity of the samples (Dunifon 2013; Sadruddin et al. 2019). However, research concentrated on adolescent and young adult grandchildren reveals that grandparent involvement decreases depressive symptoms, especially in single-parent households (Ruiz and Silverstein 2007). The benefits of these relationships increase for grandchildren who have strong relationships with their parents as well, which reveals that parents may serve as important liaisons between grandparents and their grandchildren (Dunifon 2013; Ruiz and Silverstein 2007). Despite inconsistent findings in previous research, our study reveals positive effects for Latino LGBTQ+ youth who have close relationships with their grandparents.

Sociologists call this phenomenon mutual/bilateral relationship between different generations intergenerational solidarity. This term was first developed to study the relationship between adults and children (Bengtson and Roberts 1991), but has since been expanded to the study of relationships with extended family members (Dolbin-MacNab 2019; Montoro-Rodriguez and Ramsey 2019). The study of intergenerational solidarity has been categorized into six different foci that belong to two types: cognitive-affective and structural-behavioral solidarity. Affectual solidarity, consensual solidarity, and normative solidarity belong to the cognitive-affective type, which will be used in the following analysis. Affectual solidarity refers to the degree to which grandparents and grandchildren feel emotionally connected. Consensual solidarity refers to the respect of a set of family rules. Normative solidarity refers to the degree to which a family member complies with family rules and expectations in practice. This framework covers many important aspects of the grandparent-grandchild relationship, but the underlying context that stems from race, ethnicity, and culture is necessary because these factors inherently influence family norms.

### **Racial and Ethnic Identity**

Hispanic families tend to have greater opportunities for intergenerational solidarity as they tend to maintain closer relationships with extended family members rather than isolating as nuclear family units (Gerstel 2011). Additionally, Hispanic adults tend to have children earlier, allowing grandparents more time with their grandchildren (Montoro-Rodriguez and Ramsey 2019). The importance of family in Latino culture has been the focus of study for many sociologists because of the complex ways in which racial and ethnic identity influence familial structures. Familism is broadly defined as an increased sense of solidarity, loyalty, and interdependence within one's family (Acosta 2010; Patrón 2021b). This concept – known as *familismo* in Spanish – has been empirically shown to improve Latino children's wellbeing, including improved mental health and greater school attachment due to family members who actively support them and vice versa (Przeworski and Piedra 2020; Stein et al. 2015). *Familismo* applies not just to the nuclear family but also to extended family members, as Latino households

are more likely to be intergenerational or simply have greater ties to extended family (Gerstel 2011). By extension, *familismo* may increase the importance of grandparents in Latino families.

Despite the many benefits of *familismo* mentioned earlier, such interdependence and importance placed on the family can be a stressor when there is greater pressure to maintain family cohesion. In the context of Latino LGBTQ+ youth, *familismo* may cause added stress to youth's lives for fear of disappointing their family members due to their gender and/or sexual identities (Gonzalez, Connaughton-Espino, and Reese 2022; Patrón 2021b, 2021a; Schmitz, Robinson, and Sanchez 2020). Oscar Patrón coined the term “precarious *familismo*” to describe the stress associated with *familismo* that is experienced by queer Latino folks specifically (Patrón 2021a, 2021b). Patrón theorizes that the added support and interdependence that characterizes *familismo* may be more conditional than was previously thought (2021a). He found that the support derived from *familismo* may be withheld from certain family members due to their gender or sexual orientation (Patrón 2021a). In this way, queerness may complicate our common conception of *familismo* in Latino families.

LGBTQ+ identities have been documented in the sociology of sexuality as being especially taboo in families of color, including Hispanic families (Gonzalez et al. 2022; Patrón 2021b). Acosta has dedicated much of her scholarship to studying the ways in which Latina women who identify as non-normative sexualities negotiate relationships with their families. She specifically explores the visibility of queerness within the family and how sexually nonconforming Latinas actively manage their queerness around their families, as well as how a child's sexual nonconformity is handled by the family of origin (2013). Scholarship reveals a great deal about the relationships between LGBTQ+ Latinos and their relationships with families, but they tend to focus on the parent-child relationship, leaving the extended family under-researched.

### **Family Norms**

When thinking about LGBTQ+ youth's experiences with their families, focus often veers toward parents' levels of acceptance and support of their children. This focus is appropriate as the parent-child relationship is the most common foundation of the family unit in U.S. culture, and parents are often the closest adult that youth have a relationship with. Parental acceptance and rejection of LGBTQ+ children in particular have been studied to a great degree. Studies have corroborated the importance of a positive parent-child relationship for LGBTQ+ youth, showing parental acceptance to be crucial to their health and well-being (Katz-Wise, Rosario, and Tsappis 2016; Parker et al. 2018; Roe 2017). Family rejection and conflict is shown to be a particularly critical predictor of distress in LGBTQ+ youth's lives (Klein and Golub 2016; Lefevor et al. 2019; McConnell, Birkett, and Mustanski 2016; Needham and Austin 2010; Ryan et al. 2010).

In scholarly literature concerning LGBTQ+ youth, there is little attention paid to the relationships that youth have with their grandparents – especially positive ones. Scherrer, however, has focused on the experience of “coming out” for grandchildren (Scherrer 2010, 2016). In her work she finds that most youth and their families fear grandparents' reactions to their grandchildren coming out. This fear is particularly salient when LGBTQ+ people feel an overwhelming pressure to come out to their family and friends so that they can be their authentic selves around them – a phenomenon known as the disclosure imperative (Scherrer 2010). While participants feared coming out to their grandparents, she found that many grandparents surprised their families by being unconditionally supportive of their grandchildren (Scherrer 2010). This finding is in line with recent grandparenthood literature that posits grandparents are pressured

not to interfere with their child's parenting in order to stay in close contact with their grandchildren and are expected to be an unconditional source of love and support (Fruhauf, Scherrer, and Orel 2019). To follow the social norms of the grandparent role, grandparents may exhibit indifference toward the sexuality or gender identity of their grandchildren (Fruhauf et al. 2019).

