

**[Slide 1: Title]****Grandparents, Stepgrandparents, and Extended Family Relationships**

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**[Slide 2; Definitions]**

When most people think about stepfamilies, they think about households that contain minor-age children, a parent of those children, and a stepparent. These members of stepfamily households have other relatives, however, that are often important to them and that contribute to the functioning of the stepfamily household. In this module we will talk about some of those extended family members in stepfamilies, and we will pay particular attention to grandparents and stepgrandparents. Most stepfamily households are part of multigenerational family systems, and the members of these other generations affect and are affected by the formation and maintenance of stepfamilies.

**[Slide 3 – definitions of stepgrandparents]**

A *stepgrandparent* is an adult who either: (a) has a partner who has offspring from one or more prior unions and those offspring have children (i.e., the stepgrandchildren), or (b) has an offspring who has a partner with at least one child from a previous union (i.e., the stepgrandchild to the older adult). **[Slide 4 – definitions of stepgrandchildren]** A *stepgrandchild* is an individual who either: (a) has a stepparent with living parents (i.e., the stepgrandparents) or (b) has a grandparent who has remarried or repartnered with someone who is not related genetically or legally to the individual.

**Multigenerational Stepfamilies****[Slide 5]**

There are greater percentages of adults over 50 who are grandparents and stepgrandparents than ever before in the history of the world. Three demographic trends – people live longer than in the past; there have been relatively high rates of divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation over the past 40 years; and there has been an increase in women bearing children with multiple partners, both within and outside of marriage – have led to an unparalleled number of multigenerational stepfamilies. For example, over a decade ago, nearly 40% of U.S. families had a stepgrandparent (Szinovacz, 1998), and it has been estimated that by 2030 American grandparents will have almost as many stepgrandchildren as they do biological grandchildren (Wachter, 1997).

Multigenerational stepfamilies are structurally complex and heterogeneous. It is hard to discuss stepfamily grandparents and stepgrandparents without paying attention to issues such as when in the life course these relationships began and how long stepfamily members' lives have been linked together (Ganong & Coleman, 2004).

**[Slide 6]**

*Grandparents and Grandchildren in Stepfamilies*

**When Offspring Remarry or Repartner**

Relationships between grandparents and grandchildren are mediated by the middle generation. That means that frequency of contacts between grandparents and grandchildren and even the type of involvement grandparents are allowed to have with grandchildren, are controlled to a degree by the child and/or child-in-law of the grandparents, who are also the parents of the grandchildren. Although this is true in nearly all families, marital and relational transitions by the middle generation adults have enormous potential to affect grandparents' relationships with their grandchildren.

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For example, divorced and separated mothers with minor-age children frequently turn to their parents for financial support, child care, emotional support, advice, and even a place to live (Johnson, 1992). Divorced fathers also seek support from their parents - particularly help with child care if their children are young (Troilo & Coleman, in review). Consequently, grandparents are often more involved in helping raise their grandchildren after divorce than they were before, at least when it is the grandparents' son or daughter who has physical custody of the grandchildren.

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When grandparents' offspring do not have primary or shared physical custody of the grandchildren, which is often the case with paternal grandparents, then contact with grandchildren may diminish after the middle-generation separates or divorces. Some paternal grandparents even lose all contact with their grandchildren after divorce. The nature of post-divorce relationships of grandparents and grandchildren depend on a number of issues, such as which parent initiated the break-up, the quality and closeness of the relationship between grandparents and their former son- or daughter-in-law, and the physical distance between grandparents and grandchildren (Johnson, 1992).

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Remarriage or stepfamily cohabitation after separation or divorce also affects grandparents' ties to grandchildren. For instance, it appears that the new couple draws a boundary around the stepfamily household, creating distance between themselves and others, including grandparents (Clingempeel et al., 1992). This often means that grandparents' support and their overall involvement with grandchildren are reduced when the middle-generation parent

remarries (Bray & Berger, 1990; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Clingempeel et al., 1992; Gladstone, 1989).

