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Queer Kinship: An Exploration of the Rewards and Challenges of Planned Parenting among Gay Fathers

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Queer Kinship: An Exploration of the Rewards and Challenges of

Planned Parenting among Gay Fathers

by

Ben-David Barr

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Social Welfare

in the Graduate Division of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Eileen Gambrill, Chair

Professor William Runyan

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Abstract

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Fathers

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University of California, Berkeley

Eileen Gambrill, Chair

Gay fathers are creating family forms and parenting practices that reach beyond the nuclear family model. Analysis suggests that fathers in this study are developing unique and queer versions of kinship. Fathers' desire for emotional connection leads to the creative assemblage of paid caregivers, friends, children's non-legal biological kin, and gay men's families of origin into kinship networks. These creative mixtures may be perceived as unusual family formations, but they assist gay fathers in creating social support and connected lives for themselves and their children. These findings are based on a qualitative research project that consisted of interviews with 15 gay fathers who resided in 8 households and who were raising 13 children. The participants were all self-identified gay men who had formed planned families outside of heterosexual relationships. Research aims included: To explore the lived experience of gay men raising children; To explore how gay fathers adapt concepts of kinship; To describe the role of social support in the lives of gay fathers; To present emergent and unanticipated topics.

Data-collection methods included development of a genogram that described each family and their social support networks. In-depth interviews based on a semi-structured interview guide were then conducted with participants. Data analysis techniques were based within a grounded theory framework. Analysis resulted in development of 47 repeating ideas, which were then organized into nine themes: 1) Methods of family formation and Desire to parent; 2) Challenges of parenting; 3) Rewards of parenting; 4) Kinship is about connection; 5) Biology is less and more important than I thought; 6) Importance of non-kin social supports; 7) Changes in sense of connection to the gay community; 8) I always knew I would be a dad; and 9) Experiences with social welfare institutions. Implications and recommendations for future research and practice are included.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Jerome Herschel Barr.

As people who lived before the advent of cell phones may remember, businesses, airports, and shopping malls used to have a public courtesy paging system. My dad had a habit of sending the following message out over the paging system: "*Will Dr. Ben Barr please come to the nearest white courtesy paging phone.*" These messages greeted me on just about every shopping or family outing throughout my childhood and even popped up during my travels into my 20s and 30s. My dad was a creative man who always found his own ways to reach me and let me know he loved me and that he was proud of me. I thought of him often and with new insights as I wrote this dissertation.

This dissertation is also dedicated to the future generations of my family—especially to my granddaughters, Sadie Mae and Olive Ann. I hope that someday I will be able to attend each and every one of your graduations and to someday read both of your dissertations. In the meantime… will *Dr. Sadie Mae and Dr. Olive Ann please report to the nearest white courtesy paging phone…*

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Finally, thank you to the fathers who participated in this project—thank you for sharing your stories and for your creativity, your compassion, and, most importantly, for the message about love and the meaning of family you have to teach.

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Chapter One: Introduction
Queer Kinship?

Gay men have always been involved in families. They are sons, brothers, fathers, members of extended families, and creators of families of their own design. However, only in recent times has a self-identified gay man had the opportunity to become a parent outside the confines of a heterosexual relationship. The combination of a gay identity and a desire to raise a child creates certain challenges on the road to parenthood. This study focused on how gay men are forming parent-child families and the rewards and challenges experienced by these fathers. The question of how these families are formed is rather straightforward compared to the more complicated questions that arise when examining the personal and social repercussions related to why gay men are choosing to become fathers and how their parenting experiences change their lives and the composition of the gay community. Earlier generations of gay men received messages that joining the gay community was about sexual liberation and about new ways of living one's life that did not revolve around traditional family life. These messages, fueled by the counterculture, the youth culture, and the feminist revolution, encouraged gay men to live their lives within nontraditional family and social structures.

Many have been perplexed that a social movement with these counterculture roots is now characterized by the efforts among so many to fight for the right to marry and start families. What has driven this change? Does it reflect a generational shift among gay men or the opening of long-barred opportunities? Does the desire to become parents signify acquiescence to middle-class ideology and an acceptance of the primacy of the traditional family as the central organizing social institution in modern society? Is gay fathering a demonstration of gay men accepting cultural values that two-parent, middle-class families are the ideal for achieving life satisfaction? Does their desire for family tell us something even broader about our current society? Or perhaps the family is one of the last remaining places where people living in anomic times can find connection and caring, and gay men cannot see other possible ways to meet these needs.

These are the questions that circle around the study of all families in our times and the types of questions that many of the gay men in this study seem to be struggling to answer, both in their own lives and as members of the LGBTQ social movement. While answers to many of these questions are beyond the reach of this dissertation project, they sparked the desire to study gay fathers. It was the intent of this research project to explore the social phenomenon of how and why gay men have formed parent-child families.

The 2000 census data collected important information about gay and lesbian households. The data indicate that approximately one in three lesbian households and one in five gay male two-partner households now include children (Gates & Ost, 2004).

Much of the previous research about gay fathers has studied men who were previously involved in heterosexual relationships. The intent of this project is to focus on the emergence of a new type of gay-father family: the intentionally formed gay-father family. Though still preliminary, the first study of intentionally formed gay-father families was conducted in 1993 (Sbordone, 1993). Studies on intentional gay fathers suggest that in the U.S., the majority of self-identified gay men are forming their families through adoption. For instance, one of the larger studies conducted with LGBTQ parents found that among their sample, 46 of 54 (85%) gay-father households reported that their families were formed through adoption (Johnson &

O'Connor, 2002). Parents who adopt children from the American child welfare system are often dealing with complex issues such as transracial adoption, the adoption of older children, the adoption of special-needs children, and the challenges associated with children coming from families impacted by substance abuse. Little research yet exists detailing how gay fathers are coping with the development of these more complicated family structures or describing their experiences within the child welfare system.

The number and range of studies on lesbian mothering continues to grow and represents a much more sizeable body of work than the studies on gay fathering (for more on lesbian-headed households, see Patterson, 1992, 1995a, 1995b). However, unlike lesbian mothers, who are making what can be considered private decisions about their own bodies and their private lives, family formation for gay men often challenges traditional public policy and family-court precedents. For instance, decisions about who is qualified to become a foster or adoptive parent, while important for all prospective parents, is a critical topic that will dramatically affect the development of gay-father families. The legal and ethical issues that surround surrogacy will also continue to be connected with gay-father families as will policy issues tied to recognition of other nontraditional types of families, such as a family with two dads and one mom. These nontraditional family forms challenge current public-policy views on what is considered a family and how family courts determine child custody and visitation rights. These concerns and debates raise many questions that would be best answered by well-funded longitudinal research projects, yet there is a significant lack of support for research into the motives, capabilities, methods, outcomes, and needs of gay men who parent. It is hoped that this project's planned exploration into the lives of gay fathers and their families will make a contribution toward expanding knowledge about the challenges and rewards experienced by gay men who choose to become parents.

