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‘One of the Best Members of the Family’: Continuity and Change in Young Children’s Relationships  
With their Grandparents.

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“One of the best members of the family”: Continuity and Change in Young Children’s Relationships with their Grandparents

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Introduction

As societies age, there is growing scholarly and public policy interest in the relationships between grandparents and grandchildren. Much of this research has focused on grandparents’ role as carers, since mothers are more likely to remain in the labour force, and as grandparents live longer and healthier lives, making them more available to descendent generations. The scholarship therefore focuses on grandparenting from adult perspectives – either from that of the grandparent or the ‘middle’ parent generation (Timmonen and Arber 2012, p. 10). This chapter examines the grandchild/grandparent relationship from a child’s-eye perspective. Drawing on two major archived qualitative datasets, it brings retrospective life history narratives into dialogue with contemporary qualitative interviews in order to unpack continuity and change in young children’s experiences of their relationships with their grandparents from the 1930s to the present. We show that there has been continuity in the warm and affectionate relationships that children feel towards their grandparents, associated with their experience of grandparental care. However, there have also been changes arising from two major structural transformations in family life. First, in a wealthier, more urban society, grandchildren are considerably less likely to spend extended periods of time living with a grandparent, and parents now have greater power to act as gatekeepers between the generations. Second, changes in the social construction of childhood, including the increasing

importance of formal schooling, mean that the time children spend with grandparents has become more domesticated.

The chapter begins with an overview of the changing demographic and socio-economic contexts of grandchild-grandparent relationships in Ireland. We then describe the data and proceed to examine the substance of continuity and change in grandchildren's relationship with their grandparents focusing on the changing contexts of being cared for by grandparents.

### Changing socio-demographic contexts

Population ageing has been linked to the "verticalization" of family ties as reduced mortality and increased longevity lead to an increase in the number of living generations, while reduced fertility leads to a reduction in the number of living relatives within the generations (Harper 2003, p. 155). According to Bengtson (2001), multi-generational relationships have become increasingly important for individual and family well being (but see Herlofson and Hagestad (2011) for a note of caution about this inference). In many European countries a young child's chances of having a living grandparent have increased, due to better life expectancy for older people, together with a reduction in age at childbirth during the decades immediately following World War Two. As a result of smaller family sizes individual grandchildren have less competition for their grandparents' attention (A. Gray 2005, p. 572). However, the form and extent of grandparental care also varies by the amount of state support for childcare and by regional differences in family norms, including the likelihood of intergenerational co-residence (Jappens and Van Bavel 2012). Generally speaking, frequent contact between adult children and their parents, inter-generational co-residence and reliance on grandparents for regular assistance with childcare are all more common in Southern European than in Northern European countries.

Ireland appears similar to the Southern European countries with respect to the strength of intergenerational ties and lies in an intermediate position with respect to reliance on grandparents for childcare (Jappens and Van Bavel 2012). Quail et al.(2011, p. 1) observed that: “Contact with grandparents seems to be relatively high in Ireland, perhaps because of the small size of the country and low levels of mobility, but perhaps also because of the value placed on the extended family.” The Growing Up in Ireland study showed that nearly two-thirds of the parents of nine-year olds, and nine out of ten parents of infants, have “quite a lot” of contact with grandparents. After parents (62%), grandparents are the next most common (12%) providers of regular care for infants (Williams et al. 2010, p.90).

But how much has this pattern of contact and care between grandparents and grandchildren changed over time, and how has the experience and quality of grandchildren’s relationships with their grandparents changed (or not)? Paradoxically, in the Irish case, demographic ageing has been a somewhat less salient factor. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Irish life expectancy was comparatively good and marital fertility very high. Due to high levels of emigration, “[t]he Irish population was both top heavy with older people and bottom heavy with children” (Fahey and Field 2008, p. 57). The proportions of younger people in the population increased between the 1950s and 1970s, because even as age at marriage and first childbirth decreased, (leading to a “mini baby boom” in the 1960s and 1970s), rates of emigration increased. Poor rates of improvement in life expectancy during this period meant that the proportions of older people did not increase to the same extent. “Having had the highest old age dependency among developed countries in 1960, Ireland now has the lowest, and is the only country in the world in which old age dependency is lower today than it was in the 1960s” (Fahey and Field 2008, p. 58). Nevertheless, absolute numbers of older people have increased, and contemporary grandchildren have fewer siblings and cousins competing for their grandparents’ attention than did their counterparts in earlier decades.