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Maternal grandparents probably see their grandchildren after middle-generation remarriage more than paternal grandparents do because most stepfamily households are headed by mothers and stepfathers (Kreider, 2005). Moreover, mothers are more involved than fathers in making and maintaining connections with extended family members (McGraw & Walker, 2004), so they may be more active than fathers in encouraging the parents of their new partners to develop grandparent-like relationships with their children. Consequently, paternal grandparents may lose more time with grandchildren after middle-generation remarriage than do maternal grandparents. In addition, some remarried fathers emotionally and psychologically “replace” stepchildren with whom they live for their nonresidential biological children (Manning & Smock, 2000), and if this is the case, there may be pressure on paternal grandparents to substitute sets of children as well. On the other hand, it may be that remarried mothers are more likely than remarried fathers to help former in-laws remain connected to their grandchildren. There also is some research evidence that nonresidential stepmothers also work to make sure that extended family ties are maintained (Schmeekle, 2007), which should help paternal grandparents stay involved with their grandchildren. Of course, when grandchildren are adults, they are able to maintain ties with grandparents with less interference from remarried parents than younger grandchildren, although adult grandchildren still may be affected by the quality of their parents’ relationships with their grandparents.

Although grandparent involvement may be reduced after remarriage/repartnering of the middle generation, there is evidence that grandparents continue to be actively involved in their

grandchildren's lives and their support and involvement benefit grandchildren in multiple ways (Attar-Schwartz, Tan, Buchanan, Flouri, & Griggs, 2009; Bornat et al., 1999; Bray & Berger, 1993; Kennedy & Kennedy, 1993; Lussier et al., 2002; Mills et al., 2001; Soliz, 2007).

Unfortunately, we do not know much about *how* grandparents manage to remain involved with grandchildren after the remarriage of a child or former-in-law, other than in communicating support to grandchildren (Kennedy & Kennedy, 1993; Soliz, 2007), nor do we know *why* their involvement benefits grandchildren in stepfamilies. Researchers speculate that grandparents provide stability when grandchildren are stressed by their parents' remarriages and the changes that accompany remarriage, such as moving, adjusting to a new stepparent and possibly stepsiblings, adapting to changes in household rules, and trying to maintain relationships with parents amidst these changes (Soliz, 2007).

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Clinicians have asserted that grandparents can be either helpful or harmful to new stepfamilies (Visher & Visher, 1996). Grandparents can support the new stepfamily by accepting the remarried spouse or new partner, offering assistance when requested, and attempting to develop positive relationships with stepgrandchildren while maintaining good attachments with grandchildren, or **[Slide 12]** they can try to undermine the new stepfamily by criticizing the new stepparent's treatment of their grandchildren, refusing to accept new stepgrandchildren or a new son- or daughter-in law, using money and inheritance to punish or to divide younger generations, and favoring grandchildren over stepgrandchildren (Kalish & Visher, 1982). Clinicians' assertions about how grandparents can affect stepfamilies are credible, but researchers have not conducted studies that examine them. Even less is known about grandparents in cohabiting stepfamilies.

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### *Stepgrandparents and Stepgrandchildren*

#### *The Structural Complexity of Stepgrandparenthood*

The multigenerational families that contain stepgrandparents and stepgrandchildren are structurally complex. It is important when thinking about stepgrandparents to pay attention to issues such as when in the life course of the stepfamily these relationships began, whether older adults and middle-generation adults are kin or step-kin, and how long stepfamily members' lives have been linked together. For example, a stepgrandparent may have been present at the birth of the stepgrandchild, or a stepgrandchild may be an adult stranger that the stepgrandparent has never met, or the stepgrandparent may be trying to develop a friendship with an adolescent stepgrandchild at the same time that he or she is trying to get to know the parent of the stepgrandchild. It is likely that these various stepgrand-relationships will differ enormously.