The development of families that are intentionally created by lesbians and gay men marks the emergence of a significantly new type of modern family. Sociologist Judith Stacey has observed that "intentional childbearing outside of heterosexual unions represents one of the only new, truly original, and decidedly controversial genres of family formation and structure to have emerged in the West during many centuries" (Stacey, 2003, p. 146). These "queer families" represent a unique union among a group of people who may not be linked by biological or formal legal ties.

This research project, which explores the social phenomenon of gay men who are forming parent-child families, has the following aims:

- To explore the lived experience of gay men raising children;
- To explore how gay fathers adapt concepts of kinship;
- To describe the role of social support in the lives of gay fathers;
- To present emergent and unanticipated topics.

This dissertation reports results of interviews conducted with gay fathers in Northern California using a semi-structured interview guide informed by grounded theory-based analysis. Content gathered included: transcripts of taped interviews and transcripts, focus groups, genograms, and case studies. Based on these materials, a final analytic report was prepared.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Focus on the Family

Public discourse, local and national policy, and academic scholarship have long focused on the importance of the family as a social institution. The health and stability of the American family are something of a "canary in the coal mine" for many cultural critics and academic scholars, in that they believe that the state of the family is a strong indicator of the general health or disease of a society. Others believe that the family is an important harbinger of changing social and cultural practices. Debates on the status of the family, such as movement toward more egalitarian family patterns versus the need for families to return to more traditional forms with stronger paternal leadership, are discussed on a regular basis within academia, popular culture, and public policy. "The family" and the meaning of "family" are a major area of contention within ongoing culture wars in American society. The acceptability of same-sex relationships is a key topic within this conflict (Hunter, 1991).

It seems that one of the only areas of agreement for critics on both sides of these debates is the central importance of the family unit in American life and their shared concern over the current state of the family as a social institution. Family researchers Dizard and Gadlin (1990) see within these debates an ongoing state of anxiety about the institution's ability to serve as the incubator for a healthy society. They maintain that "the result has been a constant nagging sense of tension, a sense that things are not quite right, even though most people report that their own lives are not particularly unsatisfying or perturbed" (Dizard & Gadlin, 1990, p. 8).

Research about families has occupied the attention of scholars within the fields of sociology, anthropology, psychology, psychiatry, education, and social work, among others. Each of these fields has vast literature on the role, structure, nature, and importance of the family. A few brief influences on this research project will be mentioned here.

Sociologists typically view the family as a major social institution. Family structures and family life have been key areas of research among sociologists since the inception of the field. Durkheim's (1978) early research focused on education and the role of the family in identifying underlying cultural values and patterns (Lamanna, 2002; Lukes, 1973). Lamanna (2002) recently completed a review of Durkheim's work on the family and credits him with promoting the concept of the family as a social institution. Both Lukes and Lamanna note that Durkheim's interest in the family was of central importance in his work but that when he died, he left much of his writing about the family unfinished. Lamanna maintains that "his point of view has had an influence on family studies that continues, whether or not he is recognized as the source of it" (Lamanna, 2002, p. 2). Marx and Engels studied family structures to highlight social changes created by industrialization. Engels (1884/1902) compared husbands' social domination of wives to the ruling classes' domination of workers. These writings continue to influence feminist thought and the role of women in society. Parsons reformulated the work of Durkheim and Weber to examine Western family structures (Parsons, Bales, & Olds, 1955). He also developed and promoted systems theory and the role of the family as a dynamic social system. Psychoanalysts and psychologists also focused on the family and the role of parents and family members in shaping personality. Freud (1919), Erickson (1950), Bowlby (1950, 1973), and Bandura (1977), among others, have stressed the influence of family dynamics on the shaping of

individual life courses and personality. Efforts to improve family life are also key topics that have shaped the goals and methods of social work (e.g., Gabarino, 1992; Whittaker, Kinney, Tracy, & Booth, 1990).

The field of anthropology has made many contributions to cross-cultural analysis of family structures, including kinship and family structures, which have been central topics of study among anthropologists. The study of kinship extends work on the family and often represents attempts to study and understand the family within a cross-cultural perspective. Early influential anthropologists such as Malinowski studied the functions and structures of the family (Malinowski, 1913). Levi-Strauss (1967, 1969) made significant contributions to the field of anthropology through his studies of kinship. He viewed kinship as a key organizing principle of society and argued that "kinship reshapes biological relationships and natural sentiments" and is a social product (1969, p. 490). Schneider (1968) focused attention on the study of kinship in American culture and inspired many students and scholars to examine how cultural perspectives of kinship shape social concepts of family, kin, gender, and sexuality. Feminist scholars have also focused their research attention and criticism on the structure of family in American life, most notably by looking at women's roles in the family and often viewing their roles within family life as a source of oppression (Coontz, 1992; Flax, 1982 ; Friedan, 1963; Rapp, 1982). Feminist scholar Gayle Rubin challenged and built upon the work of Freud, Marx, Engels, Levi-Strauss, and Schneider to create new critiques of gender norms. The theoretical lens she created continues to have a far-reaching impact on the study of gender, kinship, and family, especially for gay and lesbian studies, particularly her contributions to the development of the concept of *heteronormativity*. This concept attempts to describe why people are homophobic and why LGBTQ people are socially oppressed. Heteronormativity posits that our society expects and compels a heterosexual identity and that those who do not comply will experience retribution in the form of shame, stigma, and social rejection. In her influential essay "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," Rubin highlighted that analysis of sexuality is a topic that was often overlooked in previous research on the family. Given the central role of procreation within the family function, she questioned why this fact was not more fully appreciated. Rubin looked back to the work of those who had attempted to deal with sexuality in the study of families and reanalyzed Freud, Levi-Strauss, and Marx and Engels for connections between the social concepts of family, gender roles and sexuality. Rubin's work is considered a foundational text in the development of queer theory and gender studies (Rubin, 1975).

Current themes in the study of families

In a 2004 review of the methods and analysis of family development, Parke identified themes that continue to shape current theoretical approaches to the study of the family. Among these, he cited the influence of systems theory and stated that this is now the most prominent approach to understanding families. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work laid the foundation for this perspective and continues to influence studies of the family, encouraging researchers to look at how families are embedded within support systems and to also look at how cultural influences such as extended families, informal community ties, and other social institutions influence family development.

According to Parke's analysis, there is a growing recognition within systems theory research of the multi-directional nature of the influences family members have on each other. For

instance, mothers impact the quality of father-child interactions, and children impact the quality of parents' relationships. Parke also found that studying diversity of family types across and within cultures is still "severely limited," and there is a growing awareness of the need to recognize and study "variations in families" (Parke, 2004, p. 368). He stresses that it is also important to understand how macro-level social changes, such as declines in fertility, family size, timing of parenthood, women in the workforce, and divorce rates, affect child outcomes and family systems (Parke, 2004, p. 368). Other researchers have framed this as a need to recognize the impact of the historical context in which the family is living (Cohler, 2004; Cohler & Galatzer-Levy, 2000). Family interactions vary across historical periods due to economic and social changes; for example, a family raising young children through the Great Depression may interact differently than a family living through a period of national prosperity (Cohler & Galatzer-Levy, 2000; Elder, 1981).

