Grandparents raising their grandchildren: impact of the transition from a traditional grandparent role to a grandparent-as-parent role

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Grandparents raising their grandchildren: Impact of the transition from a traditional grandparent role to a grandparent-as-parent role

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B.Soc.Sci. (Hons)

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of
Doctor of Philosophy
School of Education - Centre for Children & Young People
Southern Cross University

May, 2008
DECLARATION

I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University’s rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis. I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the University (as they may be from time to time).

Signed: .............................................

Jan Backhouse

Date: .................................
In many Western societies grandparents take on the role of occasional or short-term care providers of their grandchildren. However, recent years have witnessed a significant increase, both in Australia and overseas, in the number of children being raised by their grandparents due to the inability of the children’s parents to effectively meet their parenting responsibilities.

This study is an interpretive inquiry that seeks to understand the meanings grandparents attach to their experiences of the grandparent-as-parent role, rather than the traditional grandparent role. The study also investigates how assuming the non-traditional grandparent role has influenced the identity of grandparent caregivers. A narrative inquiry approach was employed to ‘hear the voices’ of 34 grandparents who were raising their grandchildren in NSW, Australia. In-depth interviews were conducted with each of the participants and their narratives were subsequently analysed through the lens of identity theory.

Findings from the study reveal that grandparents experience a significant degree of role-identity conflict in their grandparent-as-parent role. The loss of their traditional grandparent role, together with the shift in commitment to the grandparent-as-parent role, has resulted in a ‘space of difference’ between the ‘ideal’ and the ‘real’ of being a grandparent. This ‘space of difference’ is made up of a series of binary experiences described as myth/reality, visible/invisible, deserving/undeserving, voice/silenced, included/excluded, which appear to have consequentially impacted grandparents’ self-esteem and self-verification processes. The study posits that grandparents lack adequate support, or *doulia*, resulting in a prevailing belief that their commitment to the grandparent-as-parent role is not publicly acknowledged nor afforded the justice it deserves.

The study concludes that both policy and practice in NSW have failed to recognise and address the complexity of experience, or the ‘space of difference’ occupied by grandparents who are raising their grandchildren, and provides a number of recommendations in response to the grandparent experiences narrated through this research.
LIST OF CONFERENCE PAPERS

During the course of this research project the following papers have been presented at both national and international conferences:


As one of the aims of this research was to raise awareness of grandparent-headed families, invitations were accepted to present the findings from this study to a diverse range of audiences at a number of public forums:

Australian Women’s Coalition Forum on Grandparenting, Canberra (2004)
Northern Rivers Social Development Council Ageing Forum, Kingscliff (2006)
DEDICATION

To all the grandparents
who are raising their grandchildren
in Australia.

You are indeed this nation’s
‘unsung heroes’.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people that I would like to acknowledge and to whom I extend gratitude for the support they have offered me during my PhD candidature. First and foremost, I would like to sincerely thank the participants in this study, the 34 grandparents who shared so openly with me their experiences of raising their grandchildren. I feel privileged to have met these grandparents and listened to their stories.

This thesis would not have been possible without the support and dedication of my supervisor, Associate Professor Anne Graham. Her knowledge and wisdom have been inspirational and I thank her for her patience, kindness, understanding and enthusiasm for this research. I also wish to acknowledge and give thanks to my previous supervisor Dr. Elisabeth Porter, who started me on my PhD journey, and my associate supervisor, Trevor Lucas, who very sadly passed away during my candidature. I know Trevor would be proud to see my completion of this study.

I would like to thank a number of my fellow PhD candidates who have shared this journey with me and have offered peer support and encouragement. Many thanks must go to Michele Day, Meredith Lawrence, Robyn Fitzgerald, Maz Webb, Jenny Gidley, Michelle Townsend, Liz Reimer, Shelley Thornton and Louise Holdsworth. I also extend my sincere appreciation to my colleagues in the Centre for Children & Young People at Southern Cross University who have provided endless enthusiasm and support for this thesis.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the infinite love, support and encouragement I have received from my family: my husband Don, my two daughters and three step-daughters and their partners, as well as my eleven beautiful grandchildren. You have provided me with the inspiration and motivation to see this project to its completion.
## ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Australian Broadcasting Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACPP</td>
<td>Aboriginal Child Placement Principle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACWA</td>
<td>Association of Childrens Welfare Agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARAFMI</td>
<td>Association of Relatives &amp; Friends of the Mentally Ill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAFWAA</td>
<td>Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COTA</td>
<td>Council on the Ageing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSMAC</td>
<td>Community Services Ministers’ Advisory Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAISI</td>
<td>Disability and Aged Information Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoCS</td>
<td>Department of Community Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPCAN</td>
<td>National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPWA</td>
<td>National Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUD*IST</td>
<td>Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theory-building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCG</td>
<td>Office of the Children’s Guardian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OOHC</td>
<td>Out-of-Home Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QDA</td>
<td>Qualitative Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSL</td>
<td>Returned and Services League of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>South Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNSW</td>
<td>University of New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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**DEFINITIONS/TERMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centrelink</td>
<td>Centrelink is the Australian federal government agency that operates under the Department of Human Services and delivers a wide range of services to the Australian community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Aid</td>
<td>The role of Legal Aid in Australia is to provide marginalised and disadvantaged Australians with access to justice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicare</td>
<td>Medicare is Australia’s universal health care system introduced in 1984 to provide eligible Australian residents with affordable, accessible and high-quality health care.</td>
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The terms ‘grandparents raising their grandchildren’, ‘grandparent caregivers’, ‘grandparents-as-parents’ and ‘grandparent-headed families’ are used interchangeably to specifically refer to families where grandparents provide full-time parental care of their grandchildren in the absence of the children’s biological parents. The term ‘kinship care’ is used to refer to the care provided to children by any biological family member. The term ‘out-of-home care’ is used to define the care provided to children by welfare organisations.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This thesis is about grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. It is an interpretive inquiry that seeks, firstly, to understand the meanings grandparents attach to their experiences of the grandparent-as-parent role, as distinct from a traditional grandparent role. Secondly, the study investigates how assuming a non-traditional grandparent role has influenced the identity of grandparent caregivers. In pursuing these research interests, I explore the lived experiences of 34 grandparents in NSW who are raising their grandchildren. To further assist the investigation, I also examine how state and federal government policies position grandparents-as-parents in NSW.

The chapter begins with the background to the study and provides a broad context for the seeming emergence of increasing numbers of grandparents becoming surrogate parents over the last quarter of a century. Next, the chapter examines the ways children come into the care of grandparents, as well as the financial and social support provided to grandparent caregivers by state and federal governments, non-government organisations and grandparent support groups. The impetus and justification for the study are discussed and the research questions and aims are outlined. Next, the theoretical stance, research design and structure of the thesis are discussed. The chapter concludes with a reflexive piece introducing myself, as researcher.

1.2 Background to the research

In many Western societies grandparents have long played the role of occasional or short-term care providers of their grandchildren. However, it appears that in recent years an increasing number of grandparents are moving away from the more traditional grandparent roles within the family, and into roles typically assumed by the grandchild’s parents.
Grandparents now routinely provide full-time child-care for pre-school grandchildren (Goodfellow 2003a), as well as the full-time parenting role of their grandchildren (Cox 2000a; Richards 2001; Fitzpatrick 2004; Worrall 2005). Reasons for this worldwide phenomenon include a number of changes in family structure and social conditions over the last 25 years (Backhouse & Lucas 2003).

The emergence of the construct of ‘kinship care’, as distinct from ‘foster care’, has also seen an increasing number of grandparents taking on the parenting role of their grandchildren both in Australia and overseas. The formal placement of ‘at risk’ children into kinship care rather than foster care represents a significant change in policy that began in the late 1980’s in Australia (Mason, Falloon, Gibbons, Spence & Scott 2002), as well as in a number of other countries (Kolomer 2000; Broad 2001; Worrall 2005). In a review of the history of kinship care in the USA, Kolomer (2000 p.87) explains that the use of kinship care began to escalate after the passage of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, which required that a child in need of out-of-home care be placed in the ‘least restrictive setting’. This was interpreted to be “family-like”, and resulted in the increased placement of children with kin. In New Zealand, Worrall (2005) points out that even though families have always cared for their kin children, this is now a legal requirement under the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1989. Section 13(b) of this Act states that the primary role in caring for and protecting children lies with the children’s family, and the family should be supported, assisted and protected, with minimum intervention, to ensure children’s safety and protection (Worrall 2005). In the United Kingdom, Broad (2001 p.x) considers that kinship care may be an “issue of its time” for a number of reasons, including a lack of confidence in public care, a lack of placements for at risk children, as well as a belief that kinship care, particularly by grandparents, can be beneficial to both the children and the family.

During the 1990’s a policy change in the direction of kinship care in Australia witnessed an increasing number of at risk children being placed into kinship care. A number of reasons have been attributed to this change in policy. Research by Cashmore (2001) reveals that until the early 1990’s the preferred placement for children in need of care and protection
was with foster parents, primarily because of concerns that the extended family may also be incapable of adequately caring for the children. However, Cashmore (2001) asserts this former policy preference has necessarily been revised because of a decline in the number of foster carers, the recognised importance of children being able to have contact with family members, as well as being able to maintain cultural connections. Additional factors influencing this change in policy include the perceived obligation of family to care for their own, as well as criticism about placing children with ‘strangers’ (Mason, Falloon et al. 2002).

This worldwide trend of placing children into the care of kin is well evidenced by the statistics. In the United Kingdom an estimated 8,000 children were living in formal kinship care in 2001, a 34% increase on 1997 figures, with almost half the carers being grandparents (Broad 2002). New Zealand government figures indicate that in June 2005 37% of the 4,853 children who were in the custody of Child, Youth and Family were in extended family care (Worrall 2006). In Australia, the number of children in foster care between 1979 and 2000 remained relatively constant, while numbers in kinship care rose dramatically, from 40% of children in care in 1997 to 51% in 2000 (Mason, Falloon et al. 2002). The number of Indigenous children in kinship care also rose significantly during this time, with 55% in 1997, rising to 68% in 2000 (Gibbons & Mason 2003). However, as Gibbons and Mason (2003 p.14) point out “it is important to note that in terms of numbers there were twice as many non-indigenous children in kinship care in 2000 as indigenous children”. The most recent figures indicate that at 30th June 2007 there were 28,441 children in formal out-of-home care in Australia, a 12% increase on the previous 12 months and a 102% increase in the last 10 years (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008). Over 40% (12,449) of these children were in kinship care, with more than half (6,780) residing in NSW. It is notable that NSW is the only Australian state where there are more children in kinship care than foster care.

Whilst the numbers of children being placed into kinship care have been increasing substantially, Green (2001 p.1) argues that this growth “has not been matched with policy
development and guidelines for practice”. These concerns have been further echoed by McHugh (2004 p.2):

…there is some concern that the use of kin as carers for related children in Australia has for some time proceeded in a vacuum of specified policy; minimal practice guidelines; or evidence-based local research to warrant its increasing practice.

Such arguments attest to the view that whilst policy and program responses may well be “still quite limited and piecemeal” (Spence 2004 p.274), there is a pressing need for governments at state and federal levels to give closer attention to the needs and experiences of relative carers and to the increasing numbers of children in their care.

The Australian statistics quoted above relate only to formal kinship care, that is when children have been formally placed in the care of an extended family member by welfare authorities. However, it is important to note it is informal kinship care, that is when the care of children has been arranged by the family without the involvement of child welfare authorities, that further escapes the gaze of government policy (Mason, Falloon et al. 2002). Whilst it is often not explicit in the literature, research has revealed that ‘kinship care’ often means ‘grandparent care’, with grandparents, especially maternal grandmothers, being the most frequent caregivers of children in out-of-home care (Worrall 1996; Broad 2004; Horner, Downie, Hay & Wichmann 2007). Pinpointing the statistics on the numbers of grandparents raising their grandchildren is further complicated by the fact that the data does not distinguish grandparents from other relatives who are parenting children within the extended family (Horner, Downie et al. 2007).

The impetus for this study arose in 2002 when I met a number of grandparent caregivers while interviewing participants for my Honours thesis, which investigated the impact of a number of key social changes of the 20th century on the grandparent role (Backhouse-Beaumont 2002). Even though I was a grandparent myself and had a large circle of friends who were also grandparents, I had never encountered any grandparents undertaking the parenting role. A review of the literature at that time revealed the phenomenon of grandparents raising grandchildren was centred primarily on the USA and was attributed to the crack cocaine epidemic in that country (Minkler 1999; Cox 2000). In Australia, the
emphasis in the literature on children in out-of-home care appeared to be confined to adoption and foster care (Fitzpatrick & Briggs 1994), as well as formal kinship care which did not distinguish grandparents from other kin (Cashmore 2001). At that time, grandparent-headed families appeared to be invisible within the Australian community. Whilst there have been a number of studies in the intervening period that have begun to address this issue (Parliament of Tasmania 2003; Fitzpatrick 2004; Orb & Davey 2004; Baldock & Petit 2006), none of these have been centred on the NSW context, nor have they incorporated an emphasis on grandparent identity.

1.3 Grandparents-as-parents – a growing social phenomenon

Grandparents raising grandchildren is not a new phenomenon. Historically, grandparents have always stepped in to take over the care of their grandchildren in times of family crisis. In some cultures, it is normal practice for grandparents to play a major role in the raising of grandchildren (Kornhaber 1996). However, what is new is the apparent dramatic increase in the number of children being raised by their grandparents due to changes in family structure and social conditions which have taken place over the last 25 years. It appears from the literature that this is a worldwide trend.

In the USA, this growing social phenomenon first became apparent when the 1990 census showed an almost 44% increase over the preceding decade in the number of children living with their grandparents or other relatives. Since this time, the number of grandparents raising their grandchildren has continued to rise in the USA. According to the Census 2000 Supplementary Survey, between 2.3 and 2.4 million grandparents have primary responsibility for the care and upbringing of 4.5 million children (Hayslip & Patrick 2003a). This phenomenon has captured the attention of researchers, service providers and policy makers in the USA, resulting in a number of interventions to assist grandparents raising grandchildren (Hayslip & Kaminski 2005), however it appears little has been done to ‘stem the tide’ of the increase in grandparent-headed households.
According to Worrall (2005), grandparents assuming full responsibility for raising grandchildren is also an increasing phenomenon in New Zealand. Even though the 2001 New Zealand Census recorded over 4,000 children being parented by their grandparents, Worrall (2005) asserts the numbers are now much higher. Likewise, in the United Kingdom, it is not known exactly how many children are being raised by their grandparents, however figures from British Social Attitudes Surveys suggest that there are approximately 100,000 children under the age of 13 living with a grandparent (Richards & Tapsfield 2003).

In Australia, no reliable statistics are available on the number of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. However, in order to provide some data, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) included questions relating to grandparent-headed families in their 2003 Family Characteristics Survey (ABS 2004). Results from this survey estimated that 22,500 Australian grandparents were raising 31,100 grandchildren aged between 0 to 17 years, with NSW recording the largest number of grandparent-headed families raising approximately 10,000 children. However the accuracy of these figures has been questioned because the data-set on which the Australian population estimate was based had a relative standard error of 25% to 50% (ABS 2004). Also, it is generally considered by those working in the community service industry that the ABS figures are an underestimation of the number of grandparent-headed families in Australia (COTA (NSW) 2008). Recent research by Dr. Jan Hammill (2001) has also highlighted ‘granny burnout’ in Australia’s Indigenous communities, where many grandmothers have taken over responsibility for housing, clothing, feeding and supporting the needs of their grandchildren.

It appears that children in NSW come into the care of their grandparents in a number of different ways, and this is discussed in the next section.
1.4 Grandparent-as-parent arrangements

Children usually come into the care of their grandparents in NSW in one of four ways: firstly through the federal court system, secondly through NSW child protection legislation, thirdly through a semi-formal arrangement, or lastly through an informal arrangement.

1.4.1 Commonwealth Family Law
Parental responsibility for the long term care of a child may be granted to a grandparent under Parenting Orders made by the Family Court of Australia or the Federal Magistrates Court (Newitt 1999). When making Parenting Orders the ‘best interest of the child’ is the paramount consideration of the Court. These Orders cover issues such as residency and contact, as well as specific issues such as education, medical treatment, religion, etc. It would appear that applying for a Parenting Order through the Family Court might be a last resort for some grandparents who are attempting to secure the safety of their grandchildren. The reasons for this may be threefold. Firstly, grandparents may be reluctant to take action against their own children as was the case for one grandparent in Ochiltree’s (2006a) study who was “afraid that her daughter and son-in-law might do something that would upset the situation if she took legal action”. Secondly, the high cost involved in legal proceedings may be prohibitive. As reported in the COTA study, grandparents are rarely able to obtain Legal Aid, as owning even a “modest home” prevents them from securing free legal representation (Fitzpatrick 2004 p.21). Grandparents in a number of Australian studies talk about the injustice of the Australian legal system under which the children’s parents are covered by Legal Aid, while they must pay for their own legal representation, which often amounted to many thousands of dollars. A third reason may be the uncertainty of the legal outcome of any proceedings, as was the case for one grandparent in the COTA study who explained that “many judges/magistrates appear to favour children being with natural parents in spite of their lifestyle” (Fitzpatrick 2004 p.21).
1.4.2 State child protection legislation

Children deemed to be ‘at risk’ often come into the care of their grandparents through the intervention of the NSW Department of Community Services, who may then apply to the Children’s Court for a range of protective orders. The Children’s Court may make an order allocating parental responsibility of the child to the Minister or another suitable person such as a grandparent. As discussed earlier in this chapter, relative/kinship care has increased significantly over the past decade and is now the preferred placement option for a significant number of children and young people entering out-of-home care in NSW (Cashmore 2001; Spence 2004). In NSW the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 Chapter 2 Section 9(d) stipulates that consideration should be given to placing children in ways that are ‘least intrusive’. As pointed out by Mason et. al (2002) even though placing children with kin is not spelt out as a priority in the legislation, it is supported by policy guidelines, and some social workers interpret ‘least intrusive’ as implying that kinship placement should be the first option.

Kinship care is also the first preference for the placement of Aboriginal children in need of care. This is in line with the ‘Aboriginal Child Placement Principle’ (ACPP) which outlines the preferred order of placement for children being removed from their birth family (Richardson, Bromfield & Higgins 2005). This order of preference stipulates placement firstly with the child’s extended family, secondly with the child’s Indigenous community and thirdly with other Indigenous people. Aboriginal children can only be placed with a non-Indigenous carer if an appropriate placement cannot be found from the other three groups.

1.4.3 Semi-formal arrangement

Children who have been placed in the care of their grandparents under the guidance, or with the knowledge of a state or territory government, but outside of the care and protection system are referred to by Families Australia (2007) as ‘semi-formal’ care arrangements. This usually happens when grandparents have been asked by child protection authorities to take the children in an emergency. However, once the children are safely settled with the
grandparents and there are no longer any protective concerns, the authorities may have withdrawn.

### 1.4.4 Informal arrangement

In a number of cases grandparents may be raising their grandchildren with or without the agreement of the children’s parents or the State child protection authorities (Fitzpatrick 2004). The children’s parents may have asked the grandparents to care for the children temporarily while they battle a drug or alcohol addiction, spend time in prison or a mental health facility. In other cases, grandparents may have been concerned that the children were not properly cared for and taken them without the permission of the parents. As pointed out by Fitzpatrick (2004 p.14), grandparents who have taken on the informal care of their grandchildren can apply to the Family Court to formalise these arrangements, however they may not want to “antagonize the parents”, may not be able to afford the cost of legal action, or may fear that they will be judged “unsuitable” to be raising their grandchildren.

As pointed out in a Tasmanian study (Parliament of Tasmania 2003), even though grandparents who are raising their grandchildren on an informal basis still have the responsibilities of parenting, they may not be recognised by the welfare authorities, which can make it difficult to access assistance and support. The challenges faced by grandparents raising grandchildren, especially those without formal authority, were placed on the national agenda at the June 2004 Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting. In response COAG recognised the “highly valued” role that these grandparents play, and established a Community Services Ministers’ Advisory Council (CSMAC) working group to develop a more co-ordinated approach to supporting grandparents who were providing full-time care to grandchildren (COAG 2004 p.6). At the 2006 Community and Disability Services Minsters’ Conference in Brisbane all state and territory Ministers agreed that there was a need for a coordinated Australia-wide approach to address the needs of grandparents raising grandchildren, in order to ensure they were able to access the full range of appropriate State and Federal payments and services to support them in their parenting role (CDSMC Communique 2006). The conference heard from the South
Australian Minister for Families and Communities, Jay Weatherill, who took up the challenge for grandparents who care for their grandchildren on an informal basis by recommending that all departments review legislation, policies and eligibility criteria that currently prevent grandparents who informally care for their grandchildren from accessing services and income support (Weatherill 2006). As a result it was agreed by the Ministers to develop ways in which grandparents caring for their grandchildren without formal authority would be eligible to receive Australian state and federal government payments and services (Kelton 2006). It was reported that the next step would be for the Commonwealth to formally recognise grandparents who take on an informal parenting role, which would then enable them to more easily access Medicare benefits and financial assistance for their grandchildren (Kelton 2006).

It appears from a review of NSW state and federal government policies and support, the ways in which children come into the care of their grandparents has a direct bearing on the financial and social assistance available to the grandparent-headed family. This is explored in the next section.

### 1.5 Support for grandparents-as-parents in NSW

Grandparents who are raising their grandchildren in NSW may be able to access financial or social support through a number of state and federal government departments, non-government organisations, and grandparent support groups. These are briefly discussed below to further establish the broader social, political and financial context for grandparents who take on the care of their grandchildren.

#### 1.5.1 Australian federal government support

It appears that there are no specific federal government policies relating to grandparent-headed families. Instead, grandparents raising grandchildren can apply for assistance through policies and programs set up by the federal government to support all Australian families. Grandparents-as-parents may be eligible for financial assistance through
Centrelink, the federal government’s agency that operates under the Department of Human Services and delivers a wide range of services to the Australian community. Grandparents may be eligible for means-tested Centrelink assistance whether they are raising their grandchildren through either a formal, semi-formal or informal arrangement. Details of payments available are set out in the ‘Grandparents caring for grandchildren’ section of Centrelink’s website (Centrelink 2007), as well as in their recent publication “Are you a grandparent (or relative) caring for children?” (Centrelink 2006).

Some aspects of the financial support made available by the federal government have been the subject of comment by grandparent caregivers in a number of Australian studies (Parliament of Tasmania 2003; Fitzpatrick 2004; Orb & Davey 2004). Even though it appears that grandparents have access to a great deal of federal government-funded financial support, because most of it is means-tested it is out of reach of those grandparents who have assets “accrued over a lifetime of hard work” (Canberra Mothercraft Society Inc. 2007 p.11). Grandparents also complain about the inequity of not being able to access financial support to assist in the raising of their grandchildren, while the children’s parents are able to get Legal Aid, as well as help with medical, counselling and rental expenses (Canberra Mothercraft Society Inc. 2007). Grandparents in the COTA study, who were self-funded retirees, also voiced the injustice of not being eligible for Centrelink payments because of superannuation which was needed “for the rest of our life to live on”, adding that “the government overlooks that being retired we have limited means to pay for a second car, music and swimming classes etc.” (Fitzpatrick 2004 p.26). Also, some grandparents in the COTA study believed that they would never become self-funded retirees, as the superannuation they had accumulated throughout their lives was being eroded through not being able to access financial support from Centrelink (Fitzpatrick 2004). Grandparents in the study strongly believed that as they were raising their grandchildren they should not be means tested in order to qualify for assistance (Fitzpatrick 2004).

Even though the Family Tax Benefit is available to all grandparent carers, it was noted by Families Australia in their recent report (2007) that not all eligible grandparents were
taking advantage of this benefit. Possible reasons for this included “fear that the child would be taken back by the natural parent/s, lack of awareness of their eligibility, and inability to provide evidence that the child was in their care” (Families Australia 2007 p.13). Some grandparents in Orb & Davey’s (2004) study also reported that they were not accessing any federal government financial support because the children’s parents were receiving the Centrelink payments. Grandparents may also forego receiving financial assistance rather than risk bringing their situation to the attention of the government which may result in the children being returned to the parents (Families Australia 2007).

Grandparents in the COTA study found the Centrelink system confusing with the “vast array of payments and eligibility requirements” and complained that there was no specific category for grandparents, no recognition of their status and circumstances, and Centrelink did not inform grandparents of possible benefits available to them (Fitzpatrick 2004 p.25). Also, grandparents who may not have had contact with Centrelink before their grandchildren arrived found it difficult to get information about their entitlements from Centrelink personnel (Fitzpatrick 2004). Evidence presented by grandparents in the Tasmanian study (Parliament of Tasmania 2003) suggested they found the Centrelink processes very complex and the forms difficult to complete. Grandparents also expressed concern that because some Centrelink staff had not properly understood their situation, they had been given wrong advice which subsequently resulted in them “losing money they were rightly entitled to” (Parliament of Tasmania 2003 p.50). All the participants in the Western Australian study were critical of the Centrelink system and the fact that they appeared not to fit into any of the welfare categories (Orb & Davey 2004). They felt “powerless”, “voiceless”, “invisible” and “abandoned” by the government, particularly as they believed they were saving the government money by taking on the care of their grandchildren (p.38). This confusion about grandparents’ entitlement to family assistance and criticism of Centrelink’s service delivery has resulted in a recent evaluation of service delivery by the Family Assistance Office/Centrelink to grandparents raising their grandchildren to be undertaken by the Department of Human Services. The results of this evaluation have not yet been made public.
However, even though discussions surrounding Centrelink’s service delivery have mostly been negative, it has been reported that at least one Centrelink Social Worker has recognised the plight of grandparents raising grandchildren and with the help of Anglicare has organised a Grandparents Support Group in the Goulburn area to provide support and information to grandparent caregivers (Centrelink Newsroom 2005).

It appears that very little social support has been forthcoming from the Australian federal government, even though the 2003 government-funded Council on the Ageing (COTA) investigation into the support needs of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren resulted in a number of recommendations (Fitzpatrick 2004). After the release of this report, the then Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, the Honourable Larry Anthony, announced the release of funding for two major projects, arguing however that even though child protection issues were primarily the responsibility of state and territory governments, it was the Australian federal government who had taken the lead on the critical issue of support for grandparent caregivers (Anthony 2004). Firstly, the Mirabel Foundation were granted $150,000 to update their booklet “When the children arrive” (Rowe 2004), which provides advice and information on a range of services to assist grandparent caregivers in Australia. Secondly, funding of $310,000 was provided to enable 10 projects to be undertaken across Australia to allow a better understanding of the issues faced by grandparent-headed families and to provide an opportunity for grandparents to share their experiences with other grandparents. As a result of this funding, NSW grandparents in Sydney and Tweed Heads were able to attend a full-day information session in partnership with Centrelink around a range of issues that grandparent caregivers face. Also, grandparents in the Shoalhaven and far South Coast region of NSW were able to attend workshops run by Mission Australia Nowra which provided information on developing skills and confidence in parenting, normalising grief, loss and anger, as well as developing support and self-help mechanisms.

Through their Stronger Families & Communities – ‘Invest to Grow’ initiative, the Australian government has also funded the setting up of the National Parenting Information Website (Raising Children Network 2006) which provides valuable information for
grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. The importance of this new website for grandparent caregivers was publicised in *The Senior* (2006), an Australian newspaper published specifically for the over-50’s, and available free from some pharmacies, RSL, golf and bowling clubs, libraries and community centres.

Even though the implementation of these social supports have addressed a number of the issues raised by grandparents in the COTA study, concerns such as regular respite, access to counselling for both grandparents and grandchildren and access to children’s services such as speech therapy, psychological assessment, tutoring and assistance with school work, appear to have been neglected (Fitzpatrick 2004).

1.5.2 NSW state government support

In circumstances where children in NSW are unable to live with their own family, out-of-home care (OOHC) is provided by the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS), the leading NSW government agency responsible for community services, in conjunction with other funded non-government organisations (NGO’s). A large range of care, accommodation and support services are provided to children and young people across NSW by these agencies.

The main care and protection legislation, which outlines the legal obligations in providing care for children and young people who cannot live with their own families in NSW, is the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*. One of the key elements of the Act concerns agency accreditation. Agencies that provide out-of-home care must meet the standards of service approved by the Minister for Community Services and described in the legislation in order to be accredited by the Office for Children’s Guardian (OCG). The main function of the Children’s Guardian is to promote the best interests of children and young people in out-of-home care and to work with children and young people, their families and carers, as well as government and non-government agencies to improve standards of service. In its original form Section 135 of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* expressly excluded care with relatives from the definition of out-of-home care:
(1)...residential care and control...of a child or young person:

(a) at a place other than the usual home of the child or young person, and
(b) by a person other than:

i. a parent of the child or young person, or

ii. a person who is related to the child or young person.

As pointed out by Mason, Falloon et. al (2002), there was much debate concerning this aspect of the legislation. Critics maintained that excluding children formally placed with relatives from the definition of out-of-home care, also excluded them from the benefits of ongoing support by welfare agencies and monitoring by the Office of the Children’s Guardian. Those in favour of the out-of-home care definition maintained that compulsory support and monitoring of children placed with relatives could be “disempowering for families, was ineffective and placed unnecessary strain on limited child welfare resources” (Mason, Falloon et al. 2002 p.85). However, in late 2001 the definition of out-of-home care in the Act was amended to include children and young people in the care of a relative where:

the Minister has parental responsibility for the child or young person by 

virtue of an order of the Children’s court, or

the child or young person is in the care of the Director-General

with the legislation now confirming that there is a statutory responsibility for children formally placed in kinship care.

Grandparents in NSW who have been given the parental responsibility of their grandchildren through the Children’s Court are eligible to receive a non-taxable, non-means tested payment from the state government towards the cost of raising grandchildren. In October 2006 new equitable carer rates were announced by DoCS (NSW Department of Community Services 2006) which applied to authorised foster carers, as well as relative and kinship carers. Foster carers are eligible for the ‘Statutory Care Allowance’, while relative and kinship carers may be eligible for the ‘Supported Care Allowance’ if they have parental responsibility of their grandchildren via a court order. These Care Allowances are intended to reimburse carers for day to day expenses such as food, household costs, clothing and
footwear, daily travel, suitable car restraints, gifts and pocket money, holidays, hobbies and activities, as well as general educational, medical and pharmaceutical costs. The new Care Allowances are paid fortnightly in arrears, are not means-tested and are not affected by Commonwealth Benefits that the carers or young people may be receiving (eg Youth Allowance for children or young people over 16 years).

In situations where grandparents are providing semi-formal/informal care or are experiencing hardship and there is a risk of the child entering out-of-home care or becoming homeless, grandparents can apply to receive the Supported Care Allowance which replaces the Non-parental Carer’s Allowance. Grandparents Raising Grandchildren NSW (2006b) describe this allowance not as an ‘entitlement’ that all grandparents can apply for and ‘should’ receive, but as a means tested, time-limited allowance, and payment of this allowance is made on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of DoCS according to strict guidelines.

Even though kinship carers in Mason, Falloon et. al’s (2002) study valued the financial assistance they received, many were dissatisfied with the amount they received, claiming they had difficulty in meeting expenses for children, particularly those involving medical care. According to Dunne and Kettler (2006) in a review of Australian and international literature surrounding the stressors on kinship carers, economic disadvantage was common among kinship carers, particularly as many kinship carers were single parents or older people on low incomes.

Despite the NSW state government’s provision of financial assistance for children who have been formally placed with grandparents, as well as many who are living with grandparents on an informal basis, initial and ongoing support and case management is not usually provided by the Department of Community Services. As pointed out by Mason, Falloon et. al (2002 p.36) “this is in contrast with foster care where active and continuous involvement by child welfare agencies is expected to be provided in every case”. This inequity between the support received by foster carers and kinship carers raised comments by grandparents reported in the COTA study, who felt very strongly that “they should be
treated equally with foster carers”; adding that they were saving the state and Commonwealth governments “an enormous amount of money” by taking over the care of the grandchildren who would otherwise become the responsibility of the government and placed in foster care (Fitzpatrick 2004 p.29).

While some carers in Mason, Falloon et. al’s (2002) study received welcome support from within their family, most felt they needed support from outside the family as well, especially during times of crisis. Some carers who had experienced a lack of support from the Department of Community Services described their frustrations and feelings of being of “no importance” to DoCS; others, however were aware of the organisational constraints of social workers in providing support (Mason, Falloon et al. 2002 p.38). Some carers also expressed a need for help around the emotional stresses of caring for kin children, as well as practical assistance, because of being pulled between their daughter’s needs and the grandchild’s needs (Mason, Falloon et al. 2002). Dunne and Kettler (2006 p.26) also found that the tensions that arise from the conflict between birth parents and kinship carers, combined with inadequate welfare support, “have the potential to destabilise the care arrangement and impact on the future well-being of the children”. Grandparents in the COTA study expressed a need for “access to immediate and ongoing support and case management from child protection and early intervention agencies” and this need for grandparents raising grandchildren to receive the same support services as foster carers was included in the report’s recommendations (Fitzpatrick 2004 p.46).

1.5.3 Support by non-government organisations (NGO’s)
There are a number of non-government organisations that support grandparents in the raising of their grandchildren, and a comprehensive summary of the support services these organisations provide to grandparents-as-parents is set out below. From the number of NGO’s involved, as well as the diverse range of advocacy, information and support they provide to grandparents who are raising their grandchildren in NSW, it would appear that without such services grandparent caregivers would have extremely limited support.
The Council on the Ageing (COTA) NSW has a long history in advocating for grandparents in NSW. COTA were instrumental in ensuring that questions relating to the number of grandparents providing primary care to their grandchildren were included in the 2003 Family Characteristics Survey. Since 2003 COTA (NSW) have convened two grandparenting forums and, as part of their Golden Jubilee in 2006, they launched ‘Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG) NSW’, comprising an information package (2006a) and website (2006b), to provide NSW grandparents with reliable information and support.

The Mirabel Foundation, established in 1998 to assist children who have been orphaned or abandoned due to parental illicit drug use, provides advocacy, referral, research, practical and emotional assistance to children and their kinship carers. It is Victorian based with some services also extended to New South Wales. Advocacy services include community awareness, lobbying for changes to legislation and research to promote social change. Emotional and practical assistance includes intensive crisis support, recreational, respite and education programs, support groups for kinship carers and family, telephone support/counselling, family/grief therapy, youth support/mentoring program, as well as family camps and holidays. Referral and advice services include financial, legal and health information and referrals to existing agencies and specialist supports.

The Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia (CAFWAA) is the national peak body for child, adolescent and family welfare in Australia. In 2002 CAFWAA produced a policy document, *A Time to Invest*, which calls on state and territory governments to recognise the important role relative/kinship care plays in the Australian child and family welfare system and to develop a range of policies to provide support for kinship carers (Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia 2002). These include financial assistance, ongoing family support, access to respite care, peer support for grandparents, as well as information concerning access to income maintenance, community services and referrals.
The Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) is the peak child welfare organisation in NSW and, in conjunction with its members, works to promote quality care, protection and support for vulnerable children and young people. In 2002 ACWA, in conjunction with the Childhood and Youth Policy Research Unit of the University of Western Sydney, carried out a research project which examined kinship care in NSW (Mason, Falloon et al. 2002). The major findings of the study highlighted the importance of kinship care as a form of child welfare policy, but dilemmas were evident in the state’s role in relation to children in kinship care, particularly in regard to the extent to which these placements should be supervised and/or supported.

UnitingCare Burnside is part of the Uniting Church in Australia and is one of the largest providers of child and family services in New South Wales. UnitingCare Burnside’s out-of-home care services provide children and young people who cannot live with their families with safe and stable environments where they can flourish. In 2004, together with the Social Justice and Social Change Research Centre at the University of Western Sydney, UnitingCare Burnside published a research study on the needs of children in out-of-home care (Mason & Gibson 2004). It was revealed from this study that children and young people in out-of-home care placed great importance firstly on maintaining connections with family and friends, secondly on being loved and cared for, and thirdly on having some power or ability to influence what happens in their lives.

Barnardos, Australia’s leading child welfare agency, works with families, government departments and other agencies to improve the lives of children, many of whom have suffered the trauma of neglect and abuse. Barnardos’ welfare goal is to find permanent workable solutions for children whose families are experiencing difficulties. Barnardos have strong views on kinship care, arguing that kinship placements do not need the same surveillance and monitoring as foster care placements, but instead need more creative and flexible ways to support kinship carers (Barnardos Australia 2001). These support services should include information about financial assistance, peer support, courses on dealing with changed family relationships and, most importantly, access to casework in specialised family support programs for placements that run into difficulties.
Mission Australia is a non-denominational Christian organisation, which has been set up to help people in need, whoever they are and wherever they come from (Mission Australia 2007a). In 2004 Mission Australia implemented the ‘Grandparents Program’ in partnership with the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs in Nowra, NSW, which assists around 50 grandparents who care for approximately 40 grandchildren (Mission Australia 2007b). The Grandparents Program provides grandparent carers with social support, counselling and information on legal, financial and parenting matters. Recently Mission Australia, in partnership with the Social Policy Research Centre (UNSW), the Commonwealth Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, and the NSW, SA and NT Governments, commenced a three year study into the issues facing grandparents who are raising their grandchildren in Australia, to identify the policies that will better support these families.

The Disability & Aged Information Service (DAISI) (2007) is an NGO who is supporting grandparents raising their grandchildren in Northern NSW. In 2006 and 2007 DAISI, with assistance from the Northern Rivers Community Foundation and its partners, took part in a ‘Back to School’ initiative. Through the project DAISI identified over 520 primary carer grandparent families in the Northern Rivers region who each received a $50 voucher for each child from the Target department store to help with the cost of school-related purchases. More recently, DAISI has implemented the ‘True Blue Angels’ Grand-carer and Youth Initiative to support grandparents who are raising their grandchildren in the region through the provision of resources, resilience building activities, and the establishment of support groups. The importance of grandparent support groups for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren is discussed in the next section.

1.5.4 Grandparent support groups
Corresponding to the dramatic rise in the number of grandparents who are raising grandchildren has been the increasing number of grandparent support groups as the dominant intervention for assisting these caregivers (Smith 2003). At the beginning of the new millennium there were more than 400 grandparent support groups across the USA.
providing the most widely used source of education and support for caregiving grandparents (Smith 2003). Both Australian and international research has revealed that many grandparent caregivers regard support groups as their most valued resource, providing information, emotional and social support (Minkler & Roe 1993; Richards 2001; Fitzpatrick 2004; Orb & Davey 2004; Worrall 2005). As pointed out by Cohen and Pyle (2000 p.235) in their study of custodial grandmothers, support groups provide an arena in which grandparent caregivers can be with others “in the same boat”, and is one place where there is little need for explanation, and where members can share their knowledge and experiences.

There are a growing number of grandparent support groups throughout NSW. Most groups are run by grandparents themselves, however, an increasing number of community service organisations are offering their support to keep these groups going (Grandparents Raising Grandchildren NSW 2006a). While most of these support groups provide an opportunity for grandparents to share stories, swap ideas and learn more about how to cope, others also invite guest speakers to address specific issues within the group. Grandparents in the COTA study have called on Commonwealth and state governments to recognise the importance of grandparent support groups and to assist with their establishment and ongoing running costs. Funds were requested to cover the costs of meetings, social activities and regular holiday camps for grandparents and their grandchildren, as well as funding for community service agencies to provide professional support and administration, essential to prevent “burnout” amongst group members (Fitzpatrick 2004 p.51).

In summary, whilst a number of initiatives have been established in recent years by both government and non-government agencies to support grandparent-headed families, it is clear that grandparents who are raising their grandchildren remain subject to a lack of policy and service level support to adequately undertake their roles. In their recent study into grandparent-headed families in Australia, Horner, Downie et al. (2007) argue that a lack of accurate information regarding the characteristics and needs of grandparent-headed families has resulted in insufficient evidence which government agencies and policy makers need to implement services and support for these families. They call for
recognition of the issues faced by grandparents raising grandchildren and the development of “an evidence-based approach to policy and practice through research” (Horner, Downie et al. 2007 p.82). This study aims to add to this evidence base.