It is likely, also, that in the past young children more commonly shared a household with grandparents - either as part of the process of farm transmission across the generations, or through moving to live with grandparents in an informal fostering relationship (see Gray, Geraghty and Ralph 2013). While there has been considerable debate about the form and extent of multi-generational households in early 20<sup>th</sup> century rural Ireland (for overviews see Gray 2012 and Seward 2005), as we will see, memories of living with grandparents do occur quite frequently amongst the older respondents in our study. Over time, the factors that gave rise to grandchild-grandparent co-residence have diminished - including an economy dominated by agriculture, widespread household poverty and very large family size – such that intergenerational households have become considerably less common. Less than 3% of contemporary nine-year olds live with a grandparent.<sup>1</sup> Ruggles (2007) showed how, in the United States, growing economic opportunities for the younger (adult) generation led to long-term decline in intergenerational co-residence. He found that before 1930, multi-generational households were more likely to occur amongst high-status, property-owning families. By contrast, after 1950, that relationship was reversed - intergenerational co-residence became more common amongst lower-income families, when adult children were unable to afford to live independently. In Ireland, a similar process appears to have taken place during a shorter time period. Experiences of intergenerational co-residence occurring as part of the process of inheritance overlapped with practices linked to alleviating the burden on young parents, especially young mothers. Thus, the decline in intergenerational co-residence can be attributed to a shift in the balance of power amongst adult generations, as grandchildren's parents are now less dependent on their own parents for economic survival. This change has increased parents' capacity

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<sup>1</sup> Authors' calculation from the quantitative Growing Up in Ireland data available from the Irish Social Science Data Archive <<http://www.ucd.ie/issda/data/growingupinireland/>>. Growing Up in Ireland data have been funded by the Government of Ireland through the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs; have been collected under the Statistics Act, 1993, of the Central Statistics Office. The project has been designed and implemented by the joint ESRI-TCD Growing Up in Ireland Study Team. © Department of Health and Children.

to act as gatekeepers to their grandchildren, despite their reliance on grandparents for childcare and other forms of assistance.

Elder et al (1997) pointed out that while demographic data shed light on grandparents' *potential* availability to grandchildren, it does not necessarily follow that relationships will be warm and close. In quantitative studies of intergenerational families in rural Iowa, they found that grandchild-grandparent relationships were best understood within the whole matrix of family connections and practices: grandchildren had better relationships with their grandparents when they engaged in joint activities, when the relationships were multi-dimensional and when grandparents had themselves experienced close relationships with their own grandparents as children. In this chapter, we show that *qualitative* data can provide an enhanced understanding of holistic family relationships, revealing details about the contexts and meanings associated with strong intergenerational relationships. Qualitative *longitudinal* data allow us to trace changes in these contexts, meanings and practices over time.

## Data

The analysis in this chapter is based on two major qualitative datasets available for re-use through the Irish Qualitative Data Archive ([www.iqda.ie](http://www.iqda.ie)). (1) The **Life Histories and Social Change** (LHSC) database comprises 113 in-depth life history interviews with respondents selected from the 'Living in Ireland' panel study (carried out in each year between 1994 and 2001), whose lives traversed the twentieth century. The life story interviews were carried out between 2005 and 2008 with respondents from three birth cohorts – those born before 1935, between 1945 and 1954, and between 1965 and 1974 - who opted in to the project. The LHSC database also includes life history

calendars and retrospective social network schedules.<sup>2</sup> (2) **Growing Up in Ireland** (the National Longitudinal Study on Children) is a national, government funded, mixed-method panel study centred on a child cohort (beginning at 9 years) and an infant cohort (beginning at 9 months). Qualitative data from the project include in-depth interviews with children and their parents in the child cohort, and ‘time capsules’ incorporating a range of items including drawings, writings and images. Respondents for the qualitative study were selected from amongst those who signed a consent form to have their name put forward for participation. The sample was stratified by socio-economic status, rurality, and number of resident parents, with reference to the national sample.<sup>3</sup> Each dataset included a social network instrument that allowed us to identify respondents who had a sustained relationship with grandparents in their childhood (see Table 1).