The role of the father in family studies

While the importance of the family unit has long been studied, Goldberg, Tan, and Thorsen (2009) contend that the role of the father within family research is an area that has lacked adequate academic attention. In a 2009 analysis of 1,115 articles on fathering published between 1930 and 2006, the authors found a growing trend toward more attention on a father's function within the family. However, even in the years during which the most attention was devoted to the role of fathering, "father-relevant academic articles have never occupied much more than 15% of journal space" (Goldberg, et al., 2009, p. 173). Goldberg and colleagues maintain that complex and often contradictory changes in conceptualizations of the fathering role have taken place over the past 50 years. They maintain that "modern fathers" are expected to be providers and to now also be involved in the care of their children. The authors did find a trend within academic journals toward increased attention to the role of the father in child development; however, their findings indicate that most research still views "childcare as primarily the domain of mothers" (Goldberg, et al., 2009, p. 160). Others have also identified how shifting perspectives on gender roles affect the ideals of fatherhood and concepts of masculinity (Lamb, 2004; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Schacher, Auerbach, & Silverstein, 2005; Silverstein, Auerbach, & Levant, 2002). For some of these researchers, gay fathers and other nontraditional fathers offer new opportunities to conceptualize the fathering role and family life within a wider range of options (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Marsiglio, et al., 2000; Schacher, 2002; Schacher, et al., 2005; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). Others see these new roles for fathers as signs of the dynamic process that occurs between families and their environment and as "natural experiments" in family coping strategies (Parke, 2004, p. 385). While nontraditional parenting roles are discussed in popular discourse, the review by Goldberg and colleagues (2009) found that the types of fathers being studied by researchers has slowly begun to change, but a majority of studies on fathering (76%, n=1,115) continue to focus on fathering within traditional two-parent heterosexual families.

Differentiating concepts of family and familism in family studies

Another lens for understanding the state of anxiety about the family and debates about how to study the role of family in society is to examine how current ideologies and cultural values influence analysis of the family. Scholars such as Dizard and Gadlin (1990) and others

(Carrington, 2002; Rapp, 1982; Sullivan, 2004) have identified what they see as an often-unacknowledged confusion between the concepts of "family" and "familism." These authors use the term *familism* to refer to an ideology or theory describing ideal types of family bonds, traits, and values deemed most desirable within a family system and society. Familism consists of:

> a reciprocal sense of commitment, sharing, cooperation, and intimacy that is taken as defining the bonds between family members. These bonds represent the more or less unconstrained acknowledgement of both material and emotional dependency and obligation. They put legitimate claims on one's own material and emotional resources and put forth a set of "loving obligations" that entitles members of the family to expect warmth and support from fellow family members. In addition, these bonds are assumed to be deeper and more lasting than those that exist in other, non-familial relationships. (Dizard & Gadlin, 1990, p. 6)

Other researchers have identified four components contained within familism: demographic, structural, normative, and behavioral (Parke, 2004; Ramirez & Arce, 1980; Zinn & Wells, 2000). *Demographic* refers to descriptors such as ideal family size and composition; *structural* refers to social context, e.g., geographic proximity of family members and household composition; *normative* refers to values that prioritize family connections; and *behavioral* looks at interactions between family members.

While there is shared recognition about the influence of cultural values on family systems, there are contested definitions of how to define these values within the term *familism* and conflicts over which types of familism are most helpful within a society. For instance, Dizard and Gadlin (1990) contend that the term *family values* represents one definition of familism. They go on to contrast conservative and liberal views of familism:

> Conservatives emphasize the loyalties and respect for authority that familism can entail, while more progressive thinkers value the way unconditional love and family loyalty provide a psychological basis for independent critical thinking and resistance to authority. For each of these positions, familism is the basis of hopeful responses to the most threatening or objectionable features of contemporary society. (p. 9)

Some feminist writers, such as Sullivan (2004), have defined familism as a representation of "new right" "family ideologies" (p. 173). She argues that familism represents conservative political tactics intended to "shift attention away from the regressive policies of the Thatcher and Reagan regimes and to erode the gains made for women within second-wave feminism" (p. 174). Sullivan (2004) maintains that familism is an ideology:

> that holds that the family form most capable of meeting the emotional and material needs of children and adults, and most ideal for nurturing and socializing new members of society, is a family—in some versions sanctioned by God himself—composed of a married heterosexual couple and their biological children. This ideal combination of a breadwinning husband and a nurturing/caretaking wife…and children is held up as the standard against which all other family forms are adjudicated and usually deemed inadequate. (p. 174)

Sociologists such as Dizard and Gadlin (1990) have broadened the definition of familism to a more inclusive perspective that is focused on identifying the potential within a family system to support and sustain its members. In their key work, *The Minimal Family,* Dizard and Gadlin contrast a neo-right version of familism with a newer form that they describe as "public familism." Their more liberal version of familism blends the support provided within a private family unit with public and corporate policies that seek to create support for all types of families. Key characteristics of this more liberal version of familism include "an emphasis on mutual aid rather than competition, mutual obligation rather than absolute independence, and emotional intimacy and affection rather than anonymous sensuality" (Dizard & Gadlin, 1990, p. 24). It is possible that Dizard and Gadlin's definition of familism is so inclusive that vast segments of the field of social welfare would qualify as part of, or be included within, it. A group of more conservative scholars, such as Moynihan (1965), and Popnoe (1993), have challenged notions tied to public familism. Their critiques challenge the value of public policy support for families and warn that well-intentioned social welfare policies that seek to support women, children, and families may in fact have contributed to the decline of the traditional family.

Scholars studying ethnic families, particularly Latino families, have defined familism as an ideology that prioritizes the needs of the extended family system over the needs of individual family members. For these scholars, Familism represents "interdependence, the need for support, emotional connectedness, familial honor, loyalty and solidarity in Latino families" (Muñoz-Laboy et al., 2009, p. 129). Familism is being operationalized and studied as a variable within studies on Latino families and has been claimed to be a protective factor in promoting healthy behavior for Latinos in areas such as self-esteem among Latino youth (Bush, Supple, & Lash, 2004) and negotiating safer sex among high school and college students (Villarruel & Rodriguez, 2003). Familism has typically been viewed as a protective factor among Latino families coping with acculturation stressors within American society. However, in studies of gay and bisexual Latino men, it is postulated by Diaz (1998) and Diaz and colleagues (2004) that familism may be a risk factor for depression and HIV risks. Diaz and colleagues found that familism increases life stressors for gay and bisexual men as they attempt to simultaneously manage their family obligations and attend to the formation of a gay identity (Diaz, 1998; Diaz, et al., 2004; Dıaz, Ayala, Bein, Henne, & Marin, 2001). Diaz argues that benefits of familism may only accrue to those Latino men who can find family acceptance and maintain ties to their biological families. As gay men experience family rejection due to their homosexuality, they experience tensions that increase rates of depression and HIV risks.

