

### **38. Lesbian and Bisexual Grandmothers: Beliefs, Attitudes, and Perceptions of Relationships with Grandchildren**

Orel, N. A. & Fruhauf, C. A. (2006). Lesbian and bisexual grandmothers' perceptions of the grandparent-grandchild relationship. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 2, 43-70.

In this study, 16 self-identified lesbian (12) or bisexual (4) grandmothers from the Midwest were interviewed face-to-face regarding their experiences of grand-parenting.

All grandmothers felt their relationships with grandchildren brought meaning and purpose to their lives. All felt actively involved in their grandchildren's lives. Most commonly, grandmothers defined their role as a mentor or role model for their grandchildren.

Grandmothers' descriptions of their relationships with grandchildren always involved their own children. While all felt supportive of their children, grandmothers reported that based on children's attitudes toward homosexuality, relationships with grandchildren were either discouraged or fostered by the adult children. Grandmothers who had close relationships with their children more often reported close relationships with grandchildren.

Deciding when and how to disclose sexual orientation to grandchildren was a major issue for grandmothers, and these decisions were linked to cultural, social, and familial attitudes toward homosexuality. Those who did disclose reported closer relationships with grandchildren, and felt their grandchildren benefited in learning to respect individual differences and celebrate diversity.

Participants were an average age of 61 years. All had at least one biological or legal grandchild, with 48 grandchildren represented (mean age of 18 years). Grandmothers were predominantly Euro-American. The majority had graduated from high school or beyond and 56% were employed and 44% were retired. Nine grandmothers had a female partner, with an average relationship length of 9 years. Fourteen participants had been previously married, with 12 marriages ending in divorce and two ending in the death of the husband. Interviews were audio-taped and lasted 90 to 120 minutes.