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Stepgrandparent-stepgrandchild relationships are formed in three ways. Each of these ways of coming together occurs within fundamentally different contexts that are likely to yield quite distinct patterns of interactions. *Long-term* stepgrandparent-stepgrandchild relationships are created when an adult stepchild who grew up with a stepparent gives birth to or adopts children. Other stepgrandparent-stepgrandchild relationships are formed as a result of later-life marriages or nonmarital unions of a grandparent (*later life* stepgrandparent-stepgrandchild relationships) or when an older individual's adult child marries or forms a nonmarital union with a person who has children (*inherited* stepgrandparent-stepgrandchild relationships; Ganong & Coleman, 1999). It is likely that whether or not these stepgrandparent-stepgrandchild relationships are defined as kinship ties is related to how the relationships are enacted.

### **Long-Term Stepgrandparent-Stepgrandchild Relationships [Slide 15]**

In perhaps the most common pathway to intergenerational steprelationships, an older stepparent becomes a stepgrandparent (SGP) when an adult stepchild whom the older stepparent helped raise becomes a parent. In these long-term stepgrand-relationships, the stepgrandparents start their relationships with the children at the same time as the biological grandparents do. From the stepgrandchild's perspective, the stepgrandparents have always been part of the child's extended kinship network. SGPs have the benefit of bonding with infant SGCs and having opportunities of creating warm relationships over time if they live near enough and are inclined to do so. Long-term stepgrand-relationships may resemble grandparent-grandchild ties in emotional closeness, resources exchanged, and the quality and nature of interpersonal interactions.

**[Slide 16]** In this genogram, Ann and Sue are highlighted as being in a long-term stepgrandmother-stepgranddaughter relationship. Ann married Tom, Sue's paternal grandfather, in 1979, making Ann the stepmother of Joe. Twenty years later Ann's stepson Joe and his wife gave birth to Sue. Now 11, Sue has known Ann as a grandmother-figure her entire life. Although we do not see it in this genogram, Sue could have three grandmothers and two grandfathers if both of her mother's parents are both living.

The cultural norm of having multiple grandparents is one reason why long-term step-grandparents' relationships with stepgrandchildren may be similar to genetic grandparent-grandchild ties. Given longer life spans, it is not unusual for children to have multiple grandparents and great-grandparents. Grandchildren are not expected to have to choose favorites among their grandparents - both maternal and paternal grandparents are seen as having legitimate claims to children's affection and respect, and children are encouraged to see all grandparents

equally as kin. Typically, in first marriage families grandparents are given special names (e.g., Papa, Nanna) to identify them and to distinguish them from the other grandparents, and in long-term stepfamilies it is relatively easy for stepgrandparents to be named and defined as just one of the multiple grandparents (the prefix “step” is seldom used by family members when identifying long-term stepgrandparents). The quality and closeness of the ensuing relationships are likely due, in large part, to the stepgrandparents efforts to develop close attachments with the stepgrandchildren, and to other family members actively encouraging the creation and maintenance of a grandparent-like relationship for stepgrandparents.

Of course, just as with genetic grandparent-grandchild ties, the middle generation adults can facilitate relationship development between stepgrandparents and stepgrandchildren or they can serve as barriers. Given that middle generation adults often function as gatekeepers, either limiting or freely granting grandparents’ access to grandchildren (Kornhaber, 1996), the quality of the relationship between a stepgrandparent and the middle generation stepchild may be pivotal. Although research on the development of stepgrandparent-stepgrandchild relationships is limited, we hypothesize that the quality of the older stepparent-adult stepchild bond will mediate the development of the SGP-SGC relationship. **[Slide 17]** For example, we hypothesize that if long-term stepparent-stepchild relationships have been emotionally close, if stepparents invested instrumental and expressive resources in raising the stepchild (thereby creating a sense of the need to reciprocate in the adult stepchild), then SGP-SGC relationships will be emotionally close because middle generation stepchildren will help make that happen. Distant or conflicted stepparent-stepchild relationships and/or those in which the stepparent did not invest many resources in the stepchild’s upbringing, on the other hand, will be more likely to result in



distant SGP-SGC ties because adult stepchildren will limit older stepgrandparents' access to stepgrandchildren. **[Slide 18]**

The age of the middle generation adult when the step-relationship began also may be relevant to how middle-generation stepchildren perceive the connections between their children and their stepparents and to how they help or hinder the development of such relationships. For instance, long-term stepparent-stepchild relationships that begin when children are infants or toddlers are more likely to resemble parent-child bonds than are step-relationships that begin when stepchildren are adolescents (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). If the stepparent-stepchild bonds resemble parent-child bonds, it will make it easier for stepgrandchildren to treat the stepgrandparent as simply another grandparent.