1.6 Justification for the study

Despite the dramatic rise in the number of kinship carers in Australia, many of whom are grandparents, and the increasing media interest in grandparents-as-parents (Gardner 2006; O'Dwyer 2006), grandparents who are raising their grandchildren remain virtually ‘hidden’ within our community. Additionally, most of the research that has been undertaken both overseas and in Australia has been of a descriptive nature, documenting the reasons why grandparents are raising their grandchildren, as well as the benefits and challenges of taking on the caregiving role. It appears that the deeper meanings grandparents ascribe to the grandparent-as-parent role have been neglected, as well as the impact of this non-traditional role on the identity of grandparents. A review of the Australian literature also reveals a gap in relation to understanding how the experiences of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren in New South Wales intersect with social welfare policies of this state.

1.7 Research questions and aims

In order to address the above issues, two overarching research questions were formulated:

1. What meanings do grandparents attach to their experiences of carrying out the grandparent-as-parent role, rather than the traditional grandparent role?

2. How has the identity of grandparents-as-parents been influenced by assuming the non-traditional grandparent role?

A number of research aims emerged from these two broad questions:
1. To explore the lived experiences of a small sample of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren in NSW.

2. To identify the meanings grandparents attach to carrying out the non-traditional grandparent-as-parent role.

3. To investigate how the identity of grandparent caregivers has been influenced by assuming the grandparent-as-parent role.

4. To examine how state and federal government policies position grandparents who are raising grandchildren in NSW.

1.8 Locating a theoretical stance

Given that this study investigates the lived experiences of grandparents raising their grandchildren, it was important to use a theoretical approach that allowed for the deeper meanings behind the grandparents’ stories to be uncovered. To this end, it was considered appropriate to apply Stryker and Burke’s (2000) concept of identity theory to the study. Identity theory has its roots in George Herbert Mead’s writings on symbolic interactionism in which the term ‘identity’ refers to “parts of a self composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies” (Stryker & Burke 2000 p.284). The choice of this theoretical approach was based on the belief that concepts related to identity theory, such as ‘role identity’, ‘identity salience’ and ‘commitment’, would be useful in understanding the meanings grandparents attach to the grandparent-as-parent role, as well as how the identity of grandparents-as-parents has been influenced by assuming the non-traditional grandparent role.
1.9 Introducing the research design

Given that the study aimed to capture the deeper meanings beneath the grandparents’ stories, it was considered that Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) concept of narrative inquiry would allow the grandparents’ voices to be heard and understood. Narrative inquiry involves a joint storying and restorying process in a collaborative relationship between participant and researcher and seeks to capture participants’ experiences and represent their voices (Clandinin & Connelly 2000).

The choice of a qualitative methodology which utilised in-depth interviews was influenced by the fact that apart from a study by Orb & Davey (2004), which employed semi-structured interviews to examine the perceptions of 13 grandparent-headed families in Western Australia, other Australian studies have used public forums, workshops and questionnaires to explore the experiences of grandparent caregivers (Parliament of Tasmania 2003; Fitzpatrick 2004; Baldock & Petit 2006). However, research by Goldberg-Glenn and Hayslip (2000 p.391) reveals that even though taking a macro approach which focuses on broad issues and aggregated data is important, it is also important to take a micro perspective to gain an understanding of the “variables and interactions that are unique to grandparent-headed families”. Cox (2000a) agrees that qualitative research is critical for obtaining the perspectives of custodial grandparents, as well as the grandchildren they are raising.

1.10 Structure of the thesis

Chapter Two provides an analysis of the literature surrounding the growing social phenomenon of grandparents raising their grandchildren. The chapter begins by analysing what has historically been considered the traditional grandparent role and discusses how social change has influenced the role of the contemporary grandparent.

Discussion then focuses on the rewards and challenges of the grandparent-headed family and examines a number of theories of care which have the potential to further inform the
meanings caregiving grandparents attach to their experiences of the grandparent-as-parent role. The chapter concludes by arguing that whilst existing studies have served to highlight the impact on grandparents of assuming the parenting role, there is clearly a need to explore in more depth the deeper meanings grandparents attribute to the grandparent-as-parent role, as well as the impact of the transition from traditional grandparent to grandparent-as-parent on the identity of grandparent caregivers. These gaps in the existing knowledge base are to be addressed through this study.

Chapter Three explores the key tenets of identity theory and highlights their relevance for this study with its emphasis on the lived experiences of grandparents-as-parents. As identity theory has its roots in symbolic interactionism, discussion begins with an overview of this sociological perspective and documents its development by a number of social theorists.

Chapter Four provides a rationale for approaching the study through an interpretivist paradigm and locates the need for a narrative inquiry methodology to facilitate the voices of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren, and uncover the meaning behind their stories. The techniques of using narrative inquiry both as a method for data collection and for analysing and reporting data are discussed. Details of data collection, including sample selection, in-depth interviewing, transcription, initial data analysis and coding of the data, are outlined. The ethical considerations applied to the study are discussed, and the methodological soundness is argued on the basis of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Chapter Five provides the narratives of the grandparents as they attempt to convey their experiences, and includes insights into the reasons why grandparents are raising their grandchildren, as well as the many common and special challenges they face in carrying out the grandparent-as-parent role. The grandparents’ stories uncover the many concerns, together with the satisfaction and rewards, which grandparent caregivers encounter in raising their grandchildren. Whilst the narratives of the grandparents resonate strongly with
findings from other studies, they nevertheless highlight issues and characteristics that beg further discussion and recognition in policy and practice.

Chapter Six analyses the narratives of the grandparents through the lens of identity theory to interpret how assuming the non-traditional grandparent role has influenced the identity of grandparents-as-parents. The chapter argues that there is a gap between the mythical/traditional grandparent role and the role undertaken by grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. The space between these two roles is one of difference. The chapter further argues that grandparents in the study experience a role-identity conflict in their role of grandparent caregivers, resulting in a loss of the traditional grandparent role-identity and a shift in commitment to the grandparent-as-parent role-identity. Grandparents-as-parents find themselves as part of a group defined as other, or different, and experience this difference through feelings of being invisible, undeserving, excluded and silenced within our community.

Chapter Seven draws together the threads of the study. It begins with a synthesis of the research and highlights the key issues arising from the study. The implications for the methodology and theoretical framework chosen for the study are discussed, as well as the significance of applying a number of concepts of care to the findings. Importantly, the chapter also documents a number of challenges that have emerged through this study that will require a coherent and concerted response by both federal and state governments if they are to lay claim to policies of fairness and justice. The chapter concludes with my reflections on the research, including the limitations of the study, and some implications for further research.

1.11 Reflexivity/situating the researcher

Most researchers in the social sciences pursue research questions that are bound up in some way with their own autobiography. As Mauthner and Doucet (1998 p.121) suggest:

"Reflexivity means reflecting upon and understanding our own personal, political and intellectual autobiographies as researchers, and making explicit where we are located in
In addition, Elliott (2005 p.169) believes that the use of a narrative approach by an increasing number of qualitative researchers has fostered a greater awareness of the importance of reflexivity when collecting, analysing and presenting research evidence. Elliott also argues the importance of making clear the perspectives of researchers in conducting and writing up research and the ways in which “their own theoretical and biographical perspective might impact on their relationships with research subjects, their interpretation of research evidence, and the form in which the research is presented” (2005 p.155).

Because both my parents were born and raised in New Zealand prior to moving to Australia, my childhood recollections of my grandparents were through infrequent visits, letters and photos. My own experiences of being a grandparent have been vastly different. I became a grandmother at the age of 45, which I thought at the time to be far too early, when my elder teenage daughter had her first child. Since that time, my two daughters and three stepdaughters have made me a grandmother of 11 beautiful grandchildren.

Unlike the grandparents in this study, I am not raising any of my grandchildren. However, because I often care for my grandchildren during weekends and school holidays, I can relate in a modest way to what it is like to have the responsibility, care and protection of children ‘24/7’. I have also reflected at length on the fact my experiences in no way parallel the experiences of grandparents-as-parents who are never able to ‘hand the children back’ after a visit and must contend with a myriad of challenges, including supporting their adult children whose often chaotic lifestyles may be the very reason why the children are in their care. Nevertheless, as a grandparent I am acutely ‘tuned in’ to the motivations, hopes and aspirations we have for our grandchildren, whilst becoming increasingly mindful of the complexity and challenges for those moving within and between roles.

My approach to the research has been to make evident parts of my own autobiography to participants as a way of developing a bridge between their own and my narratives. I
believed that this would enable the recruitment of participants to be made much easier, and grandparents would feel more comfortable talking to ‘one of their own’. Also, once the interview process was under way grandparents would be able to speak freely about their experiences and could be confident that I was fully able to relate to their position. Oakley (1981 p.41) notes that:

In most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own identity in the relationship.

As discussed earlier, the impetus for this study arose when undertaking my Honours thesis as I interviewed a number of grandparents who were raising their grandchildren, however a preliminary search of the literature at that time revealed that grandparent-headed families appeared to be invisible within the Australian community. It was evident to me that any study of grandparents who were raising their grandchildren should attempt to raise awareness about grandparent-headed families, as well as to give ‘voice’ to grandparents-as-parents. It followed that being able to ‘make a difference’ in the lives of grandparent caregivers was paramount in my decision to undertake this research. Whilst this is a common objective among social researchers, Munford and Sanders (2003) point out it may also be a consideration for participants, who may query whether the act of participation will make a difference to their life and that of their family. Like Munford and Sanders (2003), it was hoped that the cathartic benefits of being able to talk to a person who has no other involvement in one’s life would emerge as a benefit to participants in the research. Also, participants may be able to see that the long-term benefits of telling their stories could provide evidence of what is required for other families in their situation. In undertaking this research, there is undoubtedly a link between the personal and political in that the final chapter intends to posit a number of policy implications and possibilities in response to the grandparent narratives.

1.12 Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined the background to the study, as well as the impetus and justification for the research. It has signalled that there are a number of gaps in the existing
knowledge base surrounding the deeper meanings that grandparents ascribe to the grandparent-as-parent role, the impact of the non-traditional grandparent role on the identity of grandparents, as well as how state and federal government policies position grandparents-as-parents in NSW. It is intended that this thesis will make a contribution to addressing these gaps in knowledge. A rationale for the adoption of a qualitative narrative inquiry methodology, as well as the theoretical insights offered through identity theory, have been discussed and the structure of the thesis has been outlined, chapter by chapter. Finally, I have endeavoured to ensure I have made transparent my own position as researcher.

The following chapter begins by exploring what has historically been considered the traditional grandparent role and examines the social changes that have influenced the contemporary grandparent role. Discussion then focuses on both the overseas and Australian literature surrounding the phenomenon of grandparents raising their grandchildren.
CHAPTER TWO: GRANDPARENTS-AS-PARENTS – WHAT DO WE KNOW?

2.1 Introduction

A significant focus for this chapter is on engaging with existing studies surrounding the experiences of grandparents raising their grandchildren, so as to identify the gaps in knowledge that constitute the basis of this current study. The chapter begins by analysing what has historically been considered the traditional grandparent role, and documents some of the key developments that have influenced the contemporary grandparent role. This is followed by a discussion of the reasons why an increasing number of grandparents are taking on the parenting role of their grandchildren. The next section explores the rewards and challenges of the grandparent-headed family, an emerging family form that has arisen from changes in family structure and social conditions over the last 25 years. This is followed by an analysis of a number of theories of ‘care’, which it is argued have the potential to assist in understanding the meanings grandparents attach to their caregiving experiences. The chapter concludes by arguing that while previous studies have documented the experiences of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren, few researchers have examined the deeper meanings grandparents attribute to the grandparent-as-parent role, or the impact of the transition from traditional grandparent to grandparent-as-parent on the identity of grandparent caregivers.

2.2 Historical background

“Every time a child is born, a grandparent is born too.”
(Kornhaber & Woodward 1981 p.xi)

This section analyses the literature to identify how the ‘traditional’ grandparent role has been framed and how 20th and 21st century social changes have influenced, and continue to shape, the role of the ‘contemporary’ grandparent. The contrast in experiences is quite
sharp. As pointed out by Szinovacz (1998), grandparents born during the early years of the century would have experienced the economic hardship of the Great Depression and some may have fought in World War II. They would have also experienced a technical revolution spanning from the beginnings of flight to the exploration of outer space and while some of these grandparents may still be alive today, many would not have survived their grandchildren’s childhood. However, contemporary grandparents born during or after World War II, at the beginning of the so-called ‘baby boom’ years, may have fought in far different wars and experienced a vastly different technical revolution. Most historical accounts draw attention to the contrast in experiences through examples such as grandparents today being able to travel to far flung destinations in hours rather than days or weeks, as well as keeping in contact with growing grandchildren via the internet (Szinovacz 1998).

2.2.1 Traditional grandparent role

It appears little attention was paid to the role of the grandparent within the family in the first half of the twentieth century. According to Kornhaber (1996), the only information available about grandparenting at that time was contained in works of literature, records of grandparents’ personal experiences, or stories passed down from one generation to the next. Uhlenberg and Kirby (1998 p.39) suggest that a lack of research before mid-century may be attributed to an accepted view of old age as being “a problem” and a related “negative view of grandparenthood”.

In an Australian grandparenting study by Gonski (1994 p.4), when grandparents were asked about their perceptions of their own grandparents, participants maintained they had been “authoritarian figures – patriarchs and matriarchs”, they were “held in awe and respect, and ruled the family”. Gonski (1994 p.4), herself, recalls a photograph of her own grandfather “dressed in his best suit and hat, sitting very tentatively on an antique chair placed in the garden while we sat at his feet”. However, an examination of the traditional role of grandparents in American society by Cox (2000) revealed grandparents as assuming the role of companion and friend to grandchildren, helping to maintain a sense of family identity and continuity, as well as instilling moral beliefs and values into children. Cox
(2000) also found that grandparenthood has traditionally been associated with a peripheral role, assisting parents, but not taking on the responsibility for actual child rearing. This traditional grandparent role as being one of “pleasure without responsibility” was also highlighted by Neugarten and Weinstein (1964 p.31) in their study into the changing role of the American grandparent. In a similar way, Wearing and Wearing (1996) also referred to such beliefs by grandparents in their Australian study into the changing discourses of grandparenthood. Grandmothers in Wearing and Wearing’s (1996 p.172) study believed that their role differed from that of being a mother “in that the complete responsibility for child rearing does not rest on the grandmother’s shoulders”. They added that the grandparent role could be “fun”, a part of “leisure”, a “joy”, “rewarding” and “satisfying” (p.172).

A UK review of the literature into the meaning of grandparenthood by Clarke and Roberts (2004 p.191) revealed that even though grandparents played an active role within the family, they believed they should not ‘interfere’ in their grandchildren’s lives. This notion of ‘non interference’ by grandparents has also been reported in other studies into grandparenthood (Cherlin & Furstenberg 1986; Kornhaber 1996; Emick & Hayslip 1999; Falk & Falk 2002). Research into the historical and demographic trends of grandparenthood in American society by Uhlenberg and Kirby (1998) disclosed that writers in the early twentieth century believed that grandparental interference contributed to the negative image of grandparents at that time. Also, a review of late twentieth century literature into grandparent role expectations by Szinovacz (1998) revealed widespread support for the belief that grandparents were expected to be available in times of family crisis, but should not interfere in the parenting of their grandchildren.

However, it appears that these traditional images of grandparents taking on a ‘peripheral’ role in the lives of their grandchildren, and the grandparent role being one of ‘pleasure without responsibility’, would not apply to grandparents-as-parents. Also, the belief that grandparents should not ‘interfere’ in the lives of their grandchildren is diametrically opposed to the role of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. It could be argued that that this dissonance in the grandparent role could well prove problematic to
grandparents-as-parents and impact on their identity, particularly if their perception of the grandparent role is aligned to the ‘traditional’ grandparent model.

### 2.2.2 Contemporary grandparent role

Whilst the literature pertaining to the traditional grandparent role often emphasises the myth that “grandparents are wizened, fragile or authoritarian old people” (Gonski 1994 fwd.), a study by Kornhaber (1996) into contemporary grandparenting reveals that former stereotypes no longer apply to today’s grandparents. Instead, contemporary grandparents are often a significant source of help for families, providing childcare, financial and moral support and their roles may include living ancestor and family historian, mentor, role model and nurturer. In her recent study into Australian contemporary grandparents, Ochiltree (2006a p.1) found that grandparents were “contributing to society more than they ever have before”, and most grandparents were investing “time, money, love, attention and care in their grandchildren”. This finding certainly resonates in the case of grandparents who have assumed the parenting role of their grandchildren.

Grandparents today are healthier, better educated and more affluent than previous generations, and increased longevity has “changed the face of grandparenthood” (Kornhaber 1996 p.11). Grandparents may now range in age from their early 30’s to 100+ years and some will be grandparents for more than half their lifetime, a fact acknowledged by Ochiltree (2006a p.1) when she states that today’s grandparents “may spend more than two decades of their lives as grandparents”. However, she maintains the exception to this are grandparents in Australia’s Indigenous community whose life expectancy has been cut short because of “disadvantage and poor living conditions which are associated with the loss of land, of culture and of language, and the forcible removal of many children from their families” (p.1).

Ochiltree’s (2006a p.2) study found that Australian grandparents take an active role in the lives of their grandchildren and “the image of the little white-haired grandmother in her rocking chair doing her knitting and the little old grandfather tottering around the garden is not in keeping with 21st-century reality”. In reality grandparents are usually fit and healthy
and may still be in the workforce when their first grandchild is born, yet this image of grandparents is not always portrayed in this way. However, the image of the contemporary grandparent as healthy, active, energetic and fun-loving has been portrayed in recent Australian children’s literature (Rowe 2004a; Rowe 2004b). In her children’s book *Our Granny*, Wild (1993) describes grannies who drive trucks, fix the plumbing, go to university, go travelling, play in a band, march in demonstrations, play bowls, tennis, golf and badminton, go bushwalking, jog, dance, learn tai chi and ride a bike. In Helen McKinlay’s (2003) children’s book, a normally ‘traditional’ grandmother takes a week off from marmalade making to try her hand at more ‘contemporary’ grandmother pursuits such as climbing Mt. Kosciusko, bungy jumping and taking a rocket ship to the moon. Perhaps this notion that contemporary grandparents ‘can do anything’ is one of the reasons why present-day grandparents are expected to take on an extended caregiving role of their grandchildren, and may contribute to the current increase in the numbers of kinship carers in Australia, as discussed in Chapter One.

From her study into grandmothers, Kitzinger (1996 p.7) found that women are now challenging the basic stereotype that grandmothers are frail homebodies; they have multiple roles and for many grandmothers, life is a “complicated juggling act”. In her recent Australian study into what it means to be a grandmother in today’s world, Judy Lumby (2005 p.xii) similarly notes that “today’s grandmothers are often juggling work and family, gym workouts and yoga classes, second marriages and blended families”. It could be argued that life would be even more complicated for grandmothers who are also full-time caregivers of their grandchildren.

It appears very little has been written specifically about the role of grandfathers in contemporary families. Research by Keen and Sara (1994) identified two major roles of grandfathers, one as consultant or adviser and the other as the teacher of ‘old’ values and skills. These roles were often related to finance and grandfathers saw their role as teaching grandchildren the value of money, how to make things themselves and how to “waste not, want not” (p.11). Additionally, grandfathers often took on the important role of the historian, giving a sense of history to their grandchildren’s lives and providing a vital link
from the past to the present. In a recent study into Australian grandfathers (Gonski & Zinn 2005 p.9), co-author Jack Zinn reveals that what it means to him to be a grandfather is being allowed into the lives of his grandchildren, and where he can feel as though he is “contributing to the future in a very real way and can experience unconditional love without too many responsibilities”.

Kornhaber’s (1996) Grandparent Study in the USA revealed that a number of changes in the way families are structured, together with economic and social stresses, have had a marked effect on the grandparent role. This finding is consistent with research undertaken for my Honours thesis which found that many of the social changes of the 20th century have had a significant impact on the traditional roles of Australian grandparents (Backhouse-Beaumont 2002). The social changes identified in that study included the feminist movement of the seventies, advances in medical and communication technologies, changes to the traditional family structure, modern divorce laws, the increase in drug and alcohol abuse, as well as an increase in child abuse and neglect. A recent study by Ochiltree (2006b) highlights three of the major changes to the Australian contemporary grandparent role over the last twenty years. The first concerns the role grandparents now play in the provision of childcare for preschool children and before-and-after school care and holiday care for school-aged children. This issue has also been the subject of recent research by Goodfellow and Laverty (2003b) which revealed that grandparents in the study found the extended childcare role of their grandchildren as being both a pleasure and a challenge. The second change concerns grandparents’ contact with grandchildren after their parents separate and/or divorce, and also when they re-partner or marry. For some grandparents the effects of divorce may be either positive or negative (Aspin 1994; Ferguson 2004). From a positive point of view, some grandparents may develop a closer relationship with their grandchildren and assume greater caregiving and supportive roles. On the other hand, for some grandparents divorce within the family network can mean being denied access to grandchildren and losing contact with them altogether. The third change concerns grandparents who take on a parenting role rather than a supporting grandparent role with their grandchildren. As discussed in Chapter One, it appears that an increasing number of contemporary grandparents have been caught up in this grandparent-as-parent phenomenon.
2.3 Reasons why grandparents are taking on parenting role

A wide range of social factors has contributed to the escalation in the number of grandparents raising their grandchildren worldwide (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler 2000; Richards 2001; Fitzpatrick 2004; Worrall 2005). Drug and alcohol abuse has been cited as the most dramatic causal factor, particularly the USA crack cocaine epidemic of the 1980’s (Minkler & Roe 1993; Bowers & Myers 1999). It has also been predicted by Fuller-Thomson and Minkler (2000 p.9) that “drug and alcohol abuse will continue to be an important contributor to the formation of grandparent-headed households in the 21st century”. In Australia, parental drug use is reported to be one of the main reasons children are being placed into out-of-home care (Patton 2004) and it is also predicted that this trend will continue (Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia 2002). A recent study in Canberra, for example, identified a significant number of grandparents who were raising their grandchildren because of drug and alcohol issues with the children’s parents (Baldock & Petit 2006; Baldock 2007). Grandmothers in Australia’s Indigenous communities have also experienced the effect of this increase in alcohol and drug abuse. Hammill (in Hele 2001 p.4) asserts that grandmothers in Indigenous communities had been literally left “holding the baby”, as the children’s parents were not functioning well enough to take on the caregiving role. In a great many instances this has been shown to be due to alcohol or drug addiction.

A number of studies indicate that parental death also often results in grandparents taking on the parenting role of their grandchildren. An increasing phenomenon appears to be parental death due to drug overdose. In Australia, an escalation in the number of fatal drug overdoses prompted the setting up of the Mirabel Foundation in 1998 to assist children who have been orphaned due to the illicit drug use of their parents. As pointed out by Patton (2003a p.3), it is often the grandparents that are left to “pick up the pieces” after a parent dies because of their drug addiction. Death due to family violence has also been cited as a reason why grandparents are raising their grandchildren. In a recent Australian study, it
was revealed that an “alarming” number of grandparents were raising their grandchildren because the children’s mothers had been killed by their partners (Fitzpatrick 2004 p.20).

The world-wide spread of HIV/AIDS has also been a major contributing factor in the increase in grandparental care (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler 2000; HelpAge International 2003). According to Joslin (2000), even though earlier and more effective treatments have reduced AIDS mortality, the number of grandparents raising AIDS-orphaned children will increase over the coming decade. In Thailand, there are estimated to be almost 300,000 children under 15 years of age who have lost at least one parent to AIDS related causes (UNAIDS 2002). In a study of AIDS affected families in the Chiang Mai province of Northern Thailand, Safman (2004) found that grandparents were considered the most appropriate caregivers for children whose parents had died or were unable to provide care. Reasons included grandparents’ experience in raising grandchildren, their shared interest and affection for the children, they appeared to have fewer obligations to compete with child-rearing, and were ‘at home’ and available to provide child-care (p.13).

Sub-Saharan Africa appears to be the area worst hit by the AIDS-orphan crisis with an estimated 12 million children already orphaned by the disease and it is projected that this number will climb to more than 18 million by 2010 (UNAIDS 2004). A recent study in Ghana (Ansah-Koi 2006), revealed that an estimated number of 132,000 children have already been orphaned by the disease and the number will increase to 291,000 by 2015. As Ansah-Koi (2006 p.560) explains, because of the “strong network of kinship systems in Ghana”, many of these children will be cared for by the extended family, especially grandmothers.

Even though the number of people infected by the AIDS virus in Australia (16,000 in 2005) is relatively low compared with a number of overseas countries, on World Aids Day 2006 the then Federal Health Minister, Tony Abbott, warned that the government was very concerned about a trend towards high numbers of HIV notifications (NAPWA 2006). However, there are no existing studies that specifically refer to Australian grandparents raising their grandchildren because the children’s parents have contracted HIV/AIDS.
Divorce, teen pregnancy, a rise in the number of sole-parent families and the associated problems of raising children alone, have also been cited as reasons why grandparents are taking on the parenting role (Minkler 1999; Thompson 1999). According to Kornhaber (1996 p.131), because of the high divorce rates in the USA, “many children wind up living with their grandparents either by choice or by abandonment”. USA grandparents are also the primary caregivers of children of many teen mothers. Minkler (1999 p.205) suggests that welfare reforms which make receipt of benefits by teenagers contingent on either living with their parents, being in school, and/or having a job, “may have the effect of pressuring increasing numbers of grandparents into becoming the primary caregivers for their grandchildren”. Whilst there are no studies in Australia that have, as yet, documented this trend, this may be particularly relevant in Australia, given welfare reforms under the previous federal government that included a ‘baby bonus’. Since its inception in 2004, there have been claims that the granting of a baby bonus on the birth of a child encourages teenage girls to have children, however statistics of birth rates in Australia do not support this claim (Women's Health Queensland 2008).

The high rates of incarceration, especially of women, related to new harsh drug laws and mandatory sentencing, has also had a significant effect on the number of grandparents raising their grandchildren (Smith, Beltran, Butts & Kingson 2000). In the USA the rate of incarceration of women has increased substantially over the last decade, and research indicates that grandparents are the primary caregivers to over 50% of children of imprisoned mothers (Smith, Beltran et al. 2000). In a New Zealand study of the children of women in prison in 2000, it was found that almost half the children’s caregivers were grandparents, particularly maternal grandmothers (Kingi 2000). In Australia, the exact number of children who have a parent in prison is unknown, as such data is not routinely collected (Woodward 2003). Research in 2000 by the Children of Prisoners’ Support Group estimated that in New South Wales approximately 15,000 children were affected by parental imprisonment in one year (Larman 2000). Limited research has been conducted into the families affected by incarceration, but it has been found that in the case of women prisoners, “maternal grandmothers were often the most significant others who cared for the
children of their inmate daughters and who helped the inmate to cope with her role of prisoner-mother” (Farrell 1998 p.59).

Mental health problems have also been a contributing factor towards grandparents raising their grandchildren. Research in the USA by Ackerson (2003) shows that parenting can often present major difficulties for people with mental health problems and grandparents are often the most frequent carers if a parent is hospitalised. In Australia, a Tasmanian study which looked at the needs of children and adolescents who had a parent with a mental illness found that grandparents proved to be “important caregivers” when parents were ill or hospitalised (Tasmanian School of Nursing & Department of Health and Human Services 1999 p.31).

Child abuse and neglect is also another reason why grandparents are taking on the parenting role of their grandchildren (Worrall 1996; Minkler 1999; Fitzpatrick 2004). In a recent New Zealand study by Worrall (2006) over 46% of grandparents cited neglect of their grandchildren either as the sole reason, or co-existing with other variables, as to why they had assumed the caregiving role. Current research reveals that the number of Australian children suffering abuse and neglect is increasing dramatically. For example, in the past five years every indicator of abuse and neglect has increased – child abuse notifications, substantiated abuse cases, children on care and protection orders, and the number of children placed in out-of-home care. According to the NAPCAN foundation, Australia’s leading national child abuse prevention agency, “these findings confirm that child abuse and neglect continues to be Australia’s most serious social problem bar none – and it’s getting worse” (2006 p.1).

It is clear that a large range of changes in family structure and social conditions over the last 25 years has contributed to an increase in the number of grandparent-headed families globally. An examination of this emerging family group is discussed in the following section.
2.4 The grandparent-headed family

Research has shown that grandparent-headed families are not confined to any particular locality, nor do they belong to any particular socio-economic group. Recent publicity has highlighted a number of high-profile grandparent-headed families in Australia, including former NSW Police Commissioner Tony Lauer and his wife Joy who are raising their three grandchildren (ABC Television 2003), and former NSW Premier John Fahey and his wife Colleen who are raising two grandchildren (Marcus 2006). However, as pointed out by Horner, Downie et. al. (2007) very little data has been compiled in order to get an accurate picture of grandparent-headed families in Australia.

A profile of grandparent-headed families in the USA provided by Woodworth (1996) revealed that the average grandparent-headed household comprised two grandparents and one child, or one grandparent and two grandchildren, however, some grandparents may be rearing more than two siblings in order to keep the family together. Even though some children are being raised in three-generation households headed by a grandparent where at least one parent is present in the home, the majority of grandparent-headed families do not contain the ‘middle generation’. Woodworth (1996 p.625) reports that many grandparents refer to their sons or daughters (the children’s parents) as “the living dead”, but goes on to point out: “these families have no grieving process with which to make peace with their loss…they continue to hope that one day their adult child – the parent – will return to the family” (Woodworth 1996 p.625).

Research has shown that there are a number of intergenerational implications for all members of grandparent-headed families. A study into grandparent-headed families in the USA revealed that children in the care of grandparents were more likely to experience “cognitive, emotional and physical challenges” and their early traumatic experiences could lead to “difficulties in communication and forming attachments” (Smith & Dannison 2003 p.35). In her study into the parent perspective, Pigatti (2004) found that parents who relinquish custody of their children to grandparents experience a myriad of both negative and positive emotions; these included feelings of frustration, guilt and inadequacy, as well
as a sense of hopefulness. A study by Giarrusso, Silverstein and Feng (2000 p.86) into the rewards and challenges of raising grandchildren revealed that over half the grandparents surveyed found the grandparent-as-parent role to be a “mixed bag”, that is the experience could be both rewarding and stressful. A qualitative study by Waldrop and Weber (2001) also highlighted the importance of the interrelationship between the stress and satisfaction of raising grandchildren to those who want to understand and help grandparent-headed families. The following discussion will explore some of the rewards and challenges for grandparent-headed families that have been previously documented.

2.4.1 Benefits of the grandparent-headed family
Family preservation has been cited as the most obvious benefit when placement of children with relatives or kin is necessary. According to Crumbley and Little (1997 p.1) placing children with relatives or kin “maintains the family system as the primary provider of care for the child, and forestalls the child becoming an institutional and social responsibility”. Kinship caregivers can also assist children in avoiding those problems that have previously affected family members, such as “substance abuse, child maltreatment, incarceration, and codependency”, as well as establishing “new traditions, goals, and value systems” both for themselves and the children in their care (Crumbley & Little 1997 p.1).

It appears that in most Australian and overseas studies into the experiences of grandparents-as-parents no specific questions have focused on the benefits to grandparents of raising their grandchildren. However, in one UK study by Richards (2001) the results suggested grandparents value the love they received from their grandchildren, being able to provide the children with a safe and happy environment, as well as having the children remain within the family. Chinese, Sikh and Muslim grandparents in Richards’ (2001) study also highlighted the benefits of being able to pass down cultural traditions to their grandchildren.

Australian grandparents in the COTA study (Fitzpatrick 2004) commented that parenting their grandchildren was a rewarding experience, it brought joy into their lives and kept them active. Another recent Australian study also reported grandparents had “no regrets”
about raising their grandchildren and believed that one of the greatest rewards was the “love and happiness” they shared with their grandchildren (Dunne & Kettler 2007 p.9). Grandmothers in Minkler and Roe’s (1993) USA study believed that raising their grandchildren had given them a second chance at parenting, a sense of pride and accomplishment and a new lease on life. Also, in two further USA studies which focused on the psychological costs and benefits of raising grandchildren, grandparents talked about the joy of sharing their grandchild’s life, the enjoyment of participating in activities with their grandchildren and being able to help grandchildren learn new skills (Giarrusso, Silverstein et al. 2000; Waldrop & Weber 2001).

The existing evidence suggests that being placed into the care of relatives or kin can also have benefits for the children. Crumbley and Little (1997 p.1) assert that children in kinship care may not experience the emotional problems that are often associated with foster care, such as “separation anxiety, adjustment reactions, attachment disorders, or conduct disorders”, as well as “feelings of abandonment and rejection”. In a study into the perceived experiences of children and adolescents living with their grandparents in Western Australia, grandchildren described the love, care and sense of belonging they received from their grandparents, as well as feelings of safety, security and stability (Hislop, Horner, Downie & Hay 2004). The children in this study also expressed the benefits of being able to maintain contact with their parents, siblings and other extended family members. Notwithstanding such findings that highlight the benefits for both the children and the grandparents who are raising them, a number of challenges have also been discussed in the literature.

2.4.2 Challenges facing grandparent-headed families

When children are placed in the care of relatives or kin, “role and boundary confusion”, as well as “assuming new roles and relinquishing old ones” have been cited as challenging for all concerned: the child, the caregiver and the parent (Crumbley & Little 1997 p.2). Establishing a “hierarchy for decision making, authority, and parenting” and confusion surrounding “Who’s the boss?” can also prove to be problematic for both the adults and children (Crumbley & Little 1997 p.2). This section will explore the existing evidence
concerning the challenges facing all members of grandparent-headed families - the grandparents, the grandchildren, and the children’s parents.

The challenges facing grandparents who are raising their grandchildren have been the subject of much research. Physical and emotional health problems of custodial grandparents have been widely documented in both Australian and overseas studies. In a USA study into the link between grandparent caregiving and depression it was revealed that grandparent caregiving was directly associated with high levels of depression (Minkler, Fuller-Thomson, Miller & Driver 2000). In another USA study into factors associated with stress among grandparents raising their grandchildren, Sands and Goldberg-Glen (2000 p.103) found that “being relatively young, caring for a grandchild with psychological and/or physical problems, and having low family cohesion” were factors associated with grandparent caregiver stress. Research by Kelley and Whiteley (2003 p.137) also found that grandparents raising grandchildren were at risk of developing stress, “often serious enough to warrant psychiatric intervention”. This study also showed that higher levels of stress were associated with grandmothers whose health was poor and who had fewer resources and social support (Kelley & Whitley 2003). New Zealand research by Worrall (1999) found that women caregivers, in particular, suffered from lowered immunity, tiredness and exhaustion. Also, there appeared to be an inverse relationship between the years of caring and levels of health, where those who had assumed the caregiving role for the greatest amount of time complained of feeling burnt out.

Research by Fitzpatrick (2004) reports that a lack of support and recognition has contributed to the health problems of Australian grandparents. This is supported by another recent Australian study which revealed that grandparent caregivers “experienced significantly higher levels of stress, anxiety and depression compared with their non-caregiving counterparts” (Dunne & Kettler 2007 p.11). In a Tasmanian study into issues relating to custodial grandparents (Parliament of Tasmania 2003) a range of both physical and emotional conditions were highlighted by caregivers. These included physical exhaustion due to frailty or declining health, stress caused by legal and financial pressures and the emotional stress in dealing with disturbed children or those suffering disabilities.
Many custodial grandparents stated that their greatest emotional stress came from the fear of losing custody of their grandchildren. A Western Australian study (Orb & Davey 2004) into the perceptions of grandparents as primary carers of their grandchildren revealed that there is a risk to grandparents of potential disability because of psychological stress, emotional distress, physical illness and fatigue. Indigenous Australian grandmothers, who are raising their grandchildren because of the erosion of roles and values within the community, are also reported to be under great stress of “bearing responsibility for housing, clothing, feeding as well as supporting the needs of children socially, financially, spiritually and culturally” (Hammill 2001 p.72).

However, it is important to note that grandparent caregiving can also be beneficial to the health of grandparents. In a USA study by Waldrop and Weber (2001 p.469) “11% of the participants perceived that their lifestyle became more active and healthier as a result of raising grandchildren”. Also, in a study by Minkler et. al (1992) into the health of African American grandmothers, a quarter of the women described improved overall health compared with the previous year. This was attributed to weight loss because of increased activity with the grandchildren as well as giving up smoking out of concern for the grandchildren’s health. Even though over 50% of the grandmother caregivers in the study claimed to be in good or excellent physical health, their qualitative responses indicated an intense desire to protect their grandchildren by downplaying their own health problems. Minkler et. al. (1992) attributed these discrepancies to the grandmothers’ fear that the grandchildren may be placed into foster care if their own health problems were revealed.

Financial problems have also been universally documented in studies of grandparents raising their grandchildren, with many grandparent caregivers living below the poverty line (Fuller-Thomson, Minkler & Driver 2000; Smith, Beltran et al. 2000). The loss of income experienced by many grandparent caregivers when forced to leave the workforce to care for grandchildren was one of the main reasons cited for financial problems (Minkler & Roe 1993; Fitzpatrick 2004; Worrall 2005). Also, a lack of external financial support was attributed to the financial difficulties experienced by the majority of grandparents in a UK study (Richards 2001). A significant number of grandparents in a New Zealand study
reported the financial strain of raising grandchildren, especially if the children had on-going physical, emotional and educational needs (Worrall 2005). Australian grandparents also revealed the extra costs involved in supporting grandchildren with “psychological, emotional and physical health care needs” (Fitzpatrick 2004 p.27). Grandparent caregivers in a study by Orb & Davey (2004 p.34) reported financial hardship “when things needed repair or they needed to change their car”. Australian grandparents have also revealed that in supporting grandchildren out of retirement savings and superannuation has meant that any hope of becoming “self-funded retirees” has been lost (Fitzpatrick 2004 p.26). A lack of financial support was also a common challenge for grandparents in Dunne and Kettler’s (2007 p.9) Australian study, who pointed out that “they had saved the government considerable sums of money by not allowing their children to go into foster care”.

Legal problems are also often paramount in the lives of grandparents raising their grandchildren. It appears from the literature that the most common legal problems relate to grandparent caregivers’ legal relationship with the grandchildren in their care. As pointed out by Kelley, Yorker et. al. (2001), this lack of legal relationship can often lead to problems for grandparents in accessing medical care and enrolling children in school. Also, the lack of a legal relationship can mean that a “grandparent has no legal right to prevent an incompetent birthparent from taking physical custody of his or her child at any time” (Kelley, Yorker et al. 2001 p.32). Worrall (2001) agrees that if legal guardianship rights and responsibilities remain with the children’s parents, grandparent caregivers are unable to make important decisions in regard to the welfare of their grandchildren. However, grandparents are often reluctant to apply for legal custody of their grandchildren because of the high legal cost involved, or because they feel that taking legal action will threaten the already fragile relationship they may have with the children’s parents (Worrall 2001).

Due to strict means test regulations, Australian grandparents are often not eligible for legal assistance because they own their own home, which disqualifies them from receiving financial support. However the birth parents of the grandchildren may very well have their legal representation paid for by Legal Aid. Grandparents involved in the recent COTA
study, talked about this injustice of the Australian legal system, and also complained that they were unable to obtain information about the legal process from Legal Aid staff, whereas the grandchildren’s parents received extensive assistance (Fitzpatrick 2004). In a 2003 Tasmanian study (Parliament of Tasmania 2003) grandparents also discussed the injustice of the Legal Aid system. The personal cost to grandparents was highlighted, with some custodial grandparents having to refinance their homes to pay legal fees, and others having to place caveats on their homes to secure finance to pay legal costs.

Housing problems have also been identified as a concern for grandparents who are raising grandchildren. Retired grandparents may have moved out of the family home into smaller accommodation which is totally unsuitable for a growing family, and finding larger, more affordable housing may be difficult (Worrall 1996; Flint & Perez-Porter 1997). As reported by Fitzpatrick (2004 p.27), one Australian grandparent who was living in a small 2 bedroom villa with two grandchildren commented that she felt like “an elephant living in a matchbox”. Grandparents in a recent New Zealand study by Worrall (2005) also discussed a number of housing difficulties, with one grandparent caregiver reporting that because of overcrowding in her two bedroom cottage, she had been forced to “sleep in the lounge” (p.58). Worrall (2005 p.58) stresses that the effects of overcrowding “constitute a risk factor that must be addressed” if grandparent-headed families are “to survive with the least detriment to all family members”.