The intricacies of the experience of Latino LGBTQ+ youth have yet to be studied, especially their relationships with grandparents. However, this admittedly specific site for research will provide us with a more intersectional perspective of the family unit. Specifically, this paper will focus on how Latino LGBTQ+ youth negotiate affectual, consensual, and normative solidarity with their grandparents. As LGBTQ+ youth of color are especially vulnerable to decreased quality of mental health, it is imperative to study how the closest people to them – the family – can provide support. These specific examples will aid our understanding of intergenerational relationships, familismo in Latino families in the United States, and non-normative sexualities and gender identities in these contexts.

## **Methods**

### **Recruitment**

Before we recruited any participants, our research team developed a name and brand for the overall project: Family, Housing, and Me. This broader study seeks to understand the experiences that LGBTQ+ youth (ages 16-19) in South Texas and the Inland Empire have in relation to non-parental family members and housing. Specifically, the study focuses on youth who are in precarious housing situations so that we can understand how youth become unhoused. The Family, Housing, and Me Project is funded by the National Science Foundation, and may be extended for an additional 2 years so that we may study how these young adults' experiences with family and housing change in emerging adulthood – a critical time where housing may be withheld by parents. This study was approved by the Trinity University Institutional Review Board. Specific permission to interview 16 and 17 year olds without parental consent was obtained from the IRB as youth in this age range qualify as mature minors.

Participants were recruited through a survey to determine if they were eligible for the study. The research team displayed posters in community spaces throughout San Antonio with QR codes linked to the recruitment survey. Information and recruitment materials were given to community organizations in South Texas that would likely fit our research criteria, including the San Antonio Pride Center and Fiesta Youth. We also curated a robust presence online where we advertised the study on Instagram, Twitter, Tik Tok, Reddit, and Discord through posts and targeted advertisements. In all, over 1,000 people took the recruitment survey, and 83 youth were chosen to participate in the interviews based on their survey responses. Participants were chosen based on their ages (16-19 years old), location (South Texas or Inland Empire), housing situation (dependent upon others for housing), and relationship with parents (ambivalent or unsupportive). Additionally, a quota of participants belonging to certain racial/ethnic minority groups was met in order to ensure our sample reflected the diversity of these regions.

### **Interview**

Before interviews took place, the research team developed an interview guide in Qualtrics that each interviewer would use as an outline during their interviews. The researchers,

a combination of undergraduate and post-baccalaureate researchers from Trinity University and University of California, Riverside, tested this interview guide by interviewing each other and other volunteers within the study’s age range in addition to completing an “interview bootcamp” with Dr. Amy Stone – guided by Kathleen Gerson and Sarah Damaske’s book about qualitative interviewing *The Science and Art of Interviewing* (2020). After ample preparation, the researchers completed 83 semi-structured interviews in the summer of 2022. Each interview was conducted on Zoom and lasted from 60 - 240 minutes with the average interview duration being 120 minutes. Participants were compensated for their interviews with a \$40 Amazon gift card.

The interview guide covered a broad range of topics including past and current housing situations, family life, school life, religion, system-impacted experiences, economic state, mental health, and friendships. The interview questions most relevant to this paper were: How would you describe your relationship with your grandparents? Which one of your family members is the most supportive of you in general? In addition to these questions, grandparents naturally appeared throughout the interviews depending on the participant.

### Sample

This paper focuses on Latino participants in the Family, Housing, and Me project. Of the 83 participants interviewed, 35 identified as Latino or Hispanic. As most of the participants used the words Latino or Hispanic to describe their racial/ethnic identity, this paper will use the same terms. Although 20 participants identified as strictly Latino/Hispanic/Chicano, a large portion of the participants identified as belonging to multiple racial/ethnic groups. These identifications included Native American and Latino (n = 2), African American and Latino (n = 2), White and Latino (n = 8), East Asian and Latino (n = 1), Latino, Caucasian, and Native American (n = 1), and Black, White, Native American, and Latino (n = 1). Within this sample, a variety of sexual and gender identities were represented. Sexual orientations included lesbian (n = 5), gay (n = 3), bisexual/pansexual (n = 22), demisexual (n = 2), queer (n = 3), and asexual (n = 2). Gender identities included woman/female (n = 11), non-binary/gender non-conforming/bigender/demigender/agender (n = 17), transfeminine (n = 1), trans man/masculine (n = 3), and man/male (n = 3). Participants ranged from age 16 to 19 with the median age of this subgroup being 17. The previous demographics and educational attainment of the participants is displayed in Figure 1.

