

## GRANDPARENTING IN FRENCH LESBIAN AND GAY FAMILIES<sup>1</sup>

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Since November 1999 the “*Pacte civil de solidarité*” (PACS) has given legal recognition to same-sex couples in France. The law was drafted sometimes in reference, sometimes in opposition to the institution of marriage. It is a contract between two persons, regardless of their gender, for managing their community life. In 2007 the PACS was amended in order to grant the same economic rights and obligations as marriage, except the widow’s pension. However PACS does not address any issues related to children and family (Rault 2005; Courduries 2008).

In France same-sex partners are not allowed to marry and cannot jointly adopt children – a right, which is granted only to married heterosexual couples. A person, however, may adopt a child as a single parent, but coming out as a gay or lesbian single parent would most probably demolish any chance of adoption despite the fact that the law does not explicitly exclude single gays and lesbians from adoption. Furthermore access to medically assisted reproduction is limited only to heterosexual couples who cannot conceive, and can produce proof which shows that they have been living together for at least two years. Single women and same-sex couples, who have no access to reproductive technology in France, have to travel abroad. Surrogacy is also strictly forbidden by French law, which forces both heterosexual and same-sex couples to go abroad where surrogacy is legal.

Despite all these restrictions, a legal parent (biological or adoptive) may ask a court to share parental responsibility with another person (regardless of gender). The court has to decide in the best interest of the child. If the judge believes that lesbian or gay families are not good for the child, (s)he can refuse the application from the couple to share parental responsibilities. Furthermore if parental responsibility is granted, the right lasts only until the child’s 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Afterwards the legal

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parent can cancel sharing at any time, which means that the child has no legal way to enter into his “not legal” parent lineage.

Regardless of all the legal barriers for a growing number of people in France, being gay or lesbian is no longer incompatible with raising children<sup>2</sup> – but how do (future) grandparents react to these parental projects? When parents are told about their child’s homosexuality, they often take it for granted that they will never have grandchildren, especially if they have only one child. The belief that the lineage, or at least one of its branches, is to come to an end, is challenged when a homosexual child announces that he or she is on the way to start a family. When future grandparents find themselves in this unexpected situation, the parents of a lesbian daughter or of a gay son are led to reconsider their previous views of a childless homosexuality.

In this paper focussing on grandparenting in same-sex families I will explore the following questions: (1) Do the parents of a gay son react in the same way to the new same-sex family as the parents of a lesbian daughter? (2) Does the method chosen to start a gay or lesbian family, i.e. adoption, artificial insemination, surrogacy or a co-parenting arrangement have an influence on grandparents’ understanding of their new role as grandparents? (3) Is the grandparental position weakened by the absence of legal recognition of the parental status of a son or a daughter?

#### GRANDPARENTS BETWEEN BIOLOGY AND GENDER

In the context of the social and psychological roles of the grandparents in families, research in developmental psychology and family sociology has been primarily focusing on inter-generational bonds of heterosexual families. Developmental psychology addresses issues such as the influence of grandparents on the development and the socialisation of children, the interactions of grandparents with their children, the three generations’ perceptions of the role and place of grandparents, the factors determining the frequency of contacts etc. (Leblond de Brumath and Julien, 2001). Family sociology, on the other hand, considered issues such as their place and role in the family, the role of grandparents in the context of divorce etc. Family sociology has also highlighted that the diversity of family models in contemporary Western societies, the processes of indi-

<sup>2</sup> According to recent French public opinion findings about homosexuality, 60% of female and 49% of male respondents believed that homosexuality is a sexual orientation just like any other (Bajos and Beltzer 2008).

vidualisation and secularisation and the erosion of the normative heterosexual marriage as the only context in which children can be raised contributed to the emergence of new functions of grandparents (Schneider et al. 2005; Attias-Donfut and Segalen 2007).