Even though the purchase of adequate and affordable housing is a major concern for many grandparents raising grandchildren, Fuller-Thomson & Minkler (2003) stress that this can also be a significant problem for grandparents who are renting accommodation, particularly if they are living below the poverty line. As Fuller-Thomson & Minkler’s (2003) study revealed, many custodial grandparents are paying out a large proportion of their income for rent and also face other hardships in the renter’s market. These include overcrowding and possible eviction if occupancy limitations are breached, together with the fact the presence of children may violate rental agreements. In the USA, grandparents who are residing in senior housing may also face eviction if grandchildren take up residency (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler 2003).
Social isolation and inadequate social support have also been seen as a significant problems for grandparents raising grandchildren (Minkler 1999). A review of the literature by Hayslip and Kaminski (2005 p.264) reveals that social isolation may result directly from the demands of the parenting role, or indirectly, when grandparents are “feeling alone in their situation”. This finding is supported by grandparents in an Australian study (Fitzpatrick 2004 p.31) who reveal that because they now have grandchildren living with them they can “no longer enjoy privacy and social outings with their partners”. Other grandparents in this study experienced isolation from their peer group, which Fitzpatrick (2004) attributes to not being able to afford reliable and trusted babysitters for their grandchildren, as well as their friends not being happy to include children in their social activities. Grandparents in another Australian study agreed that they never had time for themselves because they were totally responsible for the grandchildren seven days a week, stating “we would love to go out and be a normal retiree” (Orb & Davey 2004 p.21). A ’sense of isolation and loneliness’ was also evident in a recent New Zealand study in which grandparents reported that their social calendar was empty, friends no longer invited them to dinner because of the grandchildren, and finding a babysitter for a grandchild with behavioural problems proved difficult (Worrall 2005).

In contrast, Minkler (1999 p.207) argues that grandparents and the grandchildren in their care may feel socially isolated, alienated and ‘different’ as a result of the failure of societal institutions to acknowledge their ‘reality’. Grandparents report that not only are their grandchildren embarrassed to take them to school ‘parent’ functions, but that educational organizations and community institutions have failed to recognise that, for a growing number of children, ‘parents’ are in reality ‘grandparents’ (Minkler 1999).

Parenting a new generation of children, whose cultural norms and values have changed greatly since grandparents reared their own children, can prove stressful for grandparent caregivers (Musil, Schrader & Mutikani 2000). Also, parenting grandchildren with behavioural problems because of their exposure to family trauma, abuse or neglect, can be even more demanding (Musil, Schrader et al. 2000; Richards 2001; Fitzpatrick 2004). In a
study by Emick and Hayslip (1999) it was believed that a lack of parenting skills could create new problems or exacerbate any existing problems of grandchildren. Learning modern parenting skills for their new role of grandparents-as-parents was seen as important to participants in two Australian studies (Fitzpatrick 2004; Orb & Davey 2004). As one grandparent commented “times have changed since I was a father” and “I would like access to current parenting theories” (Fitzpatrick 2004 p.29), while another stated, “I got out (library) books ‘Living with Teenagers’ so I can understand where I am coming from with him” (Orb & Davey 2004 p.22). Parenting teenagers also posed a number of problems in USA studies (Musil, Schrader et al. 2000). Issues of concern to grandparents included grandchildren’s exposure to drugs, alcohol and sexual situations, as well as career planning, dating, birth control issues, driving, and “the ever-present penchant for risk taking” (Musil, Schrader et al. 2000 p.59).

It appears limited research has focused on the perceptions of children who are being raised by grandparents or other kin and the challenges they face. In a recent USA study by Messing (2006), many children were very happy about their move into kinship care, while others expressed feelings of sadness, frustration, confusion and anger. Children in a Western Australian study revealed feelings of sadness and loss, as well as shame and secrecy about the reasons why their real parents were unable to care for them (Hislop, Horner et al. 2004). Children in this study also talked about how difficult it was to live in over-crowded conditions because of a lack of money and the strain they were placing on their grandparents’ health and wellbeing. Another challenge for children was the ‘over protective’ and ‘strict’ parenting style of grandparents who had ‘unrealistic expectations’ of their behaviour (p.36). Children being raised by grandparents who took part in the Australian COTA study revealed that they also lived in crowded conditions and were concerned about the health of their grandparents, as well as experiencing a lack of freedom, strict rules and the stigma of not being raised by their own parents (Fitzpatrick 2004). Children who took part in a recent NSW study into the needs of children in care described feelings of “loss, anger and betrayal” when the behaviour of their birth mothers contrasted with their expectations of how a mother should behave (Mason & Gibson 2004 p.32). Children and young people in this study also struggled to “find their voice amidst
competing truths” and talked about “the frustration of not being listened to” (Mason & Gibson 2004 pp.35-36). However, it is important to note that despite the challenges they faced, children in these studies were very grateful for the protection, love and support provided by their kinship carers.

The challenges facing the ‘middle’ generation of grandparent-headed families (the parents who are unwilling or unable to raise their children) have received scant attention in the past, even though a number of researchers (Dressel & Kelly 1996; Minkler 1999; Fuller-Thomson & Minkler 2000; Thomson & Thorpe 2003) have called attention to the importance of studying the needs and perspectives of all the generations in these families. This gap in the research has been addressed to some extent more recently in a small scale study of the parent perspective by Pigatti (2004) which revealed that parents who relinquish their child-rearing responsibilities, either permanently or temporarily, experience “a roller coaster of emotions” including feelings of guilt and inadequacy, as well as feelings of anger and frustration. However, Pigatti believes that parents who have relinquished ‘custody’ of their children may one day have the children returned to their care if they are able to access the support of family and the community. The participants in Pigatti’s study had “hopes and dreams for the future” that included “living a happy life and raising their children” (p.18). In an Australian study into the needs of children in care, birth parents described their feelings of “loss and powerlessness” following the removal of their children from their care (Mason & Gibson 2004 p.39). These birth parents struggled to cope with the loss of their children, their sense of identity, as well as issues surrounding contact with their children. However, they believed that their children’s emotional needs would best be met if they, the birth parents, were supported in “facilitating meaningful contact/shared care/restoration” (Mason & Gibson 2004 p.44).

It appears that most of the research surrounding the grandparent-headed family has focused on the rewards and challenges of grandparent carers, however few of these studies have focused on the concept of ‘care’ and its relationship to the grandparent caregiving role. This is examined in the following section.
2.5 The ‘care’ in grandparent caregiving

There are a number of theories that have been developed to explain the phenomenon of ‘care’ within our society and these have informed a significant amount of the research undertaken to date. The following discussion argues that care theories have the potential to assist in understanding the meanings caregiving grandparents attach to their experiences of the grandparent-as-parent role in this study.

2.5.1 Care and intergenerational exchange
Theories of ‘care and intergenerational exchange’ within the family have normally been associated with the filial obligation of the middle generation caring for their elderly parents (Finch & Mason 1997; Powell 2005). This is described by Millward (1998 p.3) as an intergenerational ‘social contract’. However, a number of significant social changes in the last quarter of a century have resulted in changes to the normal caregiver/care-recipient dynamic within families. As discussed by Goodfellow and Laverty (2003b) changes in lifestyle, employment patterns and family composition have impacted on the type of childcare which families choose. Grandparents now routinely provide childcare for preschool grandchildren, as well as before-and-after school care and holiday care for school-aged children (Goodfellow 2003a). Also, as discussed earlier in this chapter, a wide range of social changes has contributed to the significant number of grandparents now taking on the full-time parenting role of their grandchildren.

2.5.2 Feminist concept of care
The concept of care has also been firmly established in feminist literature, with women traditionally being considered to be the caregivers. A women’s ‘ethic of care’ was initially developed by Carol Gilligan (1982) whose research revealed that, when faced with a problem, women demonstrated an ethic of care that reflected both a sensitivity towards others and a feeling of responsibility to care for others, rather than taking a moral justice focus. However, as pointed out by Fine (2007c p.55), Gilligan’s emphasis on ‘care’ did not imply its inferiority to ‘justice’, but that it was “simply different”. A feminist approach to
family care also recognises that women are expected to be the primary caregivers with little concern paid to the psychological and financial effects on women’s lives (Hooyman & Gonyea 1999). According to Baines, Evans and Neysmith (1991), the gendered division of labour (women are responsible for caring, while men are the economic providers) means that women provide care rather than receive care. Traditionally, women’s caring work has not been considered to be work at all, but as something that comes “naturally” to women, “arising from the biological differences between men and women”; today, however, the reasons attributed to women as caregivers are linked to “socialization, patriarchy, and the relations of family and labour in advanced industrialized societies” (Baines, Evans et al. 1991 p.17). An understanding of the complexities, costs and benefits involved in caring has not been incorporated into the design of social policies and services, nor has it been reflected in expectations about families (Baines, Evans et al. 1991). Also, the contradictions experienced by women caregivers involving the emotions of affection mixed with resentment, together with the norms of family responsibility and obligation, have received little attention (Baines, Evans et al. 1991). It appears that women’s caregiving within the family has primarily focused on the care mothers give to their children, however, this has now expanded to include grandmothers.

The literature surrounding grandparents raising grandchildren reveals that the grandparent-as-parent role is performed predominantly by grandmothers. This growing social phenomenon of grandmothers raising grandchildren has been discussed by researchers within the feminist perspective of caring as predominantly a ‘women’s issue’, as well as the gendered division of labour around caregiving. In their study of grandmothers as caregivers, Minkler and Roe (1993 p.26) conclude that an examination of the lived experiences of grandmother caregivers within a theoretical framework of caregiving as a women’s issue, highlights the “societal ambivalence” around caregiving, as well as the ways the caregiving role restricts the choices and opportunities available to women, and invokes conflicting feelings between “affection and labor”.

In her study into kinship care in New Zealand, Worrall (1996 p.68) reveals that even though New Zealand legislation calls for the care and protection of children to be placed
with families, it has not been recognised that “the actual caregiving task is undertaken by women and that this may well change their lives”. Worrall (1996) also likens kinship care to community care, and agrees with feminist writers that community care equals family care, which equals care by women. The family now takes on responsibilities that previously were seen as belonging to the State, which translates into women, such as grandmothers, caring for grandchildren. Worrall (1996) also states that kinship care, like community care, is seen as being superior to stranger care, with children being raised within their own familiar environment, even though this may prove to be a burden on caregivers; and it is the most preferable option in economic terms, costing much less than alternative forms of substitute care. Kinship caregiving may also affect both the earning capacity and chances of promotion of women, force them into the part-time workforce, and necessitate a “juggling act” of their home and family responsibilities (Worrall 1996 p.70).

Australian studies of grandparents-as-parents (Parliament of Tasmania 2003; Fitzpatrick 2004; Orb & Davey 2004) have not specifically focused on the phenomenon of grandmothers as the primary caregivers. However, in her study into women in an Australian Indigenous community, Hammil notes that it is the grandmothers who bear the responsibility for raising their grandchildren when the young women and men in the community are unable to care for themselves or their children because of drug and alcohol addiction. Hammil (2001) argues that these ‘grannies’ who contribute the greatest share of support over the longer life span, are not only becoming demoralized through lack of voice, but are also being denied their natural ageing processes, as well as the respect and cultural role that would have traditionally been theirs.

2.5.3 Social care
Recent care theory has now been extended beyond the view that caring is the responsibility of women and should “be undertaken for love or duty, without pay” to a more social conception of care (Fine 2007a p.138). It is contended by Fine (2007a p.138) that a ‘social division of care’ perspective be developed and used as a framework to collect data as well as to monitor the “changing balances of responsibility for providing care”. Daly and Lewis
(2000 p.285) have also developed a multi-dimensional care-centred concept, which they term ‘social care’, and which is defined as:

“the activities and relations involved in meeting the physical and emotional requirements of dependent adults and children, and the normative, economic and social frameworks within which these are assigned and carried out”.

A recent study by Cass (2007) has examined the grandparent-as-parent role within the framework of ‘social care’, as Cass believes that the present theoretical emphasis on caregiving/receiving and the policy setting in which they are situated rarely considers grandparent care of grandchildren. Drawing on work by Daly and Lewis (2000) and Fine (2004), Cass focuses on how the concepts of ‘care as labour’, ‘care as a relationship embedded in obligation’ and ‘care as an activity which incurs costs’ intersects with the Australian and international literature surrounding grandparents who are the primary carers of their grandchildren (2007 p.242). In regard to the concept of ‘care as labour’, Cass concludes that grandparent care is often unpaid and unsupported, in contrast to foster care, which is state-funded and supported (2007). Regarding ‘care as a relationship embedded in obligation’, Cass found that grandparent caregivers usually accepted the grandparent-as-parent role as their “responsibility and obligation” and that this “normative expectation” has been incorporated into child welfare law and practice (2007 p.250). With regard to ‘care as an activity which incurs costs’, Cass identified that the grandparent caregiving role involves “financial, emotional and health-related” costs, which have not been recognised or compensated (2007 p.250). Cass adds that “grandparent care sits at the intersections of state/family provision”, and questions not only the impact of federal and state social policies on the wellbeing of grandparents and the grandchildren in their care, but also how such policies, shaped by expectations of familial obligation, “may diminish the public responsibility to share the costs of these beneficial relationships” (2007 p.250). Cass (2007) concludes that the framework of social care provides a more powerful lens to view the grandparent caregiver role, rather than the present two-fold perspectives in the literature which are essentially limited to a child welfare/protection focus and a focus on the sociology of ageing.
2.5.4 Care as a citizenship issue

It is argued by Fine (2007b) that debates surrounding the phenomenon of care must also include ‘care as a citizenship issue’. Drawing on work by Knijn and Kremer (1997) and Sevenhuijsen (1998), Fine states that care needs to be understood not only as a women’s issue, but as an issue of ‘inclusive citizenship’; that is, it is the right of each citizen to be able to both give and receive care (2007b). A democratic ethic of care should involve not only the recognition of the value of care, but should also be based on the ideals of human rights for both caregivers and care receivers (Fine 2007b). An ethic of care, especially towards the more vulnerable citizens in our community, is advocated by Morris (2001 p.15) when she states that:

Most importantly, we need an ethics of care which, while starting from the position that everyone has the same human rights, also recognizes the additional requirements that some people have in order to access those human rights.

Sevenhuijsen (1998 p.15) argues the necessity of locating an ethic of care within notions of citizenship in order for it to acquire “significant political meaning” and speculates that care is often omitted from political considerations because of its association with meanings of femininity. Drawing on earlier work by Pateman (1989), it is argued by Cass (1994) that the concept of citizenship fails to recognise women caregivers because they are often excluded from participating as citizens because of the informal social welfare they provide. In her research into a political ethic of care in the UK, Williams (2001) also outlines compelling reasons why care should be recognised as a central issue for social policy, arguing that an ethic of care is integral to citizenship, requiring both financial and practical support, as well as the provision of anti-discriminatory and anti-poverty policies. Williams (2001 p.487) further argues the importance of inclusive citizenship in an ethic of care, “where all those involved in the social processes of care have a voice, particularly those whose voice has historically been marginalised”.

Few researchers have focused on the concept of citizenship within the debate surrounding the care provided by grandparents to their grandchildren. However, participants in Minkler and Roe’s (1993 p.197) study express their feelings of “second-class citizenship” when
discussing inequities in government financial and other support services provided for grandparent caregivers.

2.5.5 Care and justice
Care theorists have also discussed family caregiving within the framework of caring and justice. Drawing on her experiences as the mother of a disabled child, Kittay (2002) highlights the challenges faced by caregivers and their struggle for *doulia*, the social support needed to ensure a caregiver’s wellbeing. Expanding on Kittay’s work, West (2002 p.89) argues that those who perform caregiving labour are vulnerable to exploitation, and “caregivers who lack support, or *doulia*, run the risk of serious impoverishment”. The approach taken by Kittay is also endorsed by Fine (2007c p.72), who adds that “justice is not served if those who provide care to those who are dependent are penalized, either directly or indirectly”. Fineman (2002) discusses the ‘natural’ role of the family in caring for dependents, and the ‘myth’ that families will assume full responsibility for the care of dependents, thus obviating the need for communal support for caring labour. The exploitation of caregivers is also recognised by Bubeck (2002) who identifies the mechanism of exploitation as a ‘circle of care’, and proposes a theory of justice to address concerns of those who are engaged in caring.

It appears that the framework of care and justice has not been specifically used to examine the grandparent-as-parent role. However, both Australian (Fitzpatrick 2004) and overseas (Worrall 1996) studies of grandparents raising grandchildren have revealed a number of economic and legal injustices faced by grandparent caregivers and their exploitation at the hands of government policies. Likewise, in their study of grandmothers as caregivers, Minkler and Roe (1993 p.211) have called for humane public policies that are truly committed to building a just and caring society for all, in order to address the needs of America’s “forgotten caregivers” and the children in their care.
2.6 Meaning and identity of grandparent-as-parent role

The studies cited in this chapter reveal much about the context and experience of grandparents raising their grandchildren. However, few researchers have examined the meaning grandparents attribute to the grandparent-as-parent role, as well as the impact of the transition from traditional grandparent to grandparent-as-parent on the identity of grandparents. In their study into grandparent role meaning, Hayslip, Henderson and Shore (2003 p.1) point out, that as the changing role of grandparents over the last 20 years has altered the nature of relationships between grandchildren, parents, and grandparents, “the meaning ascribed to the role of grandparent may also shift as a consequence of such changes”.

In two key USA studies (Hayslip, Shore, Henderson & Lambert 1998; Emick & Hayslip 1999) the meaning of grandparenthood was examined, drawing on samples of both traditional grandparents and grandparents who were raising their grandchildren. These quantitative studies utilised the five dimensions of meaning pertaining to grandparenthood originally developed by Kivnick (1982):

- centrality (having high personal salience),
- valued elder (being admired and sought out for advice and help by a grandchild),
- immortality through clan (being able to live on through a grandchild),
- reinvolvement with past (being able to relive earlier experiences), and
- indulgence (being able to spoil and to be lenient with a grandchild).

In a review of these studies, Hayslip, Henderson and Shore (2003) observed that custodial grandparents experienced more role confusion, isolation and life disruption than did traditional grandparents. They concluded that unlike custodial grandparents, the lives of traditional grandparents did not include the stress of raising grandchildren and they were able to experience the roles of both parent and grandparent without it impacting negatively on their relationships with other family members. However, findings from an earlier study by Hayslip, Shore et. al. (1998 p.172) revealed that, for some custodial grandparents, the
negative consequences of raising a grandchild may be lessened by “the enhanced sense of meaning they attribute to grandparenting in the context of their new parental roles”.

In a study by Landry-Meyer and Newman (2004) that utilised a role theory perspective, it was revealed that most grandparents perceived the grandparent-as-parent role as being ‘unanticipated’ and ‘off-time’. Also, ‘role conflict’ was experienced by many grandparents who believed that the grandparent-as-parent role conflicted with the expected traditional role (Landry-Meyer & Newman 2004).

In their study into relatives raising children, Crumbley and Little (1997) discuss the clinical issues impacting on relative caregivers. These include multiple losses (of life, space/privacy, traditional grandparent role, relationship with child’s parents); re-defining roles and boundaries (with child/child’s parents); guilt and embarrassment (relating to parent’s problems/loss of child, disloyalty/betrayal of parents to welfare agencies, having to request assistance from public support agencies); anger and resentment (at the child, the parent, or themselves), as well as changes in relationships with other family members.

A recent study by Standing, Musil and Warner (2007), which focuses on grandmothers’ transitions to caregiving roles of their grandchildren, reveals that even though commitment to their grandchildren is a dominant theme, grandmother caregivers experience mixed feelings around changes in personal freedom, privacy and expenditure of energy. However, it is argued that the study provides only an “initial glimpse” into the transitions of grandmother caregivers, and additional research is needed to achieve the ultimate goal of developing interventions to assist grandmothers through the transition to the caregiving role of their grandchildren (Standing, Musil et al. 2007 p.629).

Whilst these existing studies have served to highlight a number of issues associated with the transition from traditional grandparent to primary caregiver, there is clearly a need to explore in more depth the impact of this transition on the identity of grandparents-as-parents as well as the deeper meanings grandparents attach to the grandparent-as-parent role. By utilising both a narrative inquiry methodology and an identity theory perspective,
this study will ‘listen to the voices’ of grandparents in order to, firstly, identify what it means to grandparents to be carrying out the grandparent-as-parent role, rather than the traditional grandparent role, and secondly, to identify what has been the impact on the identity of grandparents in assuming the non-traditional grandparent role.

2.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has identified within the existing literature a number of social factors that have contributed to the trend towards grandparent-headed families, as well as the intergenerational implications for all members of this emerging social group. The chapter has also examined a number of theories of care, which have implicitly and explicitly informed research, policy and practice regarding care, and which have the potential to further inform the meanings caregiving grandparents attach to their experiences of the grandparent-as-parent role. The chapter concludes by arguing that whilst existing studies highlight the impact on grandparents of assuming the parenting role, further research is needed to explore this impact in more depth.

The following chapter discusses the theoretical framework adopted for the study.
CHAPTER THREE: AN IDENTITY THEORY PERSPECTIVE

3.1 Introduction

As the discussion in the previous chapter has revealed, grandparenthood in Western culture is traditionally associated with a peripheral role, assisting parents, but not taking on the responsibility for actual child rearing. However, many grandparents who are raising their grandchildren are carrying out the roles of both parent and grandparent. In order to answer the two research questions posed by this study, it was considered important to draw upon a body of theory that elucidates the links between role and identity in order to understand the meanings grandparent caregivers attach to their experiences of the grandparent-as-parent role, and examine how the identity of grandparents-as-parents has been influenced by assuming the non-traditional grandparent role.

This chapter will explore the key tenets of identity theory and highlight their relevance for this study. Given that identity theory has its roots in symbolic interactionism, discussion will begin with an overview of this sociological perspective and document its development by a number of social theorists.

3.2 Symbolic Interactionism

George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) is generally regarded as the founder of symbolic interactionism, although the actual term ‘symbolic interaction’ was coined by Herbert Blumer (1986), one of Mead’s students at the University of Chicago. According to Hewitt (1997), Mead’s work has been made available as a result of his social psychology students assembling their notes from his courses into a book Mind, Self, and Society following Mead’s death in 1931. Mead (1934) proposed that people interact through the use of symbols which provide the meaning for this interaction. However, communication with
others is only possible if the meanings of symbols are shared by others through a process which Mead (1934) referred to as ‘role taking’. This process involved people taking on the role of others by placing themselves in the position of the person with whom they are interacting. Mead (1934) argued that by observing themselves from the standpoint of others, people were able to develop a concept of ‘self’, which was an essential part of the process of becoming a human being. This awareness of self would enable people to see themselves as others see them and to become aware of the views of themselves held by others. Mead (1934) proposed two aspects of the self, the ‘me’ and the ‘I’. The ‘me’ was a person’s definition of himself or herself within a specific social role, whereas the ‘I’ was related to a person’s self-concept that had been acquired from the reactions of others as well as their interpretation of those reactions. Mead (1934) believed that the culture of societies influenced the type of behaviour appropriate for particular social roles and people would act in ways consistent with both the expected behaviour of a particular role and with their own concept of self. From Mead’s point of view, social institutions, like the family, had particular social roles attached to them, such as parent or grandparent; however, these social roles were not fixed and were constantly being modified in the course of interaction. At times it may not be possible to act in accordance with a particular role, in which case new and innovative behaviour would be necessary. Of interest to the current study is whether and how grandparents who are raising their grandchildren may need to modify their behaviours as they move between the traditional grandparent role and the grandparent-as-parent role.

A number of social theorists have developed the symbolic interaction framework, however Stryker (1980) considers that apart from Mead, Herbert Blumer has made the most significant contribution to the development of symbolic interactionism. In expanding on Mead’s (1934) work, Blumer (1986 p.2) argued that, in his view, symbolic interactionism rested on three basic principles:

- human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them;
- the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows;
- these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he (sic) encounters.
This view of people as active agents, basing their action on the meanings they attach to their social interaction, is in direct contrast with the view of mainstream sociology, in which people passively respond to external constraints. In other words, “it is the social process in group life that creates and upholds the rules, not the rules that create and uphold group life” (Blumer 1986 p.19).

Blumer (1986 p.32) also saw symbolic interactionism as requiring a methodological position different from the conventional methodological principles of empirical science, and in his view:

…the four customary means – adhering to scientific protocol, engaging in replication, testing hypotheses, and using operational procedure – do not provide the empirical validation that genuine empirical social science requires.

In order to assure that “premises, problems, data, relations, concepts, and interpretations are empirically valid”, Blumer (1986 p.32) argued that one must engage in a “meticulous examination” of the empirical social world. Blumer (1986 p.35) defined the empirical social world as “the world of everyday experience, the top layers of which we see in our lives and recognize in the lives of others”. It is argued that this meticulous examination of the experiences of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren will contribute to the validity required for this study. In order to carry out such naturalistic examination of the empirical social world, Blumer outlined two modes of inquiry, exploration and inspection.

The first, exploratory inquiry, involved using procedures such as direct observation, interviewing people and listening to their conversations, obtaining life histories, using letters and diaries, consulting public records or conducting group discussions. Blumer (1986 p.41) believed that in any exploratory inquiry it was necessary to recruit observant and well-informed people, arguing that a small group of such participants were “more valuable many times over than any representative sample”. The main aim of exploratory research was to dig deep below the surface of merely descriptive information to uncover a more factual and accurate picture of the area of study. Secondly, inspection of the empirical social world should involve not only direct examination, but should also embody analysis. Blumer (1986) believed that a different analytical procedure was required, rather than conventional methods of scientific analysis: firstly, the inspection procedure should
involve an in-depth examination of the empirical content of the analytical elements used for purposes of analysis, and secondly, should involve a similar examination of the empirical nature of the relations between such elements. For Blumer (1986 p.45), inspection as a mode of inquiry was the antithesis of that normally used in the social and psychological sciences; instead of being tied down to a “fixed mode of approach and procedure”, inspection “develops the nature of the analytical elements through the examination of the empirical world itself”. Blumer (1986 p.46) argued that both exploration and inspection were essential procedures for a naturalistic investigation of the different worlds which “both represent and shape the social life of people, their activities, their relations, and their institutions”. The qualitative methodology adopted for this study will employ a purposeful sampling technique to recruit ‘well-informed’ participants, as well as Blumer’s ‘exploration’ and ‘inspection’ procedures for analysis of the data.

According to Blumer (1986 p.47), symbolic interactionism is a “down-to-earth” approach to the scientific study of human group life and human conduct and its empirical world is the natural world of such group life and conduct. In order to study a particular phenomenon Blumer (1986 p.48) argued that the methodological approach of “direct examination” would enable the researcher to meet all of the basic requirements of an empirical science, which he explained as:

…to confront an empirical world that is available for observation and analysis; to raise abstract problems with regard to that world; to gather necessary data through careful and disciplined examination of that world; to unearth relations between categories of such data; to formulate propositions with regard to such relations; to weave such propositions into a theoretical scheme; and to test the problems, the data, the relations, the propositions, and the theory by renewed examination of the empirical world.

Such a direct examination would involve each of the four concepts of symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1986 p.50):

- people, individually and collectively, are prepared to act on the basis of the meanings of the objects that comprise their world;
- the association of people is necessarily in the form of a process in which they are making indications to one another and interpreting each other’s indications.
- social acts, whether individual or collective, are constructed through a process in which the actors note, interpret, and assess the situations confronting them;
- the complex interlinkages of acts that comprise organization, institutions, division of labor, and networks of interdependency are moving and not static affairs.
In concluding his remarks on the methodological position of symbolic interactionism, Blumer (1986 p.60) states:

…what I think symbolic interactionism strives to do is: respect the nature of the empirical world and organize a methodological stance to reflect that respect.

Expanding on Blumer’s work, Charon (2004) also argues that the symbolic interactionist’s approach to research requires a more naturalistic methodology. In order to fully understand a person’s world, it is necessary to study this world in depth, and interpret this world from the actor’s point of view, rather than that of the researcher. Data should be gathered through observing and interacting with individuals in order to fully capture their perspectives, rather than using other scientific methods. This direct observation and interaction should be followed by a careful description of the concepts uncovered in the study. It is also important to move away from mechanical models of causation (which emphasize single variables as inevitably leading to certain outcomes) towards processual models (which emphasize a number of developing factors). As discussed in the following chapter, the naturalistic methodology narrative inquiry has been adopted for this study, which will allow the grandparents’ voices to be heard and understood.

As Charon (2004) points out, symbolic interactionism has inspired a great deal of empirical research, including studies of pregnant drug users, first-time tattooees, compulsive gamblers, maximum security prisoners, high school students, etc. and adds:

These empirical studies are good examples of research using symbolic interactionism. All attempt to focus on interaction, definition, decisionmaking and the development of both societies and identities. All are examples of observation/interviewing, often asking people to tell their stories or show how their perspective is created, altered or lost. All are interested in identity, how people define themselves and others, and how people’s identity influences how they act in situations. And all of them, through showing the importance of definition, examine the human being as actively forming his or her own life rather than simply being influenced by personality, past, attitudes, emotional response, habit, other people, or society (Charon 2004 p.205).

Symbolic interactionism has also been cited as occupying a “unique and important” position in family studies and may have had more of an impact on the study of families than almost any other theoretical perspective (LaRossa & Reitzes 1993 p.135). This is due, firstly, to the emphasis it gives to the proposition that families are social groups and, secondly, to its assertion that individuals develop both a concept of self and their identities
through social interaction, enabling them to independently assign value to their family activities. Rebecca Erickson (2003 p.525) also acknowledges the contribution that symbolic interactionism has made to family studies and posits that this perspective has the potential to analyse the effects of broad-based social change on family life without losing sight of the “nuances of intrafamilial interaction”.

Symbolic interactionism is also seen as providing an ideal conceptual framework in the theory and practice of social work and offering social workers three key advantages: “a tradition integrating scholarship and practice”, a “set of distinguished role models” as well as “the tools needed for interpretive, pragmatic, progressive and humanistic helping work” (Forte 2004 p.391). However, Forte (2004 p.528) also argues that even though symbolic interactionism has contributed to many facets of social work, such as human behaviour theory, social work practice, social problem analysis, social work research and policy advocacy, it has not reached its potential “as an indispensable tool in the toolbox used for varied social work endeavours”. Despite such praise attributed to this theoretical perspective, there have been a number of other major criticisms. It has been argued by a number of theorists, for example, that the concepts of symbolic interactionism lack specificity and need to be developed into a set of empirically testable set of propositions (Stryker 1980; Stryker & Serpe 1982; Stryker 1987). In order to specify and make researchable the concepts of ‘society’ and the ‘self’ as outlined by symbolic interactionism, and to organise these as explanations of specified behaviours which could be tested in systematic empirical research, Stryker and Burke (2000) developed a body of work which has become known as ‘identity theory’.

Even though symbolic interactionism broadly resonated with the focus of this current inquiry in that it would allow the voices of the grandparents to be heard, it was believed that the deeper meanings that grandparents attach to carrying out the non-traditional grandparent role, as well as how their identity has been influenced by assuming the grandparent-as-parent-role, would be better facilitated through the application of identity theory. It was particularly apparent that the key tenets of identity theory, such as ‘role
identity’, ‘identity salience’ and ‘commitment’ held much potential for furthering the aims of this research.

3.3 Identity theory

The most general theoretical proposition of identity theory, a specification of symbolic interactionism’s basic formula, is that commitment affects identity salience which in turn affects behavioural choices. (Stryker & Statham 1985 p.346).

Following on from the work of Mead (1934), identity theory was originally formulated by Sheldon Stryker (1968) in an investigation of how an identity-based approach to symbolic interactionism could advance the sociology of the family. Even though he believed the central ideas of symbolic interactionism were sound, Stryker (1980) considered they did not constitute a satisfactory sociological theory, but rather constituted a frame of reference or perspective. Identity theory was partly a “refinement” and partly an “extension” of the traditional symbolic interactionist perspective, and was developed in order to translate the key concepts of symbolic interactionism into an empirically testable set of propositions (Stryker & Serpe 1982 p.200).

In the development of identity theory Stryker and Statham (1985) saw the key tenets of role theory, in conjunction with those of symbolic interactionism, as an integrated conceptual framework which could be used to study the reciprocal relationships between society and the individual. This structural-functional approach to role theory can be traced back to the work of Parsons (1951) on mutual shared meanings, complementary expectations and consensus on norms. As explained by Biddle (1986 p.70):

In general, functional role theory has focused on the characteristic behaviours of persons who occupy social positions within a stable social system. ‘Roles’ are conceived as the shared, normative expectations that prescribe and explain these behaviours. Actors in the social system have presumably been taught these norms and may be counted upon to conform to norms for their own conduct and to sanction others for conformity to norms applying to the latter.

Even though they acknowledged role theory was limited in its perspective, Stryker and Statham (1985) considered it was still valuable in understanding how role expectations affected behavior. Role theory was able to elucidate how expectations were communicated, how people were pressured into conforming to them and how changes in expectations could
cause difficulties. Another contribution of role theory was its demonstration of the impact structural influences could have on the content of role expectations. Landy-Meyer (1999) used a role theory perspective to gain insight into the conflicting roles of grandparent caregivers in the USA, and concluded that role theory provided the means to develop intervention strategies to enhance the grandparent caregiver role. In a later study, Landry-Meyer and Newman (2004) used three constructs of role theory, ‘role timing’, ‘role ambiguity’ and ‘role conflict’, to explore the role transition of 26 grandparents who were raising their grandchildren. Findings confirmed that the grandparent caregiver role transition was a “significant life event” that created a change in the organisation of the family (Landry-Meyer & Newman 2004 p.1023). However, Stryker and Statham (1985 p.312) believed that, separately, neither role theory nor symbolic interaction theory possessed the “intellectual and conceptual resources” needed to construct an adequate social psychological theory, but, if combined, they had the potential for adequate theorizing that separately they lacked. Hence this current study draws on the combined potential of both symbolic interactionism and role theory in exploring the transition from the traditional grandparent role to the grandparent-as-parent role. This takes the form of identity theory.

Identity theory grew out of this integration of symbolic interactionism and role theory, and was further developed by a number of social theorists (McCall & Simmons 1978; Burke 1980; Burke & Reitzes 1981; Stryker & Serpe 1982). The concept of identity theory adopted for this study is that defined by Stryker and Burke (2000 p.284) as “the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies”. This particular concept of identity theory, although based on symbolic interactionism, has evolved from two separate, but closely linked, concepts:

The first aspect concentrates on examining how social structures affect the structure of self and how structure of the self influences social behavior, whereas the second concentrates on the internal dynamics of self-processes as these affect social behavior (Stryker & Burke 2000 p.285).

Hence, the first aspect, represented by the work of Stryker and colleagues (Stryker 1980; Stryker & Serpe 1982), neglects the internal dynamics of self processes, while the second, based on the work of Burke and colleagues (Burke 1991; Burke & Reitzes 1991; Burke & Stets 1999), neglects ways in which external social structures impinge on the internal
processes. Stryker and Burke (2000 p.285) asserted that by combining these two strands of thinking, they could “refine and expand the scope of the structural symbolic interactionist frame and suggest new applications of the frame and derivative theories”.

In essence, identity theory is interested in the ways in which individuals have distinct components of self, termed ‘identities’ (Stryker 1980), or ‘role identities’ (McCall & Simmons 1978), for each of the different roles that people occupy in society. Role identities are self-conceptions, or self-definitions, that individuals devise for themselves as occupants of particular social positions. In this study, for example, grandparents may identify with the roles of wife/husband, mother/father, as well as grandmother/grandfather. These role identities are a person’s “imaginative view of himself as he likes to think of himself being and acting as an occupant of that position” (McCall & Simmons 1978 p.65). One interest of this study is to better understand the role grandparents most identity with as they move between traditional grandparent and grandparent-as-parent roles.

In addition to providing self-conceived meaning, role identities are also given meaning by their distinction from relevant complementary or counter-roles (Burke 1980). For example, within the family, the role of wife would take on meaning in connection with the role of husband and the role of parent would take on meaning in connection with the role of child. In this study of grandparents raising grandchildren, a particular focus is on how the role of grandparent takes on meaning in connection with the role of grandchild.

Stryker and Serpe (1982) use the notions of ‘identity salience’ and ‘commitment’ to account for the impact of role identities on social behaviour. As discussed earlier, identity theory proposes that individuals may have any number of identities, in accordance with the number of relationships in which they are involved, and some identities have more self-relevance, or are more important to us than others. Role identities are ranked in a hierarchy of salience: “the higher the salience of an identity relative to other identities incorporated into the self, the greater the probability of behavioral choices in accordance with the expectations attached to that identity” (Stryker & Burke 2000 p.286). As pointed out by Nuttbrock and Freudiger (1991 p.147):
Salience identities are those on which we are poised to act. They are such an integral part of our psychological makeup that we display them routinely, even in situations where they may not be deemed appropriate by others, as when a mother shows pictures of her child to uninterested friends or co-workers.

Identity theory also proposes that “the salience of a particular identity will be determined by the person’s commitment to that role” (Hogg, Terry & White 1995 p.258). Stryker and Burke (2000 p.286) define ‘commitment’ as follows:

Commitment refers to the degree to which persons’ relationships to others in their networks depend on possessing a particular identity and role; commitment is measurable by the costs of losing meaningful relations to others, should the identity be foregone.

In his work on identity theory, Stryker (1980) proposed two types of commitment. Firstly, ‘interactional commitment’ (extensivity of commitment), which involved the number of roles associated with a particular identity; and secondly, ‘affective commitment’ (intensivity of commitment), which referred to the importance of the relationships associated with the identity, that is, the level of affect associated with the potential loss of these social relationships. “The more strongly committed a person is to an identity – in terms of both interactional and affective commitment – the higher the level of identity salience will be” (Hogg, Terry et al. 1995 p.258). Drawing on work by Hoelter (1983), Hogg Terry et al. (1995 p.258) argue that:

Commitment to a particular role identity is high if people perceive that many of their important social relationships are predicated on occupancy of that role. The consequence of vacating such a role is loss of a social network that is psychologically important, for the self-concept and for self-esteem.

The concepts of identity salience and commitment are particularly relevant to this study in seeking to understand the importance of the traditional grandparent role, as well as the loss of this role, to grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. As pointed out by Szinovacz (1998 p.265) empirical evidence by Cherlin & Furstenberg (1986) “suggests that grandparenthood is important to most grandparents, however, the relative importance of the grandparent role compared to other roles remains to be tested.”

Research into the internal dynamics of self-processes as these affect social behaviour resulted in the development of theory which proposed that the link between identity and behaviour existed in the meanings they shared (Burke & Reitzes 1981). In order to answer
the question of how self-meanings relate to meanings of one’s behaviour, Burke (1991) developed an identity standard, or set of meanings held by individuals, which defined his or her role identity in a given situation. Burke and Stets (1999) argue that people act to maintain perceptions of themselves that are consistent with a particular role identity. This is the self-verification process. A mismatch or discrepancy in self-verification will result in a negative emotion, while a match would result in a positive emotion. Further research by Stets (2003) examined how identity theory’s self-verification assumptions related to the distributive justice process and people’s emotional responses to injustice. Stets (2003) found that any difference between one’s actual reward and one’s just reward in a situation produced a state of injustice. When people do not receive the rewards they expect, they experience feelings of anger, resentment and disgust. People’s emotional responses to disruption of the self-verification process was also examined by Stets and Tsushima (2001 p.284) who contend that “anger occurs when the goal of verifying one’s identity is interrupted”. Their study found that more intense anger was associated with lack of verification of intimate group-based identities such as the family identity, who need to feel valuable, worthy and accepted, rather than role-based identities which are less intimate. This finding was consistent with research by Burke (1991) that an individual would feel greater distress when the self-verification process was interrupted by a significant other than if a casual acquaintance interrupted the process. As pointed out by Stets and Tsushima (2001 p.293):

> Group-based identities, which are socio-emotional, entail strong ties that make others’ views about the self important. If the self is not verified, the emotional response can be strong.

This study affords an opportunity to consider how such a self-verification process might assist in uncovering the deeper meanings that grandparents attach to the grandparent-as-parent role.

Stryker and Burke (2000 p.288) describe the integrating of the external and internal social structures of identity theory as a meeting of behaviour that “expresses identities, often in interaction with others”. The social structure in which identities exist is based on ‘role identities’: role is external and linked to social positions within the social structure,
whereas identity is internal, consisting of internalised meaning and expectations associated with a role (Stryker & Burke 2000). This study focuses on the internal identity of the grandparent-as-parent role and its relation to the external traditional grandparent role.