Name (Pronouns)	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation	Gender Identity	Education Status	Location
Adella (she/her)	16	Hispanic or Latina	Bisexual	Female	Enrolled in High School	South Texas
Alister (any pronouns)	17	Hispanic and White	Bisexual	Bigender	Enrolled in High School	South Texas
Blaise (they/he)	17	Hispanic	Queer	Non-Binary	Enrolled in High School	South Texas
Bob (any pronouns)	17	Hispanic/White	Lesbian	Non-Binary	Enrolled in High School	South Texas
Camila (she/her)	16	Hispanic White	Bisexual	Biological Female	Enrolled in High School	South Texas

Charles (he/they)	17	Latinx/White	Demiboy and Bisexual	Non-Binary	Enrolled in High School	Inland Empire
Clay (he/him)	16	Hispanic/White	Pansexual, Unsure	Trans Man	Enrolled in High School	South Texas
Denise (she/her)	19	Hispanic/Latinx	Bisexual	Non-Binary	Enrolled in College	South Texas
Diego (he/him)	17	Latino	Strictly gay	Male	Enrolled in High School	South Texas
Elio (he/they)	17	Hispanic	Gay	Demigender	Dual Enrollment	Inland Empire
Elizabeth (she/her)	18	Hispanic and Native American	Pan	Female	Enrolled in College	South Texas
Jax (they/them)	19	White Hispanic	Pansexual	Non-Binary	Enrolled in College	South Texas
Karina (she/her)	18	Hispanic	Bisexual	Female	Enrolled in College	Inland Empire
Lorren (they/he/she)	18	Chicana	Bisexual	Non-Binary	Enrolled in College	Inland Empire
Lumen (he/him)	16	Black and Latin	Bisexual	Transmasculine	Enrolled in High School	South Texas
Luna (she/her)	19	African American, Mexican, Latino	Lesbian	Cis Female	Enrolled in College	South Texas
Manuel (he/him)	18	Latino/Chicano and Guachichil	Queer	Man	Enrolled in College	South Texas
Marie (any pronouns)	19	Hispanic	Bisexual	Gender Fluid/ Non-Conforming	Enrolled in College	Inland Empire
Mariposa (she/her)	17	Hispanic/Mexican	Lesbian	Female/Woman/ Girl	Enrolled in High School	Inland Empire
Mark (they/them)	17	Latina	Asexual	Agender	Enrolled in College	Inland Empire
Mary (she/they)	17	Hispanic/Latina	Omnisexual	Gender Non-Conforming	Enrolled in High School	Inland Empire
Merdan (she/her)	18	Hispanic/White	Lesbian	Cis Female	Enrolled in College	Inland Empire
Pepe (they/he)	19	Hispanic	Bisexual /Pansexual	Non-Binary	Enrolled in College	South Texas
Pikachu (she/her)	20	White and Hispanic	Demisexual, "idk-romantic "	Girl	Enrolled in College	South Texas
R (he/him)	16	Hispanic	Gay	Boy	Enrolled in High School	South Texas

River (he/him)	17	Mixed, Black, White, and Native	Bisexual	Trans and Non-Binary	High School Diploma	South Texas
Remi (he/they/she)	19	Hispanic/Latino	Asexual/ Bisexual	Gender Non-Conforming	Enrolled in College	South Texas
Ruby (she/her)	17	Latina	Pansexual	Cis	Enrolled in High School	Inland Empire
Sara (she/her)	17	Hispanic	Lesbian	Cis Woman	Enrolled in High School	South Texas
Sarah (she/her, they/them)	17	Latino	Bisexual	Transfeminine	Enrolled in College	Inland Empire
Silvio (he/him, they/them)	18	East Asian, Latino	Bisexual	Transgender Male	Enrolled in College	South Texas
Star (she/they)	16	Latina/Hispanic	Queer/ Unlabeled	Other	Enrolled in High School	Inland Empire
Stratus (he/they/she)	17	Hispanic, Caucasian, Native American	Pansexual	Non-Binary/Gen derfluid	Enrolled in High School	South Texas
Tina (they/them)	17	Hispanic	Pansexual	Non-Binary	Dual Enrollment	Inland Empire
Zoe (she/them)	17	Hispanic	Bisexual	Female	Enrolled in High School	Inland Empire

Figure 1. Participant demographics.

### Data Analysis

After the interviews were completed, the audio file from the Zoom meeting was sent to a professional transcription service. Upon transcription, the researchers removed identifying information and changed the names of the interviewees to the pseudonym of the interviewee's choosing. If the interviewee did not choose a pseudonym, a name was chosen by the researcher to mirror their demographic qualities. The interview transcripts were then put into NVivo where I performed open coding of the transcripts. During this stage, I searched for the terms "grandparent," "grandma," and "grandpa" as well as read through the transcripts to find any and every mention of grandparents. I coded all mentions of grandparents in this manner, and then performed axial coding by combining the initial codes into prominent themes throughout the interviews such as "Safe Space" and "Complicated Support." Through this process of oscillating between the small details and overarching themes, I analyzed the codes to understand the unique relationships between Latino LGBTQ+ youth and their grandparents.

### Findings

Out of the 35 Latino participants in this study, 26 described their relationships with their grandparents as close. The participants explained this closeness in a variety of ways from being physically present to providing a calm space to expressing love and acceptance. These findings



show that grandparents who were present played significant and overall positive roles in their grandchildren's lives, conforming to the literature that posits *familismo* as a beneficial structure of support within Latino families. Although LGBTQ+ identities sometimes presented challenges in the youth's relationships with their grandparents, for the most part our participants did not experience *precarious familismo* and accordingly, reaped the benefits of this family dynamic. The following sections demonstrate the varied ways in which grandparents played significant roles in their grandchildren's lives. Firstly, we outline specifically who is close with their grandparents, who is not, and why that is. Then we provide descriptions of how the participants felt while spending time with grandparents and what they did together. Finally, we discuss how participants understood their relationships with their grandparents in terms of their sexuality and gender identity.

