All Theses And Dissertations

Theses and Dissertations

4-2022

# Lived Experiences Of Adults Formally Raised By Grandparents On Their Connection To The School Community While In High School

Karen M. Maguire

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ADULTS FORMALLY RAISED BY GRANDPARENTS ON THEIR CONNECTION TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY WHILE IN HIGH SCHOOL

By

Karen M. Maguire


Bachelor of Science in Teacher Education from Johnson & Wales University, 1990
Master of Science Education Leadership from Fitchburg State University, 2013


A DISSERTATION


Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of
The College of Graduate and Professional Studies
at the University of New England


Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education


It was presented on
04/05/2022
and reviewed by:


Jennifer Scott, Ed.D., Lead Advisor
University of New England


Audrey Rabas, Ph.D., Secondary Advisor
University of New England


Stasia Peters, C.A.G.S., Affiliate Committee Member
Northeastern University

**UNE | UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND**

College of Graduate and Professional Studies

# Doctor of Education Program Final Dissertation Approval Form

## This Dissertation was reviewed and approved by:

Lead Advisor Signature: _____*Jennifer Scott, EdD*_____

Lead Advisor (print name): _____Jennifer Scott, EdD_____

Secondary Advisor Signature: _____*Audrey Rabas, Ph.D*._____

Secondary Advisor (print name): _____Audrey Rabas, Ph.D._____

Date: **April 5, 2022**

**Table of Contents**

## Dedication

To the grandparents who, over the last 25 years, shared their story with me. You are so brave. There is a special place in heaven for you.

## Acknowledgments

To my children, Ryan, Emily, Matt, Justine, and Dan: I love you more than words can express. I thank God for you every day. Bet on yourself, always.

Paul: the gratitude I have for the encouragement and support you continue to give me will remain with me forever. Thank you for being my sounding board, chef, chauffeur, and personal assistant. Thank you for pushing me. More importantly, thank you for loving me.

To my family and great friends, especially my sister Kath—for coming over every Sunday—and my parents, Kevin and Gail: I can come out now. I am looking forward to resuming an everyday life with you.

To all of you who have supported me by listening to endless accounts of my project or the stories I learned along the way or by sharing yours with me: I appreciate your support.

To my UNE cohort: Ride or Die, baby . . . There were some bumps in the road, but we persevered. At times, it was hard not to walk away. But the thought of a lifetime of regret haunted us... and we reminded each other of that. You were the best advisors. I will miss our Monday meetings, Sunday writing group, and daily text messages. I will never forget you.

Lola: you have been with me from the beginning. I appreciate your advisorship and wisdom. I am privileged to call you my friend. Thank you for agreeing to serve as my site affiliate.
My UNE advisors, Dr. Scott & Dr. Rabas: Thank you for pushing me. Thank you for everything.

To the Saboteur. You were with me throughout this journey. In fact, you've been with me my whole life. Thank you for the company.
But—I am stronger than you.

## List of Figures

**Abstract**

This qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis sought to understand the lived experiences of connectedness to the secondary school community of children raised by grandparents, told from the reflective viewpoint of the grandchildren now as adults. Although the relationship between grandparents and the grandchildren they raise has been studied, how those grandchildren connect to the school community has yet to be explored and was the focus of this study. Research on grandchildren raised by grandparents and student connection to the school community provided valuable insight, highlighting the need for additional exploration in this area. Education researchers have studied student engagement quite thoroughly, discovering the connection between students and the school community to be a crucial relationship and an essential aspect for all school personnel to consider. Student connection to the school community is key to ensuring successful learning. This connection becomes critical as students progress through high school; however, student engagement has mystified parents and educators for decades. The connection to the school community becomes even more challenging when a student is raised out of the home, either in foster care or relative placement, such as with grandparents. By conducting semistructured interviews, this qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis examined the connectedness to the school community of students raised by grandparents and, subsequently, how the relationship with grandparents contributed to connection to the school community. After reviewing and analyzing the transcripts of the interviews, four major themes emerged from the data: (a) compassion for people, (b) loyalty in relationships (c) individual determination and resiliency and, (d) school personnel lack of awareness of students' support needs. The most noticeable finding in which the study participants unanimously agreed was the need for programs in schools to address the specific

academic and emotional needs of students raised by grandparents. All participants reported that generally, educators did not know they were raised by grandparents, and unless they self-identified, educators made the assumption they lived in a traditional family. Each noted there were support programs for students of divorced parents, students who were homeless, or students who were in Department of Children and Families (DCF) or Department of Youth Services (DYS) custody, yet there were no programs or support services for students raised by grandparents. Because of the vulnerability of this population, programming designed to work with these students requires thoughtfulness at local and state levels.

*Keywords:* academic achievement, grandfamilies, grandparents, out of home placement, resilience, school-community, interpretative phenomenological analysis.

**CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Millions of grandparents in the United States raise grandchildren with no parent present in the home (Holloman, 2016; Kilfoyle, 2018; Mendoza, 2018). The number of children raised by grandparents in the United States has steadily increased, setting a new record for grandparents as custodians in 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, 2020). Census numbers show this as a concerning trend, identifying over 7.2 million children under 18 living with grandparents as heads of households in 2020, an increase from 5.4 million in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, 2020). The exponential increase from 2010–2020 appears to be part of an international phenomenon (Backhouse & Graham, 2013), as the increase in grandparents raising grandchildren as head of households had significantly climbed worldwide (Backhouse & Graham, 2013; Glaser et al., 2018). Although there is research examining this family structure and the concerns family members face (Cole, 2017; Holloman, 2016; Kilfoyle, 2018; Mendoza, 2018), one thing is clear: rarely do grandparents seek this new role (Davis et al., 2020; Holloman, 2016). Grandparents play an essential role in family life, sometimes providing financial, emotional, and practical care and support to their grandchildren and great-grandchildren (Glaser et al., 2018); however, this new era and need for out-of-home child placement brings on the need for grandparents to fill the role of parent, creating a new family structure: grandfamilies (Holloman, 2016; Kilfoyle, 2018; Mendoza, 2018; Williams, 2011).

Grandfamilies come from all racial and ethnic groups and socioeconomic backgrounds and exist worldwide (Davis et al., 2020). In the United States, there are currently two significant factors that have led to grandparents raising grandchildren: the resurgence in the opioid epidemic (Davis et al., 2020) and an increase in incarcerated birth parents (Martin, 2017). However, there are many other reasons why grandparents find themselves raising a family all over again (Davis

et al., 2020). These grandfamilies face unique challenges, frequently with no support in services, finances, or community (Goyer, n.d.; Holloman, 2016; Kilfoyle, 2018; Mendoza, 2018; Williams, 2011).

Children raised out of their homes, whether with relatives (e.g., grandparents) or in foster care, are at risk for poor academic outcomes during their secondary education (Hayslip et al., 2019). These children may experience abuse or neglect in the home and are subsequently placed in a healthier environment to ensure their safety and wellbeing (Edwards, 2016); however, less than 50% of those children complete high school by age 18 (FosterEd, 2018), and only 20% attend college, compared to 66% of their peers (FosterEd, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Research indicates these children are more likely than their peers to be absent from school, have special education needs, and experience traumatic life events (Peterson et al., 2019). Further research shows students who do not graduate from high school have a higher likelihood of unemployment, poverty, and health issues (Messacar & Oreopoulos, 2013). These children are also more likely to make their way into the prison pipeline (Mendoza, 2018) and, as high school noncompleters, have a six times higher likelihood of incarceration than students who graduate from high school (Peterson et al., 2019).

It is widely known when students are connected to the school community, they are more likely to graduate from high school (Peterson et al., 2019; Plasman, 2018). Connectedness to the school community is key to ensuring successful learning (Dolbin-MacNab, 2009; Plasman, 2018), and this connection becomes essential as students progress through high school (Rogers, 2021). With grandfamilies, the connectedness of these students remains somewhat of an enigma (Davis et al., 2020). Understanding how members of these families connect to the school community, particularly the grandchildren, is vital in identifying ways to assist them in being

successful students and successful graduates (Dolbin-MacNab, 2009; Holloman, 2016). To this end, the connectedness of the grandchildren to the school community needed further examination (Cole, 2017; Kilfoyle, 2018; Mendoza, 2018).

### Definitions of Key Terms

**Academic Achievement.** Academic achievement is the academic progress made over a specific period, with performance (i.e., growth) measured from the beginning to the end of the defined period.

**Custodial Grandparent.** Custodial grandparents have legal and physical custody of their grandchildren and are responsible for the decision making regarding the grandchild's wellbeing, including medical and educational decisions. In most of these situations, the parents of the children are not in the home; however, there are notable exceptions to this circumstance where one or more parents may be in the house but are not responsible for the decision making regarding the child's welfare, legally or otherwise.

**Grandfamilies.** Grandfamilies consist of custodial grandparents and the grandchildren they raise. These family structures are sometimes formalized legally or may be created through personal family agreements among grandparents and their children or child's partner. In some situations, the child's parent(s) may still live in the home; however, the grandparent(s) are the responsible custodian. In other situations, the parent is not in the home and may or may not be involved in the child's life.

**Relative Foster Care.** Relative foster care refers to a judgment placing children in the state's legal custody, physically with grandparents or other relatives. In these situations, the child welfare agency retains legal custody, and the relatives have physical custody only.

**Resilience.** Resilience is the unspoken phenomenon of having good outcomes despite bad situations and the capacity to recover and overcome despite difficulties. Resilience has three major impact factors: individual, family, and community (Cole, 2017).

**School Community.** The school community is the combination of educational activities that encompass a student's education. These activities include academic work completed at school and at home, after-school activities, attendance at school events, communication with educators, college planning, behavior support, group participation, and online school accounts.

## Statement of the Problem

The findings of current research suggest typical home-to-school partnerships between families and schools do not adequately address the needs of grandchildren raised by grandparents, potentially affecting the grandchild's participation and academic achievement in school (Cole, 2017; Edwards, 2016, 2018; Lee et al., 2017; Mendoza, 2018). Although there is much research examining the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren as a family structure, there is a shortage of research studying to what degree these children are connected to the school community while in high school. Although there is research on this connection as part of nontraditional family studies told by educators (Kilfoyle, 2018), previous research has not been explicit on how the former students—the grandchildren—understand their connectedness throughout their secondary school careers or whether this family relationship contributes to this connectedness.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis study was to understand the lived experiences of the connectedness to the secondary school community of grandchildren raised by grandparents, told from the viewpoint of those same grandchildren as

adults. Studies by Cole (2017) and Plasman (2018) indicated as a student progresses through high school, low levels of connectedness to the school community add to the likelihood of not completing at a rate of 10 times that of their peers. Plasman (2018) noted, "Engagement with school is one of the most important aspects to consider with respect to high school completion, and previous research has identified this link quite clearly" (p. 217). Those working in the school system encounter children raised by grandparents daily and are at times the first to witness the impact of placement on a child's functioning (Cole, 2017; Dannison, 2019; Holloman, 2016). Educators see the emotional, behavioral, and academic problems firsthand. Of note to school personnel are findings that students raised by grandparents may not receive the academic support or encouragement they need to succeed in school (Cole, 2017; Dannison, 2019; Holloman, 2016). For some of these families, the education level of the grandparent, along with inadequate resources in the community to assist them, may add further difficulty to students' success at school (Davis et al., 2020). Understanding the connection between the school community and this group of students is important in assisting this student population.

### Research Questions and Design

The research design is a foundation for a study, which helps find answers to the proposed research questions (Sullivan & Forrester, 2019). This qualitative study engaged an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) design method to encapsulate the perceptions of the lived experiences of students who were raised by grandparents while in high school. Specifically, the research focused on the students' connectedness to the school community. This research method allowed me to focus on the individual students' explanations of the experience and then interpret the meaning. Phenomenological research methods are used to answer what it is like to experience a phenomenon firsthand (Peoples, 2021; Smith & Osborne, 2003). The more detailed

IPA seeks to understand what experiences mean to participants by encouraging them to describe and reflect on the experiences they encounter, and the researcher interprets their meaning (Sullivan & Forrester, 2019). Phenomenology questions the experience, not merely opinions, perspectives, or perceptions (Peoples, 2021; Smith & Osborne, 2003). Phenomenology requires the researcher to gather anecdotal information from personal experiences and work to understand the essence of the experience or events as told by participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

For this study, I collected data on the lived experience of adults raised by grandparents on their connectedness to the school community while in high school via semistructured interviews. The benefit of using this design was the ability it provided to look at the lived experiences of participants and derive from that the essence of the phenomenon. In this case, the phenomenon was the connectedness to the school community while in high school and whether the family structure of the grandfamily affected that connection. Interpretative phenomenology also allowed me to obtain rich, multifaceted information that featured the experience of a growing population of people from their explanations of their experiences. This approach provided participants with opportunities to share their experiences authentically and honestly.

The research questions for this study were:

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of adults raised by grandparents on their connectedness to the school community while in high school?

Research Question 2: What are the lived experiences of adults formally raised by grandparents regarding the family structure?

## Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Framework

The purpose of the conceptual framework is multifaceted: (a) to help the researcher see the concepts in a study, (b) to provide the researcher with a general approach to organizing and

conducting the study, (c) to guide the researcher in collecting and interpreting data, and (d) to guide future research (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). The conceptual framework is divided into three components: personal interests, topical research, and a theoretical framework (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016).

This IPA research study was based partly on my interest in the family structure of grandfamilies and on my interest in developing programming that would be beneficial to student success. Throughout my 24 years as a high school teacher and school administrator working with students, families, and educators, I have seen many grandparents as custodial guardians of students. My experience with these grandfamilies gave me a firsthand view of the struggles and the unique challenges this family structure faces. It was clear that due to the lack of understanding from the educational community as a whole—from administration to support in the classroom—this family structure needed to be examined in more detail for these students to succeed at school. When searching for support material to aid in working with grandfamilies, I discovered although other researchers have reported on the struggle of the grandparents as part of grandfamilies, there is a dearth in research on the grandchildren, and the research does not include understanding the connection to the school community as explained from the grandchildren's perspective. This study examined the grandchildren's experiences in this family structure related to their lived experience in high school.

The topic for this study, discussed in detail in Chapter 2, indicates a need to examine further the connection of children raised by grandparents to the community they live, including the school community. Extensive work in studying grandparents raising grandchildren has been completed and published since 2010 by national organizations, including AARP, Generations United, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the U.S. Department of Education. Multiple individuals,

both as groups of researchers or independent researchers, have also published findings exploring this relationship. Work by Cole (2017), Kilfoyle (2018), Rogers (2021), and Lee and Jang (2019), suggested examining the connectedness to the school community of this vulnerable population, including the perspectives of the grandchildren themselves.

**Theoretical Framework**

Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as a guide (Bronfenbrenner et al., 2019), I examined the lived experiences of the connectedness to the secondary school community of adults formally raised by grandparents. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, also referred to as development in context or human ecology theory, offers a framework to examine individuals' relationships within communities and the wider society (Bronfenbrenner et al., 2019). Ecological systems theory identifies five environmental systems where an individual interacts. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, children typically find themselves enmeshed in various ecosystems, from the most intimate home ecological system to the more expansive system, including society and culture. Each of these ecological systems inevitably interacts with and influences each other in all aspects of the children's lives (Bronfenbrenner et al., 2019).

<center>**Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope**</center>

Qualitative research methods have both positive and negative attributes to their application. A phenomenological study aims to collect rich, in-depth data to better understand the phenomenon and its meaning, often focused on how and why (Creswell et al., 2018). The scope of this phenomenological research study focused on adults 18–30 who were formally raised by grandparents while in high school for the duration of their high school experiences (i.e., at least 4 years). Anyone who had coparenting arrangements with their grandparents and birth

parent(s) and those who had a break in placement with grandparents during high school years was not included in this study. The age group selected was important, as it was close enough to the lived experience to relive it reflectively without losing details of the knowledge that could fade over time.