Roles are also connected to one or more groups, networks, or social units that provide the meanings and expectations associated with the role. People are usually involved in multiple role relationships in multiple groups and hold multiple identities. These multiple role identities may reinforce one another, but if they do not, identity competition or conflicts may arise. The degree of commitment and salience these identities hold for a person, will determine the degree of stress generated by the identity conflict. According to Burke (1991; 1996), when people are prevented from affirming their identities, they experience stress, which can result in feelings of distress. The level of distress is dependent upon the severity or frequency of the disruption and whether the interrupted identity is one to which the individual is strongly committed. Burke (2003) also contends that apart from the experience of stress, having two oppositional identities activated at the same time will also result in change. Firstly, one or both of the identities may shift as their meanings change and, secondly, one or the other identity may become less important, or salient, or the commitment to the identity may become lower as the person withdraws from relationships involved with the identity (Burke 2003). This shift in commitment results in people re-identifying themselves, and changing their self-meanings as held in their identity standards.

It can be argued that the grandparent role is connected to the ‘family’ unit and the meanings and expectations of grandparents would most likely be those associated with the traditional supportive grandparent role, rather than a grandparent-as-parent role. The salience grandparents attach to the grandparent role would be determined by their commitment to the role. When grandparents are forced to take on the parenting role, rather than the grandparent role, identity conflict may result. According to identity theory, it is the meanings associated with a role that are important in understanding behaviour.
Through the narratives of the grandparent participants, this study will utilise the concepts of identity theory to examine how the meanings which grandparents attach to their experiences of raising their grandchildren challenge the socially constructed traditional image of grandparenthood. As pointed out by Stryker and Burke (2000 p.290) “identity theory has the potential to illuminate a wide range of sociological and social psychological arenas and issues”, and one area that is relatively unexploited is the “multiple identities” conceptualisation of self. Much research has been undertaken in the area of the diverse roles people play and the resulting competing or conflicting expectations for behaviour, such as the conflict working women face in their role demands of work and family. However, Stryker and Burke (2000 p.291) see one challenge for future research as the application of identity theory to the conceptions of people who occupy multiple social positions with “divergent role expectations”. This study will take up that challenge by examining the experiences of grandparents-as-parents through an identity theory lens.

3.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined the concepts of identity theory and the relevance of applying this theory to the lived experiences of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. The choice of an identity theory approach is based on the belief that the concepts it incorporates, such as role identity, identity salience and commitment, will be useful in understanding how the identity of grandparents-as-parents has been influenced by assuming the non-traditional grandparent role. Chapter Six will attempt to analyse through the lens of identity theory the meanings grandparents attach to the grandparent-as-parent role and the ways this shapes their identity.

The following chapter outlines the research design and methodology adopted for this study.
CHAPTER FOUR: ‘HEARING THE VOICES’ OF GRANDPARENTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research design and methodology for the study. The chapter begins with a brief rationale for the use of an interpretivist paradigm, and a narrative inquiry approach that builds on the discussion of symbolic interactionism and identity theory in the previous chapter. The techniques of using narrative inquiry both as a method for data collection and for analysing and reporting data are outlined. Details of data collection, including sample selection, in-depth interviewing, transcription, initial data analysis and coding of the data, are provided. The methodological soundness of the study and ethical considerations conclude the chapter.

4.2 Why a qualitative study?

All research has a philosophical framework of beliefs and feelings about the world, how it should be understood and studied, that guide the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln 1994). This study is located within an interpretivist paradigm, as it is believed that this approach enables the researcher to understand “the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt 1994 p.118). The interpretivist strives to understand the meaning that people attribute to actions and situations through Verstehen, “the process by which we make sense of or interpret our everyday world” (Schwandt 1994 p.121). Interpretive researchers seek thick and rich descriptions of the phenomenon they are studying and aim to develop an “empathetic understanding” of the world of others (Rubin & Rubin 1995 p.35). Maxwell (2005) also argues that in an interpretive approach researchers focus not only on participants’ physical events and behaviours, but also on the meanings underlying these experiences.
The decision to locate this inquiry within an interpretivist paradigm was guided by the purpose of the study, which is to not only understand and document the experiences of 34 grandparents raising their grandchildren, but also to uncover the meanings behind their experiences of assuming the grandparent-as-parent role.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994 p.2) “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”. Qualitative research usually involves the use of a number of empirical materials to collect and analyse data in order to acquire an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question, including case study, personal experience, interviews and documentary evidence. Patton (2002) agrees that naturalistic qualitative research takes place in real-world settings and the researcher sets out to understand and document the day-to-day reality of the participants, with no attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest, adding “…people are interviewed with open-ended questions in places and under conditions that are comfortable for and familiar to them” (p.39).

Although much of the literature surrounding grandparents raising their grandchildren has emphasised quantitative research using large data sets, Goldberg-Glen and Hayslip (2000) believe that the contributions of qualitative data and the importance of taking a micro perspective on grandparent-headed families cannot be underestimated. They state that even though quantitative research that focuses on broad issues and aggregated data is important, it is not helpful in gaining an understanding of the “variables and interactions that are unique to grandparent-headed families” (p.391). Qualitative studies, on the other hand, allow researchers to “raise questions about subject matter, nonverbal cues, body language and the environments that are unique to each family” (p.391). As discussed in Chapter One, there is minimal demographic information and published research regarding grandparents raising grandchildren in Australia, which state and federal government agencies can utilise to build a policy or service framework (Horner, Downie et al. 2007). It is argued that a broader range of qualitative research which focuses on all aspects of the grandparent-as-parent experience is essential to provide the evidence that policymakers need to ensure that grandparent caregivers in Australia are fully supported.
The qualitative research methodology chosen for this study is *narrative inquiry*, as it allows for an exploration of the lived experiences of grandparents raising their grandchildren, to ‘walk in their shoes’, and to attempt to capture as fully as possible the meaning behind these experiences.

### 4.3 Narrative inquiry

Over the past twenty years there has been an increasing interest in narrative inquiry as a qualitative methodology among overseas researchers, particularly in the areas of psychology, education, health promotion and nursing (Riessman 1990; Ben-Ari 1995; Chase 1995; McCance, McKenna & Boore 2001; Riley & Hawe 2005). Australian researchers have used narrative inquiry to study the experiences of mothers of ADHD children (Carpenter 1999), the perceptions and experiences of preservice teachers (Gibson 2005), and the experiences of grandparents who are regular child-carers of their grandchildren (Laverty 2003; Goodfellow & Laverty 2003b). Whilst Riessman and Quinney (2005) identify a limited use of narrative in social work research over the last 15 years, they point out it has been embraced in reflective practice and the teaching of social work. One such study has been undertaken by Crawford, Dickinson and Leitmann (2002), which uses narrative to study the reflections on field and research experiences of Australian students in a social work program.

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) social science is founded on the study of lived experience and narrative inquiry is a method of understanding people’s lived experiences. In a collaboration between researcher and participants, narrative inquiry involves the “living and telling, reliving and retelling” of stories about the experiences that make up people’s lives; in short, narrative inquiry is “stories lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly 2000 p.20). According to Kramp (2004) narrative inquiry has the power and the potential to allow the ‘voices’ of the storytellers, with all their richness of colour and detail, to be heard. Kramp (2004 p.111) argues that “narrative privileges the storyteller”, as it is through their stories, rather than through the researcher’s observations, that participants’
voices are heard. Rather than being the object of observation, participants are the narrators, or storytellers. Voice is defined by Reinharz (1994 p.180) as “the ability, the means and the right to express oneself”, however if one does not have these abilities, one is “silent”. Reinharz adds that voice is important for people who seek empowerment and can assist oppressed groups to gain a stronger position in society. As one of the aims of this study is to give voice to grandparents-as-parents, the choice of a narrative inquiry methodology will help facilitate this.

Clandinin and Connelly (1994 p.416) see “inquiry into narrative” as interchangeable with “narrative inquiry”, and argue that narrative is “both the phenomenon and the method of the social sciences”. ‘Narrative’ refers to not only the experiences to be studied, but also the methods of inquiry used to study these experiences. They clarify this distinction by defining the phenomenon as the ‘story’ and the inquiry process as the ‘narrative’. For Clandinin and Connelly (1994), people are the ones who lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers are the ones who describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of the experiences.

The approach to data collection for this study is thus based on Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) concept of narrative inquiry. This will involve studying the life experiences of grandparents raising their grandchildren, through a joint storying and restorying process, in a collaborative research relationship between myself, as researcher, and the grandparent participants. Grandparents who are raising their grandchildren will be asked to relate stories of how grandchildren came into their care, and their experiences of raising them. Following an initial analysis and narration of this data, a further round of interviews will take place with a limited number of the grandparents, in order to verify and confirm the meaning drawn from the stories and to further explore emergent themes.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) use the concepts of three dimensions of narrative inquiry (‘time’, ‘place’, and ‘personal-social’) to search for meaning within participants’ stories. Experiences are temporal, that is they are not only concerned with the present, but are related to both past and future events; experiences occur in specific places or sequences of
places; experience is both personal and social, and people need to be understood not only as individuals, but within a social context. By using this narrative framework, inquiry into personal experience is simultaneously focused in four directions: inward, toward internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions; outward, toward existential conditions, such as the wider environment, the world of social roles and relationship and the kinds of lives people live; backward and forward, towards temporality of experience, past, present and future. Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) three dimensions of ‘time’, ‘place’ and ‘social-personal’ are deemed useful for the analysis and interpretation of the grandparents’ stories. As previously mentioned, meaning drawn from these stories will be taken back to a limited number of grandparents for verification and clarification. This step allows the grandparents to hear their own stories and become involved in the restorying process.

Another important aspect of narrative analysis is ‘voice’, both that of the participants and the researcher. As pointed out by Clandinin and Connelly (1994 p.424), as researchers search for meaning within the stories of participants, they need to consider ‘the voice that is heard and the voice that is not heard’. Researchers need to listen beyond the actual words of participants to hear what has not been said and to ensure that the analysis does not obscure or silence participants’ voices (Clandinin & Connelly 1994). The researcher’s voice, or ‘signature’, is also an important aspect in transforming field texts into research texts. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe the struggle often experienced by researchers as they attempt to express their own voices as well as represent the voices of the participants. Silences, both those that researchers choose, and those of which they are unaware, must also be a consideration in the analysis of participants’ stories.

Polkinghorne (1995) identifies two types of narrative inquiry analysis, and although both types are concerned with stories, they have significant differences. The first is paradigmatic analysis, which moves from stories (collected as data) to common elements or themes that can cut across the stories, characters or settings to produce general concepts. This can be done deductively by applying theory to data, or inductively by allowing themes to emerge and concepts to develop from the stories. Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) grounded
theory concept is an example of this type of paradigmatic analysis. However, as pointed out by Riessman (1994 p.70):

If we are to take personal narratives seriously, they require a different analytic treatment than grounded theory allows, in my view. Some “unpacking” of the text is called for, that is, attention to language and representation of experience in the talk of informants.

The second form is narrative analysis which uses plot to tie together individual experiences in order to create the context for understanding meaning. The outcome of this process is a narrative or set of narratives configured from interpretation of the individual stories, through the use of a plot, in order to give meaning to experience. Polkinghorne (1995 p.21) points out that both types of narrative inquiry analysis can make “important contributions to the body of social science knowledge”.

Both paradigmatic and narrative forms of analysis will be used in this study to analyse, interpret and draw meaning from the grandparents’ stories. Firstly, an inductive paradigmatic analysis of the grandparents’ texts will attempt to uncover common elements, or themes, which will then be grouped into categories. Following this initial analysis of the data, a number of grandparents will be re-interviewed, in order to achieve greater insight and understanding of the stories told. The process of narrative analysis that follows will involve a ‘synthesizing of the data’ through an ongoing process of examination and interpretation of the texts in collaboration with the grandparent participants. The meaning drawn from the grandparents’ collective stories will form the basis of the overall story, which will be reported in detail in Chapter Five.

4.4 Participant sample: The grandparent caregivers

A purposeful sampling technique was used to recruit the participants, in order to select “information-rich cases” for in-depth study (Patton 2002 p.230). Purposeful sampling is described by Maxwell (2005 p.88) as “a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events are selected deliberately in order to provide important information that can’t be gotten from other choices”.
Grandparents of any age, gender, cultural background or socio-economic group were eligible for this study, but were required to be taking on the full-time caregiving role of their grandchildren. Consistent with the literature, an effort was made to include grandparents who were raising their grandchildren because of a diverse range of reasons. Every endeavour was also made to include grandparents whose grandchildren had come into their care through the Commonwealth Family Law system, NSW state legislation, or by an informal arrangement with the children’s parents. As pointed out by Darlington and Scott (2002 p.53), “where there are many possible experiences of a phenomenon, it will be important to talk to people representing a wide range of views and situations to build up a broad understanding of the topic”. Lincoln and Guba (1985 p.201) agree that in naturalistic investigations the purpose of sampling is to include as much information as possible and “to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor”.

Potential research participants are not always easy to find and it is common to have to try a number of avenues to recruit people to commit to the time, energy and the willingness to talk about deeply personal experiences (Darlington & Scott 2002). The search for participants to take part in this study was simplified by the timely televising during March 2003 of an edition of the ABC series Australian Story in which the former NSW Police Commissioner, Tony Lauer, and his wife Joy, revealed they were raising their three grandchildren because of their daughter’s drug addiction (ABC Television 2003; Kidman 2003). Coinciding with the interest generated from this story, details of my research were featured in the Northern Rivers television and newspaper media (ABC Radio 2003; Bellamy 2003; Editor 2003; NBN TV 2003). This publicity prompted a number of local grandparents who were raising their grandchildren to volunteer to take part in my study.

Also, in 2003 the then Federal Minister for Family and Community Services, the Honourable Larry Anthony, commissioned the Council on the Ageing (COTA) to carry out an investigation into grandparents who were raising their grandchildren in Australia. During a four-month period a number of forums were set up throughout Australia to talk to grandparents about issues they may have been facing. I attended the forums at two
locations, Lismore and the Gold Coast, where I met a number of grandparents who expressed interest in taking part in my study.

Another avenue in gaining access to participants was through grandparent support groups that had been set up throughout NSW. I contacted a number of these support groups, attended one of their meetings, and recruited a number of participants who were willing to take part in the study. Access to participants was also gained through recommendations made by friends and colleagues in both Sydney and the Northern Rivers region of NSW and in Sydney through the assistance of Barnardos.

A total of 27 grandmothers and 7 grandfathers, raising 45 grandchildren, took part in the study, including 6 grandparent couples who were involved in jointly caring for their grandchildren and who expressed a desire to be interviewed together. Grandparents were drawn from the Western, Southern and inner Sydney suburbs, as well as the mid-North coast and Northern Rivers regions of NSW. They ranged in age from their late 40’s to mid 70’s and came from a range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. All grandparents were Australian citizens, 32 were of Anglo-saxon background and 2 were Indigenous Australians. Five grandparents were in the full-time paid workforce, 8 were in part-time paid work, 12 were unemployed and 9 were retired from the work force. The grandchildren ranged in age from 1-17 years old. Most (25) of the children had been placed into the care of their grandparents through the intervention of DoCS, 5 through the Federal Court system, and 15 were being raised on an informal basis. Most (22) of the grandparents were interviewed in their homes, while 12 chose public venues, such as parks, coffee shops, or community centres, to relate their stories.

4.5 Interviews: Collecting grandparents’ stories

Qualitative interviewing is a means of sharing and understanding what others feel and think about their worlds. In order to reconstruct and understand interviewees’ experiences and interpretations, interpretive researchers “seek thick and rich descriptions of the cultural and
topical arenas they are studying and try to develop an empathetic understanding of the world of others” (Rubin & Rubin 1995 p.35).

In this study, *in-depth* interviews were chosen to gather the stories of grandparents who were raising their grandchildren. Researchers use in-depth interviewing to seek “deep” information, knowledge and understanding, usually concerning very personal matters such as an individual’s lived experience (Johnson 2002 p.104). It was my intention to achieve a deep level of knowledge and understanding of grandparents’ worlds and how they create and share meanings about their lives.

A number of researchers (Mishler 1986; Riessman 1990; Chase 1995) have argued that conventional methods of sociological interviewing tend to suppress respondents’ stories and in order to make sense of experience and communicate meaning through narration, in-depth interviews should become occasions in which we ask for life stories, rather than reports. Narrative researchers need to ask about participants’ experiences, thoughts and feelings, rather than sociological questions, and questions should be phrased in everyday rather than sociological language. During the course of the interview, the interviewer should listen for gaps, silences, or contradictions and ask questions that invite the participant to tell their stories in more detail (Chase 1995).

In this study, narrative principles of organising interview questions around participants’ stories guided the interview process (Chase 2002). Narrative interviews are based on one or two main questions that invite a life story and follow up questions come from close listening to the participant’s story rather than from prepared questions. However, prior to the data collection stage, a detailed interview guide should be written that anticipates all of the possible areas that the participant may cover. A series of questions is prepared detailing each issue or area that the researcher would like to cover in the interview. Chase (2002 p.83) believes this prepares the interviewer “to be open to a wide range of stories their interviewees may tell and it helps them to know what in general they want to hear about”. However, once the interview is under way, the researcher’s main aim should be to listen well and ask questions that focus on specific, concrete life stories rather than generalities.
During the course of the interview many of the questions on the interview guide will likely be answered without being asked.

Consistent with the above approach, the two main questions I asked each grandparent were:

1. Can you tell me how the grandchildren came into your care?
2. Can you tell me about your experiences of raising your grandchildren?

A detailed interview guide (Appendix A) was prepared, based on a review of the literature, as well as the experiences related by grandparent caregivers at the two COTA forums I attended. Apart from general demographic questions covering age, marital status, employment, educational level, number of children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and number of grandchildren being cared for, whether they were the primary caregiver etc., prompt questions were based around a number of themes. These included a broad range of common and special challenges which grandparents may be facing, concerns they may have for their own or the grandchildren’s wellbeing, support mechanisms they may have in place or need, benefits of raising their grandchildren, as well as any concerns they may have for the future.

As the goal of in-depth interviewing is understanding, it is vital that the researcher establishes a rapport with participants in order to hear the stories from their point of view (Fontana & Frey 2000). This close collaboration is seen as a ‘conversational partnership’ between researcher and participant who “work together to achieve the shared goal of understanding” (Rubin & Rubin 1995 p.11). According to Chase (1995), the close relationships formed by researchers can affect the quality of the participants’ responses to questions asked.

As discussed in Chapter One, because I am a grandmother myself, I was quickly able to build a relationship of trust and understanding with each of the grandparents in the study. Darlington and Scott (2002) believe the development of trust is essential if participants are to share their personal, and sometimes traumatic, experiences with the interviewer. Also, for rapport to be maintained, the researcher must be genuinely interested in the participant’s
experience of the issue being researched, as well as being able to communicate this interest and concern to the participant. As I have had an extended ‘hands-on’ relationship with some of my grandchildren for a number of years, I was able to develop a deep sense of shared understanding with the grandparent participants.

Each of the grandparents in the study gave their permission for the interviews to be taped, which allowed me to listen attentively and analytically to the stories being told. A tape recorder is indispensable in qualitative research, as it allows the researcher to capture the actual quotations spoken by the participants. Patton (2002 p.380) describes these actual quotations as “the prize sought by the qualitative inquirer”. Silverman (2000 p.829) adds that tapes and transcripts “are a public record, available to the scientific community, in a way that field notes are not”. The use of a tape recorder also allowed my full attention to be focused on the grandparents’ stories, listening for parts that needed further clarification, and noting new questions that would encourage a more detailed narration.

The period immediately after an interview is believed by Patton (2002 p.383) to be “critical to the rigor and validity of qualitative inquiry”; it is a critical time of reflection, elaboration and quality control to guarantee that the data obtained will be useful, reliable and authentic. Because interviews are so “precious” to those who are using them for dissertations, Patton (2002 p.384) believes time should be allowed to “make observations about, reflect on, and learn from each interview”. As it was important in this study that both the ‘heard’ and the ‘unheard’ voices of the grandparents be acknowledged in order for their stories to be accurately told, immediately following each interview, my observations and comments were noted in an interview diary. Information recorded included details regarding the setting of the interview, observations about the participant’s reactions during the interview, my reflection on the interview process and any additional details I considered would be of assistance when analysing the data.

On average, each interview took between one and one-and-a-half hours to complete, and all tapes were transcribed verbatim. According to Johnson (2002 p.112), a verbatim record is necessary if the “subsequent analysis is to be valid and meaningful”. Even though each
one-hour interview took approximately four hours to transcribe, I believed it was important to transcribe the tapes myself, as this allowed me to become immersed in the data, an experience that Patton (2002 p.441) describes as generating “emergent insights” and “a chance to get a feel for the cumulative data as a whole”. At the completion of this initial interview process, I had transcribed over 180,000 words of grandparents’ stories. Even though most narrative studies are conducted with fewer participants than the sample size employed in traditional research, “the quantity of data gathered in life stories is large…moreover, no two interviews are alike, and the uniqueness of narratives is manifested in extremely rich data” (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber 1998 p.9). Even though the use of narrative inquiry as a research method is described by Kramp (2004 p.113) as “laborious and time consuming”, it is a critical part of an inquiry that privileges ‘voice’ and narrative. In this study the use of narrative inquiry, even though it resulted in the generation of an enormous amount of labour-intensive data, gave the grandparents the power to construct their own narratives and allowed their voices to be heard.

4.6 Moving from field texts to research texts

Traditionally, qualitative researchers have analysed their data manually, typing up interviews, photocopying them, then coding them using coloured markers before cutting up the marked segments and sorting them into categories (Weitzman 2000). Since the 1980’s a number of qualitative data analysis (QDA) software programs have been developed to assist the researcher in the analysis of large quantities of data. Even though a QDA software program can provide the tools to assist in analysing qualitative data, it is pointed out by Weitzman (2000 p.805) that “it cannot do the analysis for you”. What a QDA program can do is provide the researcher with the tools for searching and organising the data, as well as storing reflections, ideas and theories (Weitzman 2000). This sentiment is echoed by Patton (2002 p.442) who agrees that qualitative software programs “can facilitate the work of analysis, but they can’t provide the creativity and intelligence that make each qualitative analysis unique”.

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Because of the large number of narratives generated from the interviews with grandparents, the QDA software program I chose to assist with the data management of this study is the NUD*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theory-building) system. Apart from being a basic code-and-retrieve system for examining documents such as narrative transcripts, NUD*IST also allows the user to “create and manipulate concepts and store and explore emerging ideas” (Richards & Richards 1994 p.457). Each of the transcripts generated from the interviews with the grandparents was transferred into the NUD*IST program’s document system in preparation for the initial inductive data analysis. This paradigmatic analysis, detailed in Chapter Five, formed the basis for the second stage of the data analysis, a deeper search for meaning within the grandparents’ stories. The emerging ‘plot’ or ‘story’ from the second stage of the data examination, the narrative analysis, is outlined in Chapter Six.

4.7 Ethical considerations

Because in-depth interviewing “opens up what is inside people” (Patton 2002 p.407), social researchers have an ethical obligation to ensure the rights, privacy and welfare of the participants in their study. This is particularly relevant given the sensitive nature of this research with grandparents who are raising their grandchildren, a topic which has the potential to be distressing for participants. Throughout this study an ethical strategy was applied based on the guidelines of the Southern Cross University’s Ethics Committee.

Prior to the interview, grandparents were given an Information Sheet (Appendix B) which outlined the purpose of the research, the general focus of the questions, the proposed length of the interview process, sought approval for the interview to be taped, and outlined grandparents’ rights to privacy and anonymity. Grandparents were assured that no information given in the interviews would be made public in a form that could be identifying. In writing up the study, or in publishing its findings, pseudonyms would be used to protect grandparents’ identities. The Information Sheet also advised grandparents that they were free to withdraw their consent and to discontinue participation at any time, as well as elect not to answer any questions asked.
At the interview, grandparents were given a Consent Form (Appendix C) to sign, confirming that they had read and understood the details contained in the Information Sheet, were taking part freely in the study, and that the data obtained would remain confidential. If they had any additional questions regarding the study, grandparents were invited to contact myself, or my Supervisor, at any time after the interview. Also, grandparents were informed that the Southern Cross University Ethics Committee had approved the research project, and any complaints associated with the conduct of the study could be forwarded to the SCU Ethics Complaints Officer.

In-depth interviewing can often raise difficult issues for participants in research studies that involve telling stories of a highly personal and sensitive nature (Darlington & Scott 2002; Patton 2002), and researchers are under an obligation to protect interviewees from harm that may result from the study (Rubin & Rubin 1995). Such risks can be reduced by using professionally trained interviewers, as well as the opportunity to debrief after the interview process (Darlington & Scott 2002). Grandparents in this study were given the contact details of free telephone and face-to-face counselling services available in their particular area. Also, as I am a trained counsellor, I was available to talk to grandparents about any issues of concern at the conclusion of the interview. On a number of occasions grandparents became visibly upset when telling stories of the grief and loss surrounding the reasons why grandchildren had come into their care. I always left time for some day-to-day conversation at the end of the interview, as well as accepting a cup of coffee, if offered, as I believed that these were important messages of acceptance of the grandparents as people, not just as research participants (Darlington & Scott 2002). Follow up letters were sent to all grandparents after the interviews thanking them for sharing with me their experiences of raising their grandchildren. If grandparents had requested information or contact details of support groups, etc., this request was noted in my interview diary and the information included with the ‘thank-you’ letters.

The ethical dimensions of the researcher-participant relationship are also highlighted when we enter into a research relationship with participants and ask them to share their stories.
with us; researchers who use personal experience methods with “real” people, and not just
texts, have a duty of care to their research participants (Clandinin & Connelly 1994 p.422).
As I moved from field texts (participants’ narratives) to research texts (researchers’
interpretations), I was conscious of my responsibility to accurately narrate the
grandparents’ voices. Clandinin and Connelly (2000 p.173) argue that in composing
research texts, narrative researchers need to be mindful that research participants are their
“most important audience”, and that researchers owe a duty of care to “compose a text that
does not rupture life stories that sustain them”. However, researchers also owe a duty of
care and responsibility to a wider audience, that of “the conversation of a scholarly
discourse” which allows the research texts to convey the ways in which researchers have
told their stories (Clandinin & Connelly 2000 p.174). I approached the data analysis tasks
with both these imperatives in mind. Chapter Five meets the first of these objectives,
which is to report and sustain the narratives of the grandparents, while Chapter Six tells the
stories through the lens of identity theory.

The next section discusses how a quality criteria was adopted to ensure rigour throughout
the research.

4.8 Trustworthiness of the data

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that the conventional measures of research rigour,
namely internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity, appear to be
inappropriate for naturalistic research. Instead, they suggest that more appropriate criteria
should include the measures of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.
These four measures have been adopted for ensuring the methodological soundness of this
study.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the most crucial technique for establishing
credibility of the evidence is by member checks, whereby data, analytic categories,
interpretations and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from
whom the evidence was originally collected. Marshall and Rossman (1999) argue that the goal of credibility is to demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described. In accordance with a narrative inquiry methodology, in this study findings from the initial paradigmatic analysis of the grandparents’ stories were taken back to a number of participants in order to verify and confirm the meaning drawn from the stories and further explore emergent themes.

Within the construct of transferability the researcher must argue that her findings will be useful to others in similar situations, with similar research questions or questions of practice (Marshall & Rossman 1999). One technique to ensure transferability is the use of purposeful sampling, providing the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Purposeful sampling was the technique adopted for this study, which provided the necessary thick description. Using multiple sources of evidence from the literature review, as well as the individual interviews with grandparents, also enhanced transferability in this study.

The dependability of a study hinges on the validity of processes used to arrive at the conclusions made (Lincoln & Guba 1985). The technique used to enhance the dependability of this study is to ensure that the research process has been specified so that the reader can follow how the evidence has been collected and analysed. In addition, a retrievable evidence bank for this study has been set up by the researcher and monitored by a supervisor to certify academic integrity.

Confirmability captures the traditional concept of objectivity and the researcher needs to ask whether the findings of the study could be confirmed by another (Marshall & Rossman 1999). The confirmability of this study is achieved through the precise description of the research paradigm and research method, as well as a retrievable evidence bank for inspection by other researchers to re-trace the process of the study. These techniques demonstrate that the findings are representative of the participants and not of the biases of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba 1985).
The research was undertaken in such a way so as to ensure it met all soundness criteria for qualitative research.

4.9 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided a rationale for the use of an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative methodology incorporating narrative inquiry to seek the meanings grandparents attach to their experiences of carrying out the grandparent-as-parent role. The methods and techniques used to collect the data for this study have been described in detail, together with an outline of the data analysis. The ethical considerations applied to the study are discussed, and the methodological soundness has been argued on the basis of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

The following chapter provides the narratives of the grandparents as they attempt to describe their experiences of raising their grandchildren.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE EXPERIENCES OF GRANDPARENTS RAISING THEIR GRANDCHILDREN

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the narratives of the grandparents as they engaged with their stories of raising their grandchildren. As indicated in the previous chapter, the semi-structured approach taken with the interviews aimed to facilitate rich accounts of their experiences. As will be evident in this chapter, these accounts reveal much about the highs and lows, joys and sadness, struggles and achievements of these grandparents as they re-live their role as grandparents-as-parents.

The necessarily lengthy nature of this chapter allows the voices of the grandparents to be heard so as to maintain the integrity of their stories. However, consistent with an inductive approach, I have thematised the narratives to uncover the key issues that have shaped their experiences. Whilst a number of these issues are consistent with those already identified in the literature, the stories of these grandparents nevertheless provide further compelling evidence about the complexity of their lives as they negotiate the dual roles of parent and grandparent. As discussed in Chapter Four, pseudonyms have been used to protect grandparents’ identities and any identifying information has been removed from their stories.

5.2 Reason for care

Each interview began by asking grandparents how the grandchildren came into their care. From the stories told by the grandparents, it is apparent the key issues are primarily linked to drug and alcohol addiction, sole parenthood, mental illness, incarceration, domestic violence/abuse, HIV/AIDS and apathy/indifference. In a number of cases it will be seen that these reasons may overlap. A close examination of the circumstances surrounding
each of the reasons for care revealed much about the impact these circumstances had on the grandparent-as-parent role.

5.2.1 Drug and alcohol addiction

Almost half the grandparents interviewed indicated they were raising their grandchildren because of their own adult children’s addiction to drugs and alcohol. Malcolm tells the following story:

We got a call at 2 o’clock in the morning, two policemen arrived and said, ‘Your grandchildren will be delivered in four hours.’ What actually happened was they were in a caravan park, he (son) and the two children. He had a shot of heroin...went to sleep in the toilet with the door locked, the kids I think at this stage had been asleep and woke up and Daddy wasn’t there, they went to the next door caravan or cabin, whichever it was, those people looked around and actually saw him and then called the ambulance. The ambulance came and took one look and called the police and DoCS. They (grandchildren) were then handed over to us. (Malcolm)

This story is consistent with findings from both overseas and Australian research that parental drug and alcohol abuse is the major reason why so many grandparents today are taking on the parenting role of their grandchildren (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler 2000; Baldock & Petit 2006). Also, of the seventy two percent of grandparents in the Australian COTA study who were raising their grandchildren due to maternal substance abuse, many talked about the impact of their children’s drug addictive lifestyle on both themselves and the children (Fitzpatrick 2004). This impact was evidenced by a number of grandparents in this study. Pam talked about the distress she felt because of the long-term drug and alcohol abuse by her grandchildren’s parents:

The grandchildren came into my care...because their mother was not capable of looking after them and their father, as the children would say, is flat out looking after himself....Because both parents are addicted to drugs and have been since the age of about 13 the kids were getting left on their own or with different men...It’s been hell, you know, their continuous use of drugs never cease, never cease...When I went to court the mother admitted that she was having at least fifteen bongs a day...plus she’s added alcohol to that, too, now. (Pam)

Miriam voiced her concern that the grandchildren were being neglected because of her daughter’s drug and alcohol addiction and was worried that the grandchildren might go into foster care after her daughter went into a rehabilitation facility:

Their Mum’s on drugs and drinks alcohol. The children were being neglected. We ‘let it go for a little while, then we thought, it’s not right for them. We took the kids on and
she ended up going into rehab…She couldn’t keep the kids and there was the danger of them going to DoCS and going to another family. That was when we said we’d have them and keep them in the family. (Miriam)

Carol told the story of how she and her husband had been worried for quite some time about how the grandchildren were being neglected and how the subsequent abuse arising from the parents’ drug and alcohol addiction had prompted DoCS to place the children in their care:

_The children were in danger, they were being neglected, they were two babies. From conception I was concerned in regards to both of them and so we kept our eye on the situation and it wasn’t until the second one was 3 months old, apart from being born with withdrawal, he received a fractured skull and then came to the attention of DoCS…Mum and Dad had no money and no way of feeding and keeping the boys, so that’s how we came to get the boys._ (Carol)

These stories attest to the concern grandparents felt for their grandchildren, sometimes long before the children came into their care. This is consistent with Weber and Waldrop’s (2000) research which revealed that grandparents may have been aware of the effects of an adult child’s problem behaviour on their grandchildren for some time before deciding to assume parental responsibility and thus focus on the grandchildren’s well-being rather than the adult child’s problems. However, as pointed out by Weber and Waldrop (2000), grandparent caregivers often maintain hope that their adult children will be able to resume the parenting role at some time in the future, and this was the case for one grandparent in this study. Even though the grandchildren’s mother was still battling her drug addiction, Joanne was pleased that she had recovered enough to be able to look after the children one day a week:

_She didn’t come back for a week and she didn’t contact us at all, no word at all. When she came back she was in a bad state, she was using amphetamines and was extremely thin and haggard and just in a dreadful physical state and certainly not able to look after herself or the children…She still hasn’t got herself to the stage where she’d be able to take the children, but she has them now for one day on the weekend, so each weekend they’re seeing her now, which is a good thing._ (Joanne)

These stories are consistent with recent Australian research by Baldock (2007) which reveals that a parent’s drug and alcohol abuse frequently conflicts with a child’s need for care. Parents who misuse drugs and alcohol often find it difficult to provide consistent parenting of their children, as well as to sustain family routines, and may be the impetus for grandparents to step in and take over the parenting role of their grandchildren.
5.2.2 Sole parenthood
A number of grandparents indicated they were raising their grandchildren because their own adult children were sole parents and were having difficulty coping with parenthood. Because her son was only 22 at the time of becoming a father, and had just begun to make a life for himself, Rachel believed that it was her duty to take on the parenting of her grandson:

He was in a bit of a pickle, he didn’t know what to do. He said ‘Mum, what will I do?’ I said, ‘Look, I’ll help you, you know, no matter what…it’s your baby’...Well, at that time he was at a time in his life where he was just partying a lot...he was trying to make a life in the world for himself. So then DoCS came and interviewed me and asked me if I’d like to have custody of (grandson), to look after him, so I said ‘Yes’. So that’s what we did, we went to the Children’s Court of NSW and I took custody of him. (Rachel)

Josie described how her son’s ex-partner had a mental illness that prevented her from raising their two sons. Because her son is now a single father, and travels a lot with his work, Josie had taken on the parenting role of the two boys for most of their lives.

She (birth mother) was schizophrenic, psychotic schizophrenic, so she lost the little fellow, the eldest one. This one I got him at 6 weeks old, his mother actually never got him out of hospital. He was with his other grandmother for 6 weeks until they did DNA tests and found out my son was the father...We got the results of the DNA at 9 o’clock in the morning, she (maternal grandmother) was on my doorstep, dropped him off in the capsule, there he is, by 11 o’clock. She never told me a thing about his feeding patterns or anything. (Josie)

The elder boy has recently been returned to his father, but the younger boy remains with Josie. However, this year Josie is hoping to return the younger boy to his father. Josie’s devotion to her grandson is apparent when she explains that if this arrangement does not work out, she is willing to have him back:

This one, he’s been with his father twice, for two month periods at a time, but it hasn’t worked, he just wanted to come back to Nana...in August, his father’s going to try and take him back, but if it doesn’t work out, I’ll take him back again. (Josie)

These stories are consistent with research by Thompson (1999) that reveals when parents part or die it is most often the grandparents who provide crucial support for children. However, few studies have described the depth of selflessness these grandparents have in regard to the circumstances of their adult children and grandchildren because of the difficulties involved in raising children alone. This loyal commitment is illustrated in
Elaine’s story as she tells of her experiences in relation to her daughter and grandson. Because of her under-age daughter’s pregnancy, and to prevent her going to gaol, Elaine had taken on the care of her grandson:

(Daughter) ran away from home when she was nearly 16...So, anyway, not long after she came back and she was pregnant. She came home, the boy went to gaol, and she came back to me...Well, he stole stuff, and she was sort of there, but she didn’t do any stealing, but she was an accessory and the Judge said that she could come home as long as she behaved herself...Anyway, she had (grandson) and between Mum and I we kept helping her. (Elaine)

Elaine’s story is consistent with studies by Ferguson (2004) and Worrall (2005) who have also revealed that many grandparents are often very involved with the support of their adult children as well as extended care of their grandchildren prior to taking on the full time caregiving role. This was also the case for Jenny and her husband who had taken on a supporting role before their grandson had been placed in their care:

Well, we’ve had a lot to do with (grandson) right from the time he was born because our daughter is a sole parent, so I was her support person right through pregnancy...Then we gradually started to have him more and more for sleepovers and about March this year (daughter) decided that she could no longer manage to have (grandson) and asked if we could have him. (Jenny)

It appears that there has been little focus in Australian literature on the problems of raising children alone as a reason why some grandparents are taking on the parenting role of their grandchildren. However, the stories told by the grandparents in this study are testimony to recent research that sole parents in Australia face many challenges, including financial hardship, social isolation, as well as physical and emotional health problems (Swinbourne, Esson, Cox & Scouler 2000; Butterworth 2003; Leppert 2005). It is argued that the challenges faced by sole parents may impact on their parenting abilities to the extent that the children are placed in the care of their grandparents.

5.2.3 Mental Illness
A number of grandparents in the study were raising their grandchildren because the children’s parents were suffering from a mental illness. Her daughter’s schizophrenia was the reason Joy had taken on the care of her two grandchildren:

My daughter suffers from schizophrenia. When she had her first breakdown she was going through a very traumatic time with her husband’s separation and due to that she
developed schizophrenia. While she wasn’t able to look after the children, we took on that role, although her husband took her to court and did get custody of the children for 2 years. (Joy)

The grandchildren were subsequently returned to Joy after her granddaughter rang the ‘Kids Help Line’ and reported her stepmother’s abuse.

“...the stepmother hit her with a brush and left a welt on the back of her leg and things like this. So my granddaughter who was really up in her rights, rang the Help Line…and the child protection agency was brought in...”(Joy)

Her daughter’s emotional health problems were the reason Nancy had taken on the care of her two grandsons:

My daughter, who is the mother of the two boys that I’m looking after, she’s got some problems from what I came to understand is regarding her father’s rejection of her...emotionally she just couldn’t cope with the responsibility (of raising the children), because in her own self she wasn’t coping with who she was as a person. She wasn’t on drugs or alcohol, it was nothing to do with that, she just basically dropped out of living, because she just couldn’t cope. (Nancy)

A great deal of research has been undertaken into the challenges facing parents with mental illness (Bassett, Lampe & Lloyd 1999; Ackerson 2003), as well as the needs of the children being raised by these parents (Cowling 1999; Tasmanian School of Nursing & Department of Health and Human Services 1999). However, even though research reveals grandparents are the most frequent caregivers when parents with a mental illness are unable to care for their children (Mental Health America 2007), there appears to have been little focus on grandparent caregiving experiences. Some of the special challenges facing grandparents in this study who are raising grandchildren because of their adult children’s mental health problems are discussed further in section 5.3.2.