**Emotional Closeness.** Of the 26 participants that described being close with their grandparents, they often referred to the affectual and functional solidarity between them. Manuel, a Latino Guachichil queer man, says of his grandmother, "For my mom's mom, my Abuela, she's close with all her grandkids. All her grandkids just adore her. She's an amazing woman. And I don't know how to more express that." Similarly, Alister, a white Hispanic bisexual and bigender 17-year-old, praises their grandmother, "She's the best person I've ever met. She's so sweet." Alister alludes to the close emotional relationship they have with their grandmother through their description of her as "sweet." Blaise, a 17-year-old queer non-binary person from South Texas, praises their grandmother as one of their closest extended family members, "But my grandma, she's literally the best grandma ever. I'm the closest to her." Jax, a 19-year-old pansexual non-binary person from South Texas, explains their close relationship with their grandmother through educational support and time spent together, "I love her, she's helping me pass my driving test because I have to take it soon, so after this I'm going to go practice with her driving, because she's much more patient. We spend every Sunday with her." Jax's close relationship with their grandmother is possible due to their close proximity, "She lives like a few blocks away." The participants from South Texas overwhelmingly held close relationships with their grandparents with 18 who did and only three who did not.

**Emotional Distance.** Contrastingly, more participants from the Inland Empire claimed to lack close relationships with their grandparents. Eight participants did not have close relationships with their grandparents while six did. The reasons that the participants provided for not being close with their grandparents included physical distance, death, or homophobia/transphobia. Physical distance and death pose threats to the structural solidarity between the participants and their grandparents as they hinder the ability of the two to spend time together. Mariposa, a 17-year-old lesbian woman, describes the difficulty of getting to know her grandparents due to distance and death, "So, I have two in Mexico. Well, I have one now. My grandpa was in Mexico, he died in 2020. He died from prostate cancer. And then I never met him, unfortunately. But my grandma still lives over there in Mexico. I haven't met her either. I'm not sure when I will be." Although Tina faces similar obstacles to having a close relationship with their grandparents, they also point to poor communication as a factor, "I guess it's kind of like a small barrier that I go through. I'm not great at socializing already with adults. That's one main thing, but then I guess also a tiny language barrier where I am very fluent in Spanish, but it's not enough to understand theirs." Both difficulty communicating based on Tina's personal preference and their language skills create barriers to them having a meaningful relationship with their grandparents.

The higher rate of distance from grandparents in the Inland Empire group may indicate that a higher percentage of Latino people in this region are first generation Americans than in the South Texas region. This finding could be due to the types of jobs available in these regions or immigration patterns. Due to the size of the sample, the regional differences between the participants certainly cannot determine that the geographical distribution of families is different between the regions, but these small differences may point to a larger trend if studied further.

Of the six participants that did maintain close relationships in the Inland Empire, they expressed similar experiences to the participants from South Texas of receiving instrumental and emotional support from their grandparents. Sarah, a 17-year-old bisexual transfeminine person, noted the importance of instrumental support her family received from her grandparents.

I guess, those that we've relied on, that my immediate family has relied on for support has been my mom's parents, and my step-grandfather on my mom's side. Then my dad's mother, and my step-grandfather on that side. They've been the ones whose places we've stayed at.

Sarah also emphasizes the emotional support that she received from her late step-grandfather.

Him [her step-grandfather] and my girlfriend are the two I really talk to the most about my emotional stuff, like what I was talking about, like my cool grandpa. They're the ones I've opened up to about that. Yeah, they're the ones that have supported me in that just by allowing me to open up and let them in, I guess.

Participants from the Inland Empire and South Texas who maintain close relationships with their grandparents display similar patterns in the ways that they relate with their grandparents. As so much literature about LGBTQ+ people focuses on the negative impact that their identities have on their relationships, the following findings will highlight the positive experiences these youth have in the presence and space of their grandparents.

### **Quality Time with Grandparents**

While spending time with grandparents, the participants engaged in a variety of activities with most falling into the category of recreational activities. This section focuses on the associational solidarity between the participants and their grandparents through examination of the ways in which they spent time together. Quality time spent with grandparents included leisure activities such as relaxing, eating, making food, and shopping. However, these activities are brought to life through the emotions that the participants associate with these activities.

**Leisure.** The presence and spaces of grandparents provided youth with a sense of peace and leisure. Luna, a 19-year-old lesbian woman from South Texas, saw her grandfather's presence as relaxing and greatly enjoyed spending time with him, "He's a very giving, loving person. I like to be with him because there's no expectation. Like you can just hang out with him and it's perfectly fine." Luna's description of her grandfather having "no expectation" points to a feeling of leisure and freedom from obligations. Prefacing this statement, she describes her grandfather as a "giving, loving person" which she later expands upon, "And he's always running around trying to do everything for you. So if you're like, 'I'm just going to go grab a bottle of water.' He's like, 'No, let me get it for you. You can put on the TV, do whatever you want.'" You just get to relax and it's like perfect". Along with a sense of peace and leisure, Luna feels taken care of by her grandfather; when she spends time with him, she gets to be cared for, which she describes as a relaxing experience. Spending time with her grandparents provides her with a refuge from the

heartbreak and stress of recently losing her mother. Due to her mother's passing, Luna has had to adapt to a life with more responsibilities on her shoulders, "We're all still adjusting to the loss of my mom, but right now it's like a ... I have to step up to fill that role a little bit." With this added pressure in her life, Luna cherishes the peaceful, leisurely times she spends in the care of her grandparents. Bob mentions a similar experience of being taken care of when they joke in answer to a question; Asked who they would live with if they could not live in their current home, "I feel like, my aunt, just because I get the feeling that if I went with my grandparents, I'd probably become too lazy." Although Bob's response indicates a preference for their aunt's home, this remark demonstrates the way in which their grandparents spoil them when they spend time together.

**Comfort.** These feelings of being cared for and loved with little responsibilities extended to the participants' feelings of safety and comfort within their grandparents' presence. Camila, a White Hispanic bisexual woman, remembers the cozy feeling of being with her grandmother before she passed away, "Every once in a while I would like come and sleep in her room and watch TV with her." Remi describes happy memories from his grandparent's ranch.