Research in developmental psychology and family sociology outlined the biological bond and the gender of the parent as two important parameters of the intergenerational relationships: in step-families non-biological grandparents often offer their grandchildren less support than biological grandparents (Johnson 1992; Attias-Donfut and Segalen 2007; Schneider 2005). Step-families share some common points with gay and lesbian families. In these families the step-parent is actually a social parent, who is not related biologically and often also not legally linked with the children in the family. In step-families as well as in lesbian and gay families, “additional grandparents” come into the grandchildren’s world (Neyrand 2005). In such family structures the emotional, biological and legal ties do not necessarily coincide; or in other words: the emotional, biological and legal bonds are not incarnated into the same two persons.

Similarly to research on step-families, the studies on the intergenerational bonds in lesbian families found the importance of the biological bond. A study comparing extended family and friendship relations of children conceived by donor insemination, including 55 families headed by lesbian parents and 25 headed by heterosexual parents, showed that the frequency of contacts between children and grandparents was similar both in same-sex and heterosexual families, however children had a stronger relationship with biological grandparents regardless of the parental sexual orientation (Fulcher et al. 2002). One possible explanation for this lays in the cultural function of the biological bond; it could be that grandparents put less effort into spending time with their non-biological grandchildren as they do not see them as fully their own. It seems that biological relatedness plays a crucial role in constructing family relationships. Social representations grant more “legitimacy” to biological bonds than to elective ones. In this sense the heterosexual nuclear family, consisting of two biological parents, remains a “reference point” for grandparents. Their feeling of “legitimacy” (that is, I am the true grandparent of the child) depends on how close they are to the bio-conjugal model of the family.

Besides the role of the “biological bond”, gender also proved to be an important factor in grandparenting. According to previous research findings maternal grandparents offer more care for their grandchildren

compared with paternal grandparents even if they are biologically connected to their grandchildren (Julien et al. 2005). Women more often establish close relationships with their parents, and consequently try to invest more in creating a “lineal bridge” between their children and children’s grandparents, potentially leading to a “matrilineal advantage” in the grandchild-grandparent relations (Chan and Elder 2000). Furthermore, if parents separate, paternal grandparents are more frequently isolated from their grandchildren. In families with a son and a daughter where both separated from their respective spouses, grandparents are more likely to keep in touch with children born to their daughter than with those born to their son (Attias-Donfut and Segalen 2007). Research also shows that the parents of the non custodian relative (generally paternal grandparents) meet their grandchildren less often than the parents of the custodian parent (maternal grandparents). The fact that grandchildren see maternal grandparents more frequently than paternal grandparents is also true in nuclear families where parents have not divorced (Schneider 2005).

Besides the biological bond and the role of the gender, the quality of the relationship between parents and their children can also significantly influence the relationship between grandparents and their grandchildren (Patterson 1998). As homosexuality can sometimes cause rejection or conflicts between parents and children, consequently a smaller grandparental investment can also be expected in a lesbian and gay parenting context.

#### SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

The empirical base of this chapter consists of two studies conducted in 2005 and 2007–2008. In 2005 I surveyed 336 members of the French Association of the Gay and Lesbian parents (APGL): 270 women and 66 men. 66% of women and 55% of men in the sample were parents, the rest of the respondents wanted to become parents. 93% of all respondents were in a same-sex relationship. They were for the most part well-educated. 88% had reached a university level. 31% were living in a rural area or in small towns (fewer than 60 000 inhabitants), 20% in middle-sized towns (from 60 000 to 160 000 inhabitants), 9% in a big city (more than 400 000), 41% were living in Paris. Most participants (46%) were 35 to 41 years old, 28% were younger than 35, 26% were 42 to 55 years old. One part of a broader questionnaire included questions about parents’ reactions to respondents’ coming out as gay or lesbian, the announcement of the pa-

rental project and the actual birth of a child. Parents of respondents were also invited to participate in the research. This parental sub-sample consisted of nine fathers (eight of whom were fathers of lesbian mothers, and one the father of a gay father), and 21 mothers (16 mothers of lesbian mothers and five mothers of gay fathers).