One assumption of a qualitative research method such as phenomenology is that participants will be truthful in their responses (Creswell et al., 2018). Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) explained assumptions reflect what the researcher understands to be true as they approach and conduct the study process. For this study, I assumed school officials who educate students raised by grandparents understand this is a vulnerable population with specific needs. It is also expected that school personnel implement programs to assist this population with their social–emotional needs and provide academic support programs in a similar fashion as other vulnerable populations. Lastly, I assumed participants spoke truthfully about their experiences as high school students raised by grandparents.

The researcher's role in phenomenological research must include the examination of biases, beliefs, and values at the onset of the study. Putting mechanisms in place to address the assumptions and limitations before they become an issue is essential to validate the integrity of the study. The general purpose of phenomenology is to understand and describe a specific phenomenon (Peoples, 2021; Smith & Osborne, 2003). Understanding a phenomenon by using an approach such as IPA is often done through interviews with a group of people who have experienced the same phenomenon (Peoples, 2021; Smith & Osborne, 2003). Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) stated although interviews are a rich data source, they are not equal. A potential limitation with a phenomenological study is the research is subject to bias (Creswell et al., 2018). Another limitation is the researcher's possibility of allowing preconceived notions to form

opinions when left unchecked, potentially affecting the research direction or outcome (Creswell et al., 2018). Also, because qualitative research is not built for multiple rechecks to prove or disprove a theory, there is a possibility of misunderstanding participants' responses because the questions were ambiguous or the participant perceptions were not accurately nor honestly reported (Creswell et al., 2018). To mitigate bias and misunderstanding, I used member-checking procedures in this study to clarify data collected from participants.

Lastly, it is critical to disclose that my own experiences working with students raised by grandparents and the educators who work with them may be a limitation of this study. However, it should be of note: while conducting the study, I did not have any working or personal relationships with any of the participants. I was not in any supervisory or leadership position with any participants, and I did not benefit financially from this study.

## Rationale and Significance

It is well established that children need to feel connected to the school community to be successful students (Holloman, 2016). The literature examined as part of this research study demonstrated there is a need for students raised by grandparents to experience stability, permanency of residence, and the opportunity to receive assistance at home for adolescent life exercises, such as completing schoolwork, navigating peer relationships, and developing a general overall connection to the world around them (Holloman, 2016; Kilfoyle, 2018; Mendoza, 2018). As part of promoting this lifestyle, the importance of children having quality educational experiences is also necessary (Cole, 2017; Holloman, 2016; Mendoza, 2018). Understanding how children feel about their connectedness to the school community is vital in examining their experience (Cole, 2017; Mendoza, 2018); however, there has been little published on their connectedness to school and what factors contribute to them or work against it. Those working in

the school system encounter children raised by grandparents daily and are, at times, the first to witness the impact of placement on a child's functioning (Cole, 2017; Holloman, 2016). Educators see the emotional, behavioral, and academic problems firsthand. Of particular note to schools are findings that grandchildren may not get the academic support or encouragement they need at home and are overlooked in the school setting (Cole, 2017; Holloman, 2016).

For some of these families, financial instability may have a detrimental effect on the household, which leads to a lack of resources to assist them (Davis et al., 2020). Often, the level of education of the grandparent also impacts their ability to assist the grandchildren with schoolwork (Davis et al., 2020) The results of this study may offer teachers and other school officials some additional insight to address the challenges and concerns of grandchildren raised by grandparents.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

This study examined the perceptions of adults formally raised by grandparents on their connectedness to the school community while in high school. Grandparents raising grandchildren as head of household in the United States is an increasing concern (Mendoza, 2018). In 2020, over 7.2 million children throughout the United States resided in grandparent-led homes, with over 2.9 million of these children raised without a parent present (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). The issues these families face—including family stress, acculturation differences, and a generation gap—need examination (Cole, 2017; Davis et al., 2020; Kilfoyle, 2018). The growing numbers of parenting grandparents also pose the question of what resources are available to help the grandparents navigate this world (Cole, 2017; Mendoza, 2018), which is potentially much different from the one they found themselves in when raising their children (Davis et al., 2020). The COVID-19 global pandemic has highlighted equity issues school-aged children face and

barriers to the children's achievement in school because of these issues (Cole, 2017; Kilfoyle, 2018).

**CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature examined for the study includes relevant, timely works exploring the relationship between grandchildren and the custodial grandparents who raise them and the relationship between the school communities and those grandchildren. This literature review, which includes peer-reviewed articles, books, dissertations, and online resources available from the University of New England Library, was conducted over 3 years to understand the intricacies of these relationships and narrow down a need for further exploration.

In developing an understanding of the connectedness of students raised by grandparents to the secondary school community, it was important first to understand the history of the family structure and what social, economic, health, and legal aspects impact it. It was also important to understand the general connection students have to the school community while in high school. The works included in this literature review address a wide variety of topics surrounding the connectedness of students raised by grandparents to the school community and rich background information overviewing the lived experiences of the members of this family structure. These areas include: (a) background of the reasons why children are placed in the care of their grandparents, (b) grandparents' lived experiences when raising grandchildren, (c) community connection of the grandchildren and grandparents who are raising them, (d) issues faced by adolescents raised by grandparents, (e) connection to the school community of students in out-of-home placement, (f) the generation gap between grandchildren and grandparents, and (g) frameworks and theories that could serve as the theoretical underpinning for the study of custodial grandchildren's connection to the school community.

This study examined the experiences of grandfamilies through the viewpoint of the grandchild, now an adult, and what implications their experiences had on their connection to the

school community while in high school. The literature examined explores the experiences of both the grandparents and the grandchildren, including why children are placed in the care of a guardian such as a grandparent (Davis et al., 2020; Martin, 2017; Turanovic et al., 2012; Turney, 2014). The literature also focuses on the dynamic between the grandparent and grandchild and what role this relationship plays in the child's success in school; however, little research is available that examines how this relationship contributes to the academic achievement, social status, and connection to the school community of the grandchildren from their point of view.

In 2020, over 7.2 million children throughout the United States resided in grandparent-led homes, with over 2.9 million of these children raised without a parent present (Generations United, n.d.; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Many factors contribute to this family structure, led by the resurgence in the opioid epidemic (Capous-Desyllas et al., 2020; Davis et al., 2020; Glaser et al., 2018; Turney, 2014), along with a growing number of incarcerated birth parents (Davis et al., 2020; Martin, 2017; Turanovic et al., 2012; Turney, 2014); however, many other factors lead to situations where grandparents find themselves once again raising a family (Crowther et al., 2014; Davis et al., 2020; Edwards, 2018; Fokakis et al., 2020; Generations United, n.d.; Goyer, n.d.).

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is comprised of three components: personal interests, topical research, and a theoretical framework (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). Personal interest refers to the underlying passion or inner motivation that drives the researcher to engage in a particular work (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016) and creates an argument about why the topic researchers wish to study matters. Topical research is the work that focuses on the subject matter and explains how the means proposed to study the subject are appropriate and rigorous (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016) by serving as the what and why of the study (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). Theoretical framework

refers to the theories found in the scholarly literature by providing the lens through which researchers conceive their conceptual framework (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). The purpose of the conceptual framework is to help the researcher see the variables and concepts in a study, to provide the researcher with a general approach to organizing and conducting the study, to guide the researcher in collecting and interpreting data, and to guide future research (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). The conceptual framework combines concepts to give a wide-ranging understanding of a research problem (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016).

At the time of this study, I worked as a high school superintendent with 23 years of experience with students, families, and educators. Throughout this time, I noticed an increase in the number of students raised by grandparents and the unique challenges grandfamilies face. It was evident because of the lack of understanding from the educational community about this group that it be examined in more detail for the students to succeed in school. When searching for support material to aid with working with this population, I discovered that although other educators had a similar interest, the work examining grandfamilies had begun only recently. I focused this study on the students in this family structure, as this group is the most underrepresented in the literature available to date. Along with my interest in this subject, the topic examined for this study indicated a need to explore perceptions of former students previously raised by grandparents and their connections to the school community while in high school.

**Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework is a lens through which researchers conceive their conceptual framework (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). Although there are numerous theories that examine behavior, I chose Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as the lens for this study. Bednarik

(2016) discussed several behavior theories that could be used to examine the phenomenon of the connectedness to the school community of adults formally raised by grandparents while in high school, including; Freud's psychoanalytic theory, Erikson's psychosocial theory, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Bowlby's attachment theory, and Maslach's self-determination theory (Bednarik, 2016). Each of these theories have been cited in research on this topic; however, none has examined perceptions of adults formally raised by grandparents on their connectedness to the school community while in high school, specifically.

Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner et al., 2019), I examined the perceptions of adults formally raised by grandparents on their connectedness to the school community while in high school. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, also referred to as development in context or human ecology theory, offers a framework to examine individuals' relationships within communities and the wider society. As such, ecological systems theory identifies five environmental systems with which an individual interacts. This theory explains children typically find themselves enmeshed in various ecosystems, from the most intimate home ecological system to the larger school system and then to the most expansive system, including society and culture. Each of these ecological systems inevitably interacts with and influences each other in all aspects of the children's lives (Bronfenbrenner et al., 2019).

## Review of Relevant Literature

In the United States, more grandchildren live with and are raised by their grandparents than ever before (Backhouse & Graham, 2013; Glaser et al., 2018). U.S. Census Bureau numbers from 2020 indicated some 7.2 million children under the age of 18 live with and are raised by their grandparents as heads of households. This metric is up from 5.4 million in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, 2020). Custodial grandparents belong to all racial and ethnic groups and

socioeconomic levels and live in all geographical regions worldwide. It is well established that typically grandparents play an important role in family life, providing financial, emotional, and practical care and support to their grandchildren and great-grandchildren (Glaser et al., 2018); however, this new era brings on an additional need for grandparents to fill the role of parent (Williams, 2011). Throughout the published literature, there has been much discussion on the implications of grandparents raising grandchildren; there are many qualitative studies on the health, wellbeing, and financial insecurities of the grandparent how they interact with their peers (Edwards, 1998; Hayslip et al., 2019). However, there is limited research focused on the grandchildren, who are at the center of this issue. According to Cole (2017) and Kilfoyle (2018), this is an area in need of further study.

Children do best in families, and if children cannot remain with their parents, the comfort of a grandparent eases the pain of separation and helps combat repercussions of separation and other trauma (Edwards, 1998; Hayslip et al., 2019). Compared to children in nonrelative care, children raised by relatives have more stability, are more apt to participate and maintain connections with family, and preserve their cultural heritage and identity (Mendoza, 2018).

**Reasons For Placement**

The stress of the responsibility of raising grandchildren without the parents present, and the rewards of this dynamic, have been well examined (Davis et al., 2020). Grandparents consistently report satisfaction in the role of caregiver (Hayslip et al., 2019); however, recent studies indicated an increase in physical and psychological health concerns for the grandparent (Fokakis et al., 2020). There are many reasons grandparents find themselves in the role of the parent, such as substance use disorder, incarceration, death, mental illness, or immigration issues of the birth parents (Davis et al., 2020; Rudder et al., 2014).

*Substance Use Disorder*

Parents with substance use disorder account for over 40% of children raised by grandparents (Hedegaard et al., 2020). In many situations, grandparents take on the role of caretaker in a time of immediate crisis, such as an accident, overdose, or lapse in parenting, but are rarely prepared to take on the role permanently (Davis et al., 2020). The opioid epidemic presents unique challenges because individuals with substance use disorder are at a high risk of death by suicide or accidental overdose and typically cycle between many years of heavy use and nonuse or light use, adding a layer of stress to the disrupted family life (Davis et al., 2020; Rudder et al., 2014). A 2020 study by Hedegaard et al. established a correlation between the increase in grandparent-led households and the surge in opioid use disorder. Nearly half of the opioid overdoses in the United States occur among people between 24–44, primary reproductive years (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2020; Rudder et al., 2014). Of these overdoses, close to one third were single females (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2020). The rate at which expectant mothers use opioids remains a concern (Rudder et al., 2014), as the withdrawal for the infant warrants consideration. Between 2004–2014, the United States saw a fivefold increase in neonatal opioid withdrawal (Rudder et al., 2014); this exposure leads to behavioral, cognitive, and motor skill developmental delays in these children and added stress to the parent and, in the case of many, grandparents (Rudder et al., 2014).

*Incarcerated Parents*

In the United States, more than 5.7 million children under the age of 18 experienced parental incarceration at some point during their lives (Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative, 2016). Incarceration may have the same impact on a child as losing a parent because the primary caregiver leaves home, and a social stigma is often associated with

the event (Turney, 2014). When a parent is incarcerated, there is a detrimental impact on the family and, in many situations, there are unintended consequences for the children who are left with grandparents or other relatives. A number of incarcerated individuals are parents, and the average age of children with an incarcerated parent is 8 (Martin, 2017). Fifty-five percent of incarcerated males and 84% of incarcerated females have dependent children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In addition, 80% of female incarcerated mothers are single parents. Short- and long-term incarceration sentences both affect children negatively; as discussed by Turney (2014), regardless of the length of the sentence, detrimental effects of leaving the children behind to continue without them remain.

### *Death of a Parent*

The death of one or both of the child's parents accounts for over 15% of grandchildren raised by grandparents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Several researchers indicated the degree to which grandchildren adjust to the death of a parent may depend mainly on the surviving parent's (grandparent's) own distress and adjustment to losing their child and on the quality of care the bereaved parent provides during this critical time (Patterson, 2018; Thompson, 2017). Without the presence of either parent, responsibility for support and communications with the school and other organizations becomes the caregiver's responsibility, who, in many instances, is an extended family member such as the grandparent. In several studies, it was found that the level of depression and anxiety a child reports is directly connected to their perception of the grandparents' level of ability and openness to communicate with them (Fokakis et al., 2020). Generations United (n.d.) provides online support and issue educational briefs to grandparents on how to handle this relationship delicately. The organization also acts as a support network,

providing opportunities for the grandparent who themselves may be grieving the loss of their

child (i.e., the parent of the grandchild; Generations United, n.d..; Thompson, 2017).

### *Other Situations That Lead to Out-of-Home Placement*

In addition to the death of a parent, incarcerated parent, or parent with substance use

disorder, there are several other reasons a grandparent may fill in as the parent figure, such as

mental illness, abandonment, military deployment, or immigration issues (Edwards, 2018;

Rudder et al., 2014). It should be noted children who have parents with significant mental illness

have a likelihood of behavioral and emotional problems and may have related educational needs

that custodial grandparents may have difficulty addressing (Fokakis et al., 2020). In other

situations, families may deal with multiple adult and child service providers as the birth parent

processes the various issues affecting their ability to raise their children. There may be times

when the parent circles in and out of the child's life, similar to the cyclical nature of substance

use disorder, and that adds an additional burden on the grandparents who remain concerned for

their child and struggle to balance both their grown children's needs and those of the

grandchildren (Crowther et al., 2014; Van Etten & Gautam, 2012; Rudder et al., 2014).

### **Experiences of Grandparents When Raising Grandchildren**

In much of the literature examined for this study, grandparents acknowledged feeling of

loss, grief, and personal struggle when raising their grandchildren, along with profound pleasure

and accomplishment (Backhouse & Graham, 2013). They expressed concern about taking over

the responsibility of the grandchildren, including financial issues, legal battles, physical and

emotional health problems, social isolation and lifestyle changes, parenting conflicts, and issues

with the children's parents (Backhouse & Graham, 2013; Van Etten & Gautam, 2012). Others

felt added concerns when the child's parent(s) were in prison, suffered from mental illness, or

supervised contact with the children (Backhouse & Graham, 2013). Grandparents also reported ongoing conflict with extended family members about the correct way to raise the children or other grandchildren who were feeling neglected (Hank et al., 2018; Thompson, 2017).