That last semester I spent most of my time over there and it was great. And I still spend, I work here this summer, so that's why I haven't been spending as much time, but still visit frequently. I intend to visit pretty frequently when I get to college since I'll be closer. But yeah, like I said, I spent a lot of my time, my summer there.

His grandparents' ranch is a space where he has fond memories and plans to visit regularly in the future. Later in the interview, Remi is asked where he feels the safest in the world and he replies.

Good question. I'd say probably, I guess on my grandparents' ranch. Previously it was my college, but I'm no longer there, I'm going to my other one. So I'd say, I guess I put that up there too, but my grandparents' ranch. Like I said, they have been very clear that they, and I feel that they genuinely very deeply care about how I am doing, make sure that I'm at my best within their means.

This response reveals how important his grandparents' home and company is to him. The participants referred to their grandparents as providing them with a peaceful, relaxing space. Elio, a Hispanic gay demigender person, describes the place that he feels the safest in the world and includes the presence of his grandmother in this setting, "Like, everything is just mine. And then, when my grandma does live with us, she...we share a room. Like, I have two beds with her. So it's just comfortable, because she's here with me, and I'm very comfortable with her." For a teenager living in the predominantly individualist culture of the United States, it is remarkable that Elio feels so comfortable sharing a room with his grandmother and purposefully includes her in his explanation of why he feels safe in his bedroom. Similarly, Luna describes her grandparents' house as a warm, inviting space.

I feel like the whole house is just a good space. You can lay down on a couch or you can pet like both of their dogs, you can go to the backyard and stare at all my grandma's weird art. Like it's just like one of those places where the whole place feels like a great place to be. I don't even feel bad about it. I could go to any room and just hang out and they would be okay with it.

Luna's description reveals a deep sense of comfort and safety within her grandparents' home because she literally feels free to roam throughout the house as she pleases.

The comfort and closeness between the participants and their grandparents is exemplified by the many discussions of grandparents in relation to housing. Fourteen participants had lived

or were currently living in the same home as their grandparents. Charles, a 17-year-old demiboy, bisexual non-binary person from the Inland Empire, described his grandparents' history of living with him or close by.

So my grandparents, I have a grandpa and grandma, and they both live like five minutes away from us. So, yeah, they're close by, and I'm very close to them because my grandma specifically she would take care of me. And she also used to live in the house when I was born, so, like, she would watch after me.

Charles and four other participants described living close to their grandparents. This proximity allowed the participants to develop close relationships with their grandparents. Ten participants even chose their grandparents' home as a viable place to live in case they were not able to live in their current home. Pikachu, a 20-year-old demisexual, idk-romantic girl, chose her grandmother when asked where she would prefer to go if she could no longer live with her parents or in her college dormitory, "Okay, so...probably my grandma. My grandma would be the first person I would ask. She has a small apartment with one room, but I would ask her first." Despite having little space to accommodate her, Pikachu still would prefer to live with her grandmother out of all of her family members because of their emotional connection.

She was a psychologist, so she knows a lot about people and she has similar interests to mine. She's an artist as well, and she's just the sweetest and I know that I could help her and she would like having me around. Mostly that she would like having me around.

The prevalence of grandparents in the youth's discussion of housing, safety, and comfort clearly shows that grandparents' homes provided many young adults with a sanctuary where they could count on being supported and loved. This reliability was comforting to the youth because they could find support outside of their nuclear family and friend networks.

**Food.** These feelings of leisure and comfort extended to the activities that the participants shared with their grandparents. Despite their close, intimate relationships with their grandparents, they often cherished the rather mundane activities that they would do together involving food. The popular cultural trope of the grandparent that spoils their grandchildren with food was prevalent throughout the transcripts. Several participants fondly reminisced about the times that they would spend with their grandparents, either baking together or being fed by them. Luna, an African American Latino lesbian woman, describes a typical moment with her grandfather, "And it's perfect because you don't have to do anything and you don't have to worry about any tension or anything. It's just be there, eat, because he forces you to eat or makes you food." Blaise, a queer non-binary Hispanic 17 year-old, recounts a common experience of their grandmother offering them food.

But my grandma, she's literally the best grandma ever. I'm the closest to her. She speaks only Spanish. I'm not very good at speaking Spanish, so our conversations are mostly her saying, "¿Tengo [sic] hambre? Are you hungry?" And I'm like, "Sí, sí" and she gets me food.

Adella, a Latina bisexual woman, references her frequent visits to her grandparents' house that centers around food, "I always go over there to take food from them." Manuel relates his grandmother's support through her cooking, "She's the reason why I went to the elementary [school] in [part of town] because she was a block away from the school. So she'd be picking us up. We'd be staying with her. She'd cook us meals and everything." Mary, a gender non-conforming omnisexual Latina, would also receive consistent sustenance from her grandfather, "He would always make us all of our lunches." The role of food in these interactions

is symbolic for more than nutritional nourishment; The food grandparents provide their grandchildren serves as an extension of their love for and support of them.

Additionally, making food was a common activity between the participants and their grandmothers. The kitchen was a place of connection where they could enjoy each other's company and spend quality time together. Sara, a Hispanic asexual/bisexual gender non-conforming 19 year-old, references baking with her grandmother as a common activity, "Basically if I go over to her house right now, we could bake, and have a good conversation, and just be laughing together in the kitchen." Similarly, Bob, a White Hispanic non-binary lesbian mentions baking in relation to their grandmother, "We can just make a lot of jokes together. We can do stuff together, like baking or shopping and talking. It's very nice." The activity in these examples was purely utilitarian, focused on making the food to consume it. The activity facilitates connection because while baking they would converse with each other. A seemingly light-hearted activity like baking made for some of the fondest memories that the participants had with their grandparents.