5.2.4 Incarceration
A number of grandparents told stories of how they were raising their grandchildren, because their own adult children were in prison. Most of those parents who were in prison were there on drug-related charges, as was the case with Isabel’s daughter:

Well, it was when she (granddaughter) was turning four, so it’s four years ago, she’s just turned eight, my daughter was on charges and going to court, she’s been a drug addict for a long time. It was only a few days before my daughter went to court and was sentenced to four months gaol that I went over there and there was a big fight between my granddaughter’s parents and I just made a decision that night. I was just taking her.
So within a few days I had a little four year old to look after, so it happened very suddenly. (Isabel)

Isabel continued the story of when her daughter was released from prison she drifted around, was still using drugs, and eventually realised that her daughter was better off with her grandmother:

…she didn’t do very well when she got out of gaol...she didn’t have a home to come out to, she’d lost her Housing Commission home in the process...and she came out and was just drifting around and staying here and there and changing boyfriends...generally she could see, she had enough sense to see that (granddaughter) was better off. I really admire my daughter for that, really, she had enough heart to see that (granddaughter) was better off… (Isabel)

Both the children’s parents being in and out of prison was the reason Joanne had taken on the care of her two grandchildren:

The first born (grandson) was with me off and on from when he was born because his parents couldn’t cope...then the parents split up...then they got back together, had another child and my son was in prison when the second baby was born, the mother wasn’t coping well, she couldn’t pay the rent and was evicted from where she was living. My son had been in and out of prison in that time, and their mother had been in and out of prison as well. (Joanne)

Ruth told the story of how, some years after her daughter had died, her son-in-law was sent to prison for raping her eldest granddaughter, who subsequently came into her care, along with her six siblings.

After their Mum passed away, he (son-in-law) raped his eldest daughter and nobody knew for a few years and when DoCS found out they took the children off him and they came here on Friday afternoon, and we had 5 minutes to say ‘yes, we’ll have the children’, or ‘no we won’t’....I mean, he had to go to gaol and they had nowhere else. Well, I suppose they would have been placed here, but we didn’t want that. (Ruth)

At the time I interviewed Ruth, five of the children had grown up and left home, leaving just the two younger children with Ruth and her husband.

Research into families affected by incarceration has revealed that in the case of women prisoners, “maternal grandmothers were often the most significant others who cared for the children of their inmate daughters and who helped the inmate to cope with her role of prisoner-mother” (Farrell 1998 p.59). However, this study has revealed one grandfather who was taking on the caregiving role. Jeremy told the story of how he picked his granddaughter up from the police station after his daughter had been imprisoned for throwing a knife at her husband:
The commitment of these grandparents to their grandchildren, as well as to their incarcerated children, is consistent with studies by Hungerford (1996) and Farrell (1998) which reveal the importance of family support for the rehabilitation of the inmate as well as the welfare of the children. Apart from the common challenges faced by grandparents-as-parents, grandparents who are providing support to grandchildren as well as their incarcerated parents, face a number of special challenges, and these are discussed in section 5.3.2.

### 5.2.5 Domestic violence/abuse

Grandchildren being subjected to domestic violence or abuse had prompted a number of grandparents to take on the parenting role. Janelle felt compelled to take her granddaughter into her care after she and her mother had suffered many years of abuse at the hand of her stepfather:

(Granddaughter) has been subjected to domestic violence and has seen her mother being beaten and for a number of years her and I have actually discussed her moving in with us, because she felt she was safe here. She was apprehensive about leaving her Mum because she felt she could help protect Mum, but it got to a point where she was being subjected to this man (stepfather) that threatened to kill her, chased her through the house with a hatchet and beat her mother up…(Granddaughter) came to stay one weekend and she never went back home. (Janelle)

Grandparents in the COTA study also revealed that grandchildren in their care had been subjected to family violence and were concerned that this could lead to their developing similar attitudes (Fitzpatrick 2004).

Abuse of the grandchildren by the maternal great-grandmother was the reason Helen had now taken on the care of the grandchildren:

My son and his girlfriend are both drug addicts and the children were with their mother's grandmother, the children's great grandmother…I got them for the weekend and when we were bathing them (grandson) was only 6 months old, and my daughter had (granddaughter) in the bath and I was doing him (grandson) in the sink, and she came racing out of the bathroom, ‘Mum, look at these marks on her’, terrible
Helen’s primary consideration for the safety and well-being of her granddaughter is supported by grandparents in Worrall’s (1996) study who also stepped in to protect their grandchildren from abuse and neglect, regardless of the financial, physical and emotional cost.

5.2.6 HIV/AIDS

Only one grandparent was taking on the care of her grandchild because both parents were HIV positive. Anne told the story of how her son had originally taken on the care of his daughter, but after some time she was forced to step in and take over the full time parenting role of her granddaughter:

(Son) is a single Dad and he’s HIV positive and his partner is too, but the baby was born ok, which was very fortunate... I’m actually her legal guardian and my son lived with us for ten months and helped look after her and did quite well and then he went out on his own. After about six months he wasn’t coping very well and he got involved in drugs again. I had to take over and look after her (granddaughter) full time. (Anne)

Even though her son has now recovered from his drug addiction and with the help of antiretroviral medication is able to take on the weekend care of his daughter, there are times when his illness prevents this:

I might get in there (to son’s flat) and he’ll say, “Oh, I don’t feel well, can you have her today, Mum?” So, I think, well there goes Saturday. (Anne)

This finding is consistent with research by Joslin (2000 p.170) that because new antiretroviral therapies are now extending the time between HIV diagnosis and terminal illness, grandparents often assume the dual roles of surrogate parent at the same time as HIV caregiver.

As indicated in Chapter Two, there are no Australian estimates on the number of children who are being cared for by their grandparents because of parental HIV/AIDS infection. Also, it appears grandparents who are taking on this role have not been included in any Australian grandparent-as-parent studies. This ‘invisibility’ within the literature has also
been noted by Joslin (2000) who comments that HIV/AIDS’ caregiving grandparents in the USA have barely been acknowledged within both gerontological and HIV/AIDS literature.

5.2.7 Apathy/indifference

Two of the grandparents in this study were raising their grandchildren because they believed their own daughters had decided that leading an unencumbered single life was more important than raising their children. Alice described how she provided part-time care for her granddaughter before finally taking on the full-time parenting role:

Well, he was two when he came to me…it was an emergency caesarean that she had and the nurse at the hospital came out of the delivery room and sort of said, ‘Well, do you realise that your daughter doesn’t want this child?’ Anyway, I stayed on for a month after he was born, and then I came home and was only home for a week and she brought him down to me. He was five weeks old and she went on holiday…I suppose I had him more than what she did, if he wasn’t with me, he was sort of at the baby sitters…Then she and the partner split up…In the end she came up one weekend and said that she was going to put him up for adoption. She couldn’t look after him, she couldn’t cope, she couldn’t manage, she didn’t want to be a single parent and could I take him? Well…she came in the morning about half past nine and she was gone again by eleven, and she sent all his stuff up by carrier, eventually…she got on with her 20-star lifestyle. (Alice)

The pain caused by her daughter’s disregard for her child is evident in Jessica’s story:

When she (daughter) fell pregnant, I said to her, “What are you going to do?” and she said, “Well, I’ve done just about everything else, so I may as well have a baby.” So she had the baby and took her home and didn’t cope particularly well…so, probably the last six months that (daughter) lived with us she got into a lot of party drugs, and so forth, and she used to stay out at night. In the end we confronted her about it, and she denied it all and everything, and said that was it, she was packing up and leaving. So she left our home and left (granddaughter) with us…We’ve got to deal with the fact that our daughter’s hopeless and doesn’t really want her child. She’d rather party on and, you know, take drugs and get around with young guys. (Jessica)

Existing studies have not described in any detail the experiences of grandparents who have taken on the parenting role of their grandchildren because of what they perceive to be apathy or indifference on the part of the children’s parents. Alice appears to attribute her daughter’s failure to raise her son to her pursuit of a ’20-star lifestyle’, whereas Jessica appears to believe her daughter would rather ‘party on’, ‘take drugs’ and ‘get around with young guys’ than raise her daughter. However, research has revealed a number of other reasons why mothers such as these may have placed their children into the care of their grandparents. Jackson (1994) points out that the reasons why mothers relinquish their children into the care of others, may be many and varied. These include a mother’s failure
to ‘discover in herself a maternal nature’, a failure to ‘provide a stable home or a permanent father’ for her child, or a decision that her child would be ‘better off without her because if she stays it will be emotionally or practicably impoverished’ (Weldon 1994 p.12). Jackson adds that whatever the reason, mothers who leave are perceived in a negative way: “an absent mother equals a bad one, and probably a woman with loose morals to boot” (1994 p.15).

The stories told by the grandparents highlight the complex circumstances leading up to the placement of children into the care of their grandparents, and how these have shaped in a myriad of ways the lives of grandparents-as-parents. Regardless of the way in which the children came into their care, the grandparents appear to have risen to the challenge of exchanging their traditional grandparent role with that of the grandparent-as-parent role. However, it is clear that grandparents experience a full range of emotions with the realization that they must assume the dual roles of grandparent and surrogate parent. As well as initial feelings of distress, grandparents also voiced their concerns relating to the children’s neglect, their duty to the devotion and protection of their grandchildren, as well as the shame of having to raise their children’s children. The next section explores in more depth the experiences of grandparents after assuming the parenting role of their grandchildren.

5.3 Grandparents’ experiences of raising their grandchildren

After the grandparents had told their stories of how the grandchildren came into their care, they were asked to relate their experiences of raising their grandchildren. This question unleashed a great deal of information covering the many challenges faced by the grandparents, their present and future concerns, as well as the benefits they perceived for both themselves and their grandchildren.
5.3.1 Common Challenges
It was clear from the initial analysis of the stories told that the grandparents interviewed experienced a number of challenges that were common across the sample. These included financial and legal challenges, health problems, social isolation, lifestyle changes, parenting issues and conflict with the grandparents’ adult children and family. This finding is consistent with overseas and Australian research which reveals that becoming a custodial grandparent can have many negative personal, interpersonal and economic consequences (Cox 2000; Solomon & Marx 2000; Fitzpatrick 2004).

• Financial
The financial challenge of raising their grandchildren was the main issue raised by the grandparents in the study and a number of grandparents commented on their concerns regarding how they would maintain meeting these expenses as the children get older:

Since taking on (granddaughter) I mean I’m in debt, and I’ve been in debt the whole time. Personal loans, credit cards, friends, whatever. I mean, it goes up and down, it fluctuates, but then basically I’m in debt. Especially now that she’s getting older. (Penny)

"Now that he’s getting a little bit older, it is a bit difficult because we do self-defence, we do swimming lessons, we do gymnastics, so it costs quite a bit for all those things; so I’m always looking for a little bit of money, you know, plus there’s uniforms for everything and stuff like that, but I think those things are important. (Rachel)

Just clothes and all these TVs and videos and other things that teenagers are wanting these days. Food, his social activities, his hobbies and all of that. I’ve found it quite difficult on the single parent payment providing for both of us. It was really hard and it is still a struggle. (Michelle)

As he’s got older the expenses have increased, things for school, sporting equipment, classes for things, shoes, all sorts of expenses in getting him to things, soccer and things like that. (Katie)

Even though many of the grandparents were receiving a State or Federal Government payment, some still found it hard to manage financially:

I live in a situation that every Thursday, especially once a fortnight, I go and do my main shop, pay my bills and then I don’t have money until the next Thursday, so basically I only have money one day a week...There are times when you get caught out because I don’t even have so much as $50 in the bank...(Rachel)

You have a big pay week and a little pay week. The big pay week is fine, you get through it easy, but the little pay week, towards the end of it, then you’re starting to scrape...(Jeremy)
If I wasn’t getting that non-parental carers’ allowance, I’d really be in trouble, but...I had to pay for tutoring to bring him up to speed at school because he was struggling. So that was all pretty expensive and just the driving back and forth, you know, constantly running around to take them to these things...So now it’s pretty much a week to week existence. (Joanne)

The expense of renovating their homes to provide extra accommodation for their grandchildren was a challenge for both Janelle and Katie:

It’s very small, very crowded, very cramped, it’s like a sardine tin. We’ve got a curtain across to give (granddaughter) some privacy, and she’s getting to that age where she needs privacy, a lot more than so a little tot would. We’ve got an outside bathroom and an outside toilet that’s only got two walls, and we’ve had to put a curtain across...I would very much like (granddaughter) to have a decent bedroom, a proper room of her own. We’re working towards it. (Janelle)

Well, at the moment I’m trying to build a bathroom, so I’m getting more into debt...extra space for my grandson is an issue now too, because I’ve got a small house and he needs his own room now, next year, so that’s coming from where I don’t know, but it’s probably going to be coming out of my savings. (Katie)

Medical and educational expenses for grandchildren were a major concern to a number of grandparents:

I mean, it’s expensive, she’s got braces, $4,500 worth of braces which we’re paying off, $150 a month for braces. (Penny)

I was told at the school, repeatedly, “This child needs speech therapy.”...So, I had about 8 or 9 lessons with her, the speech lady, at $68 per lesson. (Mavis)

They’ve both got scoliosis and they’re all the time at the chiropractor and getting massages and everything because they have so much back pain. And it was costing me a fortune, that and the tutors for their schoolwork and everything just to get them up to scratch...I was doing ironing and cleaning just so I could get them to the chiropractor for that week because they just needed it. (Nancy)

I had to pay for tutoring to bring him up to speed at school because he was struggling. (Joanne)

Financial problems have been universally documented in studies of grandparents raising their grandchildren (Fuller-Thomson, Minkler et al. 2000; Richards 2001; Orb & Davey 2004; Worrall 2005), with many grandparent caregivers living below the poverty line. Grandparents in Worrall’s (2005 p.51) study also talked about the financial impact of caring for grandchildren with “on-going physical, emotional and educational needs” and one grandmother in Orb and Davey’s (2004 p.35) study also revealed that “she cleaned houses in order to have that extra money”. However what is not always evident in the
literature is what it means to grandparents to be raising children with insufficient financial support. As one grandmother said:

So, you’re forever dipping in (to savings). It’s quite traumatic, when life should be easier, it’s not, it’s not. And there’s nobody there helping and making it easier...I suppose the children could be put into foster care, but you don’t want that, you’ll go without, like we did, and we’re still going without because you know you have to do this, you know you have to do the best for your children. (Joy)

Other grandparents also talked about the financial sacrifices they had made in order to provide for their grandchildren:

I don’t know what it is to go out and spend a dollar on myself, because it is so expensive just looking after this one boy. (Michelle)

Go without yourselves a bit to give her more. We’ve had to struggle, my word. It’s not easy, but you do it for her sake, go without things for yourself. (Julie)

The distress of one grandfather in the study was evident when he broke down while describing how he was having difficulty providing for his granddaughter because he had used his life savings to provide the bail for his daughter who was awaiting her prison sentence:

I've had to go and spend a lot of money on bail for her (daughter) which I can’t get back until that court case is over, so I’ve spent my life savings going bail for her. (Jeremy)

The feelings of loss and grief experienced by Jeremy are consistent with Crumbley and Little’s (1997) findings that relatives raising children may suffer multiple losses, and these are discussed in Chapter 2.6.

The determination of one grandmother in this study to provide for her grandchildren was evident when she explained:

Well, I make it, you get like with your own children, you find a way. I never let my own children do without, so why would I let them (grandchildren). I find a way. (Helen)

This same grandmother also revealed that the financial pressures of raising her grandchildren had prevented her from doing the volunteer work she had always hoped to do in retirement:

I’d like to do some volunteer work, if I could afford it...Like being able to take kids in for Christmas, kids that haven’t got a home, you know, and stuff like that. I’ve always wanted to do that, and I’d love to be able to afford to do that, but I can’t. (Helen)
It is clear from their comments that grandparents wanted to ensure their grandchildren were not further disadvantaged as a result of not being in a ‘normal’ parenting arrangement. Also, the financial sacrifices grandparents had been forced to make in their struggle to provide for their grandchildren was also evident from their stories, as well as their feelings of loss and grief at the helplessness of their situation.

- **Legal issues**

A number of grandparents spoke about the injustice of the current Legal Aid situation, where, in custody cases, their adult children are entitled to Legal Aid, whereas they may not qualify for Legal Aid because of home ownership, retirement savings or current employment. Cindy described how she and her husband had to use his retirement funds to pay legal expenses:

> Everybody else has Legal Aid and because we are self-funded retirees, we obviously don’t get Legal Aid, so we pay $500 a day for someone to appear in court for us. And we’ve been dragged into court for the most ludicrous things. (Cindy)

Pam also told the story of numerous court appearances over two and half years, which had cost thousands of dollars because her husband was employed and therefore they were not entitled to Legal Aid:

> The thing with the mother is she could take us back to court and keep us there forever, because she got Legal Aid, we didn’t, and even though when the eldest girl no longer wanted to see her mother, her mother got Legal Aid to take us back to court…It cost us, I think it was about $8,000-$10,000 for us to go back to court for that child to have the right not to see her mother. (Pam)

The money they had to spend on enforcing court orders, Pam believed, was money that should have gone towards the care of the grandchildren:

> To enforce the court orders, we were left with the fact that, ok, if you want to do something about it, then you take her (daughter) back to court, which means you’ve got to have the money and if you go into debt to do that, to take her back to court, then you’re taking off the children you’re trying to protect. (Pam)

Joanne, however, believed that even though the cost of obtaining custody of her grandchildren was significant, she was luckier than a lot of others:

> I had to pay, but not a huge amount, I was luckier than a lot when it came to legal expenses. I know some grandparents who’ve lost a house and have $80,000 worth of
bills through getting their kids, so I was very lucky. It only cost me about $1500 to get custody of the children. (Joanne)

Even though she was able to obtain Legal Aid in her custody battle for her grandson, Katie told the story of how she had to give up her job for a period of time to enable her to be eligible:

> When (grandson) did go out of (daughter’s) care, he wasn’t necessarily coming straight into my care, so I had to actually get a lawyer. Luckily I was able to get Legal Aid, but I had to stop going to work for a period of time so I could get Legal Aid and get other teachers to fill in my classes so I could go to court and make sure – it was really touch and go – that he could come into my care. (Katie)

As experienced by grandparents in this study, the Australian Legal Aid situation also proved to be a problem for grandparent caregivers in research by COTA (Fitzpatrick 2004) and the Tasmanian Government (Parliament of Tasmania 2003). In both these studies grandparents reported spending large sums of retirement savings on legal fees because they were ineligible for Legal Aid. Apart from the financial hardship involved in legal proceedings, grandparents in a UK study also complained about the ‘use and abuse’ of the system by the children’s parents (Richards 2001 p.43). It was clear from their stories that for a number of grandparents in this study the legal issues surrounding the parenting of their grandchildren had also posed a large number of emotional and financial problems.

- **Grandparents’ physical and emotional health problems**

It was evident from the stories told that even though many grandparents had a number of physical health problems, they played down the importance of these:

> I had polio when I was a child and I’ve got post-polio and the last six weeks I’ve had it in the arms. My arms aren’t working so good. I get up and have a hot bath in the morning and take some Panadol and get on with the day. But I’m alright, I’ve lived with that for a long time. (Mavis)

> No, we don’t have concerns about our health, but just notice that because you’re lifting, bathing, dressing, rocking, nursing, I have the odd backache or that sort of thing that I didn’t have before, but it’s nothing that really concerns us. (Cindy)

A number of grandparents were conscious of the fact that because of their age, they were no longer able to do all the physical things associated with the parenting role. Malcolm
believed that, apart from his age, his ‘dicky knee’ was the cause of his grandchildren missing out on a lot of activities:

We find that there’s a lot of things that we think that the kids...look, we really need someone who’s young and energetic, can play with the kids, and run and jump and do all this. We’re too old. I’ve got a dicky knee and we’re just too old to run and jump and do all that sort of stuff that kids really need, so they sort of miss out on that. (Malcolm)

Even though he believed that he was young compared with some grandparents, Andrew felt that because of physical limitations he could not fulfil the father role to his grandson:

Okay, we’re young compared to other grandparents, but even we can’t do what could be expected from a little fellow, for example with a father. I can’t go and kick the ball around for hours on end...and I just can’t play with him on the floor because of my knees. (Andrew)

Andrew’s wife, Jenny, echoed his sentiments:

Yes, so there’s all those sorts of little things, but it makes it hard because you can’t be a parent to them in that way. There are limitations to what you can do. (Jenny)

The sheer physical exhaustion of raising grandchildren was the main challenge facing the majority of grandparents. Alice describes how she tends to shout when she’s tired and her young grandson alerts her to this fact:

I do find sometimes I’m so tired. I start off alright, but the further the day goes, the tireder I get and I just find that sometimes I’m so tired and when I get tired I get a bit angry, I get a bit short-tempered. Like, (grandson) will say to me, “You’re shouting again Gran” and I probably am shouting, because I’m absolutely wrecked. (Alice)

Helen describes how tired she is at the end of the week, as apart from raising her grandchildren, she also has a full-time job and makes daily visits to her mother who is in a nursing home:

I do get tired now and I think I am more than a bit tired by the end of the week...after I finish work I pick up the children from the after-school care and then I go and visit my Mum and then I come home and start school homework, bath... it gets a bit much sometimes. (Helen)

Even though she is now raising only one of the four grandchildren originally placed in her care, Sarah is still struggling with exhaustion:

Physically I’m exhausted, I’m tired...in the beginning when I had them all here, like the 15 year old was wetting the bed, the baby was just like a little feral thing and the house was patrid and they weren’t doing anything. My doctor got me home help, which was marvellous, so for twice a week I had three hours and it was just wonderful, you know...but I’m still struggling, I really am still struggling. (Sarah)
These findings are consistent with overseas research which has found that the physical health of custodial grandparents is generally worse than that of non-custodial grandparents (Minkler & Fuller-Thomson 1999) and grandparent caregivers have more chronic conditions, lower self-rated physical health, and find strenuous activity more difficult (Solomon & Marx 2000; Richards 2001; Worrall 2005). However, it should be noted that a small percentage of grandparents in Worrall’s (2005) study experienced better health after taking on the responsibility of their grandchildren. Studies of Australian grandparent caregivers also revealed that “they were not always in the best physical condition to contend with the demands of rearing young children” (Parliament of Tasmania 2003 p.39) and that their health had been “badly affected by the burden of raising their grandchildren without support and recognition” (Fitzpatrick 2004 p.31).

A number of grandmothers in the study talked about their experiences of going through the menopause at the same time as raising their grandchildren. Joanne explained the effect this had on her grandchildren:

> I’m in the middle of menopause at the moment and I’m finding that my emotions are on a real roller coaster…so I can be quite calm and okay one minute and find that I can get really easily agitated the next, and I don’t like that for the kids, I don’t want them to be exposed to that. I’m supposed to be making their life better, not screeching like a banshee one minute and fine the next. (Joanne)

The combination of her granddaughter going through puberty at the same time as she was experiencing the menopause caused a few problems for Penny:

> I started going through the menopause the same time as (granddaughter) was going through puberty, so we had quite a fiery 6 to 8 months. I said, “I’m going to put a sign on the door – Warning, do not enter, female hormones at work”. (Penny)

Apart from the physical health problems encountered in the day-to-day parenting of their grandchildren, a number of grandparents talked about the emotional problems they experienced. Two of the grandparents talked about the stress of raising grandchildren and how they were handling it in a philosophical way:

> I get stressed and I now have a line that goes up the back of my head where I can feel lumps and I know it’s caused by stress, that’s what it is. But, you know, I’ll get over it and that’s the way it has to be here. It’s no good feeling sorry for yourself or anything else. (Jeremy)

> Sometimes I feel it’s a bit stressful, but that’s how it is with kids and if you take on the kids, you take on that as well. (Janelle)
Some grandparents made the comment that the stress of dealing with the grandchildren’s parents, the child welfare authorities and the court system far outweighed the stress of raising their grandchildren:

**The day-to-day care is tiring, but perfectly manageable and often absolutely joyful. It’s all the worry about them being left with us, whether the court will overrule DoCS and take them away, even the access visits they have to endure with their parents...so it’s all that side of it that’s hard. Actually looking after the children is easy.** (Cindy)

*I sometimes feel like it turns me into someone that I don’t want to be, but that’s the stress of the whole situation, it’s not just having the children, it’s the constant problems with my son.* (Joanne)

*We never begrudged having these boys, because we wouldn’t have had it any other way, but the emotional side of it, it wasn’t just with the boys, it was still with the parents ongoing and it never ceased...the drama just never left us, and it still never does, even to this day, 9 years down the track.* (Carol)

Nancy describes how she ‘puts up a wall’ to deal with the stress caused by her daughter:

*I just have to put a wall up because if I allowed what has happened to (daughter) to affect me, I would not be able to do anything for these grandchildren. I’d be a basket case. So I just have to say, well, I can’t do anything more.* (Nancy)

A recent Australian study found that “caregiving grandparents experienced significantly higher levels of stress, anxiety and depression compared with their non-caregiving counterparts” (Dunne & Kettler 2007 p.11). The most common reasons cited were conflict with birth parents and other family members, children’s social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and financial strain. Emotional stress was also a major concern for many custodial grandparents in the Tasmanian study, who reported “feelings of guilt and failure in having to care for their grandchildren because of the inadequacy of their own children” (Parliament of Tasmania 2003 p.39). Grandparents in the COTA study also reported having to cope with their own feelings of stress and grief, as well as helping grandchildren deal with theirs (Fitzpatrick 2004).

It is evident from the grandparents’ stories in this study that apart from their own health problems and the feelings of physical and emotional exhaustion involved in raising their grandchildren, the stress of dealing with the children’s parents often ‘pushed them over the
edge’. Also, having to deal with a number of different government organisations appeared to exacerbate the situation, resulting in feelings that their lives were out of control.

- **Grandchildren’s physical and emotional health problems**

A number of grandparents were concerned about physical health problems of their grandchildren, often the result of abuse and neglect by their parents:

*When he came to us at four months he didn’t seem quite right. We took him to a paediatrician and he was diagnosed with developmental delay and he needed to undergo almost twelve months of speech, physio and occupational therapy...The reason that he was developmentally delayed, the paediatrician puts down to probable neglect during the first four months of his life due to drug addicted parents. (Cindy)*

*He (grandson) was born with a physical problem as a result of being exposed to drugs, he had to be operated on as soon as he was born...he had his intestines on the outside of his body instead of the inside, so it all had to be pushed back and stitched back in... (Granddaughter) was born exposed to amphetamines, alcohol, dope, you know lots and lots of things, poor nutrition. (Joanne)*

*(Granddaughter) was born with Pierre Robin Sequence and it was genetic, it's absolutely because of drug and alcohol abuse from the womb, and to me that's abuse, absolutely, and it should be a criminal charge, but it's not. She had major surgery, which was quite traumatic for Pop and me, because we've never been through this with any of our children. (Carol)*

*When we got her at 14 months, she didn’t know what her feet were for. If you'd stand her up on her feet she’d scream. She never walked until she was 18 months. Even sitting up, when we first went and saw her at 8 months she couldn’t even sit up. She’d never sit up. Even when she was with her foster mother she used to lie in her pram all day. (Julie)*

These findings are consistent with research by Worrall (2005) which revealed that children who are placed with extended family and have suffered abuse and/or neglect, such as intrauterine exposure to drugs or alcohol, will have both physical and psychological health problems. The COTA study also found that Australian children being raised by their grandparents often had severe health problems which they may never overcome, and which required a great deal of grandparents’ love, time and money (Fitzpatrick 2004).

The emotional health of the grandchildren in their care was also of concern to a number of grandparents. Jeremy talked about the emotional trauma suffered by his granddaughter after her mother was imprisoned:

*(Granddaughter) has gone through at least 6 months of trauma from being taken away from her mother and I think separation anxiety. It took probably six months before I*
could take her to school and walk away without her screaming the place down...I think she’s had a bit of a rough year. Before that she’d never been away from her mother and to be dragged away from your mother like that would be the most horrifying thing, then people coming along and saying you can’t be with your mother. (Jeremy)

Both Pam and Isabel believed that their grandchildren were labelled as different, especially at school, because they were being raised by their grandparents:

They really feel it when kids at school say, “I’m going home to my parents”, and they’re going here, and these children, through no fault of their own, they feel that, but they also understand that their parents aren’t good for them. They suffer so much in their life. (Pam)

It’s very hard for children, that’s something I noticed, it’s very hard for them when they’re living with their Gran, really hard. When other people have got their Mums and their Dads coming to pick them up and they’ve got their Gran. (Isabel)

Pam also believed that her grandchildren had suffered emotionally because of their mother’s drug addiction:

(Granddaughter) has had a lot of counselling for different reasons, she’s been through heaps, she was her mother’s whipping dog, like she said to one of her friends. “My mother treated me worse than a dog.” She had the responsibility of the other children, totally and the house....The boy (grandson), well, whether he’s in the real world most of the time, I don’t know. Kids who are aware of the situation, a lot of them escape reality to put up with what they’re living with...some of them blame themselves for what their parents are, they think their mother is using (drugs) because they’re doing something wrong. (Pam)

Even though she and her husband are providing stability for their grandson, Jenny was aware of her grandson’s concerns that he might be given away once again:

On occasions he’s been quite disturbed...he sort of hasn’t really known where he is and sometimes he’ll say to us, “Oh, you don’t want me any more”, as if like Mum we’ll be sort of passing him on to somebody else. So those have all been difficult issues to cope with...There have been so many changes in his little 6 years and some horrible traumas as well, we’re sort of giving him stability, but then as he says sometimes, “You don’t want me any more” and then one time he said, “ Am I your little boy now, Grandma?” and I said “No, darling, you’re my grandson and I love you very much, but you’re not my son”. (Jenny)

A number of grandparents were concerned about their grandchildren’s anger. Janelle was afraid that her granddaughter’s anger would eventually harm her:

My concern is (granddaughter’s) anger, her temper, it’s going to get her into a lot of trouble. I can take it, because I’m patient with her, but in our family there was never that anger when we were growing up, there wasn’t that sort of aggression, it was never in our family, so I do have a bit of difficulty, myself, coping with that anger. She’s going to end up damaging herself. (Janelle)
Joy was unsure whether her granddaughter’s anger was targeted against her mother, or her mother’s schizophrenia:

> My granddaughter has a lot of anger towards her mother. I don’t know whether it’s because she feels cheated herself, or whether she hates the illness and she takes it out on her mother. (Joy)

Joanne told the story of how her grandson is undergoing counselling to treat his anger:

> He’s going back into counselling again soon, because he’s quite confused and he gets very angry and he doesn’t know how to deal with the anger. He was in counselling to help him to direct his anger at who he is angry with, you know, his parents, rather than taking it out on me, because I was the one that was there and he knew that he was safe taking it out on me. (Joanne)

The emotional problems experienced by the children of the grandparents in the study are consistent with those affecting children in kinship care in a study by Crumbley and Little (1997). These included the loss of the child’s parents, feelings of rejection and abandonment, guilt and low self-esteem, as well as anger and resentment. A recent Australian study also found that some grandchildren had social and behavioural problems, developmental delay and learning difficulties (Dunne & Kettler 2007). In addition, a review of the Australian and international literature surrounding the social and emotional issues of children in kinship foster care, has revealed that early exposure to high-risk backgrounds such as abuse, neglect, poor attachment and parental drug abuse, can affect children’s emotional development (Dunne & Kettler 2006).

From the stories told, it is clear that the physical and emotional problems experienced by their grandchildren are of great concern to the grandparents in the study. Their pain is evident as grandparents deal with the emotional and physical trauma suffered by their grandchildren, and strive to provide the children with a stable family environment.

- **Social isolation**

Caring for grandchildren in the ways and under the circumstances described above was all consuming for the grandparents in the study. This has inevitably had quite significant implications in terms of being socially isolated in their grandparent-as-parent role. A number of grandparents talked about losing their old friends because their lives had gone in different directions:
I mean, we still contact each other and we still love each other to death, my girlfriends and I, but our lives have gone different ways now, you know what I mean. It’s gone from never doing anything without each other to “I can’t do that”. (Helen)

Yes, all my friends that I used to work with, I mean, I don’t see them any more, no. No, things do change, but I mean the last thing on my mind at the time would have been to take on another child, but you just do it. (Rachel)

Yes, we did have quite a good social life, my partner and I, we used to have…We were involved in quite a large group and now we’re very much on the fringes of that. We sometimes get an invitation along to something, but in general the people in our group know that we’re just not available most of the time, so they don’t ask any more. (Joanne)

The age difference between herself and the other Mums at her grandson’s school was socially isolating for Alice:

I don’t fit into the school scene at all because, I mean, the new age young Mums, there’s a good 25 years between me and them and there would probably only be three mothers that even speak to you. I’ve got no rapport there whatsoever, because I’m Gran. I’m a grandmother; I’m not the low-cut jeans and the little tank tops, that’s not me. I’m Gran. And even the kids call me Gran. (Alice)

Carol also talked about the difficulty of making new friends, especially those of her own age:

I haven’t made a lot of friends really. I haven’t met anybody that I would ask to come in for a cup of coffee and we’re very sociable people…I wish I could, I wish we could do that because we do need that for the children too, but it’s really hard to meet people your own age and they’re not all doing the same thing. (Carol)

Even if she did meet some new young friends at the support group she and her husband were about to attend, or continue with old friendships, Carol believed that taking four young children into someone else’s home was not always acceptable:

We might meet some nice friends out of this who have young children that are our age. That could be the only way I’m going to build friendship with anybody is that way, otherwise I’ll still have old friends that don’t have younger children. We’re a thorn in everyone’s side with four little children. Who wants to have them in their homes? Not a lot of people do. (Carol)

However, Katie believed that as her grandson grows up they were not as socially isolated as they were when he was younger:

I think when they’re younger I didn’t have as good a network as I have now, as the children in the community have grown up and they go to each other’s places and stay overnight, that sort of thing…I found I didn’t have time to go out and I was too tired a lot of the time when he was younger. Even now I don’t go out a lot. (Katie)
Apart from the difficulty of making friends with others of the same age, Alice believed that her grandson’s diabetes was a major cause of their isolation:

> It would have been different if he hadn’t been diabetic, you would have been able to let him go to somebody’s place at the weekend, or he could have gone down to his mother’s for a week’s holiday in the school holidays, but it’s wrecked everything, because you can’t leave him with anybody because they don’t know about diabetes. I find we’re a little bit ostracized because of this, and (grandson) doesn’t get to go many places because people don’t know how to look after him or what to do. (Alice)

Grandparents’ feelings of isolation have also been experienced by grandparents-as-parents in other Australian and overseas studies. Grandparents in the COTA study talked about the isolation from their peer group because their friends were “no longer interested in having children present in their social activities” (Fitzpatrick 2004 p.31). Grandparents in Orb and Davey’s (2004 p.30) study reported that they were missing “adult conversation” because of isolation from their peers, while a significant number of grandparent caregivers in Worrall’s (2005) study indicated that now their only social activities were those that involved the grandchildren.

However, even though they were socially isolated, a number of the grandparent caregivers in this study were philosophical about this:

> Well, of course, I don’t go out socially any more. I don’t mind that, it’s not bothering me. The beauty about living in a little community like this, we do have a community hall, we do have little evenings like barbecues, community barbecues, things like that. I’m quite happy to do that, I’m not a person that needs to go out to hotels or clubs or places like that, I mean, sure I wouldn’t mind going to a restaurant now and again, but I would do that myself with (grandson) if I had the money, but I don’t. (Rachel)

> I’ve always gone without in regards to any sort of social life, you know, I think we all do with the kids...To me, it’s more important to keep those children in their routine than be dragging them out and me going to shows, or going to the pictures, or going anywhere of a night. I’ve gone without a lot for the kids, but never felt that I’ve missed out, because to me those little kids didn’t ask to be brought into the world. Their stability is more important to me than running around being a socialite. (Josie)

Despite the philosophical views of some participants, it is clear that the feelings of social isolation experienced by the grandparents has had a profound impact on their lives since assuming the parenting role of their grandchildren. Once again, grandparents’ feelings of loss and grief are evident as they mourn the loss of their old friends, their ability to socialise and the grief experienced because of their isolation.
• **Lifestyle changes**

Taking on the parenting role of their grandchildren also meant a complete change of lifestyle for grandparents in the study. Cindy related the story of how her life with her husband changed dramatically after the grandchildren were placed in their care:

> It’s very different, obviously, when Adam had been retired for a couple of years and I was just working one or two days a week, we didn’t expect to find ourselves back in the sandpit at playgroup. Adam didn’t expect to find himself sitting in a queue of young Mums at the clinic on immunization day while I’m working….I mean, you think about it, one day here we were, Adam retired and restoring a boat to spend his days fishing, me working two or three days a week in a job that involved travelling and drinking lots of coffee and talking to people. We ate out very often and we certainly had coffee out very often. We’ve been out to dinner once in eighteen months (Cindy).

Life changed even more for Cindy after she was forced to leave her job after taking on the care of the second grandchild:

> When (grandson) was placed with us we realised that I could not be out of the house two and three days a week and so I resigned from one of my jobs so that I was only out of the house one day a week...When (granddaughter) came to us we realised that I could actually not work at all, for the simple fact that (grandson) was only 18 months old and (granddaughter) was 4 months old...Our life just doesn’t exist any more, any part of it. Especially with me now having to give up work altogether, that’s part of me that’s finished now and the social side of that as well. We’ve found that over the last eighteen months we’ve just kind of broken away from our own friends, in that it just seemed easier. They often still phone and ask us out to dinner, but we don’t go, and our life is just a different life now...Yes, life is just very different now. (Cindy)

Both Rachel and Joanne also made the decision to leave their jobs after feeling the strain of taking care of grandchildren alongside full-time employment:

> I was working for I suppose 6-8 months after I had (grandson), but it got to the stage where I was relying on my sons to turn up and babysit when I went to work, and it got to the stage where panic would set in for me because my sons wouldn’t arrive home on time…and I just didn’t like the idea of putting him with strangers. He’d been through enough already, I felt, you know, what he’d already been through, so, yes, I gave up work then. (Rachel)

> I was working full-time at that time, my eldest son’s girlfriend stepped in and helped with child care and we found a long day care centre, but after about a year of that I left work and decided to stay home with them, it was just too hard. Little kids, especially in day care, they get sick all the time because they’re picking up absolutely everything and I felt guilty about not being as regular with my working hours as I would have liked to have been, so yes, I left work and I’ve been home with them ever since. They’ve been with me now for three and half years. (Joanne)

These problems associated with balancing work while caring for grandchildren have been the subject of a study by Pruchno and McKenney (2006), which also revealed a number of grandparents having to give up their jobs because of caregiving responsibilities.
Michelle also found the combination of full-time work with raising her grandson very difficult, so opted for full-time study in the hope that she would be able to more adequately provide for her grandson as he grew up:

I’ve found working was difficult, school holidays, working during school holidays was very difficult as well. So I went back to full-time study and I did that simply because I need to be providing for this boy long term. I knew it wouldn’t be a couple of years; I know that in High School he’s got a lot more expenses than what he’s had in Junior School and I want to provide for him when he’s 18 and 19 as well. So, I thought, okay go back to school, get a better kind of work, get that higher paid job that I can adequately take care of him and myself too. (Michelle)

For grandparents in Worrall’s (1996 p.114) study “the decision to care meant changed lives, unattained dreams and changed family relationships”, sentiments also expressed by grandparent caregivers in this study. Not being able to do the things they wanted to do now that they were caring for their grandson was a disappointment for Jenny and her husband:

We should be able to do other things, but we can’t now. A lot to come to terms with…I’d just started doing water-colours and all those sort of things, so that’s all gone by the board, because there are things to do at the school now…We bought the camper trailer last year thinking of this trip around Australia we were going to do and all these sorts of things…Being a grandparent caring full-time doesn’t affect just one little part of your life, it affects your whole life, your whole life. (Jenny)

Caring for their grandchildren also had a detrimental effect on Joanne and her partner’s lifestyle:

Yes, we did have quite a good social life, my partner and I, we used to have. We went away on weekends quite a bit and went out to dinner, yes, we did quite a lot of stuff before I got the kids. Now that doesn’t happen…my partner was to retire the year we got the children, nearly four years ago, and we were going to sell both homes and go bush. (Joanne)

Supporting her daughter, who suffers from schizophrenia, as well as raising her grandchildren, meant Pearl had to give up her own life:

I haven’t got a life, it’s just around my grandkids, that’s all. By the time you want to go for a cup of coffee with someone at the end of the day you can’t do it, because you’ve got something else to do, you know what I mean. And with the Mum sick, that’s another story, you know. (Pearl)

Sharing her life with her granddaughter after spending so much time alone was a major lifestyle change for Penny:

I’m a very solitary person, I’ve always lived by myself. I’m quite used to my own company and so for me it was difficult to entertain a child. I don’t watch videos very
much, so I used to take her to the beach and do stuff like this, but it was hard for me to kind of be an entertainer...It’s easier now that I’ve got more time for myself, because she’s not so demanding in terms of needing attention all the time. She can get herself ready for school, she can entertain herself. We do stuff together. (Penny)

However, even though Mary also wished for some time to herself, she missed her grandchildren when they weren’t there:

I’m like a mother again, I’m taking them to dancing and running around with them all the time. I’d like some time to myself...I used to go to the beach a lot, with a lady that lived near me, I used to go down to the beach and sunbake with her nearly all day, but I couldn’t do that any more when I got the kids...Every now and again I’d like to be able to do just what I want to when I want to. But then I miss them when they’re gone, I’ve had them so long, they’re just part of my life. (Mary)

Relationship problems, as a result of taking on the parenting role of their grandchildren, were experienced by a number of grandparents in the study. Jeremy talked about having to move away from his partner in the country to care for his granddaughter in the city, while Mary believed that taking on the care of her grandchildren had contributed to her marriage breakup:

I have a partner, but he lives at the farm and I live here, so we’re having a bit of a long distance relationship...It’s not an easy road. I’ve given up my whole life. (Jeremy)

It was a big adjustment and I think, too, not saying it played a major part in the marriage breaking up, but it did help it. I just found that (husband) wasn’t there when I needed him. (Mary)

Joanne also felt that taking on the care of her grandchildren had been hard on her relationship with her partner:

It’s hard on your relationship, I have a partner, we’ve been together eleven years. He doesn’t live with us, we’ve kept our separate homes and that’s the only way we’ve survived...But we split up for a year with the strain of all this. It was hard because they’re not his biological grandchildren and he really has a lot of difficulty with my son, there’s a lot of anger there with what has gone on with my son with the drug abuse and the stealing and the gaol. (Joanne)

Sarah talked about the affect on her other children of raising her grandchildren, and the strategies she and her husband had employed to protect their relationship:

My other children are greatly affected. They are so sad, they’re all blaming themselves that we didn’t try harder to get something done. Yes. They’re sad, they’re angry...(Husband) and I made a pact right from the word go that it wouldn’t do anything to us, we just said “Right, let’s be strong with each other, let’s back each other up no matter what”, so we’ve done that and we’re a force to be reckoned with. (Sarah)
Grandparents in other Australian and UK studies also experienced relationship difficulties because of the demands of caring for their grandchildren (Richards 2001; Fitzpatrick 2004). Problems ranged from not being able to spend time together as a couple, feeling too tired and stressed to nurture their relationship, to their eventual separation or divorce as a result of the strain of caring for grandchildren alongside managing relationships with their adult children. Taking on the parenting role of their grandchildren had varying effects on the marital relationship of grandparents in Weber and Waldrop’s (2000) study, with some describing the effects as very damaging to their marriage, while others reported having grown together because of the experience.