Another feature of Latino familism that has parallels for the study of LGBTQ families comes from the Latino *Compadrazago* system. This is a feature of familism within Latino and Mediterranean cultures that refers to relationships with what have been termed "fictive kin." The Compadrazago system defines a mutual-care network that includes godparents, godchildren, and others who become second parents or emotional siblings. These relationships may help families deal with marginal socioeconomic status or help to provide emotional support and what some refer to as "social capital" (Coleman, 1988). Anthropologist Kath Weston (1991) defined LGBTQ relationships as "families of choice" and based her analysis on concepts of kinship similar to those defined with the Compadrazago system.

While differences between ethnic family values and mainstream American culture have begun to receive recognition and respect, efforts to infuse LGBTQ family relationships with the values, traits, and commitments associated with familism have been viewed as an assault on the

traditional family system (Dizard & Gadlin, 1990). These debates about LGBTQ family values lie at the heart of what others, such as Hunter (1991), have framed as "the culture wars" and that Rapp (1987) has referred to as the "overt politicization of kinship."

These debates seem to have progressed with little notice within family research until very recently. As researchers Allen and Demo (1995) commented, lesbians and gay men have historically been "perceived as individuals but not as family members" within family research. They posit that this "reflects the society-wide belief that gayness and family are mutually exclusive concepts" (p. 112). In a study of older gay men's kinship ties, Muraco and colleagues (2008) argued that "in essence same-sex relations had historically existed independent of the institution of the family" (Muraco, et al., 2008, p. 72). Weston also recognized the exclusion of LGBTQ people from family life as well as widespread rejection of many LGBTQ people by their families of origin when she referred to LGBTQ people as "exiles from kinship" (Weston, 1991).

Queer familism: A useful construct in LGBTQ family studies?

Despite contested access to the term *family* and disagreements about family values, LGBTQ people have constructed their own views on family. The question "Is she family?" has long been asked by gays and lesbians to determine if an individual identifies as a member of the gay or lesbian community. Chauncey (1994) notes that gay men, at least as early as the 1920s, were using the term *sister* to refer to close friends and *auntie* to refer to older mentors. Stacey (2004) has explored how gay men incorporated concepts of family into nontraditional interpersonal relationships and how even some promiscuous and polyamorous relationships may have helped gay men to create their own "fictive kin" support systems.

Academic recognition of the existence of LGBTQ families began with the work of Weston (1991) and her ethnographic study of lesbians' and gay men's efforts to form family ties among fictive kin. Weston studied lesbian and gay families in the Bay Area (n=80; 40 lesbian, 40 gay men). She conducted her fieldwork in 1985–1986 and in a 1987 follow-up visit. Few of the families in her study included any type of parent-child family structures; only nine of the 80 families she studied included parent-child families, and only three of these were within gay-male households). However, the majority of the gay and lesbian subjects in her study were adapting traditional concepts of kinship to help define their emotional relationships that lacked legal or biological connections. Weston's work also describes a particular moment in time when a cohort of LGBTQ activists were on the verge of creating new family forms. Her work highlighted the desire for, and the move toward, parent-child families in the gay and lesbian community. For instance, she describes a community meeting in San Francisco in the 1980s during which a lecturer asked how many people in the audience were considering having children, and she recounts the lecturer's dismay when the majority of hands in the room were raised (Weston, 1991, p. 165). Weston identified the challenge this procreative turn created as gays and lesbians worked to incorporate biological relationships into their concepts of gay family. She remarks that the increase in parent-child relationships within the LGBTQ community has required "a subtle reincorporation of biology and procreation within gay families" (Weston, 1991, p. 168).

Is it possible that one reason for this focus on the creation of new family forms is tied to the historical rejection of LGBTQ people by their families of origin? LGBTQ people have often been excluded or disowned from their families of origin, with devastating consequences. Diaz and colleagues' (Diaz, et al., 2004; Diaz, et al., 2001) recent studies with 912 Latino men and

Ryan and colleagues' (2009) study with 224 young gay and lesbians have highlighted the negative health impact of family rejection on LGBTQ people. Similar to Diaz's finding that family rejection is a risk factor for depression and HIV risks, Ryan and colleagues study developed a list of 106 parental rejecting or accepting behaviors and reported an eightfold increase in depression, suicidality, and HIV infection rates among LGBTQ young adults who come from rejecting families compared to those raised in more accepting families (Ryan, et al., 2009). It should not be surprising, then, given the central focus and high value placed on family life within American culture and the exclusion of LGBTQ people from family life, that many LGBTQ people would begin to develop new concepts of family and new forms of family life to supplement or replace rejecting families.

Growth in LGBTQ families: "the quiet revolution"

The term *quiet revolution* is ubiquitous in describing the remarkable growth in planned LGBTQ families over the past 30 years. Lesbians began making babies in earnest in the late 1970s, most likely as one outcome of the feminist movement's efforts to gain reproductive rights. The fight for women's reproductive rights has often been framed as a fight for the right of women to terminate unwanted pregnancies; however, another, often-overlooked aspect of the struggle for reproductive rights has been work on behalf of lesbian and other unmarried women to gain access to fertility treatments. Even before acquiring this access, lesbians and other unmarried women began to organize planned pregnancies. *Baster babies* was the term used to describe home-based artificial insemination strategies, aided by store-bought turkey basters. As lesbians have gained access to professional reproductive services, the results have been quite extraordinary. The LGBTQ community has undergone, and is still in the midst of, what has been termed the *gay baby boom* (Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Strah, 2003). While that boom was initially focused within the lesbian community, it is also reaching and affecting the gay men's community. Gerald Mallon (2004) has commented that for the last two decades, "a quiet revolution has been blooming in the gay male community: more gay men are becoming parents" (Mallon, 2004, p. 11). As Gerald Mallon notes: "we have been living through a social revolution, but it has crept up on us quietly" (Mallon, 2004, p. 3).