<<Table 1 about here >>

Bringing the two datasets into dialogue we compared the grandchild-grandparent relationship across four broadly defined birth cohorts. This allowed us to develop a higher-level analysis of the changing texture of grandchild-grandparent relationships over an extended historical period, in very different socio-economic contexts<sup>4</sup> (for additional information on our approach, see Geraghty, Gray and Ralph 2013). We argue that there has been continuity in the warm relationships between children and their grandparents arising from the experience of grandparental care, but that changes in the texture of the relationship have occurred due to significant transformations in household and family contexts, and in the social construction of childhood.

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<sup>2</sup> Gray, J. & O’Riain, S., Life History and Social Change Project [collection]. Maynooth, Co. Kildare: Irish Qualitative Data Archive [producer], ID10028. Irish Qualitative Data Archive [distributor].

<sup>3</sup> Williams J., Greene, S., Doyle, E., Harris E., McDaid, R., Mc Nally, S., Merriman, B., Nixon, E., & Swords, L., Growing Up in Ireland – National Longitudinal Study of Children [collection]. Maynooth, Co. Kildare: Irish Qualitative Data Archive [producer], ID10027. Irish Qualitative Data Archive [distributor].

<sup>4</sup> For additional information on our approach, see Gray, Geraghty and Ralph (2013).

### Grandparental care in changing household contexts

The contexts and meanings associated with grandparental care in different household settings have changed in Ireland since the early decades of the twentieth century. Formerly, children were regularly cared for by grandparents with whom they lived continuously in the same household. This could happen either when children lived with parents and grandparents in a multi-generational household, or when they moved from their natal household to live with grandparents. In contemporary Ireland, many children are cared for on a daily basis in their grandparents' home, but they continue to live separately with their parents, circulating between households on a daily basis. As we will see, in almost all cases, the relationship with caring grandparents was, or is, warm and close; problems arise – in different ways, depending on the socio-historical context - from how the grandchild-grandparent relationship is mediated by the middle, parental generation.

During the 1930s and forties, when most of the respondents in our oldest study cohort were attending primary school, the Irish economy was dominated by agriculture. As late as 1961, “42 percent of total male employment in Ireland was still in agriculture, mostly in small-scale family production units, with a median size of 38 acres” (Hannan and Commins 1982, p. 97). Building on the classical anthropological study carried out by Arensberg and Kimball (1940) in the 1930s, Irish rural households were thought to have been characterized by a stem family system, in which land was inherited by a single male heir, whose marriage coincided with the retirement of his father. Under this system, we might expect to find grandparents commonly co-residing with grandchildren. But stem-extended family households have proven difficult to find in census records from the early part of the twentieth century (Gray 2012; Guinnane 1997; Corrigan 1993). One explanation may be that a cultural preference for stem-family processes (Birdwell-Pheasant 1992) did not lead to many extended households in practice because of the wider demographic context. Ruggles (2009) pointed out that the demographic potential for multigenerational households was highly constrained in countries with late marriage and long generations, and also where the proportion of elderly people

in the population was comparatively high, leading to fewer options for co-residence. Both conditions were present in the Ireland of the 1930s.

Nevertheless, memories of sharing a home with grandparents do occur in the life history narratives of the two oldest cohorts in our study, in some cases conforming very closely to the descriptions of the ethnographers. For example, Mary's [LH131, b. 1931] mother lived with her husband's parents from the time of their marriage, when he inherited the land. She explained how the three generations, including eleven children, were accommodated:

We had a big enough house if you like, it was only 3 bedrooms but the rooms would take 3 double beds...There were 3 double beds in 2 rooms and then when the grandparents were there they slept downstairs... and it was afterwards the dining room when they were gone. There was a big kitchen and a back kitchen and a sitting room, dining room... and 3 bedrooms. So there was plenty of room.

Both anthropological research and literary accounts have highlighted the extent to which relationships between *adult* children and parents were strained in multi-generational households – especially those between wives and mothers-in-law. But this did not apply to the relationship between grandchildren and grandparents: according to Arensberg and Kimball (2001 [1940], p. 124), the “old couple...very soon become the objects of the children’s love and respect.” Older adults’ memories of their relationships with co-resident grandparents in LHSC corroborate this account. After he married, Eoin's [LH222, b. 1947] father moved in to the farm that belonged to his wife's family in the south-east of Ireland, while Eoin's grandmother continued to live in the attached house. His grandmother eventually became co-resident and involved with raising her grandchildren in her home:

[Granny] was very nice to us [...] she'd look after us and tell us stories. She'd help us to say prayers when we were young and she'd teach us prayers. I suppose she did everything every

granny did and oh she was very nice to us. And she'd be there in the kitchen you know when we'd come home from school and she'd always have a smile and she'd talk to us and ah...but as I said she was getting old at the time.