Giving up retirement plans was a major concern for a number of the grandparents in the study. Nancy was disappointed she and her husband had not been able to fulfil their retirement dream of a trip around Australia and because they had waited so long he was not now well enough to make the trip:

> Your whole life, you give up your whole life. Like, I sort of got married for the second time and thought, oh yeah, we can travel around Australia now, and my husband is still waiting for this trip around Australia, but I don’t think it’s ever going to happen, and now he’s not well enough. This has cost us 20 years and I can see myself retiring when I’m 70 and doing the things I thought I was going to do when I was 50 or 60. I’ll probably be 80 when I get to do it now. (Nancy)

Because she had her children at a very young age, Joy was looking forward to retirement to do all the things she had missed out on. However, she now feels that she and her husband may never be able to retire:

> I was only 17 when I had my first child, so our whole life was saying, “Alright then, don’t worry, we’ll have our time after the children are off our hands”. But life had a different plan for us. I felt cheated, because you think, well, you have your life planned out and then this happens. So I don’t know whether we will ever be able to retire and go, to tell you the truth. I think I’ll have to be that support for my granddaughter and that’s daunting to think that you’re going to have to be here for another 20 years to help her through. (Joy)

As Joy’s husband was unable to be present at the interview, he wrote down some comments which he wanted to have recorded:

> My husband said “loss of life”, that’s what he feels, because I suppose you don’t have a life, really, your life is revolving around those kids, so you can’t just pack up for a weekend and go away, which we used to. Things were easier for us, that we could just throw the tent in the back of the car and go for the weekend and then come back, but we
These findings are consistent with research by Orb and Davey (2004 p.29) which revealed that raising grandchildren often meant grandparents had their dreams ‘thrown out of the window’, had their retirement plans ‘put on hold’, and had a ‘dramatic impact on their expectations’. Apart from the changes in the lifestyle of the grandparents after taking on the care of their grandchildren, the stories also reveal the multiple losses experienced by grandparents-as-parents, including the loss of their traditional grandparent life with all its hopes and dreams for the future.

However, one grandparent in this study believed that being able to laugh helped her to cope with the lifestyle change after taking on the care of her grandson:

It’s very difficult, but you’ve got to laugh, or you’d be stark raving mad…I often ring up my friends and say, “I’ve rung up to say goodbye” and they say “Where are you going?” and I say “I’m running away”, you know. “I’m running away to my other life”, and I just sort of laugh at different things, my other life, what I was doing before, or my next life when I’m going to buy a great big caravan and a 4 wheel drive and I’m just going to keep driving, you know, in my next life. (Alice)

Being able to laugh in the face of adversity appears to be one of the ways grandparents who are raising their grandchildren are able to deal with the shift from the traditional grandparent role to the grandparent-as-parent role.

- **Parenting difficult children**

Parenting grandchildren with behavioural problems because they had been exposed to family trauma, abuse or neglect, proved to be a challenge for some grandparents. Nancy told the story of how she had to teach her grandson basic behaviour skills because of his mother’s neglect:

I used to have to spend every day at school with (grandson) because he just could not deal with it. He lost it the first week he was at school and ran up a tree somewhere in the bush because he was frightened that he was doing things wrong, which was what happened to him as a child at home. Because she (mother) couldn’t cope, not that he’d done anything wrong, but because she couldn’t cope with the responsibility, she just used to lock him in a room and leave him there. Basically I just had to teach him correct behaviour for every situation he was in. Like, even to go shopping...the first thing he did was like run around in the shopping centre as if it was a playground, because she (mother) used to just go to a shopping centre and just sit down and veg out while the kids played in the toy departments and stuff like that because she didn’t want to have any
involvement with them. So I basically had to teach him all the basic behaviour skills to get him to the point where he could actually feel comfortable in other people’s company and do things with other people. He just didn’t know how to behave properly and acceptably. (Nancy)

Sarah and her husband talked about the enormous behavioural problems they were having with their 11 year old granddaughter who had been living on the streets with her sister before being placed in their care:

She and her sister were living on the streets for three months, living as street kids and they were stealing their food, they were going into Woolies getting frozen sausage rolls and then going into the baby’s room, the mothers’ room, and there’s a microwave there. She was smoking like a chain, they were both smoking, and her sister was sniffing paint...So, we’ve got (granddaughter) here and she’s only about the size of a 7 or 8 year old, she’s tiny, a tiny little thing with the attitude of a God knows what. She was smoking like a chimney when she first came here and expected cigarettes and, of course, we had to get her off the cigarettes and she was going through ash trays, through the bin, to get butts, my God, and my husband said, “She’s like a 55 year old bag lady in a 7 year old body”. Yes, so anyway, we’ve got her off the cigarettes. (Sarah)

At one stage, her granddaughter’s violent behaviour almost prompted Sarah to think about having her fostered out:

There’s huge social problems, huge social problems with her. And if she gets cranky, like she stabbed me through the face and the neck in my photo and threw it out at me, but then her mother cut my head off all the photos too in the frames and all that, you know, so she’d seen that, she’d seen that...We went for about three weeks where she gave us hell and I mean hell, it was terrible and I was even thinking I might even have to foster her out somewhere. I thought “she hates us, she hates us passionately” and she used to say “can’t you understand I hate you, I do not want to be here, I hate your guts”. (Sarah)

Even her experience working with children with behavioural problems did not prepare Sarah for the problems she experienced with her granddaughter:

It’s been a steep learning curve, because my husband has never had children, you know, and my job was working with kids with behavioural disorders and emotional disturbance. I was good at my job, but I don’t think I’m that good here because I’m really stressed, you know. (Sarah)

Sarah also talked about how her husband, who had never had children of his own, was also having a particularly difficult time with their granddaughter:

Yes, she is difficult, she’s had (husband) and I both in tears, which is quite amazing, you know, this tiny little thing. At one stage she stopped calling him Poppy and didn’t speak to him at all for three weeks and when he asked her to sit down with him and talk about it, she said “No, I don’t trust you”...Anyway, she’s come round, but that was after she’d spoken to her mother on the phone and I think her mother had said something to her. She’s fiercely loyal to her mother and yet she sometimes says she hates her mother, you know, and I say “You don’t hate your mother, you hate what’s happened”. (Sarah)
Because of her own experience of being raised in a stable family environment, Miriam found it more difficult to raise her grandchildren, who had come into her care with behavioural problems arising from their mother’s drug and alcohol addiction:

It’s harder to raise them because my own family were sort of all one, Dad and Mum and the children, we all lived together. But these kids, they’re not settled. They’d be more settled with their Mum being here, but Mum can’t cope with it. They fight amongst one another, they’re always fighting. They can’t sit down and have a good conversation unless they’re fighting with one another. It’s just bedlam…It’s been terrible for the kids. Mum used to come home drunk and they’d see things happen. She would try and discipline them, but it was hard as you can imagine. (Miriam)

Parenting grandchildren who had been diagnosed with ADHD proved to be a special challenge for a number of grandparents. Pearl told the story about the struggle with her grandson’s problems before he was diagnosed:

It’s been a struggle, with lots of ups and downs because the youngest one has ADHD, and that’s been very hard, living around here, because at that time he was in trouble with the police and it was so heartaches for me at that time, you know what I mean. I didn’t know how to handle it, didn’t know what was the problem then until the school let me know what was his problem at school, where he couldn’t sit down in a classroom, he couldn’t concentrate. So then I took him to a child and adolescent health doctor they referred me to because he’s a problem. (Pearl)

Malcolm described some of the behavioural problems their grandson was having both at school and at home:

The little boy’s ADHD type behaviour was pretty extreme to start with. When he couldn’t cope he would just disappear under a table or a desk somewhere, and then he’d run out, that’s why we had to go to the paediatrician. He’d just run out and the teacher said to us “Look, the only way we can get him back is to physically pick him up and that’s not acceptable, we’re not supposed to do that”….With him, it’s difficult to pick up what sends him off, but sometimes he’s just impossible and if we insist that he be obedient, he’ll actually work himself up to a stage where he physically vomits. The other night he was actually trying to throttle himself and I had the feeling that was a manipulative tool, which I guess with some people, suicide is a call for help in its extreme, but it’s almost as though when it’s over the next morning he doesn’t remember. (Malcolm)

Even though her grandson has been diagnosed with ADHD, Carol feels that he is not receiving the extra academic help he needs at school:

Because (grandson) is not aggressive, he’s not violent, he’s a loving boy, he is not getting the help through the school, through the Department of Education, which I’ve rung, and because now they don’t label ADHD as a necessity for extra help, it’s got to be ODDH, oppositional deficit, what a load of garbage. I’ve got a child that is academically struggling, will be left behind…Because he’s ADHD, the actual dollars we get, an $87 allowance a fortnight through Centrelink because it’s now recognised as a disability, that $87 goes to the tutor for another lesson, because I have the boys privately tutored, to help them. (Carol)
These findings are consistent with research that children with ADHD often experience a large number of challenging behaviours such as inattention, overactivity, temper outbursts, poor academic achievement as well as conflict with peers, parents, siblings and teachers (Australian Psychological Society 2007). Research into custodial grandparenting and ADHD by Baker (2000) has also revealed that the stresses experienced by grandparents-as-parents are increased when the child being raised has been diagnosed with ADHD. The very high prevalence of ADHD amongst the population of children in care was identified in a Western Australian study by Clare (2001). However, caregivers in Clare’s study were concerned that there was a tendency to focus on the child’s behaviour as a problem rather than as a symptom of the social and psychological pressures facing a child in out-of-home care. Also, as pointed out by Greenberg (1999), cited in Patton (2003b), research has shown that children who have been exposed to a drug-using lifestyle may be wrongly diagnosed with ADHD, when in fact they may actually be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. According to Thomas (1995), the symptoms associated with both conditions are very similar and include impulsivity, temper tantrums, aggression, inattention and hyperactivity.

It is clear from these stories that the ‘parenting’ in the grandparent-as-parent role was a major concern, as well as a source of grief and frustration, for the grandparents in the study. The parenting problems they experienced are consistent with findings in the COTA study, which revealed that grandchildren being raised by their grandparents “are often very insecure and exhibit a range of traumatised behaviour problems, such as extreme attention seeking and acting up” (Fitzpatrick 2004 p.30). Many of the grandparents in the COTA study saw a need for counselling, specialist assessment, advice and ongoing monitoring of their grandchildren, but this was rarely provided. Grandchildren’s behavioural problems, including outbursts of violence and aggression, were also mentioned by grandparents in other Australian and overseas studies by Richards (2001), Orb and Davey (2004) and Worrall (2005).
• Conflict with grandchildren’s parents

A number of grandparents believed that the problems they encountered with the children’s parents were often more challenging than those they faced raising the grandchildren. Carol talked about how the never-ending stress of dealing with her drug-dependent daughter and her husband had affected her:

We never begrudged having these boys, because we wouldn’t have had it any other way, but the emotional side of it, it wasn’t just with the boys, it was still with the parents ongoing and it never ceased, especially considering she was having a third child, and the drama just never left us. And it still never does…I don’t like the mother, I don’t like the father and I can’t hide that, because I think they’re dreadful, just dreadful people. (Carol)

Cindy and Adam were also concerned about their daughter having more children, even though she was unable to care for them because of her drug dependency:

(Daughter) is pregnant again, so there is 14 months between (grandson) and (granddaughter) and there will be 13 months between (granddaughter) and the new baby. (Cindy)

And, we don’t know what’s going to happen to that one, and even DoCS don’t know, because they just treat each case separately. There’s nothing can be done to stop her from being pregnant, it’s pretty ridiculous really, like, when this next one’s born they should be able to say “Well, we’ve got to do something, because it’s going to be another life…” (Adam)

Pam described how she had to take out an AVO against her grandchildren’s mother to prevent the abuse she and her husband had endured:

I think we’ve had twelve months peace from this mother’s abuse. When she drops the children off she abuses you and yells and screams and carries on, but the last twelve months we’ve had peace from her. Before that I took out an AVO because it wasn’t fair on the kids, she’d drop them off and abuse them and swear at them, call them names and the kids would be in tears…Finally we’re at peace from the mother, that’s a good thing, it’s like a lotto win. (Pam)

Mary had also suffered abuse from her daughter after DoCS placed the children in her care:

DoCS took the two girls off my eldest daughter… and my husband and I were given custody…because she wasn’t looking after them properly…If she can’t get her own way she’ll hit me and bash into me and everything, so I’ve put a distance between her and me for nearly two years and I’ve only just, in the last four or five days, started seeing her again…I think she’s starting to accept now that I’ve got the kids, which I think is a big thing for her too to have her kids taken off her. I know what it would make me feel like. But then DoCS told her she could get those kids back in two years if she proved herself, and she did nothing to get them back. (Mary)
Grandparents in a study by Weber and Waldrop (2000 p.37) also talked about the volatile relationship they experienced with their adult children, and their frustration with adult children who “never put their child’s needs above their own”. It is interesting to note that in this study both Carol and Pam referred to the children’s parents as “mother/father”, rather than “my daughter/son”. Grandparents in a study by Wohl, Lahner and Jooste (2003) also distanced themselves from the children’s parents in this way, which was attributed firstly to the shame and guilt grandparents feel at having raised an irresponsible parent; secondly to the anger grandparents feel towards their child for disrupting their lives; and thirdly the fear grandparents feel at the power their children hold over them. In a recent Australian study, a number of grandparents reported that the conflict between themselves and the children’s parents revolved around the birth parents using the child as a means of funding their lifestyle (Dunne & Kettler 2007). In some cases, this had involved the grandparents being threatened with removal of the children if family payments were taken away from the parents.

It is clear from their stories that grandparents in this study experienced a great deal of torment and grief while trying to balance the care and protection of their grandchildren with the parenting role of the children’s parents. It can be argued that these experiences of conflict with the children’s parents are unique to grandparents-as-parents and would not be experienced to the same degree as other kinship carers in the extended family, or foster parents.

5.3.2 Special challenges
Apart from the challenges that appeared as common or shared across the grandparents’ stories, a number of grandparents told of the quite particular challenges they faced when their grandchildren’s parents were in prison, suffered from a mental illness, or were only allowed supervised access with their children.

- **Incarceration**

For those grandparents whose adult children were in prison, taking their grandchildren to visit their parents proved to be a traumatic experience: Joanne described how physically
exhausting it was to take her young grandchildren to see their father, together with the fact that some of the prisons she and the children had visited were in no way child-friendly:

At different times you have to wait in really long queues and there have been times when we’ve arranged a visit and by the time you’re halfway there you can see that one of the kids is not really feeling terribly well, but you continue on because they’re all hyped up, they’re going to see Daddy, you know, struggling through with them. Sometimes we’ve had to wait and be checked by sniffer dogs… and you have to go through a metal detector unit first and you take out any coins or things that you have and put them in a basket. Rings, you’re allowed to leave your wedding ring on, but all other jewellery has to be off. Some of them, you can take a baby’s bottle in, or a nappy, others you can’t. You can’t take food in there for the kids, so you end up you have to buy stuff in there and a lot of the gaols just have vending machines which are, you know, soft drinks in cans, chips and lollies, that’s basically it, they don’t have much else that’s suitable for children. They have limited play areas in some of the places that we’ve visited their father in, not all of them, when he was in Parramatta you just visited him in a room and just had to try and contain them within that room. There was a small area at the back where kids could play for a little while, but they were just running around basically in the same room as you for the most part. Silverwater have an outdoor area and that was a bit better, they could run around a bit more there. It’s very exhausting, you know, it takes virtually the whole day by the time you go through the rigmarole to get in there and then wait for him to be put through the same rigmarole at his end before he’s released out to the visiting area. Then you go back through all the doors and gates and whatnot on the way out again…It’s a real pain, the gaol. (Joanne)

Visiting her daughter in prison was also a very traumatic experience for both Isabel and her granddaughter:

The other big thing we had to do was to visit the gaol and to me that was very difficult. I had lost a son in the past and I don’t know if it sounds awful or not, but sometimes I used to think I could face death more than a child in gaol. It just seemed to me that it was something I couldn’t face. So that was big. The other thing about going to the gaol in the early days was how traumatized my granddaughter was when we had to leave…She had only just turned 4 and I’d take her there and having to leave and the screaming and kicking. It was heartbreaking, it was awful…I feel emotional now, bringing all this up. It was heartbreaking taking her there to see her mother and then having to leave, but we did it, we did it. (Isabel)

Isabel also commented on the unsatisfactory conditions provided for visitors to the prison:

I kind of got used to it, but I don’t think you ever get used to going to a gaol, it’s so awful. I mean, just the way the gaol was…(granddaughter) would play in the children’s room and it was filthy and I used to feel upset thinking “Okay, it might be a gaol, but you’re treated like you’re sub-human, really, you still deserve a decent toilet and a decent playground for the kids.” It was really sub-standard stuff, that upset me. (Isabel)

There were also times when Isabel regretted taking her granddaughter to the prison to visit her mother, because of the problems it caused at pre-school:

I didn’t like taking her there, I mean, if I had my way I wouldn’t have taken her to the gaol, because you know, she told everyone at pre-school her mother was in gaol and there were problems around that, (Isabel)
The impact on relatives caring for children with incarcerated parents has been the subject of a number of Australian and overseas studies (Larman & Aungles 1991; Dressel & Barnhill 1994; Phillips & Bloom 1998). The experiences described by both Joanne and Isabel were echoed by participants in a Queensland study by Healy, Foley and Walsh (2001 p.17), who commented that “the physical aspects of the prison visiting environment were intimidating to the extent that they impacted on the quality of contact between parent prisoners and their families”. Participants in Healey et. al’s (2001) study also identified a considerable variation in visiting areas across prisons, with some providing play equipment for young children, but in all instances there was a lack of attention to the needs of older children or for parents and children to undertake activities together. Overseas research by Porterfield, Dressel and Barnhill (2000 p.194) also reveals that even though frequent contact between incarcerated parents and their children is beneficial, “most visits occur under closely guarded and inhospitable conditions that are not conducive to comfortable parent-child interaction”.

- Mental Illness

Those grandparents, who were raising their grandchildren as well as supporting an adult child with a mental illness, faced a number of special challenges. Joy talked about the need for more support in the community for people like her daughter, as well as her feelings of despair and concern for her daughter’s future when she would not be there:

*I think it’s a great idea that people like my daughter aren’t in institutions any more, I really do, but I think if they’re going to have an independent life they need that support mechanism out there to help them in no matter what capacity, as well as the family…I know I don’t hate her, but I hate the illness. It’s very hard. All these emotions that you go through and you feel bad because you feel this way, but you do, you hate the illness, at certain stages you hate it...It’s so hard, so very hard. I think it’s the uncertainty of what tomorrow is going to bring. You worry about what’s going to happen to her, how you’re going to protect her when you’re not here any more, that’s a concern. Who’s going to look after her? (Joy)*

Sarah talked about her feelings of hopelessness surrounding her daughter’s mental condition and her fears that one day her grandchildren may inherit their parents’ mental problems:

*Their (grandchildren’s) Dad was definitely schizophrenic, you know, he used to mutilate himself, he used to cut himself up all the time, cut his throat, cut across his forehead.*
I’ve never seen anything like it…My daughter is definitely psychotic, I don’t know whether she had drug induced schizophrenia or whether she’s got a personality disorder there, or what…I think it’s only just recently that I thought I’m never going to get my daughter back. I always thought that if you could only just get her back everything would be fine, it would all work out. But I often think well, I’m not going to get her back, how I want her back, you know, I don’t think that’s ever going to happen, because I don’t think this mental illness will go away. She’s had no treatment at all, she won’t, she won’t have anything, you know…What I’m worried about with these kids is if their father was schizophrenic and their mother is, what chance have they got, are they going to be schizophrenic? (Sarah).

It is clear from these stories the extent of the problems experienced by some grandparents as they strive to balance the support of their mentally ill children with the parenting of their grandchildren. A great deal of research has focused on the difficulties facing parents with a mental illness, as well as the care and support of children whose parents have a mental illness (Ackerson 2003; Cowling 2004). However, very few studies have focused on the challenges experienced by grandparents who are raising children of parents with a mental illness. Grandparents in the COTA study revealed a number of additional problems involved in caring for grandchildren whose parents had a mental illness, including getting caught up in the highs and lows of the parent’s emotional instability, as well as the constant worry of its long term impact on the children (Fitzpatrick 2004). In a study of mothers with mental illness, Nicholson, Sweeney and Geller (1998) acknowledge that grandparents often provide welcome respite for mothers with mental illness, as well as shoulder all or part of the burden of raising children, however these situations are rarely without conflict or stress. In a recent report by the Association of Relatives and Friends of the Mentally Ill (ARAFMI), it was stated that providing care and support for those people affected by mental illness may have a profound impact on families and carers, and even though providing care and support can be a positive experience, it can also be extremely challenging and stressful (Hunter 2005).

- **Contact with children’s birth parents**

Contact visits with the children’s birth parents presented a number of difficulties for some grandparent caregivers. Cindy told the story of the disruption to their lives they experienced two and three times a week when their very young grandchildren visited their parents:
The children have had to attend supervised visits for the last 17 months. For the last 17 months we have been tied down to having to be available two and three days a week for supervised visits...There’s been a lot of drama with the children’s contact with their parents. Sometimes at the very last minute they cancel the visit. Because the visits have normally started at 9.30 in the morning, it’s a bit of a mission for us to be out of bed, both children bathed and dressed, their nappy bags packed, their food and bottles packed, they’ve had their breakfast. We’ve got to be dressed because at times we’ve actually had to take the children to DoCS and pick them up. Sometimes there’s been a worker come to pick them up and take them, sometimes not. Sometimes at short notice the visits are cancelled...As (grandson) gets older it’s starting to become an issue because he may not have wanted to be dragged away from the sand pit and dressed in the first place and then he is dressed and put in the car and then next thing he’s not going. As he matures, it’s a little harder. Other times they go to the access and the parents are abusive towards each other and so the worker terminates the visit early, or sometimes they’re drug affected and aggressive, so the access worker terminates the visit early...So, we’ve been through a range of things coping with, at one time, three times weekly and then two times weekly visits. That has a pretty big impact on our lives as well as the children. During the time that they’re at access, for example now, we won’t go out because we could very well get a call on my mobile to say “I’m bringing the children home early”, so we don’t go anywhere. So that’s another limitation. 

Peggy and her husband, Malcolm, were concerned that the fortnightly access visits their grandchildren had with their parents were too frequent and unsettling:

They (grandchildren) see them (parents), generally speaking, once a fortnight...It’s supervised access for five hours on a weekend...The supervisor comes and picks up the kids in her car, then goes around to the motel where their parents are staying, and basically within limits takes them wherever the family wants to go...Someone we know who works at DoCS was very concerned about this frequent access because the children never have time to sort of settle down and by rights we are supposed to have a weekend off a month, so that meant three weekends out of four...I’m not sure whether that’s going to be re-negotiated, because something’s supposed to be coming up with DoCS about a review...(Peggy)

I guess what I’m really after is some way we can move back to once a month instead of once a fortnight, because it’s too much, as (Peggy) said, the kids don’t get a chance to settle...(Malcolm)

It is clear from their stories that grandparents who are raising their grandchildren experience an enormous amount of disruption to their lives as they strive to balance the benefits to the children of access to their parents, with the impact of these visits on the children. A great deal of research has been undertaken into contact between children in out-of-home care and their birth families which has revealed that there are no clear answers on how much contact there should be and under what circumstances this contact should take place (Scott, O’Neill & Minge 2005). Also, there has been much debate about the effect of parental contact on children in out-of-home care; some contend that it is essential
to maintain contact with the birth family, while others argue that contact undermines the new relationship with the foster family (Quinton, Rushton, Dance & Mayes 1997; Browne & Moloney 2002). A NSW study argues that “where restoration is the goal visits should be maximised, but for children in permanent out-of-home care, contact must be set at a level which does not interfere with a child or young person’s growing attachment to their new family” (Barnardos Staff 2003 p.1). This is in line with Permanency Planning amendments to the *NSW Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* which aimed to “address the problem of lack of stability in the lives of children who live in out-of-home care” (Barnardos Staff 2003 p.1). Very little research, however, has focused on how contact with birth parents affects grandparent caregivers and the children in their care. The challenges experienced by the grandparents in this study are consistent with Barnardos’ research which reveals that firstly caregivers may feel that their new parenting relationship with the child may be damaged due to split loyalties; secondly, coping with the child’s behaviour after visits may be a major issue; and thirdly, caregivers may feel that visits are unnecessary if the child is very young, does not have an attachment to the natural parent, or there is a very negative attachment.

It is evident from the stories told by these grandparents that apart from the common challenges experienced by the majority of participants in the study, some grandparents-as-parents also struggle to deal with a number of special challenges. Their feelings of sadness, frustration, grief and loss can be clearly heard from their voices as grandparents strive to balance the care and protection of their grandchildren alongside maintaining some sort of relationship between the children and their parents.

### 5.3.3 Concerns for the future

Grandparents also voiced a number of future concerns they had in the raising of their grandchildren. These included problems surrounding the grandchildren’s education as well raising teenagers in this modern world. Retirement issues were a concern for some grandparents, along with issues of conflict with other members of the family. A number of grandparents also voiced the concern they felt when and if they were no longer able to care for their grandchildren.
Making sure their grandchildren received a good education was a paramount concern of most grandparents in the study. As the education of their grandchildren had been disrupted because of their dysfunctional family life, some grandparents chose to send them to non-State schools, rather than the State schools in their area. Joy chose to send her granddaughter to the local Catholic school, even though the added expense was a financial burden, because she believed that her granddaughter would receive closer attention there:

> We booked my granddaughter into a Catholic school because of her life with her Mum and her Dad. At a young age she was sort of put through a wringer, for want of another word, she was showing signs that things weren’t quite right with her, so I needed some backup. I needed somebody to take notice of her and what has been happening for her, like counselling, and I needed to have that. So we decided to put her into the Catholic school system...So that was an added burden to us as well. (Joy)

Joy also had plans to send her grandson to an out-of-area Catholic High School, because she believed that he would not get involved with drugs, which were prevalent in the area in which they lived:

> Next year my grandson goes to High School, so we want to put him through the Catholic school system as well... One of my concerns is where we live it's a drug area. If you have children that have not had a normal life, or the stability they need, then my concerns are that he would be into that, or my granddaughter, when she was going, would get involved in that. So we figure pay for them to go. I'm just down the street from the (State) High School, a 2 minute walk, but we feel that they need to have that support and that back up to relieve us. (Joy)

Even though she initially received some resistance from her granddaughter (who had previously been living on the streets), Sharon also believed that the Catholic school would give her granddaughter a more caring environment:

> They've been wonderful support at the school. I put her into a little Catholic school because it’s small and I knew there would be a little bit of extra care. She said to me, “I don’t know why you’ve put me into that fucking Catholic school for, because I don’t even believe in God”...but she said to me not long ago, “Nan, I don’t know if I believe in God yet, I nearly do, but I believe in good” and I said “Well, that’s great.” (Sharon)

Isabel chose a Rudolf Steiner school because she believed that her granddaughter may have suffered discrimination at the local public school because of her mother’s imprisonment:

> She went to the public school for the first half a year of kindergarten and I wasn’t really happy with that, as the teacher was quite harsh and I don’t know whether she was discriminated against, perhaps...then I sent her to the Rudolf Steiner school...My son had been at a Steiner school, so I was familiar with their workings and a friend helped to pay one of the fees and that was good. (Isabel)
These stories are consistent with findings from the COTA study which revealed that quite a number of grandparents also decided that smaller private schools would provide a more suitable educational environment for their grandchildren (Fitzpatrick 2004). Despite the added cost, some grandparents in the Tasmanian study also chose small independent schools for their grandchildren, believing they provided a more sympathetic school environment than the state school system (Parliament of Tasmania 2003).

Pearl told the story of the heartache she has endured because behavioural problems had kept her grandson out of school for almost two years:

> Well, every time I try to get someone to home school him, the Education Department will step in and say, “We've got to have him at a school to mix with kids”, and then they say he cannot fit into a classroom because of his behaviour, so I was just turned around with everything, you know what I mean. But, all my patience paid off, so he’s started...He does a couple of hours a day, that’s all he can until...this is only just the starting of the school because before there was no-one that would take him because of his behaviour, he done wrong, and that sticks, you know what I mean? But apart from that now (grandson) is showing more responsibility for his actions, you know, slowly, and they’re starting to realise that he’s doing his best and trying to get himself back into school. But it’s a long story with all the schools, he’s just starting now after two years more or less out of school and he’s 10 going on 11...It was hard, heartache, but things are starting to come good now. (Pearl)

School behavioural problems of children in out-of-home care have been documented in a number of Australian and overseas studies (Dubowitz & Sawyer 1994; Worrall 1996; Richards 2001; CREATE Foundation 2006a). A study of school behaviour of children in kinship care revealed major problems such as “demanding attention, overactivity, and aggressive, acting-out behavior” (Dubowitz & Sawyer 1994 p.902). Grandparents in Worrall’s (1996) study attributed their grandchildren’s behavioural problems at school to witnessing their parents’ marital violence from a very early age, as well as the abuse and neglect they had experienced prior to coming into their grandparent’s care.

Because the education system had changed so significantly since their own children were at school, a number of grandparents felt inadequate when it came time to help grandchildren with homework. Andrew was concerned that his knowledge of the ‘new maths’ was not up
to scratch, whereas Jenny was worried about finding the time to help her grandson with his homework:

The thing that concerns me as well is maths has changed so much at school and I don’t know that I’m up to going back and learning all about the new maths, as that was never my strong point anyway...I can probably manage to get up to School Certificate level, I managed that with a pass, but of course, if he went on to do maths at Year 11 and 12, the advanced maths, it would be well beyond my experience. (Andrew)

And their expectations of what they do at school, I mean (grandson’s) in kindy and he brings homework home every night, a reader and some homework as well, so I’ll be thinking now I’ve got to prepare two meals, one for (grandson) and then one for Adam, and I’ve got to do this homework somewhere in the middle...(Jenny)

Mary felt she needed to go and do a TAFE course in order to help her granddaughters with their homework:

I went to TAFE last year for 12 months because (granddaughter) was starting High School this year and I only went to Year 9 and I just couldn’t help her with her homework. So I went back to TAFE and did Maths and English, Computers and First Aid, and I really enjoyed it...The schooling from when we went to school until now, it’s totally, totally different, totally different. Now they write differently, and computers. The kids lives are computers. How many grandparents know computers? (Mary)

Grandparents in the COTA study also worried about not being able to help their grandchildren with homework because of the changes in the education and school systems since their own children were at school (Fitzpatrick 2004). Many of these grandparents had resorted to paying for additional tutoring to help grandchildren with homework and educational problems. In line with Andrew’s comments, grandparents in Silverstein and Vehvilainen’s (2000) study revealed that of all the problems experienced in helping grandchildren with homework, assisting with maths subjects was the most difficult.

Parenting teenagers also proved to be a challenge to a number of grandparents:

She’s growing up, she’s in the teenage rebellious stage and wants to do her own thing all the time and why can’t she do this? We have rules and sort things out...But I think now, going through puberty she’s realising that basically her mother’s died, her father’s abandoned her, and then she’s left with grumpy old granny...(Penny)

They (teenage grandchildren) don’t like to be disciplined. I find it hard to discipline them. It’s because what they’ve been through. They’re okay at the moment, but it’s what they’ve been through. Sometimes they’re unsettled. (Miriam)
Even though their grandchildren were still young, a number of grandparents were concerned about the looming teenage years of their grandchildren. Joanne could well remember the difficult years that she had already experienced with her own children:

Parenting them when they’re teenagers, that’s a different thing, I’m not looking forward to that at all... The parenting issues, just going through that teenage bit again, the rebellion and “I want to do this” and “I want to do that” and “I want to go here”... You know, the life they will expect to lead and the life that I will consider acceptable will probably be extremely different, just all those dramas and boyfriends and girlfriends, learning to drive, worrying about them in cars, I’m just not looking forward to that all over again. (Joanne)

Nancy, on the other hand, was concerned about issues that she had never had to confront when she was raising her own grandchildren:

It’s a totally different ball game to rearing kids now than it was when I reared my kids. It’s just like another world... Like, the peer pressure thing is something that I never ever thought of when I was rearing my children, but I’m very well aware of it now with my grandchildren, the peer pressure to try alcohol, cigarettes and drugs. (Nancy)

Grandparents in Richards’ (2001 p.77) study also expressed concerns about raising the teenage grandchildren in their care. Problems discussed were teenage behavioural problems, how to protect vulnerable teenagers from drug use and “parenting teenagers when coupled with old age”.

Another major concern for a number of grandparents in the study was whether they would have enough money for retirement:

What worries me now is all our money that we had saved up, which wasn’t a great deal, you know, being married so young and paying a house off and everything like that, we didn’t have a great deal of money. Now our concerns are we’re not going to have enough money for retirement. My husband’s going to have to work for I don’t know how long. (Joy)

Yes, you’ve still got your everyday bills and trying to help the kids financially, and when it comes time for retirement, well, we’re leaving that in the hands of God because I haven’t got any super left. I drew all mine to help pay the bills and the solicitor’s fees. My husband’s got his, but whether he’s got enough money to retire or not is another thing. He puts in the minimum, because that’s all we can afford. (Pam)

These stories are consistent with those told by custodial grandparents in other Australian and overseas studies. Grandparents in the COTA study also revealed that they were spending their retirement savings and superannuation on raising their grandchildren and
that any hope of being self-funded retirees was lost. Having to work well beyond their planned retirement date was also a concern for some of these grandparents (Fitzpatrick 2004). Just how fast their retirement ‘nest eggs’ were dwindling was a concern to a number of custodial grandparents in overseas studies (Minkler & Roe 1993; Worrall 2005).

A number of grandparents told stories of how taking on the care of their grandchildren was the cause of conflict with other adult children in the family. Alice told the story of how her son was very angry with his sister that she was not willing to take on the care of her child:

_He’s a very angry man, very angry man, oh yes. He and his sister haven’t spoken to one another for nearly eight years for an assortment of reasons, but they don’t have anything to do with one another at all, which doesn’t give me any joy either._ (Alice)

Even though Joanne’s daughter had been very supportive, Joanne felt bad that she was not now able to give as much time to her daughter who lived interstate:

_I feel bad, she (daughter) rings me sometimes from (interstate) and she says “How’s my timing, Mum, can I have a chat?” and I say “Sorry, darling, the kids are in the bath”, “Sorry we’re rushing off to swimming class”, “Sorry, we’re doing this”, and I feel like I can’t be there as much for my children. Even though they’re adults, you still need to be involved. They’re very good, you know, but they do just sometimes say little things and you can see that they feel a little on the outskirts of the family now that Mum doesn’t have as much time._ (Joanne)

Joy was concerned that apart from causing conflict with her sons, raising her daughter’s children was preventing her from having a true grandparent relationship with her other grandchildren:

_My boys, I’ve got an older one and younger one…sometimes I think they get a little bit angry because we can’t spend as much time with their children because I’m just too tired. I just can’t. And I feel guilty because looking after my grandkids, the ones that live with me, virtually, I just don’t have enough to go around for their kids, so I think they feel like they’re cheated as well…I know for a fact I’m paying for my grandchildren’s clothes, I’m paying for their schooling, I’m paying for everything, and their kids are missing out. They’re not only missing out that I’m giving more to these ones, but they’re missing out on our time, because we just don’t have enough time to go around for that._ (Joy)

Having to cater for her teenage grandchildren, along with financial constraints, was preventing Pam from having a close relationship with her son’s children:

_I don’t see them (other grandchildren) very much at all. It costs you money for petrol to get up there and my son has offered to give us the money to go and see his children because he wants that connection and we try and keep up that connection, because his
three girls are under two. We try and get up there as much as we can, but when you’ve got teenage children you’ve got to cater to their social life as well. (Pam)

Even though Josie’s other children thought it was not her responsibility to raise her grandchildren, her father had a different opinion:

 Sometimes they sort of think that I haven’t been able to give them as much time probably now because they live (interstate), but I’ve been going up once a year and having a couple of weeks with them...Basically, as they said, it’s not my responsibility, but they’d never put me down for doing it...I said to Dad “What do I do?” He said “Well, you’ve got no choice, it’s your responsibility as a Christian.” That’s what God expects me to do, and as I say, I haven’t done it for anything more than for the children. (Josie)

These findings are consistent with research by Weber and Waldrop (2000) that relationships among all family members may be considerably changed by the onset of grandparent caregiving. Their study found that siblings often have strong feelings about their parents having to take on the caregiving role of grandchildren, which may result in them ‘disowning’ their brother/sister, while others may take on a supportive role. In this study the support Cindy had received from her three sons was also evident:

 The three boys are just absolutely in awe of the job that we do, we have a great deal of contact with our eldest son, he lives locally, the other two live away. He has a great bond with both the children and he comes here probably three or four times a week to see the children. (Cindy)

A recent Australian study revealed that, in some cases, conflict with other family members was encountered, however in other cases, family members were very supportive of grandparents taking on the parenting role of their grandchildren (Dunne & Kettler 2007).