Popular culture has promoted the role of the gay father

Popular culture and media have played a role in promoting and normalizing LGBTQ families. Following are some brief examples of how gay fathers have been portrayed in films, books, and television. In 1981, the actor Tony Randall appeared in an NBC situation comedy named *Love, Sydney* (Sandrich, 1981). The show aired for two seasons, in 1981 and 1982. The premise of the show was that Sydney, a gay man in his 50s, assumed parenting responsibilities for his irresponsible friend when she moved from New York to Los Angeles to pursue her acting career. Sydney's longtime lover had died, and he was struggling with grief, isolation, and suicidal feelings. In several episodes, he saw a psychiatrist to deal with his feelings of isolation and despair. The story line also depicted Sydney's deep love and commitment to a child for whom he had no legal rights. The show created a series of conflicts with anti-gay groups for its portrayal of an aging gay man and his love for a child. The NBC network struggled with how to portray a gay man on television (the first gay character in a central television role), and the

scripts veered between reinforcing negative stereotypes about lonely gay men and expressing more positive messages about the main character and his desire to parent.

At the same time, the Harvey Fierstein play *Torch Song Trilogy* opened on Broadway (Fierstein, 1982). This groundbreaking work told the story of Arnold Becker, an effeminate gay man looking for love and family, played by Fierstein. In the story, Fierstein's character and his lover adopt a gay youth whose heterosexual parents threw him out. Becker's lover is killed in a hate crime. In act three of the play, Becker becomes a single father and copes with his family's shock and judgment about the ability of a gay man to parent a gay teenager. The play received widespread attention, and Fierstein received many awards for his writing and acting, including two Tony Awards. The play was later turned into a movie. These early media portrayals of gay fathers were then put on hold during the AIDS crisis as the attention of the gay community and gay artists and activists focused on these health issues.

Since the late 1990s, portrayals of gay fathers within literature, film, and television have become much more commonplace. For instance, *The Velveteen Father* chronicles the story of journalist Jesse Green, describing the development of his relationship with a gay man who has adopted a child (Green, 1999). The book recounts Green's emotional struggles to merge his gay identity with a connection to his partner's child and to develop a sense of himself as a father. Green and his partner subsequently adopted a second child. Green's account is also interesting because it highlights some of the challenges involved in identifying and collecting data on gay families. Because Green maintains a separate residence from his partner and children, they would not meet definitions set forth in the U.S. Census or most research criteria, which describe a family as a group of people living in the same household. Nevertheless, Green and his partner clearly see themselves as life partners and members of the same family.

Well-known advice columnist Dan Savage wrote *The Kid: What Happened After My Boyfriend and I Decided to Go Get Pregnant* (Savage, 1999), a book that chronicles his experiences investigating different routes toward parenting and his subsequent decision to adopt a child through an open adoption. Savage's book is now being turned into an off-Broadway musical. In the book, Savage discusses his angst about becoming a father, his personal challenges as a radical gay man, and his movement toward living within a more traditional American family structure of two parents raising a child.

Noted Bay Area documentarian Johnny Symons directed and produced a film entered into competition at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival. *Daddy and Papa* describes Symons' and his partner's experiences becoming fathers (Symons, 2002). Symons, who is Caucasian, and his African-American partner detail their own experiences moving toward parenthood. The film also highlights the stories of several other Bay Area gay men who become fathers. Symons' film raises important questions about how gay fathers address issues of race, class, and gender. In one key segment, Symons' partner chastises Caucasian gay men who adopt African-American children but fail to understand the challenging experiences that can accompany raising an African-American child within American society.

And Tango Makes Three is a children's book written about a pair-bond formed between Roy and Silo, two male penguins who live at New York's Central Park Zoo (Parnell & Richardson, 2005). The book is based on the real-life story of what happened when New York zookeepers placed an abandoned fertilized egg into Roy and Silo's nest. The pair raised the hatchling, which the zookeepers named Tango. The American Library Association reports that this book was the

most challenged book of 2006, 2007, and 2008 in public libraries across America (American Library Association, 2009), highlighting the ongoing debates about the acceptability of gay men (or penguins) raising children.

Another recent work on gay fathers is a pictorial book by David Strah (Strah, 2003). Strah is a well-known New Yorker who works in the fashion industry. He is president of the fashion company for gay icon and fashion designer Marc Jakobs. Strah's homes and family life have been portrayed in several articles in the Style section of the *New York Times*. His non-academic book characterizes 24 "modern" families with gay fathers. In the book's conclusion, Strah identifies common themes he identified in his personal exploration for family that he believes are shared by the other gay-father families chronicled in his book (Strah, 2003, p. 3). The author does not claim to be presenting a study of gay fathers, and he provides no methods for his analysis beyond his own sense of what is happening in the 24 stories he has collected. But it is interesting that Strah's themes mirror findings from systematic studies of gay fathers. His identified themes include: 1) *Discovering the miracle of fatherhood:* gay men reclaim a right to parenthood that many assumed was gone when they came out; 2) *The Herculean task of becoming a father:* there are many obstacles to fatherhood, and it takes heroic figures to overcome them (Strah, 2003, p. 4); 3) *The role of adoption:* the majority of the children are multiracial and are being adopted by gay fathers who are white; 4) *The healing impact of fatherhood:* becoming a parent appears to be restorative and even therapeutic, especially for men who are estranged from their biological families (Strah, 2003, p. 4); 5) *The potential conflicts that fatherhood causes with other gay men:* many gay fathers have a sense that becoming parents has so changed their lives and sensibilities that they no longer fit in the gay community. This phenomenon is both puzzling and sad but is widely felt by the men in his book (Strah, 2003, p. 5).

The above are some examples of how popular culture has promoted the value of parenting among gay men. These and other stories have helped younger generations of gay men develop new concepts of their life choices.

While this promotion has been ongoing for the past thirty years, academic research on gay parenting has only recently begun to take notice of these social changes. To date, much of the research on LGBTQ families has focused on lesbian mothers and their children, while research on gay fathers has lagged behind. Below is a brief review of the research on LGBTQ families, which will be followed by a more in-depth review of the research on gay fathering.

Lesbian families

Compared to the very limited research on intentional gay-father families, a growing body of research has examined lesbian-headed families (Gartrell et al., 1999; Gartrell et al., 2000; Gartrell et al., 1996; Gartrell, Rodas, Deck, & Peyser, 2005; Patterson, 2002). Much of what researchers claim to know about LGBTQ families is, in reality, information about lesbian mothers. This generalization of information from one LGBTQ subgroup to others should be a concern to all consumers of this research. The conflating of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender research under the rubric of "LGBTQ research" masks potential within-group differences. It is likely that this conflation occurred to provide support to gay fathers as they sought custody and visitation rights within American courts, but its merits as a research methodology need to be questioned.

The majority of studies that have looked at child outcomes of children raised by LGBTQ parents have been conducted within lesbian households. Children of lesbians have been studied in the U.S. and the U.K. for more than 25 years, and studies of child outcomes have compared these children to children raised in heterosexual households. Their IQs have been evaluated (Flaks, Ficher, Masterpasqua, & Joseph, 1995; Green, Mandel, Hotveldt, Gray, & Smith, 1986; Kirkpatrick, Smith, & Roy, 1981), their psychological health assessed (Flaks, et al., 1995; Golombok, Spencer, & Rutter, 1983; Kirkpatrick, et al., 1981; Tasker & Golombok, 1997), and their general academic achievements and overall well-being compared (Levay, 1996; Wainwright & Patterson, 2006; Wainwright, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). No significant differences have been identified between children raised in lesbian families and children raised in heterosexual families on these factors.