Even the participants who were not emotionally close to their grandparents referenced food when describing memories with them. Remi, a Hispanic asexual/bisexual gender non-conforming 19 year-old, mentions sharing meals with his grandparents on occasion, "To be honest, we never saw each other that frequently, but whenever we did, it would be stuff like we would go to the Chuck E. Cheese and eat Thanksgiving, stuff like that." Although Remi did not have a close relationship with his grandparents, when he saw them they would share meals together. Mariposa, a Hispanic lesbian woman, mostly received familial support from her many siblings rather than her grandparents, but in one of the few times that she mentioned her grandparents she referenced food, "I remember one time, because my grandma makes this really hot chile, and I was just like, "You can't drink any water after this. You can't drink anything." These recurrent references to food, baking, and eating reveal how Hispanic LGBTQ+ youth commonly relate to their grandparents through food.

**Shopping.** In addition to providing their grandchildren with food, grandparents enjoyed taking their grandchildren shopping, particularly grandmothers. Grandmothers provided material support to their grandchildren in many different ways, but shopping together was noted as a common activity among the youth. This activity varied from shopping as a weekly chore to fetch groceries or a special occasion to look for birthday gifts. Adella describes a routine that she shares with her grandmother, "Sometimes we'll go out to just buy lottery tickets and play lottery. Yeah. I'm really close to my grandparents." Alister casually recalls their grandmother taking them shopping, "Usually, what we're doing together isn't like... It's just going shopping together and stuff. And usually, she likes to show her love through gifts and stuff. So, if it's my birthday, she's like, "Let's go shopping. Let's go buy you some stuff."” Bob, also mentions shopping with their grandmother, as shown in a previous quote that also references baking. These social exchanges between grandmothers and their grandchildren were framed by the participants as casual activities, but they served to unite the two generations through both spending quality time together and providing material support to the youth.

Charles, a Latinx White bisexual demiboy who identifies as non-binary, similarly mentions his grandmother taking him shopping, "Well, it's not much but my grandma, she'll allow me to buy men's clothing and she'll, like, we'll go shopping and she'll allow me to do certain things that normally my parents wouldn't allow me." In this way, shopping with grandma is interpreted as a form of support for Charles's gender identity. Charles interprets his grandma's

willingness to buy him men's clothing as support of his gender identity that he does not receive from his parents, "I just feel uncomfortable because they don't use my name or pronouns or respect my identity and things like that." His relationship with his mother is especially strained, "My mom doesn't really respect my identity, and we get into arguments about that." Although Charles presents his relationship with his parents as tense, he appreciates the ways in which his grandmother supports him, such as buying him men's clothes. The activities that grandchildren shared with their grandparents were often framed as positive memories in their lives and allowed them time to build meaningful connections.

### **Grandparents and LGBTQ+ Identity: Complicated Support**

Previous literature demonstrates that young queer people and their parents often fear grandparents' rejection of their grandchild's LGBTQ identity due to their generational differences and supposed conservative beliefs (Scherrer 2010, 2016). Often this fear derived from fear of anti-LGBTQ beliefs based on religion. This fear of family rejection was very real for some of the participants in our sample, but no participants described outright rejection by their grandparents based on their identity. The majority of the participants experienced something in between rejection and enthusiastic acceptance or simply silence on the issue. Attempted support or imperfect support emerged as a major theme throughout the interviews. This signified a kind of acceptance that the participants deemed imperfect but was seen as acceptable and even positive coming from someone that they expected to reject their identities. Additionally, LGBTQ+ identities sometimes impeded closeness with grandparents, but it did not act as an impenetrable barrier, more so a rift between them.

**Attempting support.** The experiences of the participants who received attempted support from grandparents framed this experience in a positive light as they saw that their grandparents were capable of less understanding due to their old age. Despite receiving somewhat ambivalent support or their grandparents not totally understanding queerness, the participants appreciated their grandparents trying to understand and highlighted the closeness they experienced with their grandparents. The fact that their grandparents even tried to understand their LGBTQ+ identity was meaningful to the youth. For example, Alister maintained a loving relationship with their grandmother as they saw her attempt to understand LGBTQ+ identities.

My grandma sent a paragraph, it was like, [in a funny accent] "Hey, yo. I still love you for you, sweetie." But when it comes to practice, when it comes to using the right pronouns and the right names, a lot of times... And when you correct her, sometimes she just won't fix it or she'll say the wrong name... I know she's trying to get better... But it's difficult. I think she's a product of her time, but I don't know. I just know that there's empathy in her and that she still loves us, even if it just might be a little complicated for her to understand.

Alister grapples with their grandmother's inconsistent use of the correct names and pronouns, but comes to the conclusion that at the end of the day, she loves them and their sibling. In this sense queerness, may present an obstacle to closeness with grandparents, especially because they belong to an older generation, but grandma will love them no matter what and her attempts at understanding are comforting. Charles faces a similar situation with his grandmother who fails to respect his gender identity but also serves as a significant source of support, "She's actually, like, one of my biggest supporters and stuff. And even though she misgenders me or sometimes, yeah,

misgenders me, I don't blame her for it because I'm like, "Oh, you know, she's trying." So I still love her a lot and appreciate her." These examples from Alister and Charles interestingly follow a similar pattern of describing unsupportive behaviors followed by acknowledgment that their grandparents are trying to be supportive of their LGBTQ+ identity and regardless, serve as positive figures in their lives.

Star describes a similar experience with her grandmother as not fully understanding queerness, but despite that, they still share a close, positive relationship, "The first person that comes to mind is my grandma because I know that I can talk to her about anything. And although she isn't really up to date with everything, as long as she just listens, that's all that really matters." In this case, Star centers her grandmother's willingness to listen as a form of emotional support that she deems as more significant than her grandmother being "up to date" or having LGBTQ+ cultural competency. Pepe, a bisexual/pansexual non-binary 19-year-old, follows in this pattern by acknowledging his grandmother's anti-LGBTQ+ beliefs all while positioning her as supportive.