*Financial Insecurity*

In the United States, grandparents living in households with their grandchildren are more likely to be socioeconomically disadvantaged than other grandparents (Dunifon, 2018; Van Etten & Gautam, 2012); one fifth of grandparents have incomes below the poverty line. This disadvantage is particularly true for households where the grandparent is younger, female, unmarried, African American, not in paid work, has lower educational levels, has more grandchildren, or is already living in poverty (Dunifon, 2018). Frequently, becoming a grandparent takes place during a time in one's life when one prepares for retirement (Crowther et al., 2014). Most people do not anticipate the financial needs of raising a second family and may be in a poor financial state when suddenly forced to do so. In some situations, grandparents are already retired when they are immersed in this new role. For some, it may mean the retirement they had planned for age 65 will take place later because they cannot afford to leave work. Some grandparents may be unable to work due to the needs of the children and may need to turn to social service agencies for assistance, and others become licensed foster parents of the children to secure needed financial support and services (Edwards, 2018; Van Etten & Gautam, 2012).

Financial concerns about parenting grandparents have increased (Crowther et al., 2014). Married couples fare much better economically than single or widowed grandparents when raising grandchildren considering most have established households (Crowther et al., 2014); however, over one third of grandparents raising grandchildren are single females (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Of these grandmothers, there is a 49% unemployment rate (Generations United,

n.d.). Although not as grave, the situation for men still demonstrates concern, as single grandfathers are at a 34% unemployment rate in households where they support their grandchildren (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). For those who find themselves in this sudden predicament, legal issues also come into play. Some grandparents need to request intervention by the court system to get their grandchildren out of foster homes and may have previously used their financial means to help their adult child, which could have a devastating impact on their retirement savings (Crowther et al., 2014; Van Etten & Gautam, 2012).

### *Health Concerns for Grandparents*

Studies exploring the personal, interpersonal, and economic consequences of custodial grandparents have consistently demonstrated worse outcomes compared to grandparents who are not primary caregivers of their children and to custodial parents (Doley et al., 2015). Stress has been identified as a critical factor among custodial grandparents (Doley et al., 2015). Several studies indicated the relationship between the birth parents and grandparents often contributes to stress among custodial parents (Doley et al., 2015).

In a study of parenting grandparents, Fokakis et al. (2020) found custodial grandparents were significantly more likely to have lower self-rated satisfaction with their health than their peers. Much of the research indicated the grandparent's health was negatively impacted by the stress caused by the new and unexpected situation where the grandparent found themselves (Fokakis et al., 2020). The mental and physical health of the grandparent often begins to decline once they begin to care for their grandchildren, and many focus their energy, attention, and finances on the wellbeing of the grandchildren, leaving themselves vulnerable to physical and mental health issues (Crowther et al., 2014). Substance abuse struggles of the child's parents cause strains on relationships between generations that directly relate to the psychical and

psychological health of the grandparents (Davis et al., 2020). For many grandparents, taking on the role was both sudden and unplanned, and such changes impacted their quality of life. Studies have also reported these grandparents have a higher percentage of depression, anxiety, and stress than their peers (Davis et al., 2020).

**Community Connection of Grandfamilies**

Aside from the financial and health implications of parenting children, grandparents also struggle to connect with services designed to assist families (Capous-Desyllas et al., 2020; Van Etten & Gautam, 2012). In some situations, grandparents have found an inability to access the social services system or access legal assistance for issues with custody and insurance (Crowther et al., 2014; Van Etten & Gautam, 2012). Although there are various services available to help, many grandparents do not understand how to navigate the system (Crowther et al., 2014). Because many of the custody arrangements are not completed legally, grandparents often find themselves unable to make connections with the school systems or access services for the grandchildren (Leonard & Gudiño, 2016).

Legislators have recently begun discussing the issues that affect the custodial grandparent's ability to raise the grandchildren. In 2018, the Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act (2018) was passed. This act calls for the establishment of a federal advisory council to make recommendations that would help grandparents and other relatives meet the health, educational, nutritional, and other needs of the children in their care, and maintain their own physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing (Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act, 2018).

**Issues Faced by Adolescents Raised by Grandparents**

For grandchildren, the traumatic events that precede living with grandparents have been linked to heightened behavioral challenges, difficulties with socialization, anxiety and depression, and lower school performance (Davis et al., 2020); however, children raised with relatives, such as grandparents, have better health outcomes, more stability, and a greater sense of belonging compared to children in foster care with nonrelatives. When children cannot remain with their parents, placing them with grandparents or other relatives reduces future trauma and mitigates the impact of past trauma (Hayslip et al., 2019). The stability, supportive relationships, and access to family and culture that grandparents provide to children promote resiliency and healing (Hayslip et al., 2019).

*Depression in Children Raised by Grandparents Versus Foster Parents*

In the United States, grandparents are parentally responsible for over 5.7 million children, yet little research has been conducted on these children's physical and mental health or school connection compared to children placed in foster care (Davis et al., 2020; Nadorff, 2017). Davis et al. (2020) and Mendoza (2018) found children raised by grandparents had significantly lower levels of depressive symptoms than those raised by foster parents (Davis et al., 2020; Mendoza, 2018). Grandparents reported substantially higher levels of consistent discipline practices and higher supervision of their grandchildren (Davis et al., 2020; Nadorff, 2017). These results suggest both discipline and supervision of children are two factors to be considered for interventions on adolescents with reported depressive symptoms (Nadorff, 2017). An additional study of grandchildren's mental health conducted by Merchant et al. (2018) found two different national samples of grandchildren between age 4–12 raised out of the home reported having increased psychological difficulties compared to similarly aged children. However, subgroups

such as grandparents were not identified explicitly in this study, so it is difficult to ascertain whether this group of children experience increased psychological difficulties compared to that of their peers. It is critical to take note of the evidence that demonstrates even though children raised by grandparents are more vulnerable than the general population, they have fewer behavioral problems than children in foster care (Merchant et al., 2018). Such evidence demonstrates that kinship care may provide a protective effect against psychological difficulties in children who cannot be with their parent(s). Collectively, these studies point to the need for improving the custodial grandparent's access to appropriate mental health services to best screen, diagnose, and treat the emotional and behavioral problems of grandchildren (Merchant et al., 2018; Nadorff, 2017), further allowing these students to connect with the school community.

### *Bullying Among Children Raised by Grandparents*

Bullying prevention and intervention has emerged as a critically important concern in schools over the past 2 decades and continues to be reported as a serious issue in schools today (Edwards, 2016). Students involved, either as targets or aggressors, display social and academic difficulties (Edwards, 2016). Bullying and victimization are associated with adverse social, emotional, and mental health issues for middle and high school students (Olweus & Limber, 2010). Olweus and Limber (2010) suggested childhood bullying is linked to psychological disorders such as depression, oppositional defiant disorder, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Emotional regulation skills and impulsive and aggressive behavior result in both aggressors and targets experiencing heightened risk for future involvement in violence (Olweus & Limber, 2010). A report by Edwards (2016) indicated children raised by their grandparent's experience more bullying involvement than their peers experience and are involved at a higher degree as aggressors, not necessarily as victims. It is widely known students who display

aggressor behavior are at a higher risk to demonstrate violent behavior later in life and likely benefit from bullying prevention programs that focus on specific dynamics, such as insecure attachment, associated with living in the alternate family arrangement in which grandparents are head of household (Edwards, 2016).

**Connection to the School Community of Children in Out-of-Home Placement**

There can be no argument that education is the main contributor to success later in life. Students who do not graduate high school have a higher likelihood of unemployment, poverty, and health issues (Messacar & Oreopoulos, 2013). These children are also more likely to grow up and make their way into prison as part of the school-to-prison pipeline, as high school dropouts have a 6 times higher likelihood to be incarcerated than students who graduate from high school (Peterson et al., 2019). Children raised out of their homes are at risk for poor academic outcomes. These children may experience abuse or neglect in the home and subsequently be placed in a healthier environment to ensure their safety and wellbeing; however, less than 50% of those children complete high school by age 18, and only 20% attend college (FosterEd, 2018). Research indicates these children are more likely than their peers to be absent from school, have special education needs, and experience traumatic life events (Hayslip et al., 2019). Relative foster care refers to a judgment placing children in physical custody with relatives, including grandparents, with legal custody assigned to the state. In these situations, education and health care consent laws allow relative caregivers, who do not have legal custody, access to health care on behalf of the children, the ability to enroll them in public school, and the ability to act as the child's guardian in all school and health matters (Hayslip et al., 2019). However, not all placements are completed legally, which puts grandparent at a disadvantage

when requesting access to the student's medical and school records and causes issues when a grandparent tries to communicate with the school regarding issues with the child.

**The Generation Gap Within Grandfamilies**

Many grandparents experience role conflict when found raising grandchildren and report having difficulty setting boundaries between being a grandparent versus a grandparent-as-parent (Capous-Desyllas et al., 2020). In a study by Backhouse and Graham (2013), grandparents expressed frustration with going back and forth between these identities. Many discussed the back and forth of visible versus invisible, deserving versus undeserving, voiced versus silenced, and included versus excluded (Backhouse & Graham, 2013). Grandparents also expressed the struggle with balancing these identities and their role in disciplining the children. Many felt confused as to how best to do this as, in many situations, the type of discipline the grandparent used in their child-rearing was no longer acceptable in society (Capous-Desyllas et al., 2020).

*Acculturation Difference*

Acculturation refers to the process when groups of individuals of different cultures come into continuous firsthand contact, which changes the original culture patterns of either or both groups (Rothe et al., 2010). It is widely known that the dynamic between grandchildren and grandparents can also have issues—not only because of the generation gap, but also because of the two different social and historic circles they move within. When these two worlds come together, the new lifestyle can vary dramatically depending on the age and experience of the grandchildren and grandparents. Grandparents might have a difficult time understanding fads the grandchildren experience (e.g., piercings, clothes, makeup), and the grandchildren may have a hard time understanding the interests and expectations of the grandparents (Rothe et al., 2010). There may also be confusion between the belief systems to which they each relate. Grandparents

may view the grandchild's acceptance of other cultures, LGBTQ identities, or music as radical, which further widens the gap (Rothe et al., 2010; Turney, 2014).

*Social Media and Technology*

Technology continues to advance rapidly, and there is a generation gap in its usage (Collins, 2009; Halpert, 2018; Twenge, 2017). For example, a 2018 Fact Tank poll reported that if grandparents use social media at all, they are more likely to use Facebook or Twitter instead of Instagram or Snapchat. In the report, 78% of people aged 18–24 have a Snapchat account compared to just 3% of people over the age of 65. The findings for Instagram are comparable. In the report, 75% of people in the 18–30 age group reportedly have an Instagram account instead of just 13% of those 65 and older. In an era when schools regularly rely on technology to communicate with families, such as with social media posts and online grading platforms, and expect families to engage in communication this way, lack of understanding and experience in this area could be troubling for grandparents (Collins, 2009; Halpert, 2018; Twenge, 2017).

**Other Risks Grandchildren Face**

Custodial grandchildren have higher behavioral and emotional issues than their general population peers do. Boys raised by grandparents are more likely to have externalized behavioral problems than girls, who are more likely to internalize issues (Cross, 2018). Cross (2018) also found younger children between the age of 2–6 raised by grandparents had the same levels of emotional development as their general population peers but lagged in academic skills (Cross, 2018).

Children raised by grandparents (or extended family) make up roughly 25% of the children in the foster care system (Edwards, 2016). Glaser et al. (2018) noted 28% of children raised by grandparents were victims of abuse, abandonment, or neglect from their parents prior

to living with the grandparent, causing significant issues with the child's growth and development (Glaser et al., 2018). To make the situation more concerning, 26% of grandfamily households fall below the poverty line and have difficulty accessing assistance and health insurance (Glaser et al., 2018).

## Summary

The literature examined indicates adolescents' issues when raised by their grandparents—including family stress, acculturation differences, and a generation gap—affect their ability to succeed at school. Although policymakers and practitioners must promote approaches that prioritize placing children with relatives when they cannot stay with their birth parents (Edwards, 2016; Mendoza, 2018), they must also provide trauma-informed training to school personnel (Mendoza, 2018) and mental health services for the children and caregivers (Mendoza, 2018). Grandparents need to be connected to comprehensive community-based supports such as legal and financial help, respite, and health care (Hayslip et al., 2019).

The COVID-19 global pandemic highlighted equity issues school-aged children face and barriers to the children's achievement in school because of these issues. Technology, in relation to the trend of remote schools, requires a supervisory (i.e., parenting) presence online that may be difficult for a generation that does not communicate this way. The need for technology may affect the grandparents' ability to assist students with schoolwork, participate in school events, and effectively communicate with the school (Davis et al., 2020).

**CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

This study examined grandfamilies' experiences through the grandchild's viewpoint and what implications they had on their connection to the school community while in high school. The literature examined also explores the experiences of both the grandparents and the grandchildren, including why children are placed in the care of a guardian such as a grandparent, whether through formal or informal arrangements. The literature examined also focuses on the dynamic between the grandparent and grandchild and what role this relationship plays in the child's success in school. However, little research is available that examines how this relationship contributes to the academic achievement, social status, and connection to the school community of the grandchildren from their point of view. According to U.S. Census Bureau reports (2010, 2020), from 2010–2020, there was a continued increase in grandparents raising grandchildren as custodians in the United States, from 5.4 million in 2010 to over 7.2 million in 2020, with over 2.9 million of these children raised without a parent present in the home (Generations United, n.d.; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). This chapter describes the methodology, research site, participants, sampling method, data collection and analysis process, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and limitations that contributed to this study.

**Site Information, Demographics, and Setting**

I solicited participants for the study from local community social media platforms based out of southeastern Massachusetts that included a population of 18–30-year-old individuals in their membership, such as Big Brothers-Big Sisters of Massachusetts, Old Colony YMCA, and The Brockton Boys & Girls Club. The social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were used for these recruitment purposes. The area in southeastern Massachusetts used for this study is racially and socioeconomically diverse; approximately 50% of the current students in

Grades 9–12 are from families of color. At least similar, if not greater, racial diversity characterizes the area's grandfamilies. Permission to post on the social media accounts was obtained from the account moderator or owner before the solicitation. A consent process that included a procedural overview was followed for each respondent selected for the interviews, following the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from the University of New England, which approved the study. I obtained permission from the UNE IRB and the individual social media site owners and moderators before soliciting participants.

## Participants and Sampling Method

The pool of participants consisted of males and females age 18–30 from southeastern Massachusetts who, for the duration of their high school careers, were raised by grandparents. Participants in this age group were selected because their ages were still close enough to the experiences they reflected on so that memories were not be lost over time. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour; I used a set list of interview questions for each participant, following up where necessary for clarification.

The purposeful sampling strategy of homogenous sampling was used in this study for participation selection. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) noted, "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore, must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 96). Homogenous sampling provided the best opportunity to recruit members who shared the same phenomenon as study participants: young adults who were formally raised by grandparents and were willing to share their experiences on their connectedness in the school community when they were in high school. In some situations, such as this study, the number of necessary participants was not

gleaned from sharing via social media, so a snowball sampling strategy was used to expand the pool to enough participants to gain saturation.

## Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedure

As discussed in the sampling method section, I conducted each participant interview remotely, lasting approximately 1 hour using the Zoom platform with the recording and transcription feature turned on. Once completed, interviews were checked for transcription errors, loaded into Microsoft Word, and stored on the external hard drive purchased for this project. Transcribed interviews were checked against the recording and edited, clean verbatim style, then sent back to the participant for member checking. Participants were given 5 days to check the transcripts for errors and inform me if they found any. After the time elapsed and I obtained the final transcripts, I coded the final transcripts and analyzed them for themes. At this point, as agreed to before recording the interviews and following the procedure approved by the UNE IRB, the voice and video recordings of the interviews were deleted from the external hard drive. To protect the privacy of participants, I assigned each participant a pseudonym. Seven years following the completion and final submission of this study, data from the interview collection will be deleted from the external hard drive permanently.

Interview questions were based on the study's literature review. Interviews included the following significant questions to gain further information in each area (this is a partial list of questions):

1.  Tell me about your experience in high school.

2.  What types of support did you have at home in completing your schoolwork?

3.  What barriers did you face as a student raised by grandparents?

4.  What were the barriers with your grandparents helping you with schoolwork?

5. How well do you think educators understood your situation?

6. What support would be helpful to educators working with a family such as yours?

7. What were the barriers to your grandparents communicating with your teachers, if any?

8. What after-school activities were you involved in, if any? (Why not?)

9. Were you truthful with your grandparents about the schoolwork you had to do?

10. In what ways did your grandparents struggle in helping with your schoolwork, if at all?

11. How did this family structure influence your ability to make friends, if at all?

Notes from each of the interviews were recorded and used along with the transcripts of the interviews to identify themes that emerged.

## Data Analysis

This qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study aimed to understand the lived experiences of the connectedness to the secondary school community of grandchildren raised by grandparents, told from the viewpoint of those same grandchildren as young adults. Once the content had been collected via semistructured interviews and transcribed clean verbatim style, I took a number of steps to process the information gleaned from the interviews. First, I broke the data down manually using a color-coded process that streamlined and narrowed the data to a set of descriptive themes as derived from participants' points of view. Breaking down the data manually allowed me, as a novice researcher, to understand and recognize themes that emerged (Sullivan & Forrester, 2019). The analysis that accompanies an IPA study has often been described as following an "iterative and inductive cycle" (Smith et al., 2012, p. 6). The second and third parts of this process included reading, rereading, and reviewing

the original transcript; noting commonalities; focusing on emerging themes; connecting these

themes and patterns; and finally, applying an interpretation of the information that emerged

(Smith et al., 2012; Sullivan & Forrester, 2019). Nowell et al. (2017) expressed thematic analysis

can be used widely to identify themes in a set of data. The thematic analysis process helped me

identify themes found within the data and interpret the meaning of those themes.

**Member Checking**

Creswell et al. (2018) described member checking as the process by which the interview

participants are sent the reworked narrative from the interview so they have an opportunity to

review for clarity and accuracy and to ensure the narrative reflects what the interviewee had been

trying to convey. This process allowed me to double check the information early in the process.

The findings were not based on erroneous information lost in translation or interpretation. This

opportunity also provided participants with an opportunity to give additional relevant

information for clarification purposes. For this process, participants had 1 week to review the

transcript sent to them via email and respond if there were any errors in its accuracy. After 5

days, I sent participants an email reminding them of the opportunity to correct any errors. This

opportunity allowed participants to provide additional relevant or clarifying information if

necessary. If, after 1 week, participants had not responded, I assumed the information was

accurate. This part of the member-checking process was explained to participants at the onset of

the interview.

<div align="center">

**Limitations, Delimitations, and Ethical Issues**

</div>

Limitations were expected as part of a qualitative research study. Creswell et al. (2018)

noted limitations are "potential weaknesses or problems with the study identified by the

researcher" (p. 198). Phenomenological research methods are used to answer what it is like to

experience a phenomenon firsthand (Peoples, 2021). Phenomenology questions the experience, not merely opinions, perspectives, or perceptions (Peoples, 2021). Instead, phenomenology requires the researcher to gather anecdotal information from personal experiences and work to understand the essence of the experience or events as told by participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Interpretative phenomenology takes this approach one step further by soliciting an interpretation of the data by the researcher (Sullivan & Forrester, 2019). As with any study of humans and their experiences, this study had some recognized limitations. Limitations to using the qualitative research design of interpretative phenomenology surround the human element of the research, including bias and preconceived notions of what the experiences ought to be (Creswell et al., 2018) and whether the researcher accurately captured the essence of the phenomenon in the interpretation (Sullivan & Forrester, 2019). Another limitation of this type of research model was the possibility the background of participants, including culture and language, may have yielded various reporting inconsistencies. To mitigate this, it was vital for me to use the same interview questions with each participant and follow up for clarification where it was needed. Subjectivity is generally a limit of any interview because of the researcher's relationship with the participants as part of the connection to the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Because this was a study of humans and their experience, it was necessary to have added safeguards to prevent bias from working its way into the research during the interview or data analysis. To mitigate bias, it was essential to stay focused on the interview questions and not allow an emotional connection to develop, which could create an error in reporting the findings.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations of this study surrounded the explicit inclusion of only children raised by grandparents as caregivers and the perspective of other kin (e.g., aunts, uncles, cousins) who find themselves in a similar situation raising high school-aged children. This study focused on the experiences of adults formally raised by grandparents, although it was assumed other kin could be in the same situation. This study limited participants to grandchildren raised by grandparents specifically, not next of kin or other family members. The decision to restrict the study to one family structure was twofold. First, the intricacies of the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren were examined as they potentially affect the grandchild's connection to the school community. Second, the generation and acculturation gap(s) were examined to see how they contribute to the grandchild's ability to connect to the school community while in high school. Although I could have found other family structures to examine, I purposefully did not want to investigate more than one structure for this study. This narrowed lens allowed me to focus only on grandchildren who experienced the lived phenomenon of being raised by grandparents and connecting to the school community while in high school.

The age range was also a necessary delimitation in this study. The age of participants in the study who were experiencing this phenomenon was selected because the age was still close enough to the experience they reflected on, not to be lost over time.

Although there is a small risk of a breach of confidentiality with this study for participants, I made every effort to capture each participant's experience as reported by them accurately. All related notes, calendars, transcripts, correspondence, early drafts, and other related materials will continue to be safeguarded and stored on the password-protected external hard drive and will be permanently deleted 7 years from the publication of the study. Participants

were reminded in the information period at the beginning of the interview that participation in

this study is voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw at any time. Using the video recording,

audio recording, and transcription feature in Zoom allowed an additional layer of information to

be checked for accuracy before final transcripts were sent for member checking. Participants

were also granted the following protections as part of the study: (a) data were coded by hand,

using preassigned pseudonyms for all participants; (b) research materials were stored at the home

of the researcher on an encrypted, password-protected external hard drive; (c) formal member

checks following data collection and data analysis were conducted to ensure accuracy; (d) ethical

practice was maintained from the inception of the study throughout the data collection and

analysis phase (Smith et al., 2012); (f) total security and confidentiality of participants will be

ensured, inclusive of pseudonyms, upholding the notion to do no harm throughout the study; and

(g) I ensured bias was mitigated and will make all findings available and beneficial to all

organizations interested in the lived experiences of students formally raised by grandparents

while in high school. Lastly, I did not benefit financially from this study and had no affiliation

nor connection to any organization that was part of this study.

**Ethical Concerns**

The information from the interviews with adults formally raised by grandparents was

reported honestly, and participants were approached with sensitivity and respect throughout the

process. Creswell et al. (2018) noted the importance of an ethical process indicating that to

ensure an ethical collection of the data, the researcher must:

> (a) disclosing the purpose and processes of the study to participants, (b) informing and
>
> reminding the participants of their rights in writing and verbally throughout the study, (c)
>
> not using deceptive or misleading practices, (d) adhering to strict confidentiality

standards, (e) following ethical interview and observation practices, (f) explaining the role of the researcher, and (g) demonstrating respect for the research sites. (p. 24)

## Trustworthiness

Trust in qualitative research is an important consideration and was monitored throughout this study. According to Creswell et al. (2018) and Sullivan and Forrester (2019), to watch trustworthiness when implementing qualitative methods, such as interpretative phenomenology, researchers need to consider four criteria for qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each participant received a description of the process, including the study's purpose, before taking part in the study at the beginning of the interview. Participants were not current students or alumni of the institution where the researcher is employed. Participants could withdraw from this study at any time with no pressure from the researcher to continue.

### Credibility

This qualitative phenomenological study demonstrated credibility through member checking. The IPA explored how participants made sense of their experiences and what that meaning relating to their experiences held for them. Participants were encouraged to speak their truth about how they experienced their connectedness to the school community while in high school as honestly as they could. Credibility requires the researcher to link the study's findings with real-life events to demonstrate the truth of the research study's conclusions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

### Transferability

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) described transferability as the ability of other researchers to replicate the findings of a project if the method and application were applied in different contexts

and environments (Creswell et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Other researchers could use the method and framework of this qualitative study to conduct a similar study in this area. Sullivan and Forrester (2019) encouraged the use of longer, descriptive, direct quotes from all participants to capture the most descriptive assessment of the experience, including the peculiarities of each unique and individual experience. This approach will ensure additional researchers have an opportunity to transfer these findings to their research. To further ensure transformability, I focused on many follow-up questions during the semistructured interview to ensure rich detail was captured from each participant as they described their perceptions and experiences.

**Dependability**

Dependability in research is how well procedures (e.g., data collection and data analysis) are documented within the research to be replicated, audited, or wholly understood (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The transparency of the study and methods used to obtain the information increased dependability. This study used semistructured interviews to gather data from adults formally raised by grandparents on their connectedness to the school community while in high school. The interviews were conducted and recorded using the Zoom platform with closed captioning transcription features. The data were then transcribed clean verbatim style. All transcripts were sent to participants for member checking.

**Confirmability**

According to Creswell et al. (2018), confirmability is a process that validates the findings of a research study. They are actual findings from data, literature, and interviews or case study examinations accurately transcribed without bias or error (Creswell et al., 2018). By using member checking, I demonstrated confirmability of the research study.

**Summary**

Multiple individuals and organizations have examined the relationship between grandparents and the grandchildren they are raising. Extensive work in this area has been completed and published by national organizations, including AARP, Generations United, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the U.S. Department of Education. Multiple individuals, both as groups of researchers or independent researchers, have also published findings exploring this relationship. However, little has been published regarding the grandchildren's success at school and how the family construct of grandparents raising grandchildren contributes to that success.

IPA is focused on "how participants are making sense of their personal and social world" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 33). This qualitative study identified areas of concern of adults formally raised by grandparents on their connectedness to the school community while in high school through IPA. This study complements themes others have previously published that surfaced throughout the review of literature. This study is the first step in identifying how to address this phenomenon and best assist students raised by grandparents and parenting grandparents so the students can be successful in school.

**CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS**

Students' connection to the school community is key to ensuring successful learning, and this connection becomes critical as a student progresses through high school (Shakur, 2012). The connection to the school community is particularly challenging for a student raised out of the home, either in foster care or relative placement, such as with grandparents (Edwards, 2016). In 2010, an estimated 5.4 million U.S. children were raised in homes with grandparents as head of household with no parent present in the home U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, 2020). By 2020, that number had risen to 7.2 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, 2020). The purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was to understand the lived experiences of connectedness to the secondary school community of children raised by grandparents. With this purpose in mind, the research questions central to the study were:

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of adults raised by grandparents on their connectedness to the school community while in high school?

Research Question 2: What are the lived experiences of adults formally raised by grandparents regarding the family structure?

Semistructured interviews were used to collect responses from five individuals reflecting on their experience as part of a grandfamily and their connection to the school community while in high school. This chapter summarizes the responses from the interviews of these five individuals and, using the IPA methodology, analyzes those responses.

**Analysis Method**

IPA as a research design was most appropriate for analyzing this study because it allowed me to work with participants while also becoming a part of the research process. A qualitative IPA study is referred to as double hermeneutic (Peoples, 2021; Sullivan & Forrester, 2019), in

which the application of the process initially examines how participants make meaning out of their lived experiences. The second part of the process involves how the researcher makes meaning of participants' interpretations of their lived experiences (Peoples, 2021; Sullivan & Forrester, 2019).

To recruit participants, I developed a flyer explaining the opportunity to participate and the need for the research study. The opportunity to participate in the study was shared via email to organizational personnel who work with grandfamilies and to social media pages of local organizations that work with young adults (see Appendix A). The flyer invited individuals over 18 raised by grandparents to participate in the study (see Appendix B). The aim was to recruit participants between the ages of 18–30 as they would be close enough in age to remember the experience vividly while also meeting the University of New England (UNE) Internal Review Board (IRB) minimum age requirement for working with human subjects. Interested participants were asked to fill out a link to a Google Form provided on the flyer or contact me via my UNE email for more information. After 1 month, using a combination of the direct connection from the Google Form, social media recruitment, and snowballing, I had a total of six participants willing to participate in the study, with five able to do so without scheduling difficulties.

I responded to each interested participant via UNE email and scheduled a time to proceed with the recorded Zoom interviews. As agreed to in the UNE IRB application, I provided an individual Zoom link for a personal interview to each participant to promote confidentiality during the project. Interviews were recorded with the closed-caption transcription feature on Zoom and stored on my external hard drive until both the final transcription of the interviews and the member-checking process occurred. After attempting to connect with the sixth participant several times without success, they were omitted as a participant. Saturation was reached early

on in the process; however, because of the pleasure I experienced talking to the participants and how they responded by telling their stories, I decided to interview all five to add richness and depth to the study.

I opened each interview by explaining the information sheet to the participant (see Appendix C) and pausing for any questions. I also took this time to explain the content of the interviews and informed each participant they were free to stop the discussion at any point if they felt it necessary. I informed participants I would be turning on Zoom's recording closed-caption feature to capture both audio and written word for each interview for analysis and coding after the interviews were complete. Once recording began, I asked each participant the following to begin the semistructured interview: Tell me about you; how old are you; where do you live; what do you do; do you have a family of your own; and do you still live with your grandparents? Once I collected this routine information and participants seemed at ease, I began the semistructured interview. I asked each participant the same questions in the same order (see Appendix D). The questions were divided into four categories: (a) connection with friends, (b) connection with grandparents, (c) connection to school, and (d) academic achievement. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. After each interview, I backed up the video and written transcripts files on my external hard drive.

Sullivan and Forrester (2019) noted breaking down data manually for an IPA study is important for a novice researcher. After each interview, I replayed the recorded video and cross-checked the transcription to ensure accuracy. I printed and manually coded final corrected transcripts. I used the analysis method of inductive content analysis (Sullivan & Forrester, 2019) to look at the entire body of data as a whole, first identifying reoccurring patterns in the data, then arranging the patterns into groups, and finally identifying themes in the groups while taking

care not to project personal bias onto the data. This process, which provided an opportunity for me to frame the study by quantifying patterns in the qualitative interviews, allowed me to look for subthemes from themes that emerged from the body of work. While manually coding the interviews, I used a color-coding system that flagged patterns, groups, and themes. During this process, I tracked patterns on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for each interview topic and responses from participants that were later sorted by theme.

IPA encourages the use of direct text and quotations from participants followed by the researcher's analysis of the meaning of the data (Sullivan & Forrester, 2019). This chapter includes both direct quotations and paraphrased excerpts from each participant's interview. Once the themes emerged, I selected relevant supportive text from each participant's transcripts, which directly supported the theme to feature in the narrative of this chapter. I sent these themes, supportive text, and the interview transcript to each participant via UNE email for member checking. I asked participants to review the transcript and report any errors within 5 days. If they did not respond to the initial email within that time, the themes and supporting material were considered accurate. All but one participant responded to receiving the email and attachments. There were no reported inaccuracies from any of the five participants.