In recent years, scholars have begun to recognize that not all LGBTQ families are the same. Lesbian-family studies have also begun to make within-group comparisons. For instance, Patterson (1995a) studied child outcomes and relationship satisfaction within two-mother households, comparing differences in how child care and work are organized and classifying families as having either egalitarian or more traditional households. She found that family differences in child outcomes and relationship satisfaction were related to how mothers divided child-care activities. The more egalitarian families showed better child outcomes and more relationship satisfaction among the mothers (Patterson, 1995a, n=26 Lesbian couples). However, in a subsequent study, researchers reported that it was the parents' satisfaction with their division of labor, rather than the actual division of labor, that was associated with the level of children's adjustment. Specifically, the nonbiological mother's level of satisfaction was related to lower rates of children's behavioral problems (Chan, Raboy, & Patterson, 1998, n=80 families, 55 lesbian & 25 heterosexual). Another topic of within-group comparison has been the timing of when lesbian parents disclose their sexual orientation to their children, which has been found to affect the self-esteem of the children. The earlier that children learned about their mother's sexual orientation, the higher their level of self-esteem (Huggins, 1989, n=36 children; Lewis, 1980, n=21 children). On another within-group topic, mothers' selections of schools with LGBTQ curriculum and mothers' involvement with the lesbian community were both found to be protective factors associated with child adjustment (Bos, Gartrell, Peyser, & van Balen, 2008, n=78 lesbian households).

Child outcomes of children raised in lesbian and gay-father families

Disagreement exists among researchers on several areas related to child outcomes. For instance, one study found that children of lesbian mothers who experience homophobic bullying have lower levels of self-esteem (Gershon, Tschann, & Jemerin, 1999). However, other studies have not supported this finding (Golombok, et al., 1983; Green, et al., 1986; Tasker & Golombok, 1997). Two meta-analyses have been conducted on outcomes of children with LGBTQ parents. The authors in both projects attempted to include both lesbian mothers and gay fathers in their analysis; however, in both cases the majority of studies focused on lesbian mothers. Allen and Burrell (1996) conducted a meta-analysis of 18 studies looking at outcomes of parents and children. Inclusion criteria required that each study included data on LGBTQ parents and their children and compared outcome data of children raised by LGBTQ parents with outcome data of children raised by heterosexual parents. Qualitative studies were excluded from their analysis. Of the 18 studies included in their review, 5 included subjects who were gay

fathers (Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989a, 1989b, 1992; Harris & Turner, 1986; Ostrow, 1977; Scallen, 1981). Comparison of parents' ratings of their child's behavior and attitudes (e.g., happiness) found that homosexual parents, as measured across four studies, were slightly more likely to rate their children as happier than heterosexual parents rated their children (Allen & Burrell, 1996, p. 28). In contrast, teachers' reports, as measured across four studies, were slightly more likely to rate the children of heterosexual, rather than homosexual, parents as happier. However, measurements were only marginally significant, and upper and lower limits of 99% confidence intervals crossed on the measures, leading the authors to conclude that they could find no differences between heterosexual and homosexual parents in reported studies.

Andressen, Amlie, and Yitteroy (2002) conducted a review that looked at outcomes of children raised by LGBTQ parents. Their analysis included data from 23 studies, 20 focused on children raised by lesbian mothers and 3 additional studies focused exclusively on children with gay fathers (Bailey, Bobrow, Wolfe, & Mikach, 1995; Bozett, 1988; Miller, 1979a). The authors found no difference in developmental outcomes of children raised by heterosexual parents and LGBTQ parents. The authors highlighted the need for additional studies on outcomes of children raised by gay fathers. Based on their analysis, the authors questioned the utility of continuing studies that compare LGBTQ parents and their children to a normative model of heterosexual parents. Instead, they call for additional studies that "explore specific needs and experiences" of LGBTQ parents and that place less emphasis on psychological outcomes utilizing in-depth and process-oriented research methods (Andressen, et al., 2002, p. 349). A third meta-analysis looked exclusively at the sexual orientation of children of gay fathers as a child outcome (Bailey, et al., 1995). The authors found no difference in the sexual orientation of children of gay fathers compared to heterosexual fathers.

The majority of reviews looking at outcomes of children raised by LGBTQ parents have not found differences between children raised by LGBTQ parents and children raised by heterosexual parents. One review, however, challenges this long-term finding: Stacey and Biblarz (2001) note that there may be small differences in gender attitudes and behaviors of children raised in LGBTQ families. In particular, the authors contend that researchers may have avoided interpreting their findings to highlight differences in order to avoid suggesting that children raised in lesbian households may have some differences with regard to sexual experimentation when compared to children raised in heterosexual households. Stacey and Biblarz (2001) speculate that "common sense and some small scant data" suggest that "children raised by lesbian co-parents should and do seem to grow up to be more open to contemplate or experience homosexual relationships," which, they speculate, could be due to genetic or family socialization interplayed with these families' choices to live in geographical areas that are less hostile to homosexual behavior. The authors' perception is that it is common sense to assume that children raised in an environment accepting of same-sex behavior may be more likely to engage in same-sex behavior.

However, one concern with the differences that Stacey and Biblarz (2001) note in their review is that they focus on differences that may have less to do with sexual orientation and more to do with past researchers' inadequate attention to matching characteristics between LGBTQ parents and their control/referent groups. For example, if lesbian mothers were compared to a group of heterosexual mothers who had raised their children in urban centers and with feminist/progressive ideals, would the differences discussed by Stacey and Biblarz be significant? They are barely significant when compared with random samples of heterosexual

parents when no controls for parents' political beliefs are included. If samples of gay and straight parents were matched on politically progressive ideals, would there be any real differences between the outcomes of children raised in lesbian homes and children raised in more liberal heterosexual homes? One study comparing different types of feminist parents (single mothers, two-parent heterosexual families, and lesbian families) combined the analysis of all three groups (Mack-Canty & Wright, 2004). When combined, the sample of all three groups showed no real differences between these groups of heterosexual and homosexual parents. It can be argued that Stacey and Biblarz's observations have less to do with a parent's sexual orientation and more to do with a parent's progressive social views.