From September 2007 to February 2008 a second, qualitative part of the research followed. Semi-structured interviews with gay and lesbian parents were carried out in 31 families, all but one were living in Paris or its suburbs. The sample consists of 12 paternal families (eight cases of surrogacy, three cases of co-parentality and a divorced father) and 19 maternal families (13 cases of artificial insemination with donor, three identified donors, three cases of co-parentality). In 15 families I met both the parents and the grandparents. The interviews intended to explore the following issues: reactions to the child's coming out, grandparents' "coming out" (having a gay son or a lesbian daughter), level of the acceptance of the same-sex couple, reactions to a PACS (i.e. decision to get "married"), reactions to the announcement of a parental project, reactions to the newly born, and what it is like to be a grandparent (naming, frequency of contacts, baby-sitting, visits, etc.).

#### ACCEPTING HOMOSEXUALITY AND HOMOPARENTING

In a homoparenting context, there are several stages to go through for one's parents to become grandparents: first, parents discover sexual orientation of their child and accept it. Secondly, they share the news with relatives and acquaintances. Thirdly, they might be introduced to the same-sex partner of their child. Finally they are told about the parental project, which is sometimes announced by their child's mentioning the desire to become a parent.

According to the 2005 survey results the acceptance of the parental project depends on the level of acceptance of each previous stage. The acceptance of the coming-out has a significant influence on the acceptance of the same-sex partner of the child and the same-sex couple as such. The stage of the acceptance of the same-sex couple seems to be decisive. It turned out to be a crucial point for the eventual approval of the homo-parental family. The research showed that 87% of mothers and 77% of fathers approve of their child's homo-parental family. Grandparent participants pointed out that for them it was easier to accept their own child's homosexuality once they saw that their child is in a loving and stable same-sex relationship. Furthermore the birth of a grandchild

also helped them in recognising and accepting the same-sex family, regardless of the possible reservations they might have had beforehand. In fact, the only grandparents in our sample who still found homosexuality disturbing after their grandchild was born were grandfathers whose son was single or entered the parental project as an individual (for example, co-parenting with two lesbians) although he was not single at the time.

Grandfathers' reservations about homosexuality reflected in the present research are in accordance with a previous French study (de Busscher 2004) on gays and lesbians aged 29 or younger, indicating that between 1997 and 2004 the number of parents who knew about their child's homosexuality increased as well as the level of acceptance towards their child's homosexuality. However, as shown in the table I, fathers tend to have more difficulties in accepting their child's homosexuality than mothers.

TABLE 1: THE LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE AND ACCEPTANCE OF CHILD'S HOMOSEXUALITY BY PARENTS (DE BUSSCHER 2004).

	1997 (N=1383)	2004 (N=1195)
Mothers knowing about their child's homosexuality	61.6%	69.7%
Fathers knowing about their child's homosexuality	45.2%	54.1%
Acceptance of own child's homosexuality by the mother	75.2%	88.4%
Acceptance of own child's homosexuality by the father	60.5%	81.9%

In the interviews grandparents reported about a variety of feelings and emotions they experienced when their own child came out as gay or lesbian. Some, mainly parents of gay sons, talked about the feelings of pain, suffering, sadness, guilt and disappointment, while others, mainly parents of lesbian daughters, talked about the fear of social stigma and difficulties their daughter will have to go through due to her sexual orientation. The small sample size, of course, does not allow for any broader generalisations, but the majority of the examined grandparents gave up the idea of becoming grandparents once their child came out to them as lesbian or gay. Furthermore, as is reflected by the following examples, they accepted their child's sexuality primarily in order to keep the child happy and satisfied:

She was 14 or 15 when she told me about that. She said: 'Mom, I am attracted to women.' She was disoriented. I was very close to her and I thought: 'Well, as long as she is happy ...'. I am tolerant. It was the happiness of my children that mattered. [Monique (58); mother of a lesbian daughter Amélie (38)]

That [homosexuality] floored me. It was something I refused. Physically I still cannot manage to bear it. I took a 180° turn when I saw the relief, the joy on my son's lighted face when he told us. I said to myself: 'It is necessary for you to go his way because he needs it'. It took me time. [Etienne (70), father of a gay son Pierre (45)]

When my son told me about his homosexuality I almost got sick, my husband violently rejected him. At the beginning the couple [the son and his partner] could not come to our house. But after several years, my husband said 'my sons' when talking about [the son and his partner]. Things got better with time. [Elisabeth (62), mother of a gay son Charles (38)]