When asked what might happen to their grandchildren if they could not continue caring for them, a number of grandparents stated that this was not a worry as other family members would take over. However, for a number of grandparents this was a genuine concern. Alice feared for her grandson’s welfare, believing that her daughter would not give up her lifestyle to look after him:

 I don’t know what would happen to the little boy if anything happened to me. I don’t know. I’ve got to live until I’m 105. If anything was to happen to me, I don’t know what would happen to him. He’d die. Because there’s nobody out there to look after him. He wouldn’t get looked after if he lived with his mother. She wouldn’t give up her lifestyle to look after him, he’d be dead in a week. (Alice)
Michelle, Ruth and Janelle, all held grave fears of what might happen to their grandchildren:

*I don’t want to think about it. I’m not going there. I can’t imagine. He (grandson) would possibly go back to my daughter. I don’t know that she would handle it. I don’t think he would handle it.*  (Michelle)

*You know, I often sit and think when I’m by myself, or at night, what happens if something happens to me… I’ve got to go into hospital on Monday and have some cancer things removed from my bladder…I am so scared of going to hospital, I mean it happens every three months, I go to hospital and have this done, and each time I think, well, am I going to wake up when they’re finished. That’s my biggest fear, that something’s going to happen and I won’t be here for the boys.*  (Ruth)

*I’d be concerned if I couldn’t look after her (granddaughter). She’d get terribly stressed out because she looks to me so much and it’s a big responsibility, and I am aware that if I let her down, it’s going to hurt her badly.*  (Janelle)

Nancy described how she was teaching her grandsons to care for themselves when she is no longer around to care for them:

*What I’m trying to do is creating a situation for (grandsons) whereby they know how to do housework, they know how to cook, they know how to clean, they know how to look after themselves…That’s the only thing I could think of, you know, I just try to teach them everything I can now, and if anything does happen to me, they’ve got a lot of things in place that they can do to help if anybody else has to take over their lives.*  (Nancy)

It was clear from their stories that grandparents had anticipated that their grandparent-as-parent role would not be a short-term one and were concerned about the future of the grandchildren in their care. The grandparents’ stories are consistent with findings from Richards’ (2001 p.82) study which revealed that the biggest concern for most grandparents was “the future”; what would happen to grandchildren when they could no longer take on the caregiving role, how children with special needs would be taken care of, along with the hope that children would not end up like their parents. Grandparents in Orb and Davey’s (2004) study were also worried about the uncertainty of the future; whether siblings would be kept together, how they would cope with advancing old age and again the possibility that grandchildren may follow in the footsteps of parents who were involved with drugs and/or had a mental disorder.
5.3.4 Satisfaction and rewards

Even though the transition from traditional grandparent to grandparent-as-parent presented many challenges and concerns for grandparents in the study, it was unanimously agreed that there were also many benefits, both for themselves and their grandchildren. Second-time parenting was a benefit for some grandparents:

*In a way it’s a blessing, because I’ve got a chance to now, with the wisdom I have got, to do a better job this time than what I did the first time. I’m enjoying it more because I’m not so pedantic about the things that have to be done, you know, allow the child to be a little bit messy, you can’t expect a child to clean up absolutely spotless.*  (Janelle)

*I like to think I’m a better Grandma that I was a Mother, just from last experiences. And being more sure of myself, which I certainly wasn’t as a young Mum, in bringing up these two children very close together (22 months apart). I look back and often I think “My goodness me”.*  (Jenny)

Watching their grandchildren grow, spending time with them, and just having them in their lives were the benefits to Carol and Brian:

*The benefits are I’ve watched them, I just look at them growing up...I look at these kids, these four kids and I can’t imagine our lives without them especially when we have our great times, the pool, off to Sea World in the holidays.*  (Carol)

*All I have to say is that we’ll have to die to part from them. I won’t give them up for the world. That’s the way I feel about them. I would not part with them for anything.*  (Brian)

A number of grandparents also commented on the love they felt for their grandchildren and described how their lives were enriched after taking on the caregiver role:

*Wouldn’t be without her, would we? We often think when we said we’d take her for 12 months, how could we have ever done that and then handed her back. There’s no way, there’s no way. We love her to bits, don’t we?*  (Julie)

*You never grow old. You can’t afford to. I’m younger now than I was before, because you just have to. I was totally resigned to retire, just sitting around doing nothing, and then everything just fell down around my ears and I thought, well, I had better get off my butt, nobody else’s going to do it, I’m going to have to get up and do it myself, if I want to see my grandchildren grow old with me. I couldn’t stand the thought of going to their funeral before my own.*  (Nancy)

*There’s a lot of joy, you know, and I think in a lot of ways it’s quite a privilege to do it, to have so much involvement with your grandchildren, I think it’s a privilege. They keep you younger, I think, because you have to be, you’ve got to be more active and organised. Saying goodnight to them, the hugs and the kisses and the smiles and the “Good morning, Nana”, that sort of thing. Yes, knowing they’re safe, definitely, knowing that they’re safe and well.*  (Joanne)
Some grandparents also believed that their grandchildren benefited from being raised by their grandparents:

*I think (grandson) has gained and I think all these kids in a similar situation have gained from being with grandparents. They come to us for a reason and if it's because of family breakdown, they gain a great deal by coming into the care of grandparents. I think we mellow over the years, we have a lot of life experiences, more patience, more tolerance, and I think we're better able to deal with these children who do come with lots of psychological issues and behavioural problems. So I think (grandson) has gained a lot.* (Michelle)

*I think the main benefits for them is the security and stability that they get through living with their grandparents, definitely...They know they can rely on me, they know that I'm always there to pick them up from school, they're not let down at any time by me, they know that if I say I'll do something it will be done, and if there's any time when something can't be, that it will be fully explained to them and they won't be left in the lurch somewhere.* (Joanne)

*The benefit for (grandson) has been enormous. I mean, his school work has come on by leaps and bounds. In fact, the impression I get is he's well ahead of the bulk of the children, simply because you do spend the time with him.* (Andrew)

*As far as (granddaughter's) concerned, she gets looked after, she gets everything she wants. She thinks she's a princess and she gets treated as a princess, you know, I think it's good for her. She has a steady childhood and she knows that someone's going to be here for her...*(Jeremy)

It is evident that the love for their grandchildren and their total commitment to providing them with a safe and happy family life had provided enormous satisfaction and rewards for the grandparents in the study. Their stories are consistent with other studies which have also revealed that, in spite of its many challenges, the grandparent caregiver role can be very rewarding (Minkler & Roe 1993; Richards 2001; Fitzpatrick 2004). Research by Giarrusso, Silverstein et.al (2000) revealed that most grandparents found the grandparent-as-parent role to be a ‘mixed bag’, both stressful and rewarding; others found it to be mostly rewarding while a minority found it to be mostly stressful. However, most grandparents in Weber and Waldrop’s (2000) study talked about the loving and positive relationship they had with their grandchildren and the satisfaction about the difference they believed they were making in their grandchildren’s lives and futures. All grandparents in a recent Australian study “had no regrets about raising their grandchildren”, and “felt that one of the greatest rewards was the love and happiness they shared with their grandchild” (Dunne & Kettler 2007 p.9).
5.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has narrated the grandparents’ stories to reveal the reasons why grandparents are raising their grandchildren, as well as the many common and special challenges they face in carrying out the grandparent-as-parent role. The grandparents’ stories have also uncovered the many concerns, together with the satisfaction and rewards, which grandparent caregivers encounter in raising their grandchildren. Even though many of these findings parallel those in the existing literature, they provide powerful testimony to the grandparents’ love and devotion to their grandchildren, both now and into the future, as well as their support for the children’s parents in often difficult circumstances.

The following chapter will explore how the experiences of negotiating the dual roles of parent and grandparent have impacted on the identity of grandparents in the study.
CHAPTER SIX: IMPACT OF NON-TRADITIONAL GRANDPARENT ROLE ON IDENTITY OF GRANDPARENTS-AS-PARENTS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the narratives of the grandparents through the lens of identity theory. The narratives presented in the previous chapter point to the dissonance for grandparents as they move between different states of being both parent and grandparent. This movement between roles is compounded by the extent of the change, loss and grief that grandparents negotiate as they assume the parenting role. The following discussion explores the impact of this complex dynamic on the identity of the grandparents as they assume the role of grandparent-as-parent.

6.2 Role-identity conflict

As discussed in Chapter Three, identity theory proposes that individuals are usually involved in multiple role relationships and hold multiple identities. These multiple identities may serve to reinforce one another, but if they do not, role-identity conflict may arise. An in-depth narrative analysis of the grandparents’ stories has revealed that the participants in this study experience a role-identity conflict in their role of grandparent-as-parent. As outlined in Chapter Two, existing research into the traditional grandparent role indicates that even though contemporary grandparents are often a significant source of help for families, providing childcare, financial and moral support, grandparenthood has traditionally been associated with a peripheral role, assisting parents, but not taking on the responsibility for actual child rearing. This has been described in the literature as ‘pleasure without responsibility’. The traditional grandparent role is also considered to be one of ‘non-interference’, with the expectation that grandparents should be available for support, but should not interfere in the parenting of their grandchildren. It can therefore be readily
envisaged that the dissonance of the grandparent-as-parent role could prove problematic to grandparents, particularly if their perception of the grandparent role was aligned to the traditional model. This proved to be the case for a number of grandparents in this study who commented that they were struggling around the issue of being both a parent and a grandparent to their grandchildren:

I feel like I’m not being able to be a grandparent, I’m more of a parent than a grandparent now. (Nancy)

I’d love to sit down and just draw with them and tidy up their mess when they’ve gone home, but we can’t…Yes, we do envy other grandparents because we don’t have that. (Carol)

I’ve never liked disciplining him and to me the whole idea of having a grandson was that you didn’t have to have discipline and you just enjoyed him. (Andrew)

You feel torn in two different directions, one is saying: ‘I’ve had my children, I don’t want to do this again, I don’t want to have to be bringing up children again’. And then you feel really guilty because you think you shouldn’t be saying this, you shouldn’t be thinking this way. You’ve got to do it, they’re your grandchildren, you have an obligation to do this. (Joy)

I go over there and I’m the mother of my son and I’m the grandparent of these ones, and yes, I’m Mum to these boys but I’m really Nan. You’ve got all these roles, and at the end of the day, who are you? (Nancy)

Other researchers have also documented the sense of conflict experienced by grandparent caregivers who are not enacting the traditional grandparent role (Crumbley & Little 1997; Landry-Meyer & Newman 2004). Redefining roles and boundaries between kinship carers and the children, as well as the children’s parents, was considered a concern for caregivers in research by Crumbley and Little (1997 p.11), who concluded that kinship carers have had to make the transition from “supporter to primary caregiver”, from “advisor to decision maker”, and from “friend or peer to authority figure”. The vast majority of grandparents in Landry-Meyer and Newman’s (2004) study experienced a role conflict in their grandparent-as-parent role, and discussed the grief, conflict and loss they experienced in their present grandparent-as-parent role compared with the traditional grandparent role they once had with their grandchildren.

Even though other research has acknowledged the role conflict experienced by grandparents and other kin who are raising children, it appears there has been little focus on the impact of this conflict on the self-identity of kin carers. Grandparent caregivers, in
particular, may well question “who am I now that I’m a parent all over again”? It is argued that for a majority of grandparents in this study the loss of the traditional grandparent role and the consequential shift in commitment to the grandparent-as-parent role was accompanied by a sense of dissonance concerning their status and identity.

6.3 Loss of traditional grandparent role

As discussed in Chapter Three, identity theory proposes that individuals have role-identities that comprise the meanings that a person attaches to oneself while performing a particular role. These meanings are derived from culture and society, as well as a person’s own understanding of, and attachment to, a particular identity. Identity theory also proposes that as well as role-identities, individuals have social identities which mark them out as members of a particular group or category (Stets & Burke 2000). The roles, which people play within these groups, all have meanings and expectations regarding performance and the relationships between the roles, commonly termed intragroup relations. It can be argued that the grandparent role forms part of the family group, and the meanings and expectations of the traditional grandparent role are one of companion or friend to grandchildren.

It is clear from the stories of the grandparents in this study that the loss of the traditional grandparent role is significant. Instead of acting as a friend or confidant to their grandchildren, grandparents have now become disciplinarians, providers and authority figures. This loss of the traditional grandparent role is evident in the comments of grandparents who described feelings of “not being able to be a grandparent” and “envy” of traditional grandparents, as well as disappointment in having to “discipline” grandchildren rather than “enjoy” them. It is argued that for grandparents in this study the loss of the traditional grandparent role, an important role-identity and social identity, has resulted in feelings of disappointment and grief:

We’re just being parents all over again and I hate that, I really hate that. (Carol)

Grandfathers are meant to be there to play with their grandchildren and give them lollies and do all nice things to them, not chastise them and tell them they can’t do this and they can’t do that. (Jeremy)
A lot of people say to us, “I don’t know how you do it”. But everyone, if they were in the same position, they’d do it themselves. We just say to them, “The only thing we miss is we won’t be grandparents”. (Adam)

The narratives allude to what Weigert and Hastings (1977 p.1171) refer to as “the painful loss of an irreplaceable and personal identity”, which they assert is a “common theme of human existence”. This is particularly the case when social change affects the traditional structures within the family unit. How grandparents have dealt with this identity loss is explored in the following section.

6.4 Shift in commitment to grandparent-as-parent role

The narratives of the grandparents provide rich insight into the depth of their commitment to the care, safety and happiness of their grandchildren, often at the expense of their own lives. The grandparents in this study have given up their routines, their friends, retirement plans, social lives, and even jobs to devote their time and energies to the welfare of their grandchildren. It is clear from the narratives that the grandparents have put their grandchildren’s financial needs before their own, using their often meagre income to provide for the children’s health, education, out of school and sporting activities etc., in an attempt to give their grandchildren the same opportunities available to other children. Some of the grandparents took on menial jobs such ironing and cleaning to supplement their income, furthered their education in order to help grandchildren with their schooling, as well as updating their parenting skills. A number of the grandparents were fighting for legal custody of their grandchildren in order to prevent them from being placed into foster care and to keep the family unit together. In some cases this was done at the same time as supporting adult children whose often chaotic lifestyles were the very reason why the children were in their care. Most grandparents sought little in return for this unconditional love and commitment, except to see their grandchildren grow into happy, healthy adults, able to make their own way in the world.

As outlined in Chapter Three, identity theory proposes that apart from the stress caused by a discrepancy in self-verification, having two oppositional identities activated at the same
time will also result in change. Firstly, one or both of the identities may shift as their meanings change and, secondly, one or the other identity may become less important, or salient, or the commitment to the identity may become lower as the person withdraws from relationships involved with the identity (Burke 2003). This shift in commitment results in people re-identifying themselves, and changing or adapting their self-meanings as held in their identity standards.

It is clear that for most grandparents in this study it was difficult to maintain the standards and perceptions congruent with the traditional grandparent role and they have consequently made a shift in commitment to the grandparent-as-parent role. This is evidenced by grandparents’ comments such as “being more of a parent than a grandparent”, as well as feeling they have an “obligation” to take on the parenting role. Grandparents have found that they are no longer able to be traditional grandparents to their grandchildren, but must now take on the grandparent-as-parent role in order to provide a stable life for their grandchildren:

As a grandmother and a grandfather I think you’re robbed of that (role). We still try and be the grandparents, but you also have to take on the parenting role. If you could change it, you would have their parents as good parents, but you can’t, so you have to do it. (Pam)

You’ve got to do it, they’re your grandchildren, you have an obligation to do this. (Joy)

...There’s nobody out there to look after him. He wouldn’t get looked after if he lived with his mother. She wouldn’t give up her lifestyle to look after him, he’d be dead in a week. It’s just me, I’ve got to do this. (Alice)

I would rather be doing this (grandparent-as-parent role) than not doing it. Because to not do it would mean I would be at their graveside. They’re the consequences I look at if I wasn’t doing this. (Nancy)

According to Burke (2006), identity change may occur when people have multiple identities that are related to each other in the sense that they share meanings and are activated at the same time. However, Burke has recognised another source of identity change that he calls “disturbances in the situation: events that are beyond the control of individuals which change the self-relevant meanings in the situation” (2006 p.94). This is particularly pertinent to grandparents in this study because of events outside their control that have triggered an identity change from traditional grandparent to grandparent-as-
The impact of this identity shift on the grandparents is explored in the following section.

6.5 Impact of shift in commitment

A deeper examination of the grandparents’ stories revealed a number of different ways in which a shift in commitment from traditional grandparent to grandparent-as-parent had impacted on the grandparents. A number of grandparents felt that their grandparent-as-parent role was not always recognised within the community:

- I don’t know, but I do think grandparents are a forgotten race, well grandparents caring for their grandchildren. (Sarah)

- We don’t have kids coming to our house because I don’t know anybody with kids and I don’t know any of the other mothers from the pre-school, because you’re sort of invisible when you’re a grandma. (Jessica)

- There’s still a very traditional view of the family in a way, even though they now accommodate de facto relationships and Mums and Dads not living together, but they still really haven’t caught up with grandparents raising grandchildren. (Katie)

Some grandparents believed that the needs of grandparent-headed families were often overlooked:

- We go back to what would our government do for these children. They give their mother and father the dole, they get free medical, they can go and see a psychiatrist and the government will pay that, but when it comes to these people’s children, who are young and need the guidance now, it’s not available. (Peggy)

- The non-recognition and the fact that the parents could get Legal Aid because they’re on the dole, so the taxpayer virtually pays for our children’s drug use through the government because they get the dole, and when we say: “Hey, these children need help, can you help us?”, they say “You don’t exist”, and that’s wrong. (Pam)

Many grandparents whose grandchildren had come into their care through the NSW DoCS system, believed that there was no equity between grandparent carers and foster carers:

- Well, foster carers, I think receive more help from DoCS than grandparents. Financially they know all the little lurks and perks, which DoCS don’t tell you about, what your entitlements are. They think grandparents are there just to raise the kids. (Adam)

- All I got from DoCS was to find out how they (grandchildren) were, maybe every few months, and eventually there was no appointed caseworker on the children, so there was no ongoing support. (Carol)
I have never seen DoCS since I actually went to court, and I said, “I thought you were supposed to make six monthly visits or something; I could be beating these kids black and blue and you wouldn’t know”. I’ve never had a visit from any of them, I can’t believe that, since I got them. (Helen)

I know foster carers get a lot, they get a lot of help. We needed a room put on this house and we had to pay for that ourselves. I believe with foster carers they’re helped out with that. (Pam)

A number of grandparents felt they didn’t have a ‘say’, they were ‘taken for granted’ and that their position within the community was not recognised or understood:

I’d never let my grandkids be in foster care, ever, if it’s the last thing I ever do...And I think most grandparents are the same, but they need the services to back them and they need a say. (Joy)

Our government knows that we exist, but I think our government thinks, “Oh well, they’re grandparents, that’s what they should do”. (Pam)

I think there needs to be more general awareness that a lot of grandparents are raising grandchildren...a general acknowledgement in the community, or awareness, that it is not such an unusual thing for kids to be living with a grandparent, especially not for Aboriginal kids, it’s almost quite normal for them. (Katie)

Some grandparents talked about feeling ‘alone’ within the community.

There was nobody to talk to about it. Everybody I spoke to...it was sort of like a door slamming in your face. You don’t have that right, you’re only grandparents. (Joy)

It’s quite traumatic, when life should be easier, it’s not, it’s not. And there’s nobody there helping and making is easier. (Joy)

Sometimes I would like someone to just ring up and say: “How are you going? I’m just thinking about you, just wondering how you’re going.” (Alice)

It is clear from these stories that the shift in commitment from traditional grandparent to grandparent-as-parent had impacted on grandparents in a number of different ways, and had provoked feelings of being unrecognised, disadvantaged, misunderstood and isolated within the community. Even though there appears to be no previous studies focused on the impact of the shift in identity commitment on grandparents-as-parents, researchers have documented the impact of a shift in identity commitment in a number of studies in other areas. Research by Burke and Cast (1997) for example has revealed the impact on gender identities of newly first-married couples and after the birth of a child. Similarly, a study by Berry (1999) into how mothers in prison defined and fulfilled their role of parent while incarcerated, revealed that even though they had not stopped loving their children,
incarcerated mothers’ commitment to the parental role decreased as the frequency of their children’s visits decreased.

It is also clear from their narratives that grandparent participants have experienced a number of disruptions to their highly committed grandparent-as-parent role. In analysing the narratives of the grandparents it appears that this identity disruption has manifested itself in experiences that have a binary effect, and this is discussed in the next section.

6.6 The space between myth and reality

It is evident that there is a dissonance for most grandparents as they move within and between different states of being both grandparent and grandparent-as-parent. This dissonance, or role-identity conflict between the mythical/traditional grandparent role and the reality of the grandparent-as-parent role, can be explained as a ‘space of difference’. Grandparents who are raising their grandchildren find themselves as part of a group defined as other, or different. It is argued that the ‘to and fro’ dynamic of this space of difference (‘on the one hand their experience is this, but on the other hand it is that’) is best understood in terms of a number of binaries that describe the ‘to and fro’ experiences, or dissonance, that are evident in grandparents’ narratives.

It is clear from the grandparents’ narratives that the meta binary evident in the data is that of myth/reality. Grandparents experience a role-identity conflict as they struggle to be both parent and grandparent to their grandchildren. Also, the loss of the traditional grandparent role and consequential shift to the grandparent-as-parent role has impacted on their identity in a number of different ways. It is argued that this disruption to the grandparents’ role-identity has provoked a series of additional binaries that include experiences linked to ‘visible/invisible’, ‘deserving/undeserving’, ‘voice/silenced’, and ‘included/excluded’. The use of binaries to measure self-meanings was developed by identity theorists Burke and Tully (1977) and used to test the role identities of a group of school children in the USA. In order to explore the self-meanings grandparents in this study attached to the grandparent-
as-parent role-identity, a closer examination of each of the binaries appeared to be warranted.

Consistent with a narrative inquiry methodology, as described in Chapter Four, this emerging interpretation of the grandparents’ experience was taken back to a smaller sample of the grandparent participants to ensure their integral involvement in the ‘restorying’ process. Five grandparent participants were invited to take part in this second stage of the data collection and were asked to comment on the issues that had emerged from the deeper search for meaning within the grandparents’ stories. The questions posed to the follow-up participants are outlined in Appendix D. The grandparents were carefully selected so as to ensure a cross section of contexts, views and experiences. Two of the participants were single grandmothers, one was a single grandfather, and two grandparents shared the care of their grandchildren with a partner. The reasons why grandparents had taken on the care of their grandchildren included their adult children’s drug/alcohol addiction, incarceration, or mental health problems. One grandparent was in the full-time workforce, one grandparent worked part-time and the other three grandparents had given up their jobs to care for their grandchildren. The purpose of re-interviewing these grandparents as part of the re-storying process was to verify and confirm the emerging interpretations being drawn from the grandparents’ stories. The following sections explore the responses of the grandparents to each of the emergent binaries and further reveal the impact of the grandparent-as-parent role on the identity of grandparents in the study.

6.6.1 Myth/reality
The narratives reported in Chapter Five are threaded with a recurring theme concerning the dissonance for these grandparents as they moved between the ideal and expectation of being the traditional grandparents, to the everyday realities of being a grandparent-as-parent. This dynamic has been captured as a binary I have identified as myth/reality. In my follow-up interviews I put this finding to the participants, inviting their further comment on the ‘to and fro’ between the ‘mythical’ and ‘real’ grandparent role. The responses from grandparents were unanimous in confirming the struggle between the two states of being a grandparent:
Yes, I do struggle with that, definitely, because I want to take on the grandmother role and treat them as a grandmother would, but I can’t because I have to be the disciplinarian, etc. So, I completely agree with that one...You can’t be their grandparent and raise them, it just doesn’t work that way. You’ve got to take on a different role. (Joanne)

Joanne added that even though there was a chance the children would one day be returned into the care of their mother, she doubted that she would be able to have a true grandparent relationship with them in the future:

I don’t feel like their grandmother any more and I don’t know, because we’re transitioning the kids at the moment back to their Mum, I don’t know if I will ever feel like their grandmother, even after they go back. I don’t know how long it will take for that to happen, because you are in the parental role and you have that conflict, I was their Nan before I was their Mum. (Joanne)

Joanne also compared the traditional grandparent role of her friends with her own reality of being a grandparent caregiver that involved the children’s mother actually taking on the ‘grandparent’ role:

When you compare if you have friends with grandchildren, their lives with their grandchildren and your life with your own, they get to have them for the fun times and we get the reverse. Their Mum driving up and dropping off Easter eggs for them at Easter and taking off for a holiday, and I’m at home with the children; it should have been the reverse. I should have been calling in with the Easter eggs and saying “goodbye kids” and off I go. (Joanne)

Cindy also compared her expectation of the mythical grandparent role with the reality of the grandparent-as-parent role:

I don’t feel like a grandparent, I feel like a parent...I thought that being a grandmother would involve being able to indulge them and spoil them and then hand them back. I guess that’s how I thought it would be. Well, it’s entirely different because I don’t have that role at all. I have the role of a mother, because it’s full time 24/7, there’s no handing them back, there’s no taking a break. (Cindy)

Because Helen was a single grandparent, she believed that she needed to take on more roles than just parent and grandparent:

You’re neither a parent nor grandparent. You’re sort of mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, you’re everything. (Helen)

Helen also compared her grandparent-as-parent role with the traditional grandparent role she was able to have with her grandson who lived next door:

To me, a grandparent is one, you come home and you have a bit of cake when you’re not supposed to, you cuddle them and kiss them. No, I don’t have that like I do with (grandson) next door. You don’t get to spoil them because you know you’re going to
Jeremy agreed that grandparent caregivers were not able to spoil their grandchildren and believed that taking on the parenting role changed the relationship between the grandparent and grandchild:

Yes, that’s the way it is. You’re a parent, not a grandparent, because you feel responsible for them and you can’t spoil them as much as you want to...It’s very hard. While grandparents are supposed to be people that the kid comes to for all the love and gets spoiled and whatnot, but when you’re being a grandparent as well as a parent, you have to be tough as well. You have to be a parent and make sure they do the right thing, so that turns the kid against the grandparent a little bit. (Jeremy)

The conflict she felt in being a grandparent-as-parent, as well as a traditional grandparent with her other grandchildren, proved to be a problem for Joy:

I've almost taken on the parent role, not so much the grandparent, and I find it hard to cut off from being the parent with the other grandchildren. You know, it’s very hard to go back to the grandparent role...so you’re jumping from grandparent to parent to grandparent. It’s not only confusing for me and my husband, but I try to make it as stable an upbringing for the grandchildren, the ones that I’m rearing, but it is very hard because it does clash with your other kids. And, also too, I don’t have as much time for my other grandchildren. (Joy)

As pointed out by Burke and Tully (1977), role-identities can only be understood in relation to counter-roles, for example, the role-identity of husband relates to the role-identity of wife, or as in this study, the role-identity of grandparent relates to the role-identity of grandchild. In order to discover the meaning of a particular role-identity, it must be examined in relation to its counter-role. In this study, an examination of how grandparent-as-parent role-identities related to grandchild role-identities, revealed the struggle grandparents were experiencing around being both a parent and a grandparent. Despite the fact that they were totally committed to the grandparent-as-parent role, it is evident from their comments that grandparents in the study were mourning the loss of the traditional grandparent role. Even though some grandparents were able to experience the traditional grandparent role with other grandchildren, they were struggling to come to terms with the fact that they would never be able to have this relationship with the grandchildren in their care. It is clear that the myth/reality binary, as it relates to the grandparent-as-parent role, has been personally experienced by many grandparents in this study. Instead of the
mythical grandparent role involving ‘pleasure without responsibility’, grandparents must now take on the parenting roles of disciplinarian, provider and authority figure.

6.6.2 Visible/invisible

It appeared from the narratives reported in Chapter Five that some grandparents were wrestling with feelings that their highly committed grandparent-as-parent role was not always prominent within the community. At times it appeared to grandparents that their role was conspicuous, while at other times the grandparent-as-parent role was unseen. This perceived inconsistency in recognising the grandparent-as-parent role has been identified through the binary visible/invisible. My question inviting comment on the perceived visibility/invisibility of the grandparent-as-parent role within the community evoked a mixed response from the participants in the follow-up interviews. Even though Joy wished that sometimes she was invisible, she believed that grandparent caregivers were definitely invisible in the eyes of mental health providers:

_Sometimes I wish I was a little more invisible, because as I said, I feel as if I’m being pulled in all different directions. But, as far as health service and service providers, yes. We’re still not in the equation as far as confidentiality and all those things come into it. We have to fight for everything that we have a say in._ (Joy)

Jeremy believed that grandparent caregivers were invisible within the wider community and that the only people who really understood his position were his friends and welfare authorities:

_All my friends think we’re doing a wonderful job, it’s a good thing grandparents are raising a child, but as far as I guess the community in general is concerned, the only one who takes any notice of you are the welfare people, Barnardos, and people like that. Apart from that, the general community probably wouldn’t care who was doing what._ (Jeremy)

However, conversely, Helen believed that her role as a grandparent caregiver was very visible within the local community, whereas she felt invisible in the eyes of Centrelink when she tried to access funding for vacation care and after-school care for her grandchildren:

_Yes, I don’t think there’s a lot of support, they (Centrelink) just look at you as though you’re not there. I’m trying to do it (raise grandchildren) to save the government money, but anything that’s handed out is handed out to parents, but not grandparents. Yes, I suppose I feel a bit invisible that way. Yes, you’re just not recognised as doing the right thing._ (Helen)
Because she was a relatively young grandparent caregiver, Joanne believed this helped her visibility within the school community:

*My situation is probably a little different because a lot of the children’s parents at school thought I was my grandchildren’s mother, being a slightly younger grandmother. So I haven’t had the same experience and children do come to play with (grandchildren) and I do know the parents at the school and I’ve made good friendships with quite a few of them.* (Joanne)

However, Joanne conceded that because little is known about grandparent carers, this could well contribute to their invisibility:

*There isn’t a lot known about grandparent carers, so you could be invisible in that way, too, because no-one really knows of their situation…people don’t understand when you say you’re raising them, they think you’re minding them.* (Joanne)

Cindy also believed that being a younger grandmother might have contributed to her visibility within the pre-school community, as well as her husband Adam’s willingness to mix with the younger Dads:

*In some cases, perhaps, it’s a little easier because I’m a lot younger than Adam, and there are Mums at pre-school that are only just a few years younger than me, so maybe that makes it a little different. I’m not an old grandma. That may put a different spin on it, but I think it’s more to do with our approach because we go to every function at pre-school, Adam goes and he sits down there with all the young Dads, he gets in the sand pit with the kids, we invite other people to our home, we get invited to other people’s homes.* (Cindy)

However, because she and Adam were very vocal about their role as grandparent caregivers, Cindy believed this raised their visibility within the wider community:

*The people we come across every day, we’re very vocal about saying “these are our grandchildren, we’re raising them” and very often that leads to a conversation where people will say, “You guys are doing a great job, that’s a great thing you’re doing”. So I don’t think we feel invisible.* (Cindy)

It is argued that the mixed response from the grandparents to perceptions of the grandparent-as-parent role being visible/invisible was largely dependent on the feedback participants had received towards their role from differing sections of the community. Those grandparents who perceived their grandparent-as-parent role as being invisible had received negative feedback, whereas those who perceived their role as being visible had received a positive response. Because of the problems they had encountered, both Joy and Helen believed their role as grandparent caregivers was invisible to mental health providers and Centrelink. However, Jeremy’s positive experience with Barnardos, had confirmed the visibility of his grandparent-as-parent role within this welfare organization. The variation
in feedback from the wider community had influenced participants’ perception of the
grandparent-as-parent role as being either visible or invisible. This finding is consistent
with identity theory’s self-verification process that a lack of identity verification will lead
to a negative emotion, while identity verification will produce a positive emotion.
However, it also confirms Burke’s (2004) theory that identities and social structure are two
sides of the same coin; even though the processes of identity verification take place within
the individual, the consequences of identity verification depend on the different ways in
which identities are tied to the social structure.

6.6.3 Deserving/undeserving
From their narratives recorded in Chapter Five, it appeared that a number of participants
believed that grandparents-as-parents were not always seen as qualifying for services and
support because they were ‘family’. It appeared to them that, unlike other carers of
children placed in out-of-home care, who were held in high esteem and were therefore
‘entitled’ to assistance, grandparent carers were ‘expected’ to care for their own without
ongoing support. Grandparents’ feelings of being disadvantaged because ‘they are family’
has been identified through the binary deserving/undeserving. In the subsequent interviews
with the five grandparents I explored this notion of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ in more
depth. Three of the grandparents strongly believed that the current services available were
towards foster carers and that kinship carers were just expected to take on the
caregiving role without any support:

*I think the services are made for foster carers. They don’t have to jump through the
hoops as much as we have to get some sort of payment. I think because society, or the
bureaucrats, actually look at it and think well, this (foster) family has applied for these
children and have gone through the measures, the checks and all that, to make sure that
they’re worthy of raising children, whereas with us because it’s just pushed on us, so
they sort of ignore us. I think we should really have the same services for grandparents
raising children as people who foster children. We should get all the same things. (Joy)*

*If you foster children you’re appreciated, but if you’re a grandparent that’s expected of
you, and that’s not on. Because, it’s not really our job, so I think if any of us do that sort
of thing we should be appreciated more than anyone. We’re taking on another family
that we shouldn’t have had to take on. Yes, I do believe that. (Helen)*

*I think DoCS feels that once a child is placed in kinship care they’re okay, they’re with
family, we don’t need to do anything more, case closed. But they have to realise that we
need support too, that it’s a shock to us the circumstances around us getting these kids
are sometimes tragic. They’re not okay just because they’re with family, we’re not okay*
just because we’re family, we still need the same back-up and that there’s a chance of respite and things like that and the availability of services for the children outside, sometimes the other things that they need like speech therapy, specialists for health problems. (Joanne)

Joanne also believed that the reason kinship carers were not looked upon in the same light as foster carers was because of the perception that somehow kinship carers were to blame for the children being placed into out-of-home care:

Yes, I think that is a very true perception between foster carers and kinship carers... I’ve had comments from people within DoCS that because we haven’t done a very good job with our own kids, why should we be given another lot to try with...It might be the shame attached to us, that we’ve done something wrong with the (adult) children that have gone along the drug path, the alcohol path, and yes, there is a definite stigma I think between foster carers and kinship carers because there is this sense of blame, that we’re somehow responsible for what’s gone wrong. (Joanne)

In contrast, both Cindy and Jeremy did not believe there was a perception that foster carers were more deserving than kinship carers:

Not, not really. I think the general public would realise that a kid was better off with a grandparent than with a total stranger. (Jeremy)

I don’t feel that anyone thinks that we’re undeserving because we are kinship carers, and I don’t think I’ve ever come across anyone that thought foster carers were any different to us. Perhaps it’s just that grandparents raising grandchildren, a lot of people just don’t recognise what a big job it is, I think. (Cindy)

However, neither Jeremy nor Cindy received the same ongoing support as foster carers. In Jeremy’s case, after an unpleasant incident with a young caseworker, support was not sought from DoCS:

... I didn’t want support. The less I have to do with DoCS the happier I am because I don’t feel that the DoCS workers have the hands-on training to understand what children are about. (Jeremy)

Cindy, on the other hand, believed that because of financial constraints DoCS were not able to offer kinship carers the same services as foster carers, but this did not mean that support wasn’t needed:

We feel that DoCS attitude has been, in terms of need (grandchildren) are doing okay, so shut the door on that, they’re okay, they’re with their grandparents. Partly we understand that because we know that it all comes down to funding. We know that things need to be prioritised and we know that (grandchildren) are not a high priority to DoCS any more, because they’re in a long-term placement, their needs are being met, they’re well cared for, they’re developing. So we can understand that, but that’s not to say that we don’t need some support and we don’t get any. (Cindy)
It appears that those grandparents who believed they were perceived as undeserving had based this perception either on the negative feedback they had received from DoCS, or on a belief that this was how kinship carers and foster carers were perceived within the community. Grandparents’ perception that both DoCS and the wider community considered them undeserving arose from the belief that grandparents had a duty to care for their grandchildren, who would be safe and protected within the family unit and would not need ongoing support. Conversely, it was believed that foster carers were performing a service to the community and therefore they, and the children in their care, deserved to be supported. This finding is consistent with Daly & Lewis’ (2000) view of social care that locates care within a normative framework of obligation and responsibility. As Cass (2007) points out, within Australian child welfare law and practice, it is a normative assumption that grandparents will take on the primary care of their grandchildren in the absence of the children’s parents.

The perception that grandparents did not deserve to be raising their grandchildren because they had somehow failed to raise their own children successfully had also contributed to a lack of identity verification for grandparents-as-parents. This finding appears to be consistent with an identity theory perspective where “enacting a role satisfactorily should enhance feelings of self-esteem, whereas perceptions of poor role performance may engender doubts about one’s self-worth” (Hogg, Terry et al. 1995 p.257). This was particularly evident for a number of grandparents when they referred to issues such as being somehow to blame for their adult children’s drug/alcohol problems.

6.6.4 Voice/silenced
The binary of voice/silenced appeared to be a strong theme in the grandparent narratives reported in Chapter Five. It was evident that a number of grandparents in the study believed that, even though the phenomenon of grandparents raising their grandchildren was receiving increasing media attention, their grandparent-as-parent role was not clearly understood within the community and there appeared to be no avenues open for grandparents to express their concerns in the raising of their grandchildren. When I put this finding to the grandparents in the follow-up interviews they were unanimous in their
response that grandparent caregivers did not have a voice and that their position in the community was not recognised or understood:

Yes, we don’t (have a voice). As I said, you can say whatever you like, you can do whatever you like, but we’re different, we’re not included, we don’t count. You’re family, you’re supposed to do that. (Helen)

Yes, people think you are minding the grandchildren. They’ve not usually come up against this situation before and they’re completely unfamiliar with it and that does lower your visibility within your community and therefore your voice, because no one understands the situation, even when you’re saying to them, “I raise these grandchildren”. (Joanne)

Joanne also believed that in order to increase their profile in the community grandparent caregivers needed to publicise their stories in the media, however this caused problems because of the necessary anonymity required to protect the children as well as prevent recrimination from the children’s parents:

Unfortunately you have to go to the newspapers and do stories, and things like that are hard, because you have to change your name, you can’t have photographs, you don’t want the children to be labelled by having their photos in, you don’t want your own (adult) children to recognize their story in the paper and have more trouble coming back to us. Yes, you’re rather limited what voice you can have, it’s only through being part of a support group I think where you can band together and have a group voice that you have a chance of being heard, but as individuals it’s very difficult. (Joanne)

Joy also felt that grandparent-headed families were hidden within the community and the way to voice their concerns was to unite:

There are lots of other families out there who are raising their grandchildren, but we don’t hear about them...I think we’re isolated in the fact that the families aren’t getting out there and saying, “We’re raising these children and we need to have a say, we need to be involved and we need more help”. But the families don’t do it, they keep it to themselves...The way to have a voice is to all to come together, to be united in saying, “We need this and we need to make changes”. (Joy)

Jeremy believed that grandparents did not have the same rights as parents while Cindy thought that belonging to an overarching group was one way grandparent caregivers could alert the community to their particular issues:

If a grandparent wants anything they have to go and fight for it, they have to go and fight Centrelink. To get that 50 hours of child-care it took about four appointments at Centrelink for them to understand what I was after, what I was entitled to, and I had to fight all the way to get it. So, really, we don’t have the same rights as parents. (Jeremy)

As a grandparent carer in the community there is no real presence is there? Yes, an umbrella group for grandparents is a good idea, because the issues are different to normal regular foster caring, definitely. (Cindy)
Helen agreed that a grandparents’ group similar to the Foster Carers Association would ensure that grandparent caregivers had a voice in the community, but she saw many problems in setting up such a group:

We don’t have a grandparents’ group. You know what I’m saying, they have these foster carers meetings and they’ve got thousands of people in them and they can voice what their problems are and go to DoCS or go to wherever they can to get help and what they need…But, there’s no group for us to have a voice to be heard. And I suppose we should all club together so that we have our own little community. But who’s got time, who wants to be president, who wants to be secretary? We don’t do it. It’s a bit our fault too, we should all band together and somehow be able to talk to people and talk to each other, but we don’t. We don’t have time because we’re usually older and looking after children and, you know, we don’t cope as well as in our teens or twenties. So we just sort of sit there. (Helen)

Agreement by the grandparents to form a grandparents-as-parents group (to raise their profile within the community and to provide them with a voice) is consistent with research by Burke and Stets (1999) which reveals that a lack of self-verification will motivate people to employ strategies to change the situation and develop more positive self-verification. In this case, the grandparents interact in response to a common concern which, in turn, works to verify the identities held by each member who then begins to view him or herself as part of an advocacy group, that is, as belonging to a new social structure (Burke & Stets 1999).