Stacey and Biblarz (2001) also contend that pro-gay researchers may be experiencing pressure they refer to as a "heteronormative presumption" that subtly creates a need to show no differences between LGBTQ and heterosexual parents (p. 161). They state that ongoing comparisons of LGBTQ parents to heterosexual parents creates an unacknowledged hierarchy and that "even the most sympathetic [researchers] proceed from a highly defensive posture that accepts heterosexual parenting as the gold standard and investigates whether [LGBTQ] parents and their children are inferior" (p. 162). The reviewers state:

> given the weighty political implications of this body of research, it is easy to understand the social sources of such a defensive stance. As long as sexual orientation can deprive a gay parent of child custody, fertility services, and adoption rights, sensitive scholars are apt to tread gingerly around the terrain of differences. (p. 162)

Stacey and Biblarz (2001) encourage future researchers to think about what this sort of hierarchical model implies and argue that if researchers are not careful, they are complicit in promoting the concept "that differences indicate deficits" (p. 162). The authors contend that these kinds of differences should represent "just a difference" of the sorts that democratic societies should respect and protect. They predict that other differences found between children raised in heterosexual and homosexual families will wither away as LGBTQ people gain full equality and that these differences will then become "artifacts of marginality and may be destined for the historical dustbin of a democratic, sexually pluralistic society" (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001, p. 177).

Estimates of prevalence of LGBTQ families

Early researchers on gay parenting estimated that there were between 1 and 3 million LGBTQ parents in the United States and that they were raising between 4 and 14 million children (Bozett, 1987b; Green & Bozett, 1991; Mallon, 2004; Morales, 1995; Patterson, 1992; Peterson, 1984). However, more recent work indicates that past researchers may have overestimated actual numbers of LGBTQ parents who are raising children under the age of 18 (Gates & Ost, 2004). The earlier estimates appear to be based on a crudely constructed algorithm derived from Kinsey and colleagues' (1948) research on human sexuality. For instance, Bozett describes the rationale he used in his early studies to estimate the number of gay fathers in the United States:

> Although no statistics on most aspects of homosexuality can be stated with confidence, the number of gay fathers can be estimated. According to Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948) ... approximately 10 percent of the population is gay. Also, in 1985 the U.S. Bureau of the Census estimated that the U.S. population in 1984 was 236.6 million. Thus, the gay population is estimated to be somewhat over 23 million. Moreover, about 20 percent of the gay male population has been married (Bell and Weinberg, 1978) … It is estimated that 20–50 percent of gay men who have married have one or more biological children (Bell & Weinberg, 1978) … Hence, it is likely that there are between 1 and 3 million gay men who are natural fathers. The combined number of children of gay men and lesbians has been estimated at 6 million by Schulenberg (1985) and 14 million by Peterson (1984). (Green & Bozett, 1991, p. 198)

Several authors have noted that there may be significant errors in these early estimates (see Allen & Demo, 1995; Levay, 1996; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). They note that these researchers did not distinguish between those who are parenting children under the age of 18 and those LGBTQ parents who have children of any age. This is an important distinction that should be considered when planning research projects looking at current LGBTQ family and parenting issues. Second, many scholars question the accuracy of determining the prevalence of LGBTQ populations based upon a 10% estimate of the total population of the United States (Allen & Demo, 1995; Levay, 1996). This 10% estimator is derived from Kinsey Institute studies (Kinsey, et al., 1948). Several researchers have argued that the use of a 10% estimator may significantly overestimate the number of men who choose to live with a gay identity (Allen & Demo, 1995; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001).

Levay (1996) notes that Kinsey's 10% estimator denotes the percentage of men who lived at least three years of their adult life as a predominantly homosexual male. However, often overlooked is the fact that three years is a small percentage of most men's adult lives; when this is factored in, the likelihood of a much lower prevalence of homosexual males at any one time becomes greater. Levay estimates about 4% of men living an exclusive homosexual identity at any given point in time. An often-repeated mistake is equating Kinsey's 10% estimate on sexual orientation with an equivalent estimate of the number of men who choose to self-identify as gay. Levay notes that the use of the 10% estimator has a long-standing history within the gay community and can be traced back to some of the first manifestos written by the Mattachine Society (one of the first gay rights organizations in America) in the 1950s. Levay states: "Evidently the prevalence of homosexuality is a research topic that speaks very directly to gay people's self-esteem, as well as to their perceived (and therefore their actual) political leverage" (Levay, 1996, p. 61).

Though much debate still takes place about the actual numbers of LGBTQ parents, it appears that early estimates significantly overstate the numbers of LGBTQ parents raising children in the United States. It is also clear from a review of the literature that these overly high estimates continually reappear within LGBTQ-focused research, even though the few scant references for the development of these estimates can be traced back to rather unscientific sources. For instance, both Patterson (1992) and Bozett (1987b) base their estimates on the work of Peterson (1984) . However, the Peterson reference is to a 1984 article on LGBTQ parenting published in the newspaper *USA Today*, a decidedly unscientific source. That the 10% estimator may overstate the size of the LGBTQ populations is an often-cited criticism of the quality of LGBTQ

research by anti-gay critics. Stacey and Biblarz (2001) note that this debate over numbers has become one of the ongoing areas of contention between many pro-gay and anti-gay researchers. They note: "Curiously, those who are hostile to gay parenting tend to minimize the incidence of same-sex orientation, while sympathetic scholars typically report improbably high numerical estimates" (p. 164).

So how many LGBTQ parents are there? And how many of these parents are gay fathers? It is very difficult to find true numbers on how many LGBTQ people there are, let alone how many are raising children or how many are fathers. It is always difficult to conduct accurate research within communities that feel a need to hide or obscure their identity and behavior. Many LGBTQ parents throughout the United States still face very real threats that their parental rights may be terminated or that their foster-care situations or adoptions might be ruled invalid if their sexual orientation were discovered. Social stigma and other concerns for their children's well-being may also compound fears about being identified, creating added incentives for many LGBTQ parents to remain hidden.

Development of a richer understanding of sexual behavior and identity, along with advances created through LGBTQ research studies, gender studies, and HIV studies, have helped to improve research methods with LGBTQ populations (see Meezan & Martin, 2003). In the past ten years, researchers have developed more sensitive estimates. For example, Patterson revised her earlier estimates on the number of children being raised in LGBTQ households from 14 million (Patterson, 1992) to more conservative estimates that reflect ranges based on confidence intervals and that take into account issues of LGBTQ identity. Her more recent estimates place the number of American children being raised within LGBTQ households at 1 million to 9 million children (Patterson, 2004). In their well-researched review of LGBTQ studies, Stacey and Biblarz (2001) estimate that between 1 and 12 percent of the dependent child population, or 1 million to 9 million children, are being raised in LGBTQ households. Using these more conservative estimates, a recent report on LGBTQ families estimated that at least 1 million American children under the age of 18 have at least one gay or lesbian parent (Brodzinsky, Patterson, & Vaziri, 2002). What is not clear is how many of these children are from a parent's previous heterosexual relationship and how many are from intentionally planned LGBTQ families.