Especially men's homosexuality as a problematic and unacceptable notion is somehow assuaged in the context of a more acceptable loving and stable same-sex couple. The couple therefore concentrates on other references (for example, happiness, safety, care) rather than just on homosexual orientation. As parents reported about the importance of their child's happiness, such a couple could be seen as a "materialisation" of such happiness. That is why some male respondents came out to their parents only after they had found a stable partner and could reassure their parents that they are happily in love. Parents then have a representation of their child living as a couple: even though the partner is of the same sex, and even though the couple might have no desire to have a child, it still complies with the conjugal model, which seems to be an important reference point for parents in accepting their child's homosexuality.

Jonas, for example, kept his homosexuality a secret because he first wanted to find "the right one" before coming out to his parents. He wanted to show them his happiness.

When I met François I immediately knew that he was the one I had been waiting for, so the only thing I had to do was to share this good news with my parents. But I knew that I was going to cause them a great pain as they will probably never be grandparents. [Jonas (28)]

As already mentioned the acceptance of child's homosexuality positively affects the attitudes towards grandchildren and homoparenting. In our sample there were few grandparents who did not approve of a "homosexual lifestyle" and consequently had no relationship with their grandchildren.

They liked Madeleine, but when they learned about our relationship, they threw me out and we have never made up. We moved and when I gave birth to Alice, they did not show up.; Alice only met them when she turned 18 and the request to meet them was hers. [Bénédicte (52)]

My father does not want me to come [to their house] with my partner. Then, inevitably, I don't see my father very often. The twins are 18 months old and they have practically never seen their grandparents. [Henri (37)]

When the same-sex couple announces the parental project to their own parents, the news is not always well received. In some cases the parental project is the ultimate sign that the couple is stable, which affects parents' potential hopes that their child's homosexuality might just be a passing phase. In these cases the parents never fully accepted their child's homosexuality, but the birth of a grandchild might nevertheless have a positive effect. The grandmother of a lesbian daughter, for example, thought at first that her daughter's homosexuality would disappear in time. When she heard about the parental project, she reacted badly:

You want to play with a doll? You are insane! [...] When they announced that they were going to the Netherlands to try and have Elsa, they phoned me to say: 'That's it, we are leaving, we are going to see the stork'. I cried. I cried every time [I thought of that], because I was sad. I did not want this to happen, I had always refused it. [...] And then Elsa was born. My husband and I visited her. When I went back to work, I shone. Everything was changed. I had seen the little one. A young colleague asked me what had happened to me. I said it all just like that: 'I am a granny, my daughter is homosexual and her girlfriend gave birth'. [Micheline (57), mother of a lesbian daughter Sophie (36)]

In some other cases the parental project might come as shocking news as it destroys the heteronormative representation of what a family is. A father of Iranian origin, for example, reacted to such news by saying that it was the worst news he had ever heard. In another case parents reacted similarly when they heard that their daughter's partner was pregnant. They said she has done something monstrous and that the grandchild will seek a father forever. Nevertheless, on the basis of our sample we can say that these two examples are an exception rather than the rule. The more common reaction of future grandparents is worries. They worry about the position of the grandchild in a same-sex family configuration: they worry about the absence of a father, or, in the case of co-parenting arrangements (a gay father and a lesbian mother), because of the unusual family configuration, in which the child has two homes, or because of society's opinion, homophobia and the issues the child will have to face.

The birth of a child modifies the position of everyone in the family: children become parents, and parents become grandparents. However,



as psychoanalysts Ducouso-Lacaze and Gadechoit (2006) claim, the places' symbolic permutation system is not always immediate when a place is vacant. It can also be pointed out that when there is only one parent, temptation is strong for a grandparent to replace the absent father or the mother.

In same-sex families, the absence of an opposite-sex parent can thus potentially cause a sort of generational confusion. Some lesbian daughters from our sample, for example, reported their fathers' failing to occupy the right place as grandfathers. They disqualified the social mother's educational role and appeared as if they were the "right man for the job". This way social mothers could easily find themselves in competition with the father of their partner.