After reviewing and analyzing the transcripts of the five interviews, four major themes emerged from the data (see Figure 1):

- Loyalty in Relationships

- Compassion for People

- Individual Determination and Resiliency

- School Personnel Lack of Awareness of Students' Support Needs

**Figure 1**

*Themes Summary*
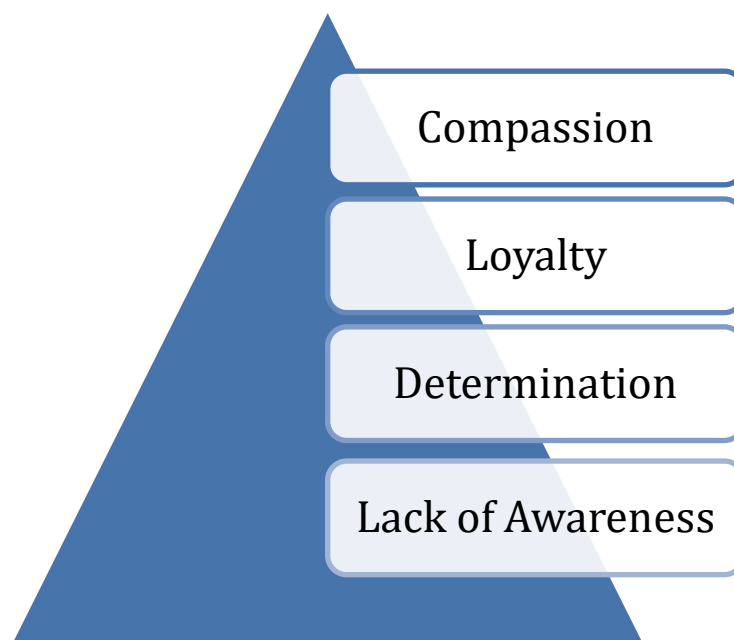


*Note*. Themes are in order as they appear in the text.

These themes were identified as repetitive words, phrases, and descriptions of events that continued to surface and were further compared and analyzed as part of the data analysis process. Notably, IPA requires the researcher to analyze and make meaning of the intent in the participant's experience (Sullivan & Forrester, 2019).

## Presentation of Results and Findings

This study explored connection to the school community via adults who were raised by grandparents and the lived experiences of participants as part of the grandfamily structure; however, throughout the interviews, each participant spoke about their love, thankfulness, and admiration for their grandparents whenever given an opportunity. Participants consistently discussed how their grandparents rescued them and spoke frankly about the shelter the

relationship provided them. It was clear they were proud of their grandparents and felt a sense of gratitude because their grandparents had raised them.

**Theme 1: Compassion for People**

I asked participants a series of questions about making friends that framed how connections were made in relationships. I asked participants about whether their family structure influenced their ability to make friends in and out of school and how they felt about their connection to their grandparents and biological parents. The theme of compassion surfaced early in the process and reached saturation as four of the five participants spoke about their need to find friends who needed attention or were vulnerable themselves. The fifth participant spoke about the need to have multiple friends and help others who needed it. This finding was not consistent with the results of Edwards (2016), who reported students raised by grandparents had higher rates of aggressor bullying behavior than those of their peers raised in traditional homes. However, it should be noted the quantitative Edwards (2016) study focused on middle school students as subjects, and participants I interviewed for this qualitative study reflected on their experiences while in high school.

Participant 1 noted:

I only had a few close friends growing up. I always had a tendency to become friends with needy people; I was friends with a boy whose mom had died. My own mother died when I was 5. I have always been drawn to others who have a unique situation. Even my best friend from that time, her mother had brain cancer.

Participant 2 shared similar experiences of compassion:

It was kind of hard for me to make friends. I had one friend since we were little. I had switched schools, so I had no choice but to open up in order to make friends. When I got

older, I spoke my mind more. I would definitely stand up for people if someone was being mean to them. I always felt bad for people who had things going on.

Participant 3 spoke of friendship circles being important, but also expressed concern with his grandmother worrying about peer pressure and life choices:

It was hard because she would worry about me and what I was doing and if I was going to do the right thing. I hung around with the cool kids, if you know what I mean. But I always was like worrying about the kids that would sit alone or not have any friends, and I always was like wondering if they needed friends. There were a lot of kids who got in trouble. They probably got in trouble because of their situation or whatever. But that wasn't me. My grandmother was a force. She always wanted me to do the right thing. I played a lot of sports growing up. I always knew she was looking out. She always came into the room when we were in there. She always checked on things. I was like, stop worrying!

The theme of compassion also appeared when participants talked about their experience with their birth parents. Each noted feelings of sorrow that their biological parent had a significant struggle in their life that prevented them from parenting. Each of the participants reported one or both of their biological parents were alive at the time of the interview. Four out of five noted their birth parent struggled with substance use disorder or mental health issues. One of the five reported their mother had passed away and the father was remarried. Three of the five discussed developing a relationship with their biological parents either while they grew up with their grandparents or later in their lives. Discussion of these factors throughout the interview demonstrated saturation in the theme of compassion for people.

Participant 4 spoke about his feelings regarding his biological mother's struggle after an accident left her impaired. He noted:

My mom lives near me, and I see her sometimes. It's hard for her, though. She has a hard time getting around, so my aunts have to help her. I try, but she wants my aunts because they are females. She doesn't work or anything like that. I never knew my father. My grandmother did everything for my mom and for me, too. I feel bad that my mom had to be like that. She has a hard time with like everyday things. She can't drive. I will pick her up sometimes and give her rides. It wasn't like she was abusive; she just couldn't take care of me when I was little, so I stayed living with my grandmother.

Participants 2 and 5 both spoke about the struggle of having two parents with substance use issues and how that addiction contributed to the breakdown of the family and eroded the relationship between the biological parents and the grandparents—leaving the grandchild in the middle. Participant 2 said:

My mom and dad both have substance use issues. They were together, but when they split, that's when everything got bad for us. My dad and me moved in with my grandparents, and my sisters stayed with my mother. She wasn't taking me to school or things like that, so that's when my grandparents took me to live with them, and that's when they split up. It was hard for a while there, but it was really for the best. My dad was there too, when I was growing up, but he was more like my brother than anything. It's still like that now. But I grew up with my dad's parents actually as my parents.

This theme was further demonstrated by Participant 5 when talking about his biological parents:

My biological parents are in my life now but weren't while I was growing up. My mother was supposed to come to my college graduation, but she didn't make it. There have been other times since then when she didn't show up for things that she said she would. But that's expected and understandable given the circumstances. She still struggles with substance use. I'm sure it is hard for her. There are times when I was younger that I was mad. But not now. I understand that it is a lifelong struggle. I understand her, and I still love her. It was hard to watch how this impacted my grandmother and grandfather—particularly my grandmother. She didn't trust her and it was hard. But I understand.

The theme of compassion was also demonstrated by all five participants in recognizing how difficult it was for their grandparents to be responsible for their upbringing. There are many factors grandparents face when raising grandchildren. Financial, health, and legal issues are all part of the equation (Davis et al., 2020). These factors also played a role in the lives of the participants in this study, with each reporting a concern for the well-being of their grandparent during the time they lived with them.

Participant 1 noted:

We had so many things to deal with. It was hard because there was always secrecy, and I didn't know what was going on. There were issues with my father's health. He lived with us. I think we may have had an order of no contact at school for my mother; I don't really know. We had financial issues and court issues but didn't talk about it. I know my grandparents really tried. My grandmother and grandfather were great parents to us but they really needed help—but they had to navigate on their own because there wasn't anything out there for help, and they needed it.

Participant 2 expressed similar recognition of the struggle of his grandmother:

She was by herself. It was me and my brother. My mother wasn't around, and my

grandmother was mad at that. She had to quit her job to take care of us. She was working

but then needed to be home with us. Finances were tight. She sometimes didn't eat so we

could. She wouldn't say anything, but we knew. Sometimes she would be really tired. I

felt bad because she already had this experience, you know? She already raised her kids,

and now here she was having to do it all over again for me and my brother. It weighed on

me, you know? She wouldn't say it, but it weighed on me knowing that she had to do this

for us. She is a very determined woman. Now I am in college, and I worry about that, too.

It was clear from interactions with participants that they were proud of the grandparents'

work raising them. Each of the five reported needing to seek out vulnerable friends, a need to

defend people who others might be treated harshly, a connection to and understanding of their

biological parents regardless of the relationship the biological parents had with the grandparents,

and an unwavering recognition of the struggle their grandparents faced in raising them. Each of

these sentiments, individually and then together as a theme, emerged as compassion.

**Theme 2: Loyalty in Relationships**

The first half of the interview focused on participants' relationships with family and

friends. I asked participants to discuss their childhood via a series of questions surrounding their

connection to friends, family, and their school community. The overwhelming sentiment that

emerged from each of the five participants was a feeling of genuine loyalty to their grandparents.

This theme was revisited by each participant several times during the interview. Participants

talked about their continuing connection to their grandparents and how it has only strengthened

over time. Each responded with a sense of gratitude to their grandparents for raising them, and

all spoke about a role reversal that happened, as they take care of the grandparents who raised

them—and find pleasure in doing so. Four of the five participants continued to have their grandparents as a presence in their lives at the time of this study. One participant's grandparents had passed away.

Participants reported that in addition to having a very strong connection to their grandparents, they also had strong connections to their extended family, including siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins. They also reported having deep-rooted philosophies in child-rearing that sometimes conflicted with the more modern approaches of their spouses or partners.

Participant 1 noted: "I talk to them just about every day [the grandparents]." When asked about her current family situation and whether her upbringing in a grandfamily influenced her parenting style, she replied:

I am married with 3 children of my own and two step children, and sometimes I find myself implementing some of the same approaches my grandparents used. That sometimes causes a problem with my children because their friend's parents seem to parent much differently that I do. Growing up we weren't allowed to do some of the things my friends were. I couldn't sleep over my friend's house or go places that other kids were allowed to go. I realized at a very young age that we were different. My grandparents had some friends but they all had grown children. We were never able to establish friends the way others seemed able to. I always noticed when families were friends with other families. We weren't in that situation.

Participant 2 noted:

I love them and still see or talk to them every day. They gave up a lot for me. They didn't have to, but they did. Now I see that they are getting older and need help with things. I bring them to appointments, manage their calendars, and things like that. I make sure

they have what they need. It is funny now that they rely on me for everything. I love that they are so close to my kids, too.

Participant 3 stated:

It's funny now because even though I am at school, I now worry about her and what she's doing. We can call and text, but I worry about her. It's like reversed now. She is getting older, and she gave up a lot for me. I think about that and am like so appreciative of that. She is still at home, and I am all the way over here in college.

When asked if he intended to take care of his grandmother for the rest of her life, he responded, "Definitely. Come on—of course."

Participant 5 shared similar sentiments about his grandparents:

My grandparents were the best parents a kid could ask for. They are both gone now, and I always knew that they wouldn't live forever, but it is hard when I have things like milestones in my life, and they are not here with me. Like when I got married or when my twins were born. They were here when I got engaged, but both passed before I got married. I know they were proud of me. I always knew that.

The theme of loyalty emerged from all participants when talking about their grandparents and biological parents. Each of the five participants expressed concern for their biological parent's current or past situation and showed a remarkable sense of forgiveness and understanding with the struggle the birth parents faced and a genuine sense of thankfulness that their grandparents had raised them.

**Theme 3: Individual Determination and Resiliency**

The theme of self-determination and resiliency emerged in each interview, with participants discussing many aspects of this theme. Each participant noted feelings of

determination with their school work and the need to earn good grades. Each spoke about this achievement as important because they were determined to have a different life from their biological parents. All participants also noted they were determined to make their grandparents proud of them for their success in school. Participants spoke of the desire to be involved in school activities, but four of the five expressed difficulty getting rides after school or to and from community activities. Two participants expressed this barrier, further indicating the grandparents' inability to get a ride prohibited them from developing childhood friends until well into high school.

Participant 1 noted:

My life opened up after I got my license; I was able to get places without having to ask my grandparents, especially toward the end of high school. It seemed like some of the restrictions and overprotectiveness wore off once I was accepted to college.

Participant 2 responded:

My grandparents would always tell me that they were too old to drive me around whenever they drove me anywhere. This was always the number one thing that they would say whenever they drove me anywhere. I had to try to get rides from a friend's parents if I wanted to go places, so that's what I did so I could go. So, even if I made friends, it was a lot more difficult than if it was my parent. I feel as though if it were my parents, they would definitely be driving me around like the others were. They would be more willing.

When asked if she were able to become involved in school activities, she responded:

Only if the bus could take me home. Until I got older and had some friends that drove, I didn't play in school activities or anything like that. But I finally found a way to get

places when I had friends that had their license and when I got mine. It's funny now because I am driving my grandparents around to appointments!

Participant 4 noted his grandmother would drive him to activities, albeit reluctantly: "She would drive me, but I know she didn't want to." He further noted, "Mostly, I would ride my bike or get a ride. It was easier than asking all the time."

All participants noted the difficulty in homework assistance, especially as they progressed through high school and needed to figure things out for themselves. Participant 2 noted:

> School always came easy to me. I wanted to be on the honor roll. I was always on the honor roll. But sometimes, it was frustrating because I didn't have anyone to help me with my homework if I was stuck on something. I always felt like they didn't understand what I was learning—especially math. My grandfather would try, but he learned it differently and would get mad when I tried to tell him that I had to show it differently. They would always tell me to "look it up in the dictionary" when I asked to help me with something.

Participants 1 and 3 also expressed similar experiences with homework assistance. Both indicated the assistance was more available from their grandparents when the subjects were English or history, but the subjects of math or science were more difficult. Participant 1 remarked, "I felt like I was teaching them!" and Participant 3 responded:

> She tried to help, but while she was trying to figure it out, I would look on Google. I am lucky I had Google. I remember that it was good when we got a computer. Before that, it was hard. Sometimes I would ask my brother because he was closer to knowing things

than my grandmother. That was something. To think about it now is like, wow. She really

wanted to help, but she couldn't, and she was also tired, too.

The availability of the internet and platforms such as Google, YouTube, and numerous

academic support programs assisted the grandchildren in their homework; however, three of the

five participants indicated when they were growing up, using the household computer was

considered a privilege one earned only after completing their homework. The computer was not

considered an assistive device. One noted the computer was used for the grandparent's work.

Participant 4 noted, "My grandmother wouldn't let me look things up on the computer. She

believed that we weren't supposed to do that. I was only allowed to go on the computer on

weekends."

Participants reported knowing they would need to work harder than their peers to achieve

things. Throughout the interviews, they each spoke about knowing the difference between their

family structure and their peers' families. They noted differences in expectations from their

grandparents and that there was a lack of trust from the grandparents. Participant 2 noted:

It took a while to earn things. I think they were always skeptical of whether I was really

doing what I was doing. They were strict, but I think it was because they trusted my

father, and he turned out to have substance use issues, so they were not going to make

that mistake again with me even though I was a good kid! I had to earn everything. I

wanted a TV in my room. Or a phone. I had to earn it, prove that I could be good.

Participant 5 noted:

My mother stole from them [the grandparents]: money, jewelry, stuff like that. I had to

pay the price for that. They were always waiting for the "other shoe to drop" with me, if

you will. They always expected the worst because of what happened to them with my mother. It took a long time for them to trust me.

When asked about what they needed in their family structure that could have contributed positively to their upbringing, three of the five spoke about the need to have a role model they could identify with. Participant 3 reported:

It was hard to be a male with my grandmother. I didn't have a male role model at all, and it would have been nice to have that. I learned about all living things from my friends, you know what I mean? It wasn't like we could have had a conversation about how life works or anything like that with my grandmother. I definitely could have used a male role model, but I figured it out.

Participant 2 reported:

I had no one to tell me about anything like the "birds and the bees." My grandmother didn't talk about any of it. I had to learn all of that on my own. She didn't tell me about anything like menstruating or anything like that. I had to learn about it from my friends. I think it's a generational thing. There was no open communication or things like that. There was always secrecy about things. I feel like if I was with my biological parents, we would have been able to talk about these things out in the open. My grandmother's generation doesn't talk about anything.