For John [LH217, b.1946], whose parents returned from England to inherit a small farm in the west of Ireland, his paternal grandmother who lived with them was “like a second mother to me, even more bossy than my mother!” Teresa's [LH228, b. 1950] family similarly lived with her paternal grandparents on a farm in the west of Ireland:

[M]y father's parents were in the house with us and my grandfather died when I was about five and my grandmother died when I was about twelve, we were very close to her, I used to sleep with her and I missed her an awful lot when she died [...] I really missed her there was really a gap there you know when she died.

Whereas much of the research on household and family structures in the early part of the last century has focused on intergenerational co-residence arising from inheritance practices, our life history interviews revealed that grandchildren often found themselves living with grandparents as a result of being sent away from their parental home – in both rural and urban settings.

Grandchildren in these circumstances usually enjoyed a good relationship with their grandparents, but the practice led to strained relationships with their own parents and siblings, and sometimes to rather lonely childhoods in the company of elderly people. Peter's [LH121, b. 1926] family lived in the eastern part of Ireland, but as an infant he went to live with his grandparents and unmarried aunts on his father's home farm in the west of Ireland:

I was there when I was an infant for some length of time because I came back from there with a [western] accent and I didn't recognise my mother and I used to look for my aunty and my mother would be very upset. I loved living down there but it had a bad effect eventually.

The most common reason our respondents gave for this practice was that it relieved pressure on mothers who were raising very large families - although it is clear that grandparents and unmarried aunts and uncles also enjoyed the opportunity to have young children living with them, and older grandchildren provided help around the house and farm. Respondents also told us that such arrangements were made to facilitate attendance at school, at a time when the journey to primary school entailed walking long distances, and secondary schools were inaccessible for many rural people in the absence of a school transport system (Gray and O'Carroll 2012).

Joan [LH124, b. 1928] described the practice in an urban setting:

My grandmother wanted me to go out there and in those days... there was a kind of tradition that very often people got married and were expected to have large families, many of them didn't have any money, it was difficult for them to support a big family and very often grandmothers took the first and second child. And that happened in my grandmother's case, she took another of her daughter's...Her first two children were two girls and she took both of them and they...were sent up [to school] everyday on the bus. But that divided up the family.

Although Joan lived with her grandmother only on the weekends, she had somewhat less than happy memories of the arrangement and felt that she had spent a lot of her childhood “with very elderly people” and that “somewhere in my head I wasn't happy.” In a rural setting, Sheila's [LH141, b. 1934] older sister had gone to live with their grandmother “because probably mammy had enough at home you know,” and she remembered, as a child, praying that she also would be allowed to live with her granny, but without success:

It was a good job really because I was better off with my own brothers and sisters at home you know, it would have been, my sister had gone.....but it would have been very lonely you know when you are reared with two adults, like a grandmother.

In Cohort 3 (LHSC) and Cohort 4 (GUI), as the proportions of people living in urban settings increased, childhood stories of being sent to live with grandparents gradually give way to stories about spending long summer holidays with them. Our respondents mostly remember these times as a welcome opportunity to “run wild.” As Jennifer [LH313, female, b. 1970] explained,

My mother's mother, we would have, yes, we would have been there a lot during the summer. My sister, one of my sisters and myself would have spent a long time down there, we would always have been there in the summer and, you know, we lived there in the summer really. You know, it was great to get out of town.

#### Experiencing grandparental care in non-residential arrangements

During the 1970s and eighties there were continuing changes in the Irish class structure, as the proportions of men employed in agriculture declined rapidly. Manual occupations began to decline from the mid-1980s onwards (Whelan, Breen and Whelan 1992; Layte and Whelan 2000), alongside an increase in the proportions of married women in paid employment (Fahey et al. 2000). This latter trend accelerated during the 1990s and 2000s in the context of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ boom. Between 1998 and 2007 the proportion of women with school-aged children in the labour force increased from 52% to 65% (Russell et al. p. 17). The proportion of families with children less than 15 years old that were headed by lone parents increased from 7.2% in 1981 to 21.3% in 2006 (Fahey and Field 2008, p.42). These changes in the structure of the economy and society were accompanied by rapid urbanisation (Corcoran et al. 2010).