Her father invests himself more than he should because there is no father. I find it hard to feel legitimate as a social parent. [Micheline (33)]

#### GRANDPARENTS' COMING OUT

With the parental project and the arrival of a child, it is no longer possible for grandparents to hide the fact that their child is a homosexual and is involved in a same-sex relationship. In fact some grandparents reported that they found it easier to talk about their child's homosexuality after they became grandparents. Some reported announcing the news to all their friends and relatives, so that all family members were informed about it and there were no surprises at the next family gathering. Others organised big family reunions with every single cousin to introduce the couple and the child to the whole family. A christening of the child can also be the occasion to officially introduce the couple and the homoparental family.

The arrival of this little girl especially increased the circle of people we informed. From the moment when there is a baby, and that people know your daughter is not married, one has to ... give explanations to friends, to give more information about what the reality is. [Philippe (68), father of a lesbian daughter Elisa (32)]

For some parents it is hard to explain the "unusual" family situation. A father of a gay son who got a child together with his partner through surrogacy explained that it was hard for him to explain this situation as he was faced with double "transgression": homosexuality and surrogacy. The father wanted to share his happiness with others, but he had to be careful in giving out this information.

One has to try and explain this ... there is a grandson, who, in addition, was not born in France, all that ... Our friends already have grandchildren. When it happened to us, we were crying all over the place and they were asking us: "But are you going to have it? And the mom, why didn't she stay?" It is perhaps for that reason that my wife says that the birth of our grandson was ... really, it was necessary for us to make the Roman torse ahead afterwards. [Etienne (70), father of a gay son Pierre (45)]

In our sample there were two sets of religious grandparents who were faced with the opposing views from the Church. As they needed to reconcile the love for their child and their faith, they started a dialogue with church authorities to protest and to defend their child.

I even wrote a letter to a bishop who had said some unfortunate words on homoparenting. I wrote to him that I was scandalised. You have two young women who chose a generous way and you condemn them. From a materialist point of view, these two young women's lives would be more comfortable if they had had no child. [Paul (71), father of a lesbian daughter Jeanne (37)]

When a child is born in a same-sex family, the grandparents are forced to come out if they wish to publicly assume the role of a grandparent. The fact that such family situations are new can be seen also in the lack of appropriate terms. Our respondents reported that grandparents are struggling with the issue how to address their child's partner. Some refer to their child's partner as "daughter-in-law" or "son-in-law". The majority, however, tend to use less explicit terms such as "friend" ("here is my daughter and her friend"), which makes it possible not to reveal the nature of the homosexual relationship. Sometimes, when they are at ease with the homosexual couple, parents literally adopt the partner of their child and they called them "my sons" or "my daughters". It is a way of eluding the question of conjugality while at the same time integrating the partner into the family.

#### SOCIAL PARENTING

Previous studies have shown that sometimes step-grandparents do not feel authorised to designate themselves as grandparents or to let their grandchild call them grandpa and grandma: the higher the number of parents, the less step-grandparents feel legitimate as grandparents (Schneider 2005). Our research showed a similar situation in same-sex families. The "conjugal dimension" of the parental project turned out to be a crucial point. Grandparents who were biologically (and therefore legally) linked to the grandchild had closer relationships with the child

compared to “social grandparents”. Other factors which might have had effects on such relationships included the level of acceptance of homosexuality by parents, how important the grandparents found the biological bonds, and the position of their child in homoparenting. If the (grand)parents’ child helped another same-sex couple to get a child (for example, a gay son being a donor for a lesbian couple, without being recognized as a legal father), the parents of the gay son were less likely to assume the role of the grandparents for the child to be born to the lesbian couple. In other words: the closer the same-sex family composition is to the heterosexual nuclear family, the more likely the grandparents are to take on their roles as grandparents. The “conjugal dimension” of the parental project turned out to be a crucial point. A good example of this is the case of Philippe and Fabien. They are a same-sex couple, but Philippe conceived his daughter and raises her in a co-parenting arrangement with a lesbian woman. He carried out his parental project individually and believes that the biological father and mother are the unique parents of this child. Moreover Philippe’s homosexuality is not accepted by his father. In this kind of family structure Fabien’s parents are not at all likely to be regarded as (social) grandparents to Philippe’s child.