She was really homophobic, too. When Devin came out, she wanted him to go to a church kind of thing. Honestly, it's sad, but it's kind of expected from the way that my family grew up as Jehovah's witness. That's just how they are. But obviously she's learned to get past that. And I think she still has, it's hard to say that she has a lot of learning to do because I think she just turned 80. And I'm a strong believer of "it's never too late to change", but I don't know. Sometimes I'm just maybe some causes are lost, but what I do know is that she's very supportive of Devin and she gifted both me and him a sewing machine because Devin wanted to learn how to sew his own outfits and stuff. Not that he's been doing that, and not that I've been using the sewing machine, but I did make a skirt once and that's about it. But she tries and I think that's why I still feel supported by her, even though I know that she watches Fox News a lot.

Their grandmother's attempts to understand is heart-warming to Pepe – she is held to a lower standard since she belongs to an older generation. Merdan, an 18-year-old lesbian woman, highlights the way that her grandmother gives her support through ways that she finds odd but appreciates the thought.

And when I watch her dog, I watched my grandparents' dog when they went to the family reunion, because my grandfather was not gonna go if the dog didn't go, but she's, like, a probably, like, 8-year-old pitbull who, like, his back leg doesn't really work that well, so I just stayed at their house with her and my grandmother made sure to tell me, like, you know, "Don't bring too many boys over, or girls." Okay.

Although this was a small comment, Merdan remembers this interaction and appreciates feeling seen by her grandmother. The way that these youth understand their relationships with grandparents is extremely nuanced; they acknowledge that grandparents sometimes have problematic beliefs due to their growing up in a different time, and they express frustration with having to tolerate these beliefs. Nonetheless, they see their grandparents as having a positive impact on their lives because they appreciate that their grandparents try at all to understand them.

**Obstacles in their Relationships.** As outlined above, some participants described their grandparents attempting to understand their LGBTQ identity. Others recounted receiving support to a lesser extent where certain conditions were necessary in order for them to maintain a positive relationship with their grandparent. These experiences go hand-in-hand with the concepts of consensual and normative solidarity because they refer to conforming and not

conforming to certain familial expectations. Charles references navigating a close relationship with his grandfather through an agreement to not talk about queerness, “He just said he loves me for how I am and things like that. He said he just doesn't care really to speak about, like, things LGBT-related. And I'm like, “Okay.” Like, I mean, he still misgenders me, but I don't really expect him to, like, change or anything. He's just an old guy.” Although Charles cannot talk about LGBTQ issues with his grandfather, he almost expects this kind of reaction from someone of an older generation and emphasizes the fact that his grandfather loves him regardless. Similarly, Alister references their grandmother’s age and as a result her heteronormative beliefs as the greatest difficulty in their relationship.

It's mostly the age gap between us and the generational gap. Because I remember one time I was going to go to homecoming with my ex, so he's my ex-boyfriend. And he was not financially stable, and so I was like, “Hey, I could help pay for the ticket. Let me pay for the ticket.” Even though it was just \$15, but he struggled to get money for it. But I was like, “I can pay for that. It's really easy. I think I have money.” And then my grandma was like, “No!” I'm like, “Uh.” I was like... She's like, “No! No. The male pays for it.” It was like, “The male pays for the ticket.” And it's like, “Okay.” It was scaring me the way she... She looked like I killed someone. It's like, “Tradition?” [Laughs] So yeah, that gap is, I think, the main reason why I don't think we'll ever completely understand each other.

Although Alister’s grandmother, as mentioned earlier, attempts to support them, Alister still sees their generational gap as a barrier to their getting closer. No matter how accepting grandparents seem to be, the participants have to negotiate an age barrier in order to maintain positive relationships with them.

This negotiation is particularly difficult for the transgender and non-binary participants for there are several examples of grandparents policing their grandchildren’s gender. Remi navigates certain boundaries with his grandmother who supports some aspects of his identity and not others, “I thought about changing my name and I brought the idea to my grandma and she didn't really like that. But I've told, I said sometimes I'll do stuff like paint my nails, wear earrings, I'd have my hair long, stuff like that, and she seems fine with it.” In this scenario, Remi’s grandmother shows discomfort with some aspects of their identity, but tolerates others. These examples depict the intricacies of their relationships. In this case, there is a particular boundary that allows Remi and his grandmother to maintain a close relationship. Pepe’s grandmother also has difficulty accepting their grandchild’s masculine presentation.

She literally almost clocked me, bro, the first time I cut my hair really short.. And she was like, “Is she a boy?”... But I was like 100% sure that she knew that I was bi. I'm really like trying to ride this bisexual thing for as long as I can. I mean obviously I am right, but trying to use that as a reason why I'm GNC, trying to use that as like yeah, yeah, I'm just butch. But yeah, obviously, apparently it doesn't work. I don't know if my grandma knows, but she really did almost clock me... She sniffed me out. Obviously she doesn't know now, she thinks my hair right now is cute, so... And she also has short hair, but I think it's just the more like boyish look that I obviously tend to try and go for that she was more concerned about.

Pepe articulates that their sexuality is easier for their grandmother to digest than their gender identity. They try to make their gender identity seem like an extension of their sexuality in order to avoid explaining their gender to their grandmother.

Breaking gender norms seemed to be more difficult for grandparents to accept. Sarah describes the way that her grandfather reacts poorly to her feminine gender performance.