Participant 5 noted:

When I look back on it now, I think I could have used a program like Big Brother, or something like that. They spent a lot of time on my mother's needs; I was kind of lost in the shuffle with some things. Plus, I don't know how much my grandmother would talk

to me about life things; she really was about the day to day. Not so much into having

philosophical conversations. I think I could have used some support growing up.

These factors seemed to add to the participants' resilience: balancing low expectations from the

grandparents with their own self-determination. This personal will to succeed added to the ability

of these individuals to become resilient people who had something to prove.

**Theme 4: School Personnel Lack of Awareness of Students' Support Needs**

Throughout the latter half of the interview, I asked participants to talk about their

involvement in school activities and their academic progress while in high school. I asked

participants to discuss their experience by discussing the following questions: (a) How well do

you think educators understood your situation? (b) What supports were in place for you at

school? and (c) What would be helpful to educators working with a family such as yours? When

discussing these topics, lack of awareness of the family situation and lack of support services in

school quickly emerged as a theme among each of the participants. Each of the five participants

spoke about these issues and suggested the need for implementing programs to address the

specific academic and emotional needs of students raised by grandparents.

All participants reported that generally, educators did not know they were raised by

grandparents, and unless they self-identified, educators made the assumption they lived in a

traditional family. Each noted there were support programs for students of divorced parents,

students who were homeless, or students who were in Department of Children and Families

(DCF) or Department of Youth Services custody, yet there were no programs or support services

for students raised by grandparents.

Participant 2 stated:

It was hard because I really didn't have help at home, and I needed to lean on my

teachers to help me more than the other kids did. They only knew about my situation

because I told them. I remember the teachers were always surprised. I had to lean on

them a lot. I stayed for after-school help and things like that. Especially in high school. I

wanted to get my first shop choice, so I knew I had to get good grades to have that

happen. So, they helped me a lot. I have a lot of my teachers as friends on Facebook now;

I formed great relationships with them over the years.

When asked if there were programs outside the classroom, such as guidance or other support

initiatives, her response was: "No. Nothing. I really didn't have anything. Just had to try to find

help for myself."

Participant 3 stated:

Nobody knew I was living with my grandmother. Not even the teachers who had my

brother before me. They didn't ask, and we didn't tell them. It was not done through the

courts or anything like that, so I think she [my grandmother] just didn't want to have a

problem. I would tell people sometimes, and they would be surprised. Didn't matter if it

was a kid or a teacher or someone's parent, they would always look at me with this look

on their face.

When asked if there were programs outside the classroom, such as through guidance or other

support initiatives, their response was:

No, no, no, and no. There was legit, nothing. It was very tough. We weren't like other

families. I think there should have been something for us, but there was nothing. Over

time I met some other kids who lived with their grandparents, too, and they understood.

But not much else. It's a different situation. Not the traditional family. It happens for

some reasons that are hard, and we have some anxiety and all things like that. But no one

knows. Not even the principal or anyone, unless we say something. But who was going to

do that? Like, walk in and say "Hey, I live with my grandmother" to teachers, right? It

doesn't work like that. So, you just go with it. And then the homework is hard and your

grandmother doesn't understand what is going on in a kid's life. It's a hard thing.

Participant 4 had a bit of a different experience but still highlighted the lack information

shared in the school setting:

I went to a high school in a different town than where I grew up. My grandmother called

the school counselor to let them know I was having a hard time. Just thinking about going

to a new school made me nervous. I remember that she asked the counselor to let the

teachers know that I was living with her and that my mother had a serious injury. It made

me feel better that she had done that. But when I got to the school, I could tell that the

teachers didn't get the message. They didn't know anything about me or my mother's

accident. They were all really nice, and I could tell that they felt bad, but they only knew

because I told them.

When asked if there were programs outside the classroom, such as guidance or other support

initiatives, his response was:

I don't remember there being a program or anything. No, I don't think so. If there were a

program, I didn't know about it, but I did get to know my adjustment counselor. She was

nice. She helped me do the search for college and to get into nursing school. I still talk to

her.

Participant 5 had a unique experience that contributed to his relationship with teachers:

I know that we had a lot going on with the court system. At one point, my mother was threatening to try to take me back. My grandparents weren't wealthy, and I know we struggled for money. I wasn't supposed to talk about my parents or what was going on. I know the teachers didn't know because my mother's name was still on the school paperwork. I did tell a few teachers on my own, but they didn't say anything to anyone. I know that when my grandparents would write a note to dismiss me or anything like that, they'd write my mother's name on it. One time when the cards came home that needed to be filled out for family information, I wrote my grandparents name on them and took my mother off. I remember worrying that we would be in trouble. But nothing ever happened. No one asked, and then the mail started coming addressed to my grandparents. No problem after all those years of worrying about it; I ended up fixing it and no one questioned it.

When asked if there were programs outside the classroom, such as through guidance or other support initiatives, his response was: "I don't think there was anything."

Participant 1 noted: "I don't know if my teachers were aware. They never said anything or asked me about it." When asked if there were programs outside the classroom, such as through guidance or other support initiatives, her response was:

No. We had the traditional classes. That was it. I know it is so much different now, my own kids have so many more choices and they have counselors at the school if they need support with anything. There is a focus on kindness and bullying. These weren't things that we talked about in school while I was a student. I think it's about time that the

schools are focusing on emotional health. I definitely could have used that. I don't think we ever talked about it.

Participants unanimously stated it was often difficult to engage in school activities because of either transportation, finances, overall lack of support at home, or other feelings of disconnect. Participant 1 stated, "I swam, played softball for a while and also tried gymnastics. I was really an introvert. I had a hard time trusting relationships. Everyone I knew was gone and I didn't have clear reasons why."

It was clear after speaking to the participants that each longed for a support structure in the school setting that could help them connect to the school community. Participants indicated they were aware of support programs or counseling services for students who were in other types of out-of-home placement, such as homeless students, students in DCF custody, or students in foster care. However, even though the group of students raised by grandparents often experienced their own trauma—similar to that of their peers placed out of the home—programs to assist them were not offered nor available. When asked what supports or programs might have helped them connect to the school community or what would be helpful to educators working with a familial structure such as their own, participants each spoke of the importance of educators understanding their situations and having professional development in working with students raised by grandparents.

Participant 2 responded:

I think there definitely needs to be better communication. I don't think that the communication was there at all. Unless you, as the student, tells the teacher where you live, or who you live with, or things like that, they don't know. And even after that, they don't know what to do. So, they might send home a paper to fill out for communication

or what have you, but that doesn't mean anything. It goes in the computer as who to contact, but that doesn't tell them anything.

When asked to elaborate on the communication concern, she stated:

It's just that there's no communication. I feel like they need to make it okay that everyone's situation is different at home. Just because we're not in the system doesn't mean we don't have difficulties or anything going on—it's more so. Try to figure what works for each child.

Participant 4 noted:

I remember there were some kids in my class who had divorced parents. The school had a program for them to go to. They would leave class and meet with the people who ran that club; they had hot chocolate! I remember thinking that a meeting like that was a good idea for them because it must be hard to not have one of your parents living at home with your family. Then I thought, "Wait a minute!" It sure was hard. How about kids like me who had zero parents living with them? No one thought of that. We didn't have a program. We also had a girl in class whose mother died. I know that she also had some help from the counselor. And the teachers all knew about her situation. They really tried to help her.

When asked if he attempted to join the support group, he responded, "I wasn't on the list. You were selected ahead of time for that. So, that's what I mean. They knew about those kids, but not about kids like us—even though we had grandparents and not parents."

Participant 3 added:

There should be some outreach to connect with families like ours. Especially once kids

get to high school. It's harder for teenagers and kids to articulate their situation and the

problems they have. It's hard for them to reach out.

When asked what he would do if he were in charge of the school to make the educational

environment better for students raised by grandparents, he responded:

I think it definitely can be done. If I were principal, I would put in more outreach. I

would find out who the kids are that are in this situation, and I would try to get them

involved. Try to connect with them more. Have a group for them so they know that there

are others like them. I would have some programs that they can go to that will help with

the schoolwork and homework. That's a big one.

Participant 5 added:

There should be a class that helps kids who are raised by grandparents adjust to high

school life. A lot of things change in high school. There should be help with applying to

college and how to do the financial documents. Things like that. Sure, announcements

were made about college planning and things like that, but when you go home to your

grandparents, they don't know anything about these things and have a hard time

understanding it, and you don't understand it, either. I think that the school should know

this ahead of time and plan to help with this. I had a great guidance counselor. But I know

my grandmother didn't know anything about the process. Not at all. I know other people

[living with grandparents] who didn't go to college because no one helped them.

When asked if he knew where they [the other students] were now or what they were doing, he

said, "Not good things."

Participant 1 noted, "It would be helpful for there to be groups to support the kids living with grandparents. There also should be supports for teachers on how to work with them. It's not really talked about."

When explicitly discussing academic achievement in school, participants responded to the following questions: (a) What types of support did you have at home in completing your schoolwork? (b) How involved were your grandparents in your education while you were in high school? (c) Tell me about how your grandparents stayed aware of your participation and completion of your schoolwork. When discussing the ability of the grandparent to remain aware of the grandchild's school work and progress at school, the generation gap with technology was also a common subject. Each participant discussed the ability to complete homework, check grades, or follow along with school progress. Participants indicated their grandparents' disconnect with technology often prohibited them from staying up to date with school-related information. There were ranges of affectedness among participants, with grandparents of participants aged 20–29 having more of a disconnect than grandparents of participants who were over 30. When Participants 1 and 5 were in high school, electronic devices were not yet used, and students used hard-copy textbooks and workbooks. Schools also sent home physical written grading reports instead of the online programs the three participants aged 20–29 each used.

Four of the five participants acknowledged they were not always truthful with their grandparents about the progress they made in school. Two of the five admitted to using their superior technological skills to obtain school emails before the grandparents could see them, and one admitted to signing into the system masquerading as the grandparent using school-issued credentials.

Participant 2 noted:

My grandmother might come to parent–teacher conferences, but if there was anybody

signing onto that electronic platform to check grades, it was definitely me! They didn't

know anything about that stuff. I did it. So, to be honest, it was a little bit more easy to

not lie but pretend that, "Oh yeah, I already did this or I already did that." It was fine,

though, because I always got great grades and wanted to do well. But it was definitely

easy. The only thing was if they were ever to mail home a progress report that showed the

grades or missing assignments. But when I got to high school everything was online. No

more paper reports mailed home.

When asked if her grandparents' inability to monitor her progress affected her schoolwork, she

replied, "It was definitely easier to fall behind. But I was a good student, so I was able to do

okay."

Participant 3 responded:

My grandmother hated technology. Hated it. She had a computer, but hated it. I used to

try to work the system a little bit for the work and homework. It was all online so that

was good because she couldn't see it. But the problem is that the reports at the middle

[progress reports] and the report cards were emailed home. I would try to get home to get

them first off the computer, but she figured it out and how to do a new password. In

elementary and middle school, I would just say that I got the report card and it was good.

But in high school, she actually got them. She would be waiting for me when I walked in.

She's older, but she is a very determined woman. She knew something was up. She was

determined to do it, but she hated that it was all technology. Even though she hated it, she

figured it out.

When asked if his grandmother communicated with the school he replied, "If she had to."

Participant 4 discussed the strain on his family during the time he was in high school, indicating his grandmother was connected to the guidance counselor but her relationship with the greater community was superficial. He acknowledged she did not use the online program to track his progress, noting:

> There was really so much going on with my family. I don't think my grandmother could really add this [learning an electronic grading program] to that. She communicated with the school by calling and talking to them, but she didn't use the computer to look things up. I had a great guidance counselor who really helped me. I knew I wanted to go to college, so this goal was a lifesaver for me.

## Summary

Each participant explained the unique challenges experienced by children raised in a household headed by grandparents of which educators were not aware, such as a generation gap, ongoing and historical traumatic events, court issues, custody issues, and other insecurities. Participants felt if educators had been aware of their situations and had training in working with students raised by grandparents, their academic, social, and overall participation in the school community would have improved.

Through semistructured interviews, data were obtained that constructed themes that surrounded connectedness to the school community and the perception of the family structure of grandfamilies from the participants' points of view. These interviews were voiced in a reflective frame describing what life was like for the participants while they were in high school. Five participants were given an opportunity to describe their firsthand experiences that can enable

educators to identify the needs of future students raised by grandparents to connect to the school community. The themes were:

- Loyalty in Relationships

- Compassion for People

- Individual Determination and Resiliency

- School Personnel Lack of Awareness of Students' Support Needs

These themes emerged when repetitive words, phrases, and descriptions of events surfaced among participants. IPA requires the researcher to analyze the intent of the participant's experience (Sullivan & Forrester, 2019). These themes were unique to this study and suggested implications for further research on the topic of children raised by grandparents, as detailed in Chapter 5.

Students' connection to the school community is vital to their educational success (Shakur, 2012). The connection to the school community is particularly challenging for a student raised out of the home, either in foster care or relative placement, such as with grandparents (Edwards, 2016). This qualitative IPA aimed to understand the lived experiences of connectedness to the secondary school community of children raised by grandparents.

**CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was to understand the lived experiences of the connectedness to the secondary school community of grandchildren raised by grandparents. In the United States, millions of grandchildren reside in the home of a grandparent as head of household with no parent present in the home (Holloman, 2016; Kilfoyle, 2018; Mendoza, 2018). U.S. Census Bureau numbers suggest this family structure is a growing population after identifying over 7.2 million children under 18 living with grandparents in 2020—an increase from 5.4 million in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, 2020). This trend is not exclusive to the United States, as there has been an exponential increase of grandparent head of households worldwide (Backhouse & Graham, 2013). Research examining grandfamilies has indicated child placement with the grandparents brings on added challenges for all members of the grandfamily (Holloman, 2016; Kilfoyle, 2018; Mendoza, 2018; Williams, 2011). This IPA study addressed the specific needs of grandchildren regarding their connections to the secondary school community. There are many reasons why grandparents find themselves raising a family all over again (Davis et al., 2020), including the surge in substance use disorder, incarcerated birth parents, and parental mental illness (Goyer, n.d.; Holloman, 2016; Kilfoyle, 2018; Mendoza, 2018; Williams, 2011). Research shows these grandfamilies also face unique challenges, frequently with no support in services, finances, or community (Goyer, n.d.; Holloman, 2016; Kilfoyle, 2018; Mendoza, 2018; Williams, 2011).

Children raised out of their homes, whether with relatives (e.g., grandparents) or in foster care, are at risk for poor academic outcomes during their secondary education (Hayslip et al., 2019). Less than 50% of those children complete high school by age 18 (FosterEd, 2018), and only 20% attend college, compared to 66% of their peers (FosterEd, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau,

2020). Children placed outside of the home are more likely than their peers to be absent from school, have special education needs, and experience traumatic life events (Peterson et al., 2019). Additional research shows students who do not graduate from high school have a higher likelihood of unemployment, poverty, and health issues (Messacar & Oreopoulos, 2013). These children are also more likely to make their way into the prison pipeline (Mendoza, 2018), as high school noncompleters are six times more likely to experience incarceration than students who graduate (Peterson et al., 2019). Conversely, when students can connect to the school community, they are more likely to graduate (Peterson et al., 2019; Plasman, 2018); therefore, connectedness to the school community is key to ensuring successful learning (Plasman, 2018), and this connection becomes even more essential as students progress through high school (Rogers, 2021). With grandfamilies, the connectedness of these students remains unknown (Davis et al., 2020), and understanding how members of grandfamilies connect to the school community—particularly the grandchildren—is vital to developing ways to assist them in their learning (Holloman, 2016). To this end, the connectedness of the grandchildren to the school community needed further examination (Cole, 2017; Kilfoyle, 2018; Mendoza, 2018).

## Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of adults raised by grandparents on their connectedness to the school community while in high school?

Research Question 2: What are the lived experiences of adults formally raised by grandparents regarding the family structure?

**Interpretation and Importance of Findings**

Four themes emerged in this IPA study after conducting semistructured interviews of five participants. They were:

- Loyalty in relationships

- Compassion for people

- Individual determination and resiliency

- School personnel lack awareness of the students' support needs

Research Question 1 asked: "What are the lived experiences of adults raised by grandparents on their connectedness to the school community while in high school?" The findings for this question were consistent among all participants. Individual determination and resiliency emerged as a theme for Research Question 1 as participants each spoke about their struggles in (a) completing homework with little or no assistance from the grandparents, (b) connecting with friends or participating in activities outside of the school day because of transportation or permission issues, (c) sensing an internal motivation to "do well in spite of everything" that guided them, and (d) working through pre-established trust issues with the grandparents.

Participants indicated they knew early on they were "different," and other family structures approached life differently. Because of this, participants developed a resiliency that motivated them to succeed in spite of their circumstances. Notably, it is unclear if this resiliency is something that is common among children who are raised out of the home, or if it is specific to children in this family structure. Participant 2 noted: "It took a while to earn things. I think they were always skeptical of whether I was really doing what I was doing. They were strict."

These factors developed participants' resilience, allowing them to balance internal and external factors to establish their own sense of self-determination. This personal will to succeed

added to the ability of these individuals to become resilient people who had something to prove to themselves as much as anyone else. This essence of resiliency aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, in that the participants described becoming part of the process of their own creation due to their circumstances (Bronfenbrenner et al., 2019).

The theme, school personnel lack of awareness of the students' support needs, was the most overwhelming theme that emerged from this study. Participants unanimously reported a sense of disconnect with school programs and a connection with teachers and other school support staff only after the student initially made the connection. Programs at each of the participant's high schools were in place to address the needs of students who came from broken homes or in outside custody placements, such as the DCF or other youth services placement. These programs did not include students placed with grandparents. It is unknown why these students were omitted. Certainly, one contributor could be that often grandfamily placements are made informally. Unless the parent, grandparent, or student report this placement to the school, educators have no way of knowing. However, the respondents in this study did not believe enough outreach was made by the school system personnel to learn about individual family structures.

Participants also reported communication between grandparents and schools was also lacking and the advancement of technology added an additional barrier to the connection between the school and the home. This was difficult to overcome as difficulty using technology became a barrier in grandparent communication with the school personnel; the grandparent's ability to monitor social behavior of the grandchildren, such as media accounts; and in the grandchild's ability to receive homework assistance. One participant noted:

It's just that there's no communication. I feel like they need to make it okay that

everyone's situation is different at home. Just because we're not in the system doesn't

mean we don't have difficulties or anything going on—it's more so. Try to figure what

works for each child.

One participant noted, "My grandmother might come to parent teacher conferences [but

regarding the ability to communicate electronically] . . . they didn't know anything about that

stuff." Another noted:

There should be some outreach to connect with families like ours. Especially once kids

get to high school. It's harder for teenagers and kids to articulate their situation and the

problems they have. It's hard for them to reach out. I think it definitely can be done. If I

were principal, I would put in more outreach. I would find out who the kids are that are in

this situation, and I would try to get them involved. Try to connect with them more. Have

a group for them so they know that there are others like them. I would have some

programs that they can go to that will help with the schoolwork and homework. That's a

big one.

All participants reported that generally educators did not know grandparents were raising

grandchildren unless the participants self-identified. Participants also felt educators made the

assumption they were living as part of a traditional family. Participants agreed with Cole (2017)

and Holloman (2016) that students raised by grandparents do not receive the academic support or

encouragement they need to succeed in school. Those working in the school system encounter

children raised by grandparents daily and are at times the first to witness the impact of this

family placement on a child's functioning (Cole, 2017; Holloman, 2016). Schools need to

develop outreach programs to identify these students and subsequently design and implement programs to support the students raised by grandparents emotionally and educationally. Research Question 2 asked: "What are the lived experiences of adults formally raised by grandparents in the grandfamily structure?" Participants view on their lived experience in the family structure also remained consistent. The themes of compassion for people and loyalty to family emerged early in the process.

Four of five participants indicated their desire to be friends with others who were vulnerable. The fifth participant spoke about the need to have multiple friends rather than close friends but still possessed a need to help others. It should be of note this finding is not consistent with the results of Edwards (2016) study examining bullying behavior among children raised outside of the home (i.e., in placement). Edwards (2016) reported students raised by grandparents have a higher rate of aggressor bullying behavior than that of their peers raised in traditional homes. However, it should be noted the quantitative Edwards (2016) study focused on middle school students as subjects, and participants for this study reflected on their experience while in high school. Participants also reported a strong connection to their grandparents and a genuine thankfulness when reflecting on growing up with grandparents as parents. One noted: "They were the best parents a kid could ask for." This sentiment was consistent among the five participants. Participants who are fortunate enough to still have their grandparents in their lives indicated they now experience a role reversal in the relationship: they provide assistance to their grandparents.

Loyalty emerged as the fourth theme in this study as four of the five participants spoke about their connection with their birth parents and the feeling of compassion and connection they have with their birth parents today. This remarkable theme emerged as each participant took time

to describe their relationship with their birth parent(s) and the relationship between the grandparent(s) and the birth parents, which at times was very confrontational. Participants spoke about the awkwardness of this relationship triangle and how they took steps to navigate it from a young age. One noted: "I know my grandmother did not like my mother. Her daughter. I know she struggled with things, but Gram didn't want to hear it." This description played out consistently among participants.

<div align="center">**Implications**</div>

After speaking to the participants, it was clear each of them longed for a support structure in the school setting that could help them connect to the school community, including receiving assistance with homework and schoolwork. Participants indicated they were aware of support programs or counseling services for students who were in other types of out-of-home placement, such as homeless students, students in Department of Children and Families (DCF) custody, or students in foster care. However, even though the group of students raised by grandparents often experienced their own trauma similar to that of their peers placed out of the home, programs to assist them were not routinely offered nor available. When asked what supports or programs might have helped them connect to the school community or what would be helpful to educators working with a family such as their own, participants each spoke of the importance of educators understanding their situation and having professional development in working with students raised by grandparents. The themes from the study also pointed to a need for assistance for grandparents raising grandchildren. The technology gap was apparent, as three of five participants reported their grandparents had difficulty communicating with the school because of a technology gap. This gap appears to be growing, as the younger participants indicated the most disconnect with the grandparents and technology. Although this seems to be out of place because

it is widely assumed that younger grandparents would be more tech savvy, this disconnect aligns with the increased use of technology within school systems for the age group of 18–24 year olds where older participants did not have a technology aspect to contend with.

<div align="center">

**Recommendations for Action**

</div>

Four recommendations emerged from data analyzed for this study:

1. Implement a process to identify students living with grandparents within the school system.

2. Create and implement a program that will offer emotional and academic support to students living with grandparents.

3. Design a role model program for students raised by grandparents

4. Create a group to support grandparents that includes topics that bridge the school-to-home gap, including technology, social media, and current topics that relate to today's youth.

**Recommendation 1**

The first recommendation surfaced quickly from the data. Participants consistently noted educators at their high schools did not know which students lived with grandparents as head of households. There could be a number of reasons for this disconnect, including grandparents wishing to keep their family situation private or ongoing court issues. However, regardless of home placement circumstances, educators need to be aware of these students so they can ensure the students are connected to the school community. As previously stated, connectedness to the school community is detrimental to success as students (Cole, 2017; Kilfoyle, 2018; Mendoza, 2018). Educators can easily remedy the disconnect to the school community experienced by grandchildren raised by grandparents by implementing a family outreach program that includes a

mechanism to routinely identify student family structures. This program could satisfy the need to identify other vulnerable groups as well, such as students of same-sex couples, students raised by single parents, and students raised by siblings.

**Recommendation 2**

Notably, most overwhelmingly expressed among participants was the recommendation to create and implement programs that offer social, emotional, and academic support to students living with grandparents. As discussed throughout Chapters 4 and 5, participants consistently reported feeling disconnected from the school community both academically and socially. Participants reported noticing peers joining and participating in groups designed to bridge connection to the school community because of their home situation. Still, there was a dearth in programming to assist grandchildren raised by grandparents, although these grandchildren often experience loss, trauma, and other family issues as well. Aside from social disconnect, participants also reported significant problems with academic disconnect when it came to schoolwork and assistance with homework. Educators should design and implement support programs for students raised by grandparents that address social, emotional, and academic needs of this unique group that is currently overlooked.

**Recommendation 3**

The third recommendation is to design a role model program for students raised by grandparents. Participants in this study reported feeling a need to connect with a role model who could help them navigate high school. Programs such as Big Brothers Big Sisters of America would be appropriate partnerships for grandchildren raised by grandparents However, absent such a program, educators should consider designing a role model program for students raised by

grandparents. This program could comprise part of Recommendation 2 or serve as a standalone program.

**Recommendation 4**

The fourth recommendation indirectly contributes to the grandchildren's access to the school curriculum. Participants consistently reported a technology gap between contemporary approaches to education and the technological ability of the grandparents. Because of this pattern, I recommend creating a program to support grandparents that includes topics that bridge the school-to-home technology gap. This program should include basic technology usage; social media exposure; and current school technology requirements, such as the school program used to house student grades, attendance, and other records. This program should also include topics that are relevant to today's youth so grandparents can stay up to date.

Participants who were in their 30s did not report the technology gap as an issue when it came to school connection; however, three of the five participants who were in school when schools transitioned to online communication programs spoke about the disconnect their grandparents had with the school because of technology.

<div align="center"><b>Recommendations for Further Study</b></div>

Continuing the research examining the connection to the school community of grandchildren raised by grandparents will be important to determine what should be in place to assist these children in becoming successful students. As part of this study, a number of topics surfaced that could benefit from further examination. They include: (a) impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic on the achievement of students raised by grandparents, (b) resiliency of students who are raised out of the home by people other than grandparents, (c) inclusion of grandchildren

raised by grandparents in other areas of the United States, and (d) examination of additional age groups of grandchildren raised by grandparents.

**Recommendation 1 for Further Study**

The COVID-19 global pandemic has highlighted equity issues school-aged children face and barriers to the children's achievement in school because of these issues, and it is unclear how grandchildren raised by grandparents responded during this time. Considering the topics raised by participants in this study—technology gap, connection to the school community, and need for programming to assist both grandchildren and grandparents—I recommend researchers examine the impacts of remote learning for grandchildren raised by grandparents during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

**Recommendation 2 for Further Study**

It is unclear if the resiliency demonstrated by participants in this study was something that is common among children who are raised out of the home or if it is specific to children in this family structure. Researchers may be interested in using the methodology provided in this study to look at resiliency in children raised in out-of-home placements not with grandparents. The results from a study examining out-of-home placement (i.e., not with grandparents versus placement with grandparents) would allow for thorough examination of placement options.

**Recommendation 3 for Further Study**

This study was exclusively completed with participations from southeastern Massachusetts. Expanding this topic on a broader geographical scale would allow an opportunity to obtain information on the lived experiences of students raised by grandparents on their connection with the secondary school community. If results are the same on a broader scale, a comprehensive approach to programming in numerous schools could be considered.

**Recommendation 4 for Further Study**

This study examined the perceptions of adults formally raised by grandparents on their connectedness to the school community while in high school. This project consisted of adults reflecting on a phenomenon they experienced as adolescents a number of years prior. Although the assumption is each participant spoke the truth in their recounting of their experience, there is a possibility their detailed experiences were not entirely accurate. To mitigate inaccuracies from long-term reflections, I recommend a study that includes grandchildren currently in high school or middle school and their perceptions on their connectedness to the school community.

**Conclusion**

This IPA study examined perceptions of adults formally raised by grandparents on their connectedness to the school community while in high school. The number of grandparents raising grandchildren as head of household in the United States is steadily rising and an increasing concern (Mendoza, 2018). The issues grandfamilies confront, including family stress, acculturation differences, and a generation gap. have been examined; however, there is a dearth of information on how this family structure contributes to the grandchild's ability to connect with the school community while in high school (Cole, 2017; Davis et al., 2020, Kilfoyle, 2018). The COVID-19 global pandemic has heightened the awareness of equity issues school-aged children face and barriers to their achievement in school because of these issues. It is unclear how grandchildren raised by grandparents responded during this time. Additional research regarding grandfamilies questions the availability of resources to help grandparents navigate this new world (Cole, 2017; Mendoza, 2018), which is potentially much different from the one they found themselves in when raising their children (Davis et al., 2020).

This IPA study aimed to fill a gap in research pertaining to connection to school for students who are in out of home placement, specifically, placed with grandparents. The research questions were:

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of adults raised by grandparents on their connectedness to the school community while in high school?

Research Question 2: What are the lived experiences of adults formally raised by grandparents regarding the family structure?

It is well established that children need to feel connected to the school community to be successful students (Holloman, 2016). Previous research demonstrated a need for students raised by grandparents to experience stability; permanency of residence; and the opportunity to receive assistance at home for adolescent life exercises, such as completing schoolwork, navigating peer relationships, and developing a general overall connection to the world around them (Holloman, 2016; Kilfoyle, 2018; Mendoza, 2018). As part of promoting this lifestyle, the importance of children having quality educational experiences is also necessary (Cole, 2017; Holloman, 2016; Mendoza, 2018). Understanding how grandchildren in the grandfamily structure feel about their connectedness to the school community is vital in examining their experience (Cole, 2017; Mendoza, 2018).

Those working in the school system encounter children raised by grandparents daily and are, at times, the first to witness the impact of placement on a child's functioning (Cole, 2017; Holloman, 2016). Of particular note to school personnel were the findings that grandchildren may not get the academic support nor encouragement they need at home and are overlooked in the school setting (Cole, 2017; Holloman, 2016).

For some of these grandfamilies, financial instability may have a detrimental effect on the household, leading to a lack of resources (Davis et al., 2020). Results of this study may offer teachers and other school officials some additional insight to address the challenges and concerns of grandchildren raised by grandparents.

Participants in this IPA study overwhelmingly supported that educators, when aware of students' grandfamily status, were more able to adapt and find additional ways to assist them; however, there is a disconnect in the system where information regarding the students' placements with their grandfamilies is not communicated. Participants also overwhelmingly indicated a need for support programs within the school setting designed to support students and assist them with their schoolwork.

**References**

Backhouse, J., & Graham, A. (2013). Grandparents raising their grandchildren: Acknowledging the experience of grief. *Australian Social Work*, *66*(3), 440–454. https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407x.2013.817595

Bednarik, R. G. (Ed.). (2016). *Understanding human behavior: Theories, patterns and developments*. Nova Biomedical.

Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2019). *Completing your qualitative dissertation* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Bronfenbrenner, U., Koller, S. H., Paludo, S. D. S., & de, M. N. A. (Eds.). (2019). *Ecological engagement: Urie Bronfenbrenner's method to study human development.* ProQuest Ebook Central. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Capous-Desyllas, M., Perez, N., Cisneros, T., & Missari, S. (2020). Unexpected caregiving in later life: Illuminating the narratives of resilience of grandmothers and relative caregivers through photovoice methodology. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work, 63*(4), 1–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/01634372.2020.1746462

Cole, M. K. (2017). *Exploring the experience of grandchildren in custodial grandparent care* (Publication no. 10678544) [Doctoral dissertation, Antioch University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global. http://www.proquest.com/docview/1991532874/abstract/791CF983AED14DBBPQ/1

Collins, A., & Halverson, R. (2009). *Rethinking education in the age of technology: The digital revolution and schooling in America*. Teachers College Press.