The genders of the older and middle generation adults also may be a relevant factor. In general, stepsons adjust to having a stepparent more easily than do stepdaughters, so it might be assumed that long-term stepparents of stepsons would have closer relationships with their stepgrandchildren than if they had stepdaughters. Stepfathers also have been found to have closer relationships with stepchildren when they are young than do stepmothers (Ganong & Coleman, 2004), which may mean that stepgrandfathers are closer to stepgrandchildren than are stepgrandmothers. On the other hand, women work harder at kin-keeping than do men, even in stepfamilies (Church, 1999), so long-term stepmothers may work harder at facilitating the development of positive long-term stepgrandparent-stepgrandchild relationships than do stepfathers. Right now, there is not enough research on these long-term stepgrandparent relationships to know if there are gender differences.

**[Slide 19]** Despite the potential importance of the middle generation as gatekeepers, there is evidence that long-term stepgrandparents function as grandparents and are seen by

stepgrandchildren as grandparents even when stepparent-stepchild relationships have been affectively neutral or even emotionally distant in the past (Clawson & Ganong, 2002). In a study of adult stepchild–older stepparent relationships, Clawson and Ganong found that adult stepchildren reconsidered their negative judgments about older stepparents when they saw how close their children felt toward the older stepgrandparents. Close and loving relationships between long-term stepgrandparents and stepgrandchildren helped facilitate the development of closer relationships between stepgrandparents and their adult stepchildren. Observing their stepparents reach out to their children with loving actions, gifts, and emotional support changed how they felt about their stepparents.

We think these long-term step-relationships are important to stepfamily members and are deserving of more attention by researchers and clinicians. Long-term stepgrandparents and their relationships with stepgrandchildren are somewhat challenging to identify, however, because family members often do not define these long-term relationships as “step” kin ties, so they may not identify themselves as such to outsiders. For instance, it is likely that stepgrandparents go missing in surveys because questionnaires are likely to be responded to as if the relationships were grandparent-grandchild linkages; as Lynn White (1995) discovered years ago, family members define their relationships differently than researchers and others do.

### **Later-Life Stepgrandparent-Stepgrandchild Relationships**

**[Slide 20]** When an older adult remarries later in life a person who has grandchildren, that older adult becomes a later-life stepgrandparent. The stepgrandchildren may be quite young, or they may be emerging adults or older. **[Slide 21]** As seen in the genogram, Ann is Sue’s later-life stepgrandparent, a status she gained when Ann married Sue’s grandfather in 2000. At the time that this later-life stepgrandparent-stepgrandchild relationship began, Sue was 31. Although

not depicted on the genogram, it is possible that Sue lives far away, and could be married with children of her own.

**[Slide 22]** It is probable that stepgrand-relationships formed via later-life marriages or cohabiting unions rarely become emotionally close; they may not even be perceived as kinship bonds (Ganong & Coleman, 2006; Ganong, Coleman, & Rothrauff, 2009). Instead, it is more likely that a new spouse or cohabiting partner of a grandparent will be seen as a family friend or acquaintance rather than as a member of the family or kin network (Ganong & Coleman, 2006). The reason for this is relatively straightforward - members of intergenerational stepfamily relationships formed later in life generally have less contact than long-term stepfamily members because they have fewer years with which to build intergenerational relationships. In addition, there often may be considerable physical distance between the households of later-life couples and their offspring and grandchildren, which contributes further to less contact.

There also is some evidence that members of intergenerational stepfamilies formed later in life have little motivation to develop close ties. For example, because stepgrandchildren are often adolescents or young adults when grandparents' later-life remarriages/repartnerings occur, they may be less interested in developing a relationship with the grandparent's new partner than if they were younger. Cherlin and Furstenberg (1986) found that the older grandchildren were when their parents remarried the less likely they were to think that stepgrandparents were as important to them as were their genetic grandparents. Adolescents and emerging adults are withdrawing from family connections in all families as they become more independent, so they have little motivation to develop close bonds with a grandparent's new partner. The new partner of a grandparent also may be relatively disinterested in developing relationships with stepgrandchildren, particularly if they have grandchildren of their own.