### 6.6.5 Included/excluded

It was evident from the grandparents’ narratives in Chapter Five that a number of grandparents were struggling, at times, with experiences of being socially isolated within the community. Even though many of the grandparents felt supported by friends and family in their new grandparent-as-parent role, they also often had feelings of being ‘left out’. The binary included/excluded was identified to capture this finding. In the follow-up interviews, there was a mixed response from the grandparents to my request for their reaction to this issue. Joanne believed that grandparent caregivers were excluded from taking part in a lot of activities because of a lack of respite along with the burdens of child rearing:

They (grandparent caregivers) usually don’t get a chance to interact with their peers because of their different circumstances. Yes, they certainly get very few opportunities to go out on their own because respite just doesn’t happen…Their friends are out having lunch and they’re at home washing nappies or feeding babies or something. (Joanne)
The restraints on their social life after taking on the grandparent-as-parent role were evident in Jeremy and Joanne’s comments:

*Because you take on raising a child your life just goes out the door and completely changes. People don’t really take into consideration, okay you were doing this, this and this before, and now you have a child and whatever you do you have to take the child with you. In a way you’re socially different.* (Jeremy)

*Because these kids have experienced so much in their lives they’re not always well-behaved, calm, quiet, little kids. My two at the moment are so unsettled with this back and forth between their Mum’s place and mine that I certainly don’t willingly take them to a lot of places because I just don’t want the behaviour problems.* (Joanne)

Joanne also believed the secrecy surrounding the reasons grandchildren had come into their care was seen to contribute to grandparent caregiver’s social isolation:

*They can’t talk to other grandparents often about the same sort of thing because your experience is so different from theirs. And, once again, you would be asked questions and sometimes you’re not comfortable with what answers to give to those questions.* (Joanne)

Joy felt that one of the reasons grandparent caregivers were socially excluded from the community was because they were judged as somehow being part of the problem:

*The way community and our society look at mental illness as well as drug and alcohol problems, or anything that’s not the norm or that you can’t explain…I know one of the service providers here said to me that she believes that carers, family members, are part of the problem, and that shocked me to think that in today’s society and all the advertising and education that we give service providers that this person still thought that we were part of the problem…They question you, so you’re not game enough to sort of go out there and say, “I’m raising my grandchildren”, so that’s part of the isolation, that’s part of feeling you’re alone because people will judge you.* (Joy)

Even though they received support from her family, Cindy believed they didn’t really realise what it was like for her and Adam to take on the full-time parenting role:

*We receive good family support from the family around us…But, when (son) goes home he goes home to have a nice couple of glasses of red and watch the football and Adam very often doesn’t even get to watch the football any more because, you know, one of the kids won’t settle that night and they need to be sat with. So a lot of the time, even the close family that do support us, they don’t actually know what it’s truly like 24/7.* (Cindy)

Although she received support from her friends, Helen talked about ‘self-imposed isolation’ because of the physical demands of raising her grandchildren alongside working full-time:
I’ve got a lot of friends and they all expect me to bring the children, so I don’t feel isolated because they always include me which is good. So, no, I don’t get isolated, it’s me that’s too blasted tired to do anything. I want to be isolated, I want to just be home and curl up when the kids go to sleep. (Helen)

It appears that grandparents’ feelings of social exclusion have resulted in what Thoits (1991) refers to as identity-relevant stress. Thoits argues that a wide variety of ‘identity-relevant stressors’, including social isolation and a lack of resources, may threaten an identity that an individual values highly and the outcome may be “depressing, anxiety-provoking, or simply upsetting” (Thoits 1991 p.106). It is posited then that for many of the grandparents in this study their commitment to the grandparent-as-parent role has been threatened by a lack of support and exclusion from the community, which has resulted in their exposure to identity-relevant stress. Grandparents’ feelings of being socially excluded from the community are also consistent with Daly & Lewis’ (2000) research that positions care as an activity with costs, both financial and emotional. The costs incurred by many grandparents in this study include a lack of respite, being socially isolated from their peers, as well as restraints on their social life because of child-rearing responsibilities.

At the conclusion of the second round of interviews the re-storying process had generated further rich insights into the experiences of the grandparents, particularly in response to the proposed binaries and their impact on identity, and these issues are examined in the next section.

6.7 Impact of ‘space of difference’

The narratives of the grandparents in the follow-up interviews highlight the impact of the space of difference experienced by grandparents as they move between the expectation of the mythical/traditional grandparent role and the reality of the grandparent-as-parent role. Two major issues to emerge from this re-storying, not so readily apparent in the narratives from the first round of interviews, are the significant impact of the grandparent-as-parent role on self-esteem and a prevailing sense of injustice.
6.7.1 Self-esteem
As discussed previously, identity verification is an ongoing process where meanings in a social situation match or confirm meanings in an identity. Cast and Burke (2002) suggest that verification of an identity produces feelings of competency and self-worth, which in turn increases self-esteem. However, “like any other resource self-esteem can be built-up, but when used, it is lost” (Cast & Burke 2002 p.1043). That is, successful self-verification builds up reserves of self-esteem, but when the self-verification process is disrupted self-esteem will decline.

Identity theory also focuses on the importance of the relationship between goals and achievements. When a person is able to achieve a match between an identity goal and the successful achievement of that goal, self-esteem is a direct outcome of this successful self-verification. Identity theorists (Burke & Stets 1999; Cast & Burke 2002) argue that a person’s perception of goal-achievements may relate to either worth-based self-esteem or efficacy-based self-esteem. Worth-based self-esteem relates to receiving self-verifying feedback within a group, whereas efficacy-based self-esteem relates to self-attributions. This means, when individuals receive self-verifying feedback within a group, feelings that one is accepted and valued by others within the group are reinforced, increasing their worth-based self-esteem. However, when individuals reflect on their lives and observe that they have been successful at achieving their goals, efficacy-based self-esteem will result from this success.

Identity theorists believe that self-esteem may also be used as a buffer against the negative emotions associated with disruption in the self-verification process. As already discussed, disruption of the self-verification process can have negative emotional consequences, such as stress, which often leads to distress. Self-esteem appears to be one resource that people can use to support them through these periods, “ensuring that negative emotions do not become too overwhelming” (Cast & Burke 2002, p.1048). Self-esteem can therefore be thought of as a personal resource to protect oneself from stressful experiences and maintain social relationships.
It is argued that the self-esteem of grandparents in this study has been seriously affected by discrepancies in the self-verification process. Even though findings reveal that grandparents have made the shift from traditional grandparent to grandparent-as-parent, and are highly committed to their new role, they appear to be struggling around identity issues associated with this shift. It is evident from a narrative analysis of the stories told that the unfavourable feedback grandparents often receive towards their grandparent-as-parent role has caused a disruption to their self-verification process and has resulted in a decline in their self-esteem. This finding is consistent with research by Stets (2005 p.51) which revealed that when a person receives negative feedback in a role, not only are they not being verified, the meaning of such feedback also implies that the individual is “not a good person”. It is also argued that a lack of positive, self-verifying feedback has not enabled grandparents to build up the reserves of self-esteem necessary to support them in their very difficult grandparent-as-parent role.

6.7.2 Injustice

It appears that, apart from a decline in self-esteem, the space of difference between the mythical/traditional grandparent role and the reality of the grandparent-as-parent role experienced by grandparents-as-parents has also impacted on the grandparents’ emotional response to the justice process.

It is evident that grandparents in this study believe their total commitment to the grandparent-as-parent role has not been accorded the justice it deserves. According to Hegtvedt (2006), individuals use social experiences, to produce a justice evaluation. This is usually based upon their beliefs about what is just, together with processes of social cognition and comparison. Further, in terms of the theoretical interest of this study, identity theorists have examined how self-verification assumptions relate to the distributive justice process and people’s emotional responses to injustice. For example, Stets (2003) found that any difference between one’s actual reward and one’s just reward in a situation produced a state of injustice that resulted in feelings of anger, resentfulness and disgust. It is clear from the grandparent narratives that the disruption to their self-verification process has not only resulted in a loss of self esteem, but has also evoked feelings of
disappointment and frustration at the injustice of their situation. This is evidenced by grandparents’ comments of ‘saving the government money’ by raising their grandchildren, yet not receiving adequate financial and social support to do this job. Grandparents say that they have always paid their taxes, but feel frustrated when they need help and ‘the government doesn’t want to know you’, and ‘anything a grandparent wants they have to fight for it’. This finding is consistent with Kittay’s (2002) research on care and justice which argues that when caregivers lack support, or doulia, both the caregiver and the care receiver will suffer. West (2002) also suggests that caregivers who lack support may suffer serious impoverishment and subsequently be unable to participate fully or equally in society.

Many of the grandparent narratives made reference to a belief that foster carers were ‘appreciated’ for the job they do, however grandparent caregivers were ‘expected’ to do the same job without any recognition. Also, foster carers were viewed as being able to avail themselves of ongoing support in raising foster children, whereas when children were placed with grandparents it was assumed that ‘they’re okay, they’re with family’ and no further support was required. This was also the case for a number of grandparents in the COTA study who, after seeking help from child protection authorities, were told “We know the children are safe with you. We have closed the file” (Fitzpatrick & Reeve 2003). These findings are consistent with research by West (2002) which reveals that caregivers are, by definition, both emotionally and ethically committed to the work of caring for their dependents and are therefore vulnerable to exploitation.

A number of the grandparents also commented on the fact that welfare authorities did not appear to acknowledge that, unlike foster carers, grandparent caregivers have the ‘baggage of family’ to deal with in addition to their caring responsibilities. Many of the grandparents believed that there is a lot of stigma attached to the grandparent-as-parent role, that they have been unjustly blamed for having to raise their grandchildren, and are ‘somehow responsible for what’s gone wrong’.
In conclusion, it is clear from the grandparents’ narratives that there is a space of difference between the expectation of the mythical/traditional grandparent role and the reality of the grandparent-as-parent role. Grandparents who are raising their grandchildren experience a role-identity conflict in their grandparent caregiving role resulting in a loss of the traditional grandparent role and a shift in commitment to the grandparent-as-parent role. The impact of this shift in commitment can be explained through a number of binaries. Language theorists Saussure (1974) and Derrida (1974) contend that language and culture are organised by systems of binary oppositions, however the terms in each binary are not of equal value. One half of the pair is in a privileged position, whereas the other is marginalised, as illustrated by the binary pairs strong/weak, wealthy/poor. It is argued that many grandparents in the study have experienced a number of disruptions to their highly committed grandparent-as-parent role that places them in the marginalised positions in the binaries visible/invisible, deserving/undeserving, voice/silenced and included/excluded. It is further argued that the unfavourable feedback grandparents often receive towards their grandparent-as-parent role has caused a disruption to their self-verification process and has resulted in a decline in their self-esteem and a prevailing sense of injustice. Drawing on a model developed by Carpenter (1999) for use in another context, Figure 1 illustrates this argument and shows the linear relationship that exists between myth, reality and the meaning of difference.
The Space between Myth and Reality

Role-identity conflict

Myth
Traditional grandparent role

Reality
Grandparent-as-parent role

Space of Difference

Loss of traditional grandparent role
Shift in commitment to grandparent-as-parent role

Impact of shift in commitment
visible/invisible
deserving/undeserving
included/excluded
voice/silenced

Loss of self-esteem
Perceived injustice
6.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has argued that there is a gap between the mythical or traditional grandparent role and the role undertaken by grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. The space between these two roles is one of difference. Grandparents in the study experience a role-identity conflict in their role as grandparent caregivers, resulting in a loss of the traditional grandparent role and a shift in commitment to the grandparent-as-parent role. Grandparents-as-parents find themselves as part of a group defined as other, or different, and experience the space of difference through feelings of being invisible, undeserving, excluded and silenced within our community. This has resulted in a loss of self-esteem, as well as a belief that their total commitment to the grandparent-as-parent role has not been accorded the justice it deserves. The challenge is to explore how the space of difference can best be addressed through policy and improved practice, and this is the focus of the final chapter.
CHAPTER SEVEN: KEY ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS ARISING FROM THE RESEARCH

7.1 Introduction

This chapter draws together the significance and key findings of the study. The chapter begins with a synthesis of the research, highlights the key issues arising from the study, as well as the implications for the adoption of an identity theory perspective and a narrative inquiry methodology. The significance of applying a number of concepts of care to the findings of the study, and the implications for policy and support for grandparents-as-parents, are also discussed. The chapter concludes with my reflections on the research, including the limitations of the study, and some implications for further research.

7.2 Synthesis of the research

Chapter One began with the background to the research, which provided a backdrop for the seeming emergence over the last quarter of a century of increasing numbers of grandparents becoming surrogate parents. The chapter examined the ways children come into the care of grandparents, as well as the financial and social support provided to grandparent caregivers by Australian state and federal governments, NGO’s and grandparent support groups. The impetus and justification for the study were discussed and the research questions and aims were outlined. The theoretical stance, research design and structure of the thesis were discussed, and the chapter concluded with a reflexive piece introducing myself, as researcher.

Chapter Two began by analysing what has historically been considered the traditional grandparent role and documented some of the key developments that have influenced the
contemporary grandparent role. Next, the chapter identified within the existing literature a number of social factors that have contributed to the trend towards grandparent-headed families, as well as the intergenerational implications for all members of this emerging social group. The chapter then explored the rewards and challenges of the grandparent-headed family and examined a number of theories of care that had the potential to inform the meanings caregiving grandparents attach to their experiences of the grandparent-as-parent role. The chapter concluded by arguing that while previous studies had served to highlight the impact on grandparents of assuming the parenting role, there was clearly a need to explore in more depth the deeper meanings grandparents attribute to the grandparent-as-parent role, as well as the impact of the transition from traditional grandparent to grandparent-as-parent on the identity of grandparent caregivers.

Chapter Three explored the key tenets of identity theory and discussed the relevance of applying this theory to the lived experiences of grandparents who were raising their grandchildren. The chapter argued that the choice of an identity theory approach was based on the belief that its key concepts, such as role identity, identity salience and commitment, would be useful in understanding how the identity of grandparents-as-parents had been influenced by assuming the non-traditional grandparent role.

Chapter Four described the research design and methodology adopted for the study. The chapter began with a brief rationale for the use of an interpretivist paradigm and the qualitative methodology narrative inquiry to explore the lived experiences of grandparents raising their grandchildren in order to capture the meanings behind these experiences. Next, the chapter provided details of data collection, including sample selection, in-depth interviewing, transcription, initial data analysis and coding of the data. The methodological soundness of the study and ethical considerations concluded the chapter.
7.3 Findings from the study

Chapter Five provided the narratives of the grandparents as they related their stories of raising their grandchildren. In response to the first question relating to the reasons why they were raising their grandchildren, the grandparents’ stories revealed the complex circumstances leading up to the placement of the children in their care. Key issues included parental drug and alcohol addiction, sole parenthood, mental illness, incarceration, domestic violence/abuse and HIV/AIDS. These six factors have previously been well documented in the literature, however, a new category, which was labelled ‘apathy/indifference’ was uncovered.

In response to the second question relating to grandparents’ experiences of raising their grandchildren, the feelings of sadness, frustration, grief and loss could be clearly heard from the narratives of the grandparents as they revealed the many challenges they faced. These included financial and legal issues, physical and emotional health problems, social isolation and lifestyle changes, parenting problems and conflict with the children’s parents. Apart from these common challenges that were shared across the grandparents’ stories, a number of grandparents faced additional challenges when the children’s parents were in prison, suffered from a mental illness, or had supervised access with their children. Grandparents also voiced a number of future concerns, including the grandchildren’s education, raising teenagers, retirement issues, conflict with members of their extended families, as well as what might happen to the grandchildren if and when they could no longer care for them. Even though the transition from traditional grandparent to grandparent-as-parent had presented many challenges and concerns, the narratives of the grandparents also revealed many benefits, both for themselves and their grandchildren. These included the chance to parent a second time, watching their grandchildren grow, and their assurance that the children were now safe and secure.

The findings were discussed in relation to previous Australian and overseas studies of grandparent caregivers. It was argued that whilst many of the findings parallel those in the
existing literature, they nevertheless provide further compelling evidence of the grandparents’ love and devotion to their grandchildren, as well as their support for the children’s parents in often difficult circumstances.

7.4 Significance of the findings

A number of key issues have arisen from this research study. It was argued in Chapter Six that an in-depth analysis of the grandparents’ narratives revealed that grandparents in the study experienced a role identity conflict in their role of grandparents-as-parents. Instead of the traditional grandparent role, normally a peripheral role within the family, grandparent caregivers must now assume the non-traditional, full-time parenting role of their grandchildren. Grandparents also experienced a loss of the traditional grandparent role and a shift in commitment to the grandparent-as-parent role. However, even though grandparents in the study were totally committed to their new grandparent-as-parent role, they still mourned the loss of the traditional grandparent role, an important role identity and social identity.

A deeper examination of the grandparents’ narratives revealed a gap between the expectation of the traditional grandparent role and the reality of the grandparent-as-parent role. The space between these two roles can be characterised by a sense of difference. Grandparents who are raising their grandchildren may find themselves as part of a group defined as other, or different. It was argued that this space of difference could be explained through a number of binaries that describe the dissonance evident in the grandparents’ narratives. The meta binary that best illustrated the grandparents’ struggle to be both parent and grandparent to their grandchildren was identified as myth/reality. In addition, the disruption to the grandparents’ role identity had provoked a number of additional binaries that included experiences linked to being visible/invisible, deserving/undeserving, voice/silenced and included/excluded.

These findings were taken back to a smaller sample of the grandparent participants to verify and confirm the interpretations drawn from the grandparents’ narratives. At the conclusion
of the re-storying process the narratives of the grandparents in the follow-up interviews validated the impact of the space of difference experienced by grandparents as they struggled with the transition from the traditional grandparent role to the grandparent-as-parent role. It was also evident that many grandparents in the study had experienced a number of disruptions to their highly committed grandparent-as-parent role that placed them in the marginalised positions within the binaries visible/invisible, deserving/undeserving, voice/silenced, and included/excluded. Instead of being recognised for their total commitment to the grandparent-as-parent role, grandparents believed that they were primarily invisible, undeserving, voiceless and excluded. Two major issues had also emerged from the re-storying process which were not so apparent in the narratives from the first round of interviews.

Firstly, it was evident that the self-esteem of the grandparents in the study had been seriously affected by discrepancies in the self-verification process. As previously discussed, identity theory proposes that self-esteem is a central component of the basic identity process. When individuals are able to successfully verify their identities, there is an increase in their self-esteem, whereas, a decrease in self-esteem is experienced when the self-verification process is disrupted. It was argued that a lack of positive, self-verifying feedback had impacted on grandparents’ self-esteem. Grandparents believed that their grandparent-as-parent role was not recognised within the wider community, that grandparent caregivers were not as worthy as foster carers, they had no real presence in the community and were socially excluded because of the demands of their caregiving role.

Secondly, it was evident that the grandparents’ commitment to the grandparent-as-parent role had not been accorded the justice it deserves. Grandparents believed they were unsupported and unappreciated in their role, despite the fact that they had given up their whole lives to devote their time and energies to the welfare of their grandchildren. Grandparent caregivers also lacked support, or 

"doulia," in their grandparent-as-parent role, and many of the grandparents and the grandchildren they were raising faced severe hardship because of this lack of support.
It can be concluded that grandparents-as-parents are committed, both emotionally and ethically, to the welfare of their grandchildren, and will care for their grandchildren regardless of whether they are supported or not. This unconditional commitment to the grandparent-as-parent role means that grandparent caregivers are vulnerable to the exploitation that West (2002) attributes to others who perform caregiving labour. West (2002 p.91) also believes that:

“caregivers – whether or not they choose to become such, whether or not they are parents, and whether they are men or women – enjoy no rights of support”.

It appears that there are no specific rights of support available to NSW grandparents-as-parents, however, an examination of the NSW Social Justice Directions Statement (1996 p.1) reveals the NSW Government’s commitment to the principles of equity, access, participation and rights for all people in NSW:

Social justice means the people of this State getting a fair go at the opportunities of life that should be open to all and a fair share of the resources which the Government manages on their behalf. It also means the people having a fair say, informed by accurate information, about the shape of their own and the State’s future.

Also, the 2006-09 Strategic Framework of the Australian Federal Government’s Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs states its purpose as:

Improving the lives of Australians by helping to build the capacity and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. (Australian Government 2007)

From the stories told by grandparents in this study, it appears that grandparent-headed families have ‘slipped through the cracks’ of both the NSW Government’s social justice strategy and the Federal Government’s FaCSIA strategic framework. It is argued that grandparents-as-parents’ experiences of being invisible, undeserving, silenced and excluded demonstrates their preclusion from both the State and Federal Government’s commitment to social justice. It is clear from their stories that grandparent-headed families are not receiving a ‘fair go’, a ‘fair share’, or a ‘fair say’ and their wellbeing does not appear to be a priority of government policy. Recommendations to address this inequity are detailed in Section 7.7. As argued by West (2002 p.93):

If caregiving is not to impoverish or diminish the opportunities of those who engage in it, they need familial, community, or state support, whether or not the decision to embark on the caregiving path was voluntarily taken”.

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7.5 Implications for theory and methodology

As discussed in Chapter Four, the choice of an identity theory approach to interpret the lived experiences of grandparents raising their grandchildren was based on the belief that many of the concepts of identity theory would be useful in understanding the meanings grandparents attach to their caregiving role. The concepts of role-identity, identity salience and commitment, as well as disruption to the self-verification process, have proved to be powerful tools to interpret the impact on the identity of grandparents who have taken on the grandparent-as-parent role. The application of an identity theory framework to the grandparents’ stories has revealed that grandparents-as-parents experience a role identity conflict, resulting in a loss of the traditional grandparent role and a shift in commitment to the grandparent caregiver role. A disruption to grandparents’ self-verification process has resulted in a loss of self-esteem and feelings of injustice. Even though it appears the majority of previous research utilising an identity theory framework has been based on quantitative studies, it is argued that this study reveals that the concepts of identity theory are also valuable in the interpretation of data from qualitative studies.

As discussed in Chapter Five, the qualitative methodology narrative inquiry was chosen for this study as it was believed that it would allow me to explore the lived experiences of grandparents raising their grandchildren, to ‘walk in their shoes’ and to capture the meaning behind those experiences. The study has fulfilled each of these expectations.

By adhering to the narrative inquiry principle of asking one or two main questions that invite a life story, rather than prepared questions, allowed grandparents to relate in their own way the reasons why the grandchildren had come into their care and their experiences of raising them. Allowing grandparents to tell their stories uninterrupted, except for clarification or more detail, validated grandparents’ experiences, and produced an immense amount of rich data. Even though the data collection process was time consuming for both participant and researcher, it was often a cathartic experience for grandparents and revealed
to the researcher the full story of both the pleasure and pain involved in raising grandchildren. A narrative analysis of the grandparents’ stories uncovered many similar themes, however, each story contained a unique insight into the real-life world of the grandparent caregiver. Searching beneath the layers of the stories allowed the deeper meanings to be uncovered, which could then be taken back to the grandparents for further clarification. Examining the meanings grandparents attach to the grandparent-as-parent role is discussed in the next section.

7.6 Implications for the application of a ‘care’ perspective

As discussed in Chapter Two, there are a number of theories surrounding the phenomenon of care which have the potential to assist in understanding the meanings caregiving grandparents attach to their experiences of the grandparent-as-parent role. These include ‘care as an intergenerational exchange within the family’, ‘care as a women’s issue’, ‘care as a social issue’, and ‘care as a citizenship issue’. Findings from this study have implications for each of these theories of care.

The traditional intergenerational exchange within families normally constitutes the middle generation caring for their elderly parents. However, a number of significant social changes in the last quarter of a century have resulted in changes to the traditional caring role of grandparents. Consistent with the literature, findings from this study indicate that some grandparents are now assuming the parenting role of children, a role normally undertaken by the middle generation. Reasons include parental drug and alcohol addiction, sole parenthood, mental illness, incarceration, domestic violence/abuse, HIV/AIDS, as well as an emerging category ‘apathy/indifference’.

Parallel with feminist literature surrounding care as being predominantly a women’s issue, 19 of the 27 grandmothers interviewed for this study were found to be the primary caregivers of their grandchildren; 6 of these grandmothers were married, while 13 grandmothers were raising grandchildren alone. This finding, that grandmothers are the
primary caregivers among grandparents-as-parents, appears to perpetuate the long-standing notion of women as primary carers of children.

Findings from this study also have implications for the concept of social care. Consistent with research by Cass (2007), the three concepts of social care have relevance for grandparent-as-parents in this study. The first concept, ‘care as labour’ involves consideration of whether care is paid or unpaid, formal or informal and the state’s role in determining these and other boundaries. Only those grandparents who were raising their grandchildren on a formal or semi-formal basis were receiving either State or Federal Government financial support for the children in their care. Also, the majority of grandparents had no access to the services and social support provided to foster carers. The second concept, ‘care as obligation’ involves locating care within a normative framework of obligations and responsibility. Grandparents in this study believed they had a moral duty to raise their grandchildren in the absence of the children’s parents. However, a lack of financial and social support by government towards the care of their grandchildren was perceived as an injustice by grandparents-as-parents.

The third concept, ‘care as a cost’ involves care as having financial, physical and emotional costs that extend across public and private boundaries. Grandparents in this study have experienced enormous financial, emotional and health-related costs in their role as grandparent caregivers. They have given up their whole lives, their social life, retirement plans, and employment in order to devote their time and energy to the welfare of their grandchildren. This has often been at the expense of their relationship with other grandchildren and their families. The major cost to grandparents-as-parents has been the impact on their identity, which has resulted in a loss of self-esteem and a belief that their total commitment to the care of their grandchildren has not been accorded the justice it deserves.

It is clear that the stories told by the grandparents in this study also have implications for care as a citizenship issue. Grandparents who provide care to their grandchildren do not enjoy the right to receive care and are therefore not included in a democratic ethic of care.
Grandparents who are raising their grandchildren in NSW are ‘marginalised families’, described by Healy and Darlington (1999) as those who are unable to access the social and economic support they need to participate in society. Grandparent-headed families need to be included in a full range of government and community policies and support if they are to become ‘first-class citizens’ of NSW, and this is discussed in the next section.

7.7 Implications for policy and support

As discussed previously, self-esteem is considered to be a renewable resource that can be built up and used by individuals to motivate and energise them during stressful times. It is argued that because of the many stressful experiences involved in carrying out the grandparent-as-parent role, it is imperative that the self-esteem of grandparent caregivers be acknowledged and enhanced so as to provide a buffer against the negative emotions associated with this often difficult role. Also, as previously discussed, grandparents in this study believe their total commitment to the grandparent-as-parent role has not been accorded the justice it deserves. Despite the fact that they have devoted their whole lives to the care and safety of their grandchildren, grandparents feel unsupported and unappreciated in their grandparent-as-parent role and the injustice of their situation has resulted in feelings of disappointment and frustration.

Grandparents-as-parents’ experiences of being invisible, undeserving, silenced and excluded within the community, which have resulted in a loss of self-esteem and feelings of injustice, need to be addressed through a large range of responses and interventions at all levels of government, in non-government organizations, and the community. A number of policy and practice responses are set out below:

7.7.1 Invisibility

In order to address grandparents’ feelings of invisibility, awareness of the unique circumstances surrounding grandparent-headed families needs to be raised among government departments, policy makers, health professionals, caseworkers and teachers, along with members of the wider community.
• It is recommended that training be provided to employees of all state and federal government departments accessed by grandparent caregivers, in order to raise awareness of the challenges facing grandparents-as-parents. As discussed in Chapter One, the federal government is currently evaluating the service delivery of the Family Assistance Office/Centrelink to grandparents raising grandchildren, however this evaluation of services to grandparent caregivers needs to be extended to the medical, educational and welfare sectors.

• Health professionals need to be aware of the physical and emotional health problems faced by grandparents who are parenting children traumatised by exposure to family violence or drug and alcohol abuse. Those in the mental health sector also need an understanding of the challenges encountered by grandparents who are raising their grandchildren as well as providing day-to-day support to the children’s mentally ill parents.

• Teachers in the early childhood, primary and secondary school systems should be made aware of the learning/behavioural problems of children who are being raised by their grandparents because of their own parents’ inability to take on the parenting role. Teachers need to work with grandparents to address the many challenges facing children whose education has been severely disrupted by family dysfunction. Higher education can also play its part in addressing the invisibility of grandparents-as-parents by incorporating the issues facing grandparents raising their grandchildren into social science/welfare and teacher education curriculums.

• In order for grandparent caregivers to be fully supported in their role, all employees of welfare organisations should receive ongoing training to recognise the unique challenges faced by all members of grandparent-headed families.

• To increase the visibility of grandparents-as-parents within the wider community, an awareness campaign needs to be undertaken by all levels of government, along with NGO’s, and community and service organizations. Federal, state and local government departments can play their part by openly advertising the services they provide to grandparent caregivers. The print, TV and radio media could be used to publicise the growing social phenomenon of grandparents raising their grandchildren in Australia today and to encourage all sectors of the community to
lend their support to grandparent-headed families. Through the use of guest speakers and support activities, community and service organizations can raise awareness among their members of the many challenges facing grandparents and the grandchildren they are raising.

7.7.2 Undeserving
Grandparents’ feelings of being undeserving need to be addressed by policy makers, state and federal government departments and welfare authorities to ensure that the ongoing financial and social support grandparents-as-parents so rightly deserve is made available.

- Australian state and federal governments must work together to provide adequate financial support to all grandparent-headed families regardless of whether the grandchildren have come into the care of grandparents through Commonwealth Family Law, state child protection legislation or by informal arrangement.
- The present Legal Aid inequity must be addressed in order for grandparents to obtain full and free access to the legal system in order to provide for the care and protection of their grandchildren.
- The current inequitable disparity between foster carers and kinship carers needs to be addressed by welfare authorities. The full range of services accessible to foster carers must also be readily available to kinship carers. These services should include financial support, respite, case management, parenting support and training, advice and information.

7.7.3 Silenced
Grandparents-as-parents’ feelings of being voiceless within our society need to be addressed through services provided by a collaboration between the Australian state and federal government welfare sectors.

- A national Grandparents-as-Parents Association, similar to the Foster Carers Association, needs to be established in order to provide a platform for the voices of all grandparents who are raising their grandchildren in Australia, irrespective of whether the children have come into the grandparents’ care through a formal or informal arrangement.
• As well as being a vehicle for grandparents’ voices to be heard, a well-funded Grandparents-as-Parents Association could provide advocacy, information, support, respite and training that meets the unique needs of grandparent caregivers.

7.7.4 Excluded
Grandparents’ feelings of isolation and exclusion need to be addressed by all levels of government, alongside community organizations, to ensure grandparents-as-parents are supported and included within our society.

• State and territory government funded support groups need to be set up in all areas of the Australian community to provide friendship, information and social support for grandparents-as-parents.

• The burden of setting up and running support groups must be removed from the grandparents themselves and replaced by appropriately trained and government-funded employees.

• Community and service organizations could also play their part by providing holiday camps and social outings for grandparent-headed families to enable both grandparents and grandchildren to enjoy the company of others who are in similar situations.

• To further address the social isolation experienced by grandparents-as-parents, a 24 hour telephone helpline needs to be established in each state and territory and staffed by personnel trained to assist grandparents who very often take on the care of their grandchildren at short notice and through traumatic circumstances.

7.8 Researcher’s reflections on the study

When my journey began to investigate the lived experiences of grandparents who were raising their grandchildren in NSW, it appeared that little research had been undertaken in this area. Whilst there have now been a number of studies that have explored the experiences of grandparents raising their grandchildren in Australia, none of these have centred on the NSW context, nor have they focused on the impact of the transition from traditional grandparent to grandparent-as-parent on the identity of grandparent caregivers.
Now, at the end of my journey, I contend that this study has addressed these gaps in the knowledge base. At the commencement of the study it was also important to me that the research would raise the awareness of grandparent-headed families in NSW and give voice to grandparents-as-parents. I believe that by documenting the narratives of the grandparents in this thesis, as well as presenting the findings to a diverse range of audiences during the study, I have achieved these aims.

Despite the claim that the findings from this study have contributed to the knowledge base surrounding grandparents-as-parents in NSW, a number of limitations of the study must be acknowledged. Due to the limited financial resources available for this study, it was not possible to include grandparents from all regions of New South Wales. However, the sample of 34 grandparents represents a diverse mix of grandparent caregivers from the western, southern and inner Sydney suburbs, as well as the mid-North coast and Northern Rivers regions of NSW. Despite the limited size of the sample, the study has generated a large amount of rich data, which has contributed to the achievement of a significant depth of understanding relating to the experiences of grandparents raising their grandchildren in NSW. The study has provided clear answers to the two research questions regarding the meanings grandparents attach to their experiences of carrying out the grandparent-as-parent role, as well as its impact on the identity of grandparents-as-parents.

A number of implications for further research have emerged from the study. As discussed in Chapter One, the number of children in out-of-home care has been steadily increasing each year. As at June 2007 approximately 57% of all children and young people in statutory out-of-home care in NSW were placed with relatives or kin, more than the number of children placed in foster care. Although exact figures are not available, it can be assumed that grandparents are raising a large number of these children, yet, as previously discussed, it appears no previous studies have been undertaken into grandparent-headed families in NSW. Extensive, statewide research is required to build on this study, in order to further examine the unique challenges faced by grandparents-as-parents in NSW. In order to obtain a full picture of grandparent-headed families in NSW, research is also required which focuses on the children being raised by grandparents, as well as the
‘missing’ members of these families, the parents of these children. As this study’s sample included only two Indigenous grandparents, further research is necessary to explore the experiences of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren in Australia’s Indigenous communities. This is particularly important in light of Jan Hammil’s (2001) research, discussed in Chapter Two, which reveals that it is the grandmothers who bear the responsibility for raising their grandchildren when the young women and men in our Indigenous communities are unable to care for themselves or their children because of drug and alcohol addiction.

7.9 Concluding remarks

As I made clear in the opening chapter, being able to ‘make a difference’ in the lives of grandparent caregivers was paramount in my decision to undertake this research. I have maintained a friendship with many of the grandparents who shared their stories so openly with me, and a number of them often contact me with additional information about what is happening in their lives. Now that their stories have been told, I sincerely hope that the findings from this study make it clear that grandparents-as-parents are Australia’s ‘unsung heroes’ and deserve recognition and support from all areas of government and the community for their total commitment to the care and safety of their grandchildren, who are, of course, our nation’s future.
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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Demographic Questions
- Gender
- Age group (30-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50, 51-55, 56-60, 61-65, 66-70, 71-80, 80+)
- Marital status
- Employment status
- Country of birth/Australian citizenship
- Ethnicity
- Educational level
- No. of children, grandchildren, great grandchildren
- No. of grandchildren in your care and their ages
- Are you the primary caregiver, or is care shared equally with a partner/other(s)?

Main questions
- Can you please tell me how the children came into your care?
- Can you please tell me your experiences of raising your grandchildren?

Additional questions (if required)
- Financial issues  (What has been the impact on your financial situation by taking on the grandparent-as-parent role?)
- Legal issues  (Do you face any legal issues in relation to caring for your grandchildren?)
- Support mechanisms  (What types of support are you able to access in your grandparent-as-parent role?)
- Concerns re wellbeing of children  (Do you have any concerns about the wellbeing of the grandchildren in your care?)
- Concerns re personal wellbeing  (Do you have any concerns about your personal wellbeing while caring for your grandchildren?)
- Benefits of raising grandchildren  (What do you see as the benefits of raising your grandchildren?)
- Future concerns  (Do you have any concerns for the future in your grandparent-as-parent role?)
APPENDIX B: INFORMATION SHEET

Re: Research study on grandparents who are raising their grandchildren in Australia

I am undertaking research for my PhD on grandparents who are raising their grandchildren in Australia. The aims of this research are to uncover the challenges faced by grandparent caregivers, to raise awareness of grandparents raising their grandchildren within the community and to suggest implications for Australian government policy reform. I am particularly interested in your perspective on this topic.

The research process
The study involves your participation in an interview that will be similar to an everyday conversation. The questions will focus particularly on the financial and legal issues you may be facing, support you may require, as well as any concerns you may have about your own personal wellbeing or the wellbeing of the grandchildren in your care.

It is envisaged that the interview will take approximately one hour of your time. If it is necessary, your permission will be sought to extend the interview beyond one hour. The interview will take place at a time and venue that is suitable to you.

With your permission, the interview will be recorded on audiotape and the tape will be safely stored at the University. You will be given the opportunity to check taped transcripts of your interview. You are free to request that interviews not be taped, and in this case I will request permission to take notes during the interview. If you should decide to withdraw from the study before the data analysis stage, you will be given the option of either keeping tapes and transcripts from the interviews or having them destroyed. After this time information used in the analysis would not be separately identifiable.

Interview risks
It is recognised that this interview may raise difficult issues in regard to your children and grandchildren. For this reason, a list of free telephone and face-to-face counselling services available in your area will be made available to you. As well, immediately following the interview, the researcher, who is a trained counsellor, would be happy to talk to you about any issues of concern at no cost to you.

Privacy and confidentiality
No information given in the interviews will be made public in a form that could identify you. In writing up the study, or in publishing its findings, pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity.

Participation in the study is strictly voluntary and your confidentiality is assured. You are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time. You may also elect not to answer any questions asked.

My research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Anne Graham, who is a member of Southern Cross University’s School of Education. If any issues or questions are
raised as a result of participating in this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Graham by telephone (02) 66 20 3613 or email araham@scu.edu.au.

If you have any problems associated with this project, please contact Southern Cross University’s Ethics Complaints Officer, Mr. John Russell, Graduate Research College by telephone (02) 66203705 or email jrussell@scu.edu.au.

The University’s Ethics Committee has approved this study.

Jan Backhouse,
PhD candidate,
School of Social Sciences,
Southern Cross University.
Telephone: (02) 66 203882
Email: jbackh20@scu.edu.au
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Project

Working title: Grandparents raising their grandchildren: a case for Australian policy reform?

Researcher: Jan Backhouse, PhD candidate
School of Social Sciences,
Southern Cross University.
Telephone: (02) 66 203882
Email: jbackh20@scu.edu.au

☐ I agree to participate in the above research project. I have read and understand the details contained in the Information Sheet. Also, I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the study and I am satisfied with the answers received.

☐ I agree to my interview being recorded on audiotape.

   OR

☐ I do not agree to my interview being audiotaped and prefer the researcher to take handwritten notes.

☐ I understand that I am free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. I have been informed that prior to its analysis, any data that has been gathered before the withdrawal of this consent will be returned to me or destroyed.

☐ I understand that neither my name nor any other identifying information will be disclosed or published, except with my permission.
I understand that the Southern Cross University’s Ethics Committee has approved this project.

I am aware that I can contact the researcher at any time after the interview. Also, if I have any additional questions about this study, I am free to contact Dr. Anne Graham (Research Supervisor) by telephone (02) 66 20 3613 or email agraham@scu.edu.au.

If I have any problems associated with the conduct of this project, I can contact Southern Cross University’s Ethics Complaints Officer, Mr. John Russell, by telephone (02) 66 20 3705 or email jrussell@scu.edu.au.

I understand that I will be given a copy of this form to keep.

I have read the information above, and agree to participate in this study. I am over the age of 18 years.

Name of Participant:…………………………………………………………

Signature of Participant:…………………………………………………………

Date:……………………

I certify that the terms of the Consent Form have been verbally explained to the participant and that the participant appears to understand the terms prior to signing the form and that proper arrangements have been made for an interpreter where English is not the participant’s first language.

Signature of Researcher:…………………………………………………………

Date:……………………
APPENDIX D: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW GUIDE

Question 1: Some grandparents appear to be struggling around the issue of being both a parent and a grandparent. Can I ask what your thoughts are on this?

Question 2: A number of grandparents commented that grandparents who are raising their grandchildren are not always visible within the community and sometimes they feel invisible in their grandparent-as-parent role. Can I get your comments on this?

Question 3: Some grandparents believe that foster carers are perceived as deserving, whereas they, as kinship carers, are perceived as undeserving. What are your thoughts on this?

Question 4: A number of grandparents feel that grandparents who are raising their grandchildren don’t have a voice and that the grandparent-as-parent role is not always recognised or understood within the community. What is your reaction to this?

Question 5: Some grandparents commented that they often feel socially isolated within the community because they are raising their grandchildren. What are your feelings on this?