The transformation of Ireland's socio-economic structure altered the context for grandchild grandparent relationships (Share and Kerrins 2009). In contemporary Ireland, grandchildren continue to experience regular care by grandparents, but as part of an arrangement with their parents that usually involves spending daily time at their grandparents' house until their working parents are able to take them home. Accounts of young children living with grandparents for longer periods do occur in Cohort 3 (born 1965-74) and Cohort 4 (born 1998-2000), but these unusual circumstances are mostly associated with strained family relationships, and are depicted as problematic.

For example, Mandy [LH303, b.1965] described how her mother struggled to cope with pregnancy, young children and post-natal depression when the family had to move as part of her husband's job. To help, her grandparents took in her oldest brother for a time:

He was born in 1962 he was four. So he started school [in western village] in September and he went to school there I think until the following Easter. And then one of my mum's friends [in Northern Ireland town] said, you know [...] if you don't go down and get him now and bring him back to live with you, you know, it will be too big a wrench for him so when he had six months he's building his own life and it was awful, I can remember. I really, and I was only, like [...]well he would have been five and I would have been three and I do remember the day that we took him out of my granny's house and that he was actually coming home with us. And he got into, we had a little Volkswagen beetle so there was four children and my parents and all the gear [...] and we were looking back at him and they were out waving and crying and he was, let me out, my granny is crying for me, let me out. And he was, oh it was awful and my parents were so, everybody was so upset.

A practice that would have been considered unexceptional in earlier decades, and might well have led to a long-term arrangement, had become a source of family strain and emotional distress. In Cohort 4 (GUI) one parent described how her mother took care of the study child when her younger sister was born:

Erika was then just a baby when Gaby was born. She was just getting off the bottle and mammy took Erika for four weeks after Gaby was born and I think that is where the bond with mammy and Erika came. Then I would go up at weekends and I would have to leave her for the weekends because mammy said, 'you will never manage.' She didn't take Kathy, just Erika. Even when I was changing the baby's nappy she would be coming up to see what was going on and I would be mooching her away. Even though they are very close I remember she was up there four weeks and I remember the day we were bringing her home, you swear she was the new born baby. Mammy bawled her eyes out so she is very close to her but no difference in raising them (GUI 088\_interview with parent).

Another parent described how living with his mother had created hierarchies amongst the grandchildren because some of them had been 'spoilt' (GUI 103\_interview with parent). A child respondent described how his relationship with his grandmother had improved, now that they were no longer living together:

[She] was always giving out if you were messing and the stuff that you are not supposed to do.  
[...] I get on better with her now but when I was living with her we were always giving out.  
She mostly buys us stuff and gives us money and we visit her. (GUI 038\_interview with child)

It is difficult to judge whether this child's *feelings* about living with his grandmother are really any different from those that John [LH217, b.1946] from Cohort 2 might have experienced as a child. His grandmother was "very strict," but his *memories* of living with her are warm and positive.

Nevertheless, it is clear that, as the wider socio-economic context changed, intergenerational co-residence became atypical.

In contemporary Ireland, parents' increased economic independence, together with smaller family sizes, means that grandchildren are unlikely to live in the same household as their grandparents. However, a considerable proportion of Irish parents rely on grandparents to provide childcare as mothers remain in the labour force. Typically, this takes the form of spending days or afternoons in a grandparent's house, until parents come to collect – facilitated by residential proximity. In Cohort 4 (GUI) there were many references to grandparents providing childcare. In the extract below, Emmanuelle [003\_Child] and her mother are describing a photograph taken as part of the exercise:

Interviewer: Does your nanny collect you [from school]?

Emmanuelle: Yeah me and [the dog]

Mother: That is Emmanuelle's cousin. He is seven. Emmanuelle is the only granddaughter so it is all boys.

[...]

Interviewer: So nanny minds the cousins as well?

Mother: Yeah there would be no one working only for nanny. I couldn't do it without my mam. Financially you wouldn't be able to do it if you had to pay someone to mind the kids.