**[Slide 23]** There are indications that the middle-generation adults do little to facilitate intergenerational bonding among their children and their older parents' new partner acquired late in life because they do not think of the new partner as a member of the family (Bornat, Dimmock, Jones, & Peace, 1999). In fact, Kalish and Visher (1982) have suggested that adult offspring may resent and be jealous of the new partner of their older parent and concerned about inheritance and their parent's well-being. Such upset adult offspring would not be likely to encourage their children to develop warm relationships with the new stepgrandparent.

Even when they see each other regularly it is probable that stepgrandparent–stepgrandchild relationships formed later in life will not develop into emotionally close relationships because they have not had adequate time to perceive each other as kin (Ganong & Coleman, 2006; Ganong et al., 2009). Consequently, they perceive little or no responsibility to provide help to older stepgrandparents when the relationships were formed later in life. The exceptions to this are when younger step-kin perceive a debt to the stepgrandparent because of past support given by the stepgrandparent to the grandparent or when the relationship with the stepgrandparent is perceived to be a good one.

### **Inherited Stepgrandparenthood [Slide 24]**

In the third pathway to becoming a stepgrandparent neither the older adult nor the grandchild does anything to achieve their new stepfamily statuses. Instead, they “inherit” each other - when a grown son or daughter of the older adult becomes a stepparent by marrying or cohabiting with someone who has children from a prior union, the older adult inherits not just a son- or daughter-in-law, but stepgrandchildren as well. Children “inherit” not just a new stepparent, but they also get the stepparent's extended family, including new stepgrandparents.

**[Slide 25]** In this genogram Tom and Ann, who were married in 1965, became stepgrandparents in 1998, after 33 years of marriage, when their son Joe married a divorced woman with a 10-year-old daughter, Sue. Tom and Ann “inherited” a new daughter-in-law and Sue as a new stepgrandchild.

The closeness of inherited stepgrandparent–stepgrandchild relationships is likely to vary, depending on distance, genders of the older and middle generations, and ages of the stepgrandparent and stepgrandchild. The number of genetic grandparents that children have and the number of grandchildren older adults have also may affect these inherited step-relationships.

**[Slide 26]** We hypothesize that these relationships will be closer if (a) they live near each other and/or have frequent contact, (b) the middle-generation stepparent and the older stepgrandparent are women, (c) the stepgrandchildren and stepgrandparents are younger when their relationship begins, (d) the stepgrandchildren live with the stepgrandparent’s offspring, and (e) the stepgrandchildren have few or no genetic grandparents available to them and the stepgrandparents have few or no genetic grandchildren available to them.

**Contact and friendship-building.** Living near each other and being in frequent contact provide more chances for stepgrandparents to build friendships with stepgrandchildren by doing nice things for them, having fun with them in leisure activities, giving them gifts, and bonding with them over time (Clawson & Ganong, 2002). Children expect adults to make the first moves when they are building a new relationship, and children respond to adults’ friendship-generating overtures if they perceive a benefit in doing so (Ganong, Coleman, & Jamison, 2011).

Consequently, it seems likely that stepgrandparents who work at building close emotional bonds with their new adult stepchild and that stepchild’s children or who provided tangible support like

money or a place to live would facilitate bonding with the stepgrandchild. This needs to be studied.