Yeah, my biological grandpa on my mom's side, he is really goofy in that way. It's kind of funny, but then every once in a while, like in what I chose to wear for a birthday recently, he went off because of the way I dressed. I was wearing a skirt and he did his weird, old-man thing... It's kind of just passive-aggressive language, and being, like, "Oh, you look ridiculous." That's a pretty specific thing, like, "Ugh, I don't get it."

Sarah concedes that this behavior is transphobic, but at the same time, she acknowledges that her grandpa supports her in other ways.

He and I talk because maybe I need a ride to school or something and I can call him up and he'll still show up and help me out. But then, whenever something related to being queer comes up then he'll go off and freak out. I don't know, he'll be weird and old. Yeah, it's kinda hard to deal with him. It's hard to, I guess, let him in in that way.

Sarah's relationship with her grandfather mostly centers around material and instrumental support, but Sarah cannot talk about LGBTQ issues with him, which causes them to be emotionally distant. In conjunction, these quotes from Sarah show how nuanced the relationships between Latino LGBTQ youth and their grandparents are. There are certain boundaries that the youth must navigate in order to maintain relationships with family members of a different generation.

## Discussion

Although Latino LGBTQ+ youth seemingly reside in a position vulnerable to discrimination and unacceptance within the family, our findings above show that other aspects of their relationships with family members are more important to their relationships than their sexuality or gender identity. The negative pressure to conform to family gender and sexual norms for fear of not receiving support or precarious *familismo* does not accurately depict the situations of our participants. Yes, the participants had conflicts with their grandparents about their non-normative gender and sexual identities, but these conflicts did not bar them from having positive relationships with their grandparents. In this way, normative solidarity was generally lower for our participants as they went against family gender and sexual norms, but at the same time, this lack of shared norms did not necessarily block the youth from receiving the benefits of *familismo*. Rather affectual solidarity between the youth and their grandparents overrode the lack of consensual and normative solidarity between them. The participants toed the line between appeasing their family members and authentically expressing their identities, but often their grandparents proved to be unconditionally loving and supportive of them.

Our findings reveal that overall intergenerational solidarity is strong between these youth and their grandparents because of a number of factors. Racial/ethnic norms related to the family in Latino culture, known as *familismo*, may act as a protection against family rejection for Latino LGBTQ+ people even with older generations. This strong bond between family members allows older generations to be able and open to accept their LGBTQ+ family members, especially when they are emotionally close to them. Our study finds that family truly comes first in a majority of our participants' families. However, these relationships should not be overly-romanticized as it appears that the youth hold their grandparents to lower standards than other family members because of their age. In other words, the youth in this study do not depict their grandparents as perfect by any stretch of the imagination; nonetheless, they acknowledge their grandparents as significant sources of support and love. The two parties have an unspoken agreement that allows

them to coexist in a loving relationship while possibly having disparate views about gender identity and sexuality.

### **Limitations**

This study was originally designed to focus on LGBTQ+ youth's experiences of precarious housing in order to identify how and why LGBTQ+ experience homelessness. This focus required much deliberation over the youth's family, especially those that they lived with or near. The findings above were gathered simply from youth's descriptions of their relationships with family members in the context of their greater lives, which in one sense is extraordinary in and of itself and reveals that this is a rich topic to study. On the other hand, the fact that relationships with grandparents was not the center of analysis in the creation of the interview guide limits the study to a degree because we do not have all the puzzle pieces for this picture.

Additionally, the scope of the participants does not necessarily represent the experiences of all LGBTQ+ Latino participants. Firstly, this study only explores LGBTQ+ Latino youth in South Texas and the Inland Empire. Participants were also selected based on certain criteria that may have skewed the data. All of the participants chosen had or were in precarious housing situations. It is of great importance to note too that within this research the specific geographical ANCESTRY of participants was not gathered, so we do not know exactly which culture each participant identified with when they called themselves 'Latino' or 'Hispanic.' These terms themselves are extremely broad, and although they refer to one demographic group that shares many similarities, this in no way means that they are monolithic. In conclusion, the findings in this study are not necessarily generalizable to all Latino LGBTQ+ youth, but they provide us with a baseline understanding of some Latino LGBTQ+ youth's experiences that have only just now been explored.

### **Conclusion**

As relationships between Latino grandparents and their LGBTQ+ grandchildren show a great deal of variation, there leaves a lot to be studied. Particularly, this paper begs the question of how these relationships are unique when compared to LGBTQ+ Latino youth's relationships with other family members. Does the greater age difference between grandchildren and their grandparents cause these relationships to differ from those between parents and their children or between siblings? A comparative study between youth's relationships with their family members from different generations would shed greater light onto the effect of age on relationships. Additionally, another paper could address the specific barriers to close relationships with grandparents that was experienced by a minority of our participants. Why did some LGBTQ+ Latino youth benefit from close relationships with their grandparents and others did not? There are myriad questions left unanswered by the data, but this study adds a new, important perspective to this conversation.

Our findings demonstrate that grandparents can be a significant support for Latino LGBTQ+ youth, which leads us to the conclusion that there may be too much emphasis on parents in discussions around LGBTQ+ youth and the family. This perspective stems from white middle-class norms that we have demonstrated are not the reality for the entire population. These findings imply that grandparents and extended family members should be included in conversations about LGBTQ+ youth as they may be an untapped source of support, love, and

acceptance. In order to implement such practices, interventions that teach families about LGBTQ+ cultural competency should target all family members, especially grandparents. The old notion that grandparents are too fragile or obstinate to learn about LGBTQ+ identities is false. Older generations, as shown above, are perfectly capable of adapting to new social norms around gender and sexuality. If we treat them as such, there are wonderful possibilities for stronger familial bonds and acceptance of LGBTQ+ youth.

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