Cross, C. J. (2018). Extended family households among children in the United States: Differences by race/ethnicity and socio-economic status. *Population Studies*, *72*(2), 235–251. https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2018.1468476

Creswell, J. W., Poth, C. N., & Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches.* SAGE Publications.

Crowther, M. R., Ford, C. D., & Peterson, T. (2014). A qualitative examination of barriers for urban and rural custodial grandparents. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships, 12*(3), 241–256. https://doi.org/10.1080/15350770.2014.929938

Dannison, L., & Smith, A. (2019). *Grandparents raising grandchildren: Expanding your view.* CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Davis, M. T., Warfield, M. E., Boguslaw, J., Roundtree-Swain, D., & Kellogg, G. (2020). Parenting a 6 year old is not what I planned in retirement: Trauma and stress among grandparents due to the opioid crisis. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work, 63*(4), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/01634372.2020.1752872

Dolbin-MacNab, M. L., & Keiley, M. K. (2009). Navigating interdependence: How adolescents raised solely by grandparents experience their family relationships. *Family Relations, 58*(2), 162–175. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20456848

Doley, R., Bell, R., Watt, B., & Simpson, H. (2015). Grandparents raising grandchildren: Investigating factors associated with distress among custodial grandparent. *Journal of Family Studies*, *21*(2), 101–119. https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2015.1015215

Dunifon, R. E. (2018). *You've always been there for me: Understanding the lives of grandchildren raised by grandparents*. Rutgers University Press. https://muse.jhu.edu/book/68033

Edwards, O. W. (1998). *Grandfamilies--Grandchildren raised by grandparents: Impact on students and school services* [Doctoral dissertation, Florida International University]. FIU Digital Commons. https://doi.org/10.25148/etd.fi15101269

Edwards, O. W. (2016). Bullying among middle school children raised by grandparents. *Contemporary School Psychology*, *20*(3), 254–261. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-015-0082-6

Edwards, L. (2018). Relative placement: The best answer for our foster care system. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, *69*(3), 55–64. https://doi.org/10.1111/jfcj.12116

Etten, D. V., & Gautam, R. (2012). Custodial grandparents raising grandchildren: Lack of legal relationship is a barrier for services. *Journal of Gerontological Nursing*, *38*(6), 18–22. https://doi.org/ 10.3928/00989134-20120509-02

Fokakis, Z., Nadorff, D., & Mckay, I. (2020). Is raising your grandchild bad for your health? The association between custodial grandparent status and health biomarkers in Taiwanese grandparents. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *17*(5), 1753. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17051753

FosterEd. (2018). Fostering success in education: National factsheet on the educational outcomes of children in foster care. https://foster-ed.org/fostering-success-in-education-national-factsheet-on-the-educational-outcomes-of-children-in-foster-care/

Generations United. (n.d.). *Grandfamilies*. Retrieved July 22, 2020, from https://www.gu.org/explore-our-topics/grandfamilies/

Glaser, K., Stuchbury, R., Price, D., Gessa, G. D., Ribe, E., & Tinker, A. (2018). Trends in the
    prevalence of grandparents living with grandchild(ren) in selected European countries
    and the United States. *European Journal of Ageing*, *15*(3), 237–250.
    https://doi.org/10.1007/s10433-018-0474-3

Goyer, A. (n.d.). *Grandparents raising grandchildren.* American Association of Retired People.
    Retrieved July 22, 2020, from https://www.aarp.org/relationships/friends-family/info-08-
    2011/grandfamilies-guide-getting-started.html

Halpert, B., & Geller, J. (2018). *Grandparents guide to technology: Raising savvy cyber
    grandkids*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Hank, K., Cavrini, G., Gessa, G. D., & Tomassini, C. (2018). What do we know about
    grandparents? Insights from current quantitative data and identification of future data
    needs. *European Journal of Ageing, 15*(3), 225–235. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10433-018-
    0468-1

Hayslip, B., Jr., Fruhauf, C. A., & Dolbin-MacNab, M. L. (2019). Grandparents raising
    grandchildren: What have we learned over the past decade? *The Gerontologist*, *59*(3),
    e152–e163. https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnx106

Hedegaard, H., Miniño, A. M., & Warner, M. (2020). *Drug overdose deaths in the United States,
    1999–2018* (Data Brief No. 356). National Center for Health Statistics.
    https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db356-h.pdf

Holloman, A. (2016). *Grandparent caregivers and the school system* (Publication no. 10193503)
    [Doctoral dissertation, Trevecca Nazarene University]. ProQuest Dissertations and
    Theses Global.
    http://www.proquest.com/docview/1922606971/abstract/F53D293B785242E2PQ/1

Kilfoyle, B. (2018). *Teachers' perceptions of and collaboration practices with non-traditional families* (Publication no. 10824482) [Doctoral dissertation, Loyola University Chicago]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global. http://www.proquest.com/docview/2238203184/abstract/A57B82841D74D80PQ/1

Lee, Y., Bronstein, L., Kida, L., & Saastamoinen, M. (2017). Working with grandparent-headed families in schools: School professionals' perspectives. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 22*(1), 25–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/10824669.2016.1250096

Lee, Y., & Jang, K. (2019). Mental health of grandparents raising grandchildren: Understanding predictors of grandparents' depression. *Innovation in Aging*, *3*(1 Suppl.), Article S282. https://doi.org/10.1093/geroni/igz038.1042

Leonard, S. S., & Gudiño, O. G. (2016). Academic and mental health outcomes of youth placed in out-of-home care: The role of school stability and engagement. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, *45*(6), 807–827. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-016-9357-y

Martin, E. (2017). *Hidden consequences: The impact of incarceration on dependent children*. National Institute of Justice. https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/hidden-consequences-impact-incarceration-dependent-children

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review, 50*(4), 370–396. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/h0054346

Mendoza, A. N. (2018). *A social network analysis of the relation between social support and resilience in grandparents raising their grandchildren* (Publication no. 10785669) [Doctoral dissertation, Colorado State University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global. http://www.proquest.com/docview/2056550843/abstract/1C209F680E5F49C0PQ/1

Merchant, W., Smith, G., Estrada, S., & Hayslip, B. (2018). Psychological difficulties among custodial grandchildren: Whose view really matters? *Innovation in Aging*, *2*(1 Suppl.), S977–978. https://doi.org/10.1093/geroni/igy031.3619

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). Six common qualitative research designs. In *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed., p. 25). John Wiley & Sons.

Messacar, D., & Oreopoulos, P. (2013). Staying in school a proposal for raising high-school graduation rates. *Issues in Science and Technology, XXIX*(2), 55–61. https://issues.org/derek-high-school-graduation-rates/

Nadorff, D. (2017). Depression in children raised by their grandparents vs. foster parents: The impact of parenting style. *Innovation in Aging*, *1*(1 Suppl.), S189–189. https://doi.org/10.1093/geroni/igx004.723

National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2020, March 10). *Overdose death rates.* National Institutes of Health. https://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847

Olweus, D., & Limber, S. P. (2010). Bullying in school: Evaluation and dissemination of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 80*(1), 124–134. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.2010.01015.x

Patterson, J. (2018). Grandparents, grandchildren, and caregiving: The impacts of America's substance use crisis. *Family Matters*, *42*(3), 15–22. https://search-proquest-com.une.idm.oclc.org/docview/2188099799/fulltextPDF/BAFB1D17C04A4461PQ/1?accountid=12756

Peoples, K. (2021). *How to write a phenomenological dissertation.* SAGE Publications.

Peterson, T. L., Scott, C. B., Ombayo, B., Davis, T., & Sullivan, D. (2019). Biggest concerns of school personnel about students raised by grandparents. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *102*, 201–209. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.05.004

Plasman, J. S. (2018). Career/education plans and student engagement in secondary school. *American Journal of Education, 124*(2), 217–246. https://doi.org/10.1086/695608

Ravitch, S. M., & Riggan, M. (2016). *Reason & rigor: How conceptual frameworks guide research* [eBook edition]. SAGE Publications.

Rogers, A. (2021). *Grandparents in parental roles with grandchildren and social work practice* [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/9805

Rothe, E. M., Tzuang, D., & Pumariega, A. J. (2010). Acculturation, development, and adaptation. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, *19*(4), 681–696. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chc.2010.07.002

Rudder, D., Riebschleger, J., & Anderson, G. R. (2014). Kinship care for children of a parent with a mental illness. *Journal of Family Social Work*, *17*(2), 102–118. https://doi.org/10.1080/10522158.2014.880982

Shakur, C. R. (2012). *An analysis of barriers to and strategies for improving parent engagement* (Publication no. 1511091) [Master's thesis, Loyola University Chicago]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global. http://www.proquest.com/docview/1021042301/abstract/D386181038D94C8BPQ/1

Smith, J. A., Larkin, M., & Flowers, P. (2012). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. SAGE Publications.

Smith, J., & Osborn, M. (2003). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J.A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 51–80). SAGE Publications.

Sullivan, C., & Forrester, M. A. (2019). *Doing qualitative research in psychology* (Vol. 2). SAGE Publications.

Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act, Pub. L. No. 115–196, § 1091 (2018). https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/s1091

Thompson, P. (2017). The role of grandparents when parents part or die: Some reflections on the mythical decline of the extended family. *Ageing and Society*, *19*(4), 471–503. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0144686x99007461

Turanovic, J. J., Rodriguez, N., & Pratt, T. C. (2012). The collateral consequences of incarceration revisited: A qualitative analysis of the effects on caregivers of children of incarcerated parents. *Criminology*, *50*(4), 913–959. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2012.00283.x

Turney, K. (2014). The intergenerational consequences of mass incarceration: Implications for children's co-residence and contact with grandparents. *Social Forces*, *93*(1), 299–327. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sou062

Twenge, J. M. (2017). *iGen: Why today's super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy and completed unprepared for adulthood and what that means for the rest of us.* Atria Books.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). *Families and households.* https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-14.pdf

U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *Families and households.*

    https://www.census.gov/topics/families/families-and-

    households.htmlhttps://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/families/cps-2020.html

Van Etten, D., & Gautam, R. (2012). Custodial grandparents raising grandchildren: Lack of legal

    relationship is a barrier for services. *Journal of Gerontological Nursing*, *38*(6), 18–22.

    https://doi.org/10.3928/00989134-20120509-02

Williams, L. (2011). What leads to the formation of grandfamilies? In R. E. Dunifon (Ed.).

    *You've always been there for me* (pp. 37–50). Rutgers University Press.

    https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1w8h3xk

**Appendix A**

Site Approval Communication

Dear Operator of Brockton Area Boys & Girls Club:

I am conducting research for my dissertation pursuant to earning a Doctorate of Education at the University of New England in Biddeford, Maine. I am seeking your permission to use your page to solicit participants in my research study.

The title of my project is: The Lived Experiences of the Connectedness to the Secondary School Community of Adults Formally Raised by Grandparents. My research is focused on young adults who are over the age of 18 who were raised by grandparents. The purpose of this study is to understand how people who were raised by grandparents understand their connection to school while in high school and what they needed to be successful.

The names of all participants who participate in this study will remain confidential. At no time during the study process will any individuals or organizations be identified. Additionally, no cost will be incurred by participants or by the social media sites that assist in recruiting them.

Please see my attached flyer for posting on your page. If approved, please post publicly on my behalf.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. I can be reached at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or xxxxx@une.edu. I thank you in advance and look forward to your reply.

Professionally,

Karen M. Maguire

Doctoral Student

University of New England

xxxxx@une.edu

**Appendix B**

Recruitment Flyer

Are you an adult age 18-30 who was raised by grandparents while in high school?

-Would you would be willing to share your experience as part of a research study?

1 hour Interviews held via Zoom
Topics discussed:

- The issues children raised by grandparents face connecting to school while in high school.
- 
- The 'generation gap' between grandchildren and grandparents.

- What schools can do to help foster a working, trusting relationship with families so that children can learn.

All interviews will be confidential and held online via Zoom

To be part of theis study or for more information contact:
Principal Researcher:
Karen Maguire, Doctoral Student
University of New England
Kmaguirexxxxxxxx

**Appendix C**

Information Sheet

**UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND**

**INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDY**

**Project Title:** The Lived Experiences of the Connectedness to the Secondary School Community of Adults Formally Raised by Grandparents

**Principal Investigator(s):** Karen M. Maguire

**Introduction:**

The purpose of this form is to give you information about the process of this research study. You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

**Why is this research study being done?**

You are being invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Karen Maguire, a doctoral student at the University of New England. The purpose of this study is to examine how individuals raised by grandparent's experience connectedness to the school community while in high school. I hope to determine whether the relationship between the child and grandparents affects the connection the child has to the school community while in high school. The findings of this study may provide public school administrators data that supports a new and innovative way of providing social and emotional support to students in their learning environment.

**Who will be in this study?**

Participants in this study will be individuals who are young adults, over the age of 18, who were raised by grandparents throughout the duration of their high school experience.

**What will I be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview. The interview will take place via Zoom with a recorded session that will last approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be designed to gather information about your perception of your experience connected with the school community while in high school. You may be asked to provide clarification to answers should the need arise. This could involve an additional Zoom interview of up to 30 minutes.

**What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?**

There are limited risks involved in this study. Due to the design and the sample size, identification of participants is unlikely, however, a breach of confidentiality is possible. If there are questions that arise during your interview that may cause concern, you may end the interview at any time or exit the study without any repercussions. Data obtained from a participant who chooses to withdraw will be destroyed and not included in the study.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?**

The study does not provide financial or other immediate benefits. However, this study has the potential to contribute to the body of research regarding children raised by grandparents and encourage public schools to implement procedures to engage learners.

**What will it cost me?**

There is no cost. There is only a commitment of your time to complete the interview.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

I will not connect your interview to your name. The interview will be recorded using an audio device with video capability. Transcription of the interview will be conducted using a platform (Zoom) and coded by hand. All participants will be assigned a pseudonym so that names and identifiable information will be omitted during the coding process. You will have the opportunity to review your interview transcripts for clarification and accuracy.

Participants will arrive to the meeting with their cameras on but will have the opportunity to turn their camera off during the interview if they wish.

Interviews will be conducted online via Zoom from my home office with no one else present in person or in on the Zoom meeting. Interviews will be strictly confidential.

**How will my data be kept confidential?**

I will maintain all documentation on the external hard drive, which will be locked in a secure filing cabinet in my home office that only I have access to. After 7 years from the publication of the dissertation, these files will be destroyed.

**Whom may I contact with questions?**

- The researchers conducting this study is Karen M. Maguire xxxxx@une.edu

## Appendix D

### Interview Questions

**Connection with Friends**

Tell me about your friends while you were in high school.

How did this family structure influence your ability to make friends?

Did your friends know that you were being raised by grandparents?

Tell me about your relationship with friends out of school.

**Connection with Grandparents**

What barriers did you face as a student raised by grandparents?

What were the barriers with your grandparents helping you with schoolwork?

What were the barriers in your grandparents communicating with your teachers?

Were you truthful with your grandparents about the schoolwork you had to do?

In what ways did your grandparents struggle in helping with your schoolwork, if at all?

Did the people at school know you were being raised by grandparents?

**Involvement in School Activities**

Tell me about your experience in high school.

How well do you think educators understood your situation?

What support would be helpful to educators working with a family such as yours?

What after school activities were you involved in, if any? (Why not?)

**Academic Achievement**

What types of support did you have at home in completing your schoolwork?

Tell me about your experience in participating in learning while at school.

How involved were your grandparents in your education while you were in high school?

Tell me about how your grandparents stayed aware of your participation and completion of your

schoolwork?