**Gender and kin-keeping.** Women generally maintain kin ties in families (McGraw & Walker, 2004) and stepmothers have been found to function as kin-keepers (Schmeekle, 2007; Vinick, 1999; Weaver & Coleman, 2005). Although stepfathers have an easier adjustment in younger stepfamilies than do stepmothers (Ganong & Coleman, 2004), the fact that women moderate the relationships between members of the adjacent generations (Schmeekle, 2007; Vinick, 1999; Weaver & Coleman, 2005) makes it likely that stepchildren's relationships with stepgrandparents differ depending on whether the older adults are step-maternal or step-paternal grandparents. This has rarely been investigated; however, in one British study the gender of the stepparents was not related to the amount of contact between stepgrandchildren and stepgrandparents (Lussier, Deater-Deckard, Dunn, & Davies, 2002). Nonetheless, when the stepparent is a stepmother, her parents are the inherited stepgrandparents, and so she may be more likely to work hard to build bridges across the generations, perhaps harder than a stepfather would, because this is culturally more common for women in families. Stepfathers may do less to facilitate a bond between their stepchildren and their parents because this is less often seen as part of men's family responsibilities.

**Ages of SGP and SGC.** Children expect adults to make the first overtures toward relationship-building (Ganong, Coleman, Jamison, 2011), so age may be a factor related to the older adults' relationship-building efforts. For instance, having fun with grandchildren takes a lot of energy when children are young, so younger stepgrandparents who have more energy to invest in affinity-building efforts may be more likely to engage in such behaviors more often than older stepgrandparents. Younger stepgrandparents also may have more motivation to do so,

since they may perceive that they have a long period of time to be involved as kin with the children. Younger stepchildren are more likely to accept stepparents' extended family members as new relatives (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986). Stepfamilies also are more likely to try to recreate a nuclear family when children are young, which means that parents and stepparents may encourage stepgrandchildren to relate to their stepgrandparents as grandparents.

**Stepgrandchild residence.** Whether or not the stepgrandchild lives with the offspring of the stepgrandparent also may affect the relationship. Parents of residential stepparents may be more likely to have contact with their stepgrandchildren than parents of nonresidential stepparents (Lussier et al., 2002). Nonresidential stepparents may themselves have minimal interaction with their stepchildren (e.g., weekends only or maybe short summer visits and holidays, if they don't live nearby), so the opportunity for stepgrandparents to form relationships with their stepgrandchildren may be limited.

**Available grandchildren.** Having grandchildren already may affect how inherited stepgrandparents feel and think about new stepgrandchildren. As with younger parents who remarry or cohabit and become stepparents, older adults who inherit stepgrandchildren may have unrealistic expectations about the relationships they will have with them. For instance, they may expect to experience "instant love" towards these new stepgrandchildren and expect to have similar bonds with them immediately. When that does not happen, they may feel guilty or may not try as hard to create attachments (Giles-Sims personal communication, 2003). It might be simpler for inherited stepgrandparents who do not have any grandchildren, because they lack a comparison and may welcome filling the role of new grandparent. In support of this, Giles-Sims (personal communication, 2003) found that stepgrandmothers' relationships with stepgrandchildren varied depending on whether or not they had genetic grandchildren.

Having experience as a grandparent may also affect how they interact with stepgrandchildren (Giles-Sims, 2003). In one study, recently remarried mothers reported that grandmothers engaged in more expressive and instrumental behaviors with their grandchildren than with their stepgrandchildren; grandmothers interacted with their grandchildren in stylistically different ways than they did with stepgrandchildren (Henry, Ceglian, & Mathews, 1992). Maternal grandparents in particular become more involved in the lives of their grandchildren after the divorce or remarriage of the middle generation (Attar-Schwartz, et al., 2009; Lussier, Deater-Deckard, Dunn, & Davies, 2002), which may make it harder for them to incorporate new stepgrandchildren into their families.

**A developmental model.** Henry, Ceglian, and Ostrander (1993) proposed a developmental model for stepgrandparents that applies to inherited stepgrandparents. This model began with tasks related to adjusting to an adult offspring's divorce and subsequent changes in extended family relationships. Henry and colleagues predicted that stepgrandparents would face ambiguity and confusion about their new roles, and would need to work at understanding how stepfamilies, and their positions as stepgrandparents, differ from that of grandparents in first-marriage families. These inherited stepgrandparents must get to know the new spouses of their children as well as figure out how (and if) to maintain ties with former in-laws, which may be important if their grandchildren live with their former in-law rather than with their adult child. Depending on the length of the middle generation adult's courtship and the distance between them, instant stepgrandparents may feel like this new family configuration has been thrust upon them. Without some support from the middle generation adults for their new step-roles, these older adults who inherited stepgrandchildren may not fully embrace those roles. Conversely, stepgrandparents can be significant helpers in the development of a positive