In Cohort 4 (GUI) the children generally described their relationships with grandparents who were minding them in positive or non-committal terms. On their family circles they placed their carer grandparents close to them,<sup>5</sup> and identified them (alongside their parents) as people they would talk to about their day, or if they had a problem. Thus we can trace a pattern of continuity in the affectionate relationships between grandchildren and their grandparents. However, as we show in

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<sup>5</sup> As part of the qualitative interview, the children were asked to display the degree of closeness they felt toward each family member using a visual tool of concentric circles with their own name at the centre.

the next section, wider changes in the social construction of childhood have given rise to changes in the social significance of the relationship.

### Grandparents as a bridge to the wider world

As we have seen, the decline of co-residence with grandparents was associated with the growing economic independence of parents, who have acquired greater capacity to mediate relationship between grandchildren and their grandparents, despite the extent to which they rely on the latter for help with childcare. This change has overlapped with a long-term trend towards the domestication and privatization of childhood (Karsten 2001; Holloway and Valentine 2000; Zinnecker 1995). Over time, in western societies, there has been increased emphasis on the development of spaces specially dedicated to children, but this has also been associated with the segregation of childhood within the home, school, and other child-oriented places that are insulated from the public sphere. While this has meant that grandchildren and carer grandparents spend more 'quality' time together, grandparents are now less likely to provide a bridge to wider inter-generational community networks. Contemporary children's experiences of being cared for in the private space of a grandparent's home contrast with adult memories from earlier decades, which describe how they explored the wider world in the company of grandparents.

The trend towards the 'domestication' of childhood and its effect on grandchild-grandparent relationships can be illustrated by the changing accounts across Cohorts 1 - 4 of the daily journey between home and school. In contrast to contemporary children who are almost always collected by adults (including, in many cases, grandparents), children in the past travelled in peer groups of relatives and friends, often visiting neighbouring households along the way. One of our oldest respondents remembered dropping in to her grandmother on the way home:

And my grandmother then, it was on our way home from school and we used to go in and she'd have the bacon and cabbage in the pot on the hearth and she'd give us the mug of cabbage water and say, drink that into you then and run away home and don't be eating blackberries on your way home and that will bring you home until your mother gets you your dinner. [LH111, female, b. 1924].

In contrast, Damien [085\_Child] from Cohort 4 (GUI) described a typical contemporary arrangement:

Interviewer: How do you get to school every day?

Damien: In my mum's car.

Interviewer: And how do you get home from school?

Damien: My Nana.

Interviewer: Who would you talk to about your day?

Damien: My Nana when I get home and later when my mum gets home from work.

Paradoxically, as the acquisition of formal credentials has become more important for the transmission of social position from one generation to the next, 'schooling' has crept backwards from the public space of the school into the private space of the family (Zinnecker 1995). By contrast, in more "traditional" social settings, where social position depended on membership and reputation within local communities (Arensberg and Kimball 2001 [1940], pp. 184 and 302-303; Hannan 1979, pp. 83-94), the informal acquisition and maintenance of social and cultural capital was more important for social reproduction. In such contexts, family and kinship relationships blended into neighbour and work settings, and children acquired essential social and cultural skills in unstructured, everyday forms of interaction. Memories of childhood narrated by our older LHSC respondents show how grandparents assisted children in the acquisition of social position by

providing a bridge to social relationships within the local community. Young children “tagged along” with grandparents as they went about the daily activities of working and visiting.

For example, Sally [LH225 b. 1949], who lived with her grandmother on the farm her father had inherited, remembered time spent in her company while she visited with neighbours:

[We] walked, I visited all of the neighbours. I’m talking before television now and we visited all the neighbours. I did with her...There was one old lady in a wheelchair, I remember, a neighbour...and all up along the road. She visited them all so I’ve that. I was only small. I might have been six, seven, you know along that age, primary school...[And] I remember the neighbours coming then we used to sit outside. There was a little wall and they’d sit outside at night time, in the summer time, in the evenings, and people would come and chat and sit down.

Such memories are not confined to rural settings. In urban areas, grandparents sometimes provided a bridge to communities of work. LH113 [male, b.1926] remembered (as a somewhat older child) visiting his shoemaker-grandfather’s workshop, and dropping in to the workshops of other shoemakers on the same street:

[Y]ou dropped in for no particular agenda... and there’d be talk and there’d be gossip and there’d be a laugh... and it was great. We’d spend an hour there and he was very interested in gardening of all things and so was I and we’d have a chat, get him started, and it was great. And my grandfather’s place was more or less the same...[It] was therapeutic to go in and you’d also have the mix, the likes of me and my friends and the shoemaker’s contemporaries or even his seniors, and like you’d be absolutely accepted, there was no question of a child muscling in on an adult conversation.