In contrast, when the parental project emanates from the couple, when the couple is perceived as a parental unit and both partners consider themselves parents, grandparents – regardless of their biological or social link to the grandchild – are more likely to position themselves in respect to how the same-sex couple sees itself. If the couple designate themselves as two mothers or two fathers, the grandparents will have to position themselves by taking these terms into account, despite the fact that they might find such a designation transgressive. On the other hand, if the same-sex couple conforms to the traditional representations according to which one cannot have two mums or two dads, grandparents will not adopt a more “transgressive” position than that of their own children. Consequently they will not refer to the grandchild’s biological and social parent as “two mums” or “two dads” – only one partner (the biological one) will be seen as a parent.

These patterns were also present in the findings of the 2005 survey. It was shown that all grandparents who were biologically or legally linked to their grandchild used the term “our grandson” or “our granddaughter” in front of outsiders. On the other hand, only 30% of the parents of the legal mother’s partner and 10% of the parents of the legal father’s partner did so.

Additionally, the number of parents also has an influence on how grandparents understand and call their biological or social grandchildren. The 2005 survey showed that when children are born in a bi-parental context via donor insemination, surrogacy or adoption, more social grandparents name them as a grandson or a granddaughter than when children are born in a more-than-two-parents context, such as co-parenting. In some cases of co-parenting biological grandparents do not renounce to traditional representations and regard the biological father and the biological mother as a couple, ignoring their respective same-sex partners. This also implies that co-parenting arrangements make it possible for grandparents to minimise homo-conjugality in favour of heteroparentality and conformity with the traditional bio-conjugal model.

Françoise and Irène, for example, have a little girl by Irène conceived in a co-parenting arrangement. The lesbian couple feels that they are both parents and they say that the child has three parents: both of them and the father. Nevertheless, Françoise's mother is not really sure whether she has the right to be called granny, not only because of the absence of the biological bond, but also because she appears to be some kind of 'extra' character – the third grandparent:

It is not my real granddaughter. I do not want to usurp a place which is not mine. There are already Irène's parents and those of the dad. If there was no dad, perhaps I could be a grandma, too. Three people, it is too complicated. [Jeannette (71), mother of a lesbian daughter Françoise (38)]

The grandparent respondents claimed that for grandparents to feel completely "legitimate" in a social grandparent position depends on how the same-sex parents of the child position themselves with regard to the heteronormative expectations of the nuclear family. If parents do not position themselves as parents, grandparents cannot assume their role. Marie's mother, for example, is not certain whether she is a grandmother or not. She has a photograph of her lesbian daughter and her partner and their child displayed on a table. She refers to this child as "*like a granddaughter*", but she wonders whether she has the right to be called Granny since her daughter does not want to be called Mum.

As parents and grandparents need names to refer to each other, they come up with different solutions. The social parent is often called "the second mother" or "the second father" as is the case with Pierre and Didier, who have been together for 15 years and have had a child via surrogacy. Didier's parents regard Pierre as a second father and Pierre's mother as a grandmother.

I regard my son's companion as a second father. Before the child's birth, he was rather like another son. I have much affection for him. I think that he looks after him [my son] very well... From time to time I even happen to say that the child resembles him, although I know very well that it cannot be. [...] With the mother of our son's companion, we have a very close relationship. I wondered how things would go when he [Pierre and Didier's child] meets her as he is not her real grandson, but on the contrary she goes mad when the little one comes and visits her [...] The mother of our son's companion is definitely the grandmother of our grandson. [Elisa (68), mother of a gay son Didier (42)]

For Didier's father, a sexual relationship with a mother brings a greater legitimacy for that person to be called a father. However, as Didier's child was born via surrogacy and there was no sexual relationship with that woman, the absence of such a relation enables him to define Pierre as a father as much as Didier.