stepfamily environment by building barriers or by helping the generations connect (Kalish & Visher, 1982). Stepgrandparents who help make intergenerational connections often are perceived to be important resources for stepgrandchildren (Ganong et al., 2011). A study by Sanders and Trygstad (1989) found that if either the stepgrandparents or the stepgrandchildren were upset about or didn't support the middle-generation remarriage, it was less likely that a good relationship would develop between them. However, Sanders and Trygstad found that 48% of stepgrandchildren in their sample viewed the stepgrandparent relationship as either important or extremely important, and 63% wanted more contact with their stepgrandparents.

Normative expectations for relationships between inherited stepgrandparents and stepchildren are unclear. In fact, expectations for these relationships are so vague that some families do not even recognize the possibility of this relationship existing.

A final comment about inherited stepgrandparenthood: The prior discussion has centered primarily on remarriage of the middle generation rather than on cohabiting. It is not known if stepgrandparent–stepgrandchild dynamics in cohabiting steprelationships are similar to those of remarried couples. In the United States, cohabiting couples with children are more marginalized than stepfamilies, so there may be differences between them. However, in societies such as New Zealand, Australia, and most European countries, the relational dynamics between remarried and repartnered cohabiting stepfamilies appear to be more similar. In the United States, however, it would be logical to speculate that few families would see the parents of cohabiting stepcouples as stepgrandparents, with the possible exception of African American families (Crosbie-Burnett & Lewis, 1993). Instead, they might be seen as friends or acquaintances of the de facto stepchildren.

### **Research on Grandparents and Stepgrandparents [Slide 27]**

Few researchers have examined grandparents in stepfamilies. How do they interact with younger family members after changes in marital status somewhere in the family tree? How do they affect offspring's remarriage and grandchildren's adjustment to stepfamily living? How are grandparents affected by the changes in family structure experienced by children and grandchildren? How do remarriages of grandparents affect their extended family relationships? As of yet, there are no answers to these questions.

Researchers have not distinguished between the different types of stepgrandparents. Consequently, it is rarely clear in studies how long stepgrandchildren have known their stepgrandparents (e.g., all their lives, 2 years), and sometimes it is not clear how much contact they have had (e.g., daily, never met them). The early studies on intergenerational step-relationships have been largely exploratory, and there is little research on relational processes (i.e., the development of relationships, how stepgrand-relationships are maintained).

Studies have found that some stepgrandparents play an important part in the lives of their stepgrandchildren. Although relationships between later life and inherited stepgrandchildren and stepgrandparents are typically less involved than grandparent-grandchildren ties, many stepgrandchildren think of their stepgrandparents as valuable resources and see stepgrandparent relationships as important (Henry, Ceglian, & Matthews, 1992; Sanders & Trygstad, 1989).

**[Slide 28]** Despite their prevalence, stepgrandparent–stepgrandchildren relationships have not been widely studied. The body of literature on stepgrandparents and stepgrandchildren is characterized by the use of convenience samples of college-students and small qualitative studies in which the researchers generally have ignored the complex histories of these relationships (Ganong, 2008; Ganong & Coleman, 2010).

### **Extended Family Members in Stepfamilies [Slide 29]**

By extended family members, we are referring to aunts, uncles, cousins, and other kin who do not belong to the immediate family. Grandparents are clearly important extended family members, at least in many stepfamilies, but what about other extended kin? Unfortunately, we know little about the roles and relationships of extended family members in stepfamilies. Researchers have not studied extended kin who are genetically related to stepfamily members, nor have they studied extended kinship created by a remarriage. These individuals are probably highly interested observers of the stepfamily's dynamics, and as such they likely could be, as grandparents can be, either strong supporters of the stepfamily and its members, damaging critics, or neutral spectators. At this point, not enough is known to even speculate.