By contrast, the transformation of inter-generational relations and the shrinking spaces of childhood have in some cases reversed the different patterns of interaction that children experience with

parents and grandparents, when the latter provide daily care, as revealed in this somewhat ambivalent reflection by Damien's mother [GUI 085\_Parent] from Cohort 4 (GUI), who co-habited with her parents briefly during her separation from Damien's father:

Interviewer: And you were saying your parents have a lot of say in Damien's upbringing. Do you think that impacts on Damien or your relationship?

Damien's mother: Well I get to be the cool one. Well no it is not like they are in charge. He always wants to go home with [me and my partner]. And obviously [his grandparents] were able to discipline him. If he was running around the supermarket I was always able to discipline him too. I just think Damien is used to it.

In traditional rural and urban settings, the company of grandparents provided an opportunity for children to “find their place” in the local community, in comparative freedom from the hierarchical structure of inter-generational relationships at home and in school. In contemporary urban settings such “neighbouring” has become less significant for the acquisition of social position and status – although it remains important for everyday help and support, especially amongst families with young children (Corcoran et al. 2010). We did not find similar accounts of grandparents providing a bridge to intergenerational local communities in our two youngest cohorts (Cohort 3 (LHSC) and Cohort 4 (GUI)).

Nevertheless, there are echoes of the past in more recent accounts. For many young children, grandparents continue to be a focal point for relationships with extended kin, as 9 year-old Sarah from Cohort 4 explains:

Well one of my Nanas lives across the road, so when my Dad goes to work I normally go over to hers. And my other Nana lives up with my Granddad and I go to her every Wednesday to have dinner and see my aunties and uncles and cousins (GUI 105\_Child)

Furthermore, there is some evidence that grandparents continue to contribute to the development of a sense of collective identity (Attias-Donfut and Segalen 2002, p.292) through the connection they provide to the past. For example, one child described how his grandfather told stories about when he played county hurling (GUI 081), while another told how he/she would 'get songs' from her grandparents (GUI 060).

### Conclusion

This chapter has explored the transformation of inter-generational relationships over a comparatively long historical period, focusing on the relationships between children and their grandparents from a "child's-eye" perspective. Recently, Duncan (2011) has described family change as a process of "bricolage"—whereby past institutions 'leak' into the present as people make sense of – and adapt to – changing socio-historical circumstances. Our research has revealed continuity in Irish children's experiences of warm and positive relationships with their grandparents.

Grandparents not only continue to be the source of practical care and affection, they also remain an important basis for children's sense of identity beyond the nuclear family.

However, the long-term process of social transformation giving rise to a shift in power relations between adult generations and an increasingly 'domesticated' childhood, has meant that there have also been significant changes in the substance of grandchild-grandparent relations. Whereas in the past, grandparent care usually occurred in the context of inter-generational co-residence, today it normally takes the form of grandparents minding children until they return to their 'own' parental home when parents return from work. Today, grandchildren are less likely to explore the social world beyond the family in the company of grandparents. The social and spatial context for

grandchild-grandparent relationships has shrunk within the context of an overall trend towards age-segregation in everyday life (Hagestad and Uhlenberg 2005) and increased ambiguity about grandparents' role within the adult generations (May et al. 2012, Attias-Donfut and Segalen 2002, Lundstrom 2001). Nevertheless, we should not underestimate children's own agency (Zinnecker 1995) in mobilizing and maintaining inter-generational relationships. In the words of one child, filling in his circle of family relationships: "And the last one, my Granny. Didn't think I would forget about her did ya! [Looking to mum]. She is one of my favourite members of the family" (GUI\_Child 101, male).

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**Table 1: Data Summary**

<b>Cohort</b>	<b>Dataset*</b>	<b>Date of Birth Range</b>	<b>Number of respondents in cohort</b>	<b>Number of respondents who identified grandparents in childhood network*</b>
Cohort 1	Life Histories and Social Change (LHSC)	1914-1934	46	7
Cohort 2	LHSC	1945-1954	41	10
Cohort 3	LHSC	1965-1974	26	9
Cohort 4	Growing Up in Ireland (GUI)	1998-2000	117	44

\* See text for detailed description