For my grandson, I give my son's companion the title of the second father, yes. Since my son had it without sexual intercourse ... so to speak ... with this woman, I do not see him as a more genuine father than his companion who did not have such a relationship. In fact, to me they have equal responsibilities in terms of paternity. If something happened to our son, I'd put my head on the block: this child would remain with my son's companion. [George (70), father of a gay son Didier (42)]

In some cases grandparents have difficulties in accepting the idea that their son's or daughter's companion is a (social) relative. This is especially the case in contexts where parents cannot accept their child's same-sex partner: when parents generally ignore the partner and some are even in competition with them. One such example from our survey is the case of a grandmother who competed with her daughter's partner during the pregnancy as well as just after the birth. She thought that since her daughter was the mother, her partner could be assigned only as some kind of a father. That is why it came as a shock to her when she was told that the couple is planning a second child, except that this time the child would be carried by the daughter's partner.

Some social grandparents expressed their fear that they might lose contact with their grandchild, if something happened to the grandchild's parents (for example, in case they separate). Such fear is closely related to the lack of legal protection of the social bonds. In other words if there is no biological connection a question how to define a parent and a grandparent can be raised. It seems that the law is too often based only on the biological connection and disregards the quality of relations. A social parent or grandparent can have a good quality relation with a

child and they can be important figures in child's life, however, in legal terms these parents and grandparents remain invisible. Such invisibility was also reflected in some of the concerns expressed by social grandparents in our research:

My selfish side told me this little one will be Corinne's child [the partner of my daughter]. If something happens, I will perhaps never see this child again. Ones love a baby automatically and I was afraid. Well, finally he is here and I am his granny. There are photographs of this little one as there are of my other grandchildren [...] I thought about my three grandsons on my son's side. It is my son, it is our blood. Apart from sharing the love one can give to a baby ... well, he [Corinne's child] is a foreigner to us ... How many grandchildren do I have? At first I said three, but now I can say four without hesitation. He is my grandson in my heart. [Social grandmother Marianne (64), mother of Danielle (36), Corinne's partner].

## CONCLUSION

Our findings indicated that in the interviews conducted with social grandparents similar issues were raised as in the case of step-families (Schneider 2005). In step-families being a step-grandparent primarily depends on the nature of the bonds that parents and grandparents maintain, while other factors, such as personal availability and geographical proximity, seem to be less important. Nevertheless grandchildren in step-families only rarely call their step-grandparents grandpa and granny. The relationship between children and their step-grandparents intensifies in situations where other (biological) grandparents are absent and there is a possibility for step-grandparents to play a symbolic part in the family. Another element which introduces step-grandparents into the child's life is the reintroduction of the "institutionalising" stages: marriage for the couple, and the adoption of the grandchild. Although there are many similarities between step-families and same-sex families, the option of marriage as an "institutionalising" step is not available for same-sex families in France. These families undoubtedly use PACS to build a legitimacy (Rault 2005), but there is not enough empirical evidence available to say that PACS plays the same symbolic role as marriage and therefore enables social grandparents to enter into the context of co-parentality.

Our research showed that the roles played by social grandparents in the life of a same-sex family depend on the bonds between parents and grandparents, and particularly on the grandparents' degree of acceptance towards the same-sex couple. If grandparents are able to redefine

the same-sex family for themselves as just an ordinary family that raises children, such redefinition usually facilitates the introduction of grandparental bonds.

However, the acceptance of the couple as parents also depends on the way the couple apprehends their own parental status. Co-parenting arrangements can increase the number of parents involved, and consequently can also weaken the intensity and the legitimacy of the elective bonds of those who are not biologically connected to the child. If one member of the same-sex couple is not convinced that he or she is a “true parent”, his or her own parents will probably also have some difficulties entering into a grandparental role. In other words, the research showed the power of the heteronormative matrix, which grandparents, and sometimes also parents, in same-sex families have to deal with. The cultural as well as legal and political pervasiveness of the exclusively heteronormative nuclear family model makes it difficult to register the legitimacy of the “extra grandparents”, when there is no biological bond, or when there are already grandparents from the two lines of biological parents of the child. Nevertheless, parents and grandparents tend to find their own innovative ways to interpret, understand and live such family situations. The latter can be best illustrated by the grandmother who claimed that her grandson is not hers biologically, but “he is my grandson in my heart”.

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