

Research shows Latinx grandparents create a sense of safety for their LGBTQ+ grandchildren

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A new study centers its research on LGBTQ+ Latinx youth and their positive relationship with grandparents.

The study, "Latinx LGBTQ+ Youth and Grandparents: Intergenerational Solidarity, Precarious Familismo, and Cisnormativity" shines light on the crucial intergenerational support Latinx [grandparents](#) offer their LGBTQ+ grandchildren. The study, which appears in *Journal of Marriage and Family*, is coauthored by Brandon Andrew Robinson, associate professor and chair of the University of California, Riverside's Gender and Sexuality Studies Department.

"Family research, especially research on LGBTQ+ youth, often focuses on the parent-child tie. But families are so much more complicated, expansive, and multifaceted than just the relationship between parents and their children," said Robinson.

"In this study, we found how some grandparents love and support their LGBTQ+ grandchild, including some grandparents offering gender and sexuality support such as buying their grandchild gender-affirming clothes. We can often miss this type of important familial support if we only focus on the parents."

The paper analyzed the lives of 35 Latinx LGBTQ+ youth, a subset of the 83 total participants involved in a two-year longitudinal study of LGBTQ youth ages 16 to 19 from the Inland Empire and South Texas, two geographic areas identified as understudied places in LGBTQ+ research.

For this study, the 35 participants were each interviewed for nearly two hours; initial interviews were conducted during the summer of 2022, followed by surveys and a second interview during the summer of 2023. A majority of the participants in this study are trans or nonbinary.

Most [sociological studies](#) in the United States tend to focus on the "idealized [family](#)," a white, middle class, married heterosexual couple with children. The reality is that in the U.S. about one third of children

live with non-parental relatives at some point of their childhood, the research study notes.

"Grandparents are important for Latinx families, as Latinx families tend to have closer relationships with non-parental family members rather than isolating as nuclear family units," Robinson and the co-authors wrote. "Only a few studies consider the relationship between LGBTQ+ adults and their grandparents, and none of those studies focus on LGBTQ+ youth or LGBTQ+ youth of color."

Researchers also found that Latinx households are more likely to be intergenerational and wanted to capture the meaning and importance of grandparents in [young people](#)'s lives.

How are Latinx grandparents supporting their LGBTQ+ grandchildren? Some participants reported that their abuelas and abuelos offered strong emotional closeness and solidarity, others noted the quality time they spent together, such as watching TV, eating, shopping, doing work on a ranch, or receiving driving lessons.

This type of intergenerational support that offers young people a way to navigate their everyday life is crucial in helping youth feel safe and loved, Robinson said.

Simultaneously, young people have low expectations of their grandparents in terms of understanding the youth's gender identities. For instance, the youth tend to accept when their grandparents don't use the correct pronouns or don't support a name change, as the youth see their grandparents from an [older generation](#) who can't understand gender diversity. The researchers dubbed this process as generational gender expectations.

"He just said he loves me for how I am and things like that. He said he

just doesn't care really to speak about this, like things LGBT-related. And I'm like, 'Okay.' Like, I mean, he still misgenders me, but I don't really expect him to change or anything. He's just an old guy," one participant said of his grandfather.

Another study participant said his grandmother affirmed his gender expression, but not a name change. "I thought about changing my name and I brought the idea to my grandma, and she didn't really like that. But... sometimes I'll do stuff like paint my nails, wear earrings, I'd have my hair long, stuff like that, and she seems fine with it."

In this study, as in a past study regarding the crucial role aunts play in a young person's well-being, grandparents become a safety net.

"Intergenerational solidarity could translate into important material support practices of keeping [youth](#) housed and safe," the study's authors noted.

This work is part of the Family, Housing, and Me Project, or FHAM Project, co-led by Robinson and Amy L. Stone, sociology and anthropology professor at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. The other study co-authors are Otis McCandless-Chapman (first author) and Abby Ottoway, both from Trinity University.

More information: Otis McCandless-Chapman et al, Latinx LGBTQ+ youth and grandparents: Intergenerational solidarity, precarious familismo, and cisnormativity, *Journal of Marriage and Family* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12979](https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12979)

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