During the Clinton administration, the U.S. Census Bureau began to collect data on same-gender, two-person households in the decennial census. This data has, for the first time, provided some national population-based analysis of LGBTQ households. However, caution must be used in interpreting this data. Census data does not provide full information about the LGBTQ community, as it only collects data on same-gender, two-person households. Confusion about how to code data from these households has likely created some miscounts and coding errors. It must also be remembered that no one is certain how many LGBTQ people are willing to disclose their same-sex relationships on a government survey. Lack of information of this policy change also means that many LGBTQ couples may not be aware that they are eligible to be counted as a two-partner household. Excluded from these counts are people in nontraditional families (two moms and one dad, for instance) or single women parenting with friends, or people who have been in previous coupleships that have now been dissolved. Given these caveats, it is still interesting to note that census data for 2000 revealed that one in four lesbian households now includes children under the age of 18 (Gates & Ost, 2004). Even estimates based on this partial data make it very clear that the lesbian community has embraced the role of motherhood.

A companion to the U.S. Census is the annual American Community Survey (ACS). The 2008 ACS identified an estimated 564,743 same-sex couples in the United States, including 149,956 couples who designated themselves as *spouses* and 414,787 who used the term *unmarried partner*. There are interesting differences in how these terms are used. One key difference is related to couples who are raising children. Couples with children in their home are more likely to refer to themselves as *spousal couples*, while LGBTQ couples without children in the home are more likely to refer to themselves as *unmarried/cohabiting partners*. A total of 31% of same-sex spousal couples reported that they were raising children, and 17% of same-sex unmarried partners were raising children. More than a third (34%) of male spousal couples reported raising children, compared to only 7% of male unmarried partners (Gates, 2009).

This work has also shown within-group differences among ethnic LGBTQ parents. For instance, African-American gay men are almost twice as likely to be raising a biological child as their white counterparts (Dang & Frazer, 2004). Socioeconomic differences are also being found. For instance, two-mother households with ethnic same-sex spouses are reporting lower rates of home ownership and lower economic status (Gates, 2009).

Other findings from the U.S. Census data reveal that a significant number (see below) of LGBTQ families raising children are living in states that offer no legal recognition for their family structure (Gates & Ost, 2004), and these states may, in fact, include majorities who are opposed to legal recognition of same-sex families. Several of these states (n=3) have barred legal recognition of second-parent adoption, gay adoption, and foster parenting by LGBTQ people, as well as gay marriage. According to Gates and Ost, the states with the highest concentration of same-sex couples with children include: 1) California, 2) New Mexico, 3) Vermont, 4) Nevada, 5) Alaska, 6) Texas, 7) Arizona, 8) New York, 9) Georgia, 10) Louisiana.

Just as in current heterosexual households, LGBTQ parents had, on average, two children. In addition, Gates and Ost found that gay male couples have a slightly higher percentage of households with a partner serving as a full-time stay-at-home caretaker than among heterosexual families. Another intriguing finding is that in some states, a high percentage of couples who identified themselves as living in a same-sex relationship also identified that they were raising children; for instance, 41% of all same-sex couples in Mississippi who provided data in the 2000 census reported having children in their household.

Another important contribution from the U.S. Census data is that it provides the first data on non-Caucasian LGBTQ households. Using 2000 census data, several reports have been prepared that look at African-American, Asian-American, and Hispanic-American households. It was found that Asian, African-American, and Hispanic same-sex couples are all more likely to have children residing in their homes than their Caucasian same-sex counterparts. For instance, in comparing 19,213 Asian same-sex households living in three cities (New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco), researchers found that

> Children lived in substantial numbers of Asian same-sex households, representing a much greater presence than in non-Asian gay and lesbian homes. Close to half (44% and 43%, respectively) of Asian same-sex households in Los Angeles and New York had children in them, while children lived in more than one-fourth (27%) of such households in San Francisco. Comparable rates of children in the home for non-Asian gay and lesbian households were 32% in Los Angeles, 27% in New York, and 18% in San Francisco. (Yan, Peng, Lee, Rickles, & Abbot, 2004)

The majority of Asian-American same-sex couples also reported that they were immigrants and naturalized U.S. citizens (unfortunately, this data was not broken down by gender of same-sex couples).

Similar findings were reported among the 85,000 African-American same-sex partners who responded to the 2000 Census report. African-American same-sex households are nearly twice as likely as Caucasian same-sex households to include children. African-American *male* same-sex households are nearly twice as likely as Caucasian male same-sex households to include at least one child (46% versus 24%). A total of 61% of African-American *female* same-sex households include mothers living with at least one child, compared with 38% of Caucasian female same-sex households. Also, African-American same-sex households report the presence of nonbiological children at higher rates than Caucasian same-sex households. Nonbiological children include adopted children, foster children, grandchildren, nephews, and nieces. A total of 14% of African-American female same-sex households report the presence of at least one nonbiological child, compared to only six percent of Caucasian female same-sex households. African-American male same-sex households are over three times as likely as Caucasian male same-sex households to include nonbiological children (10% versus 3% percent, respectively) (Dang & Frazer, 2004).

National data on Hispanic same-sex couples is not yet available, but a preliminary report on 9,000 Hispanic same-sex couples residing in Florida reflects similar information for Hispanic same-sex couples as national data on other ethnic minority same-sex couples. Male same-sex households in Florida in which both partners are Hispanic/Latino are raising children at three times the rate reported by white male same-sex households, 40% versus 13%, respectively. However, Hispanic/Latino-interethnic male same-sex households report the lowest rates of raising children among all household types (10%). A total of 43% of female same-sex households in which both partners are Hispanic/Latina are raising children, compared to 32% of Hispanic/Latina interethnic female same-sex households and 39% of Caucasian non-Hispanic/Latina female same-sex households. Based on these reports, far larger numbers of African-American, Asian, and possibly Hispanic same-sex couples are raising children than have ever been reflected in research studies conducted to date specifically on LGBTQ parents (Cianciotto & Lopez, 2005).

Review of Research on Gay Fathers

Monumental changes in gay life occurred between 1950 and the 1960s, and again from 1979–1993. Most other reviewers have folded research from different time periods into one literature review; however, it is this reviewer's opinion that doing so overlooks the impact of social changes in gay identity as well as the impact of AIDS on the gay men's community. To take these important factors into account, the review below is divided into historical periods.

Historical review of research on gay fathers

As preparation for this dissertation study, the researcher conducted an extensive literature search on LGBTQ parenting and reviewed the majority of research studies on gay fathering conducted between 1979 and 2006. From 1979 until 1993, all studies focused on gay men who became fathers within heterosexual relationships and then subsequently divorced or divulged

their gay identity to a heterosexual spouse. Initial studies were sociological investigations into the experiences of men who had fathered children in heterosexual relationships (Bozett, 1981b n=18; Miller, 1979b n=54). These studies examined how gay men integrated their fathering responsibilities for children from heterosexual marriages with the development of gay identities, what Bozett refers to as their "gay careers." (1981b).

Typically, most reviews of gay-father research have started with a discussion of research conducted by Brian Miller in 1979 (Bozett, 1987a; Patterson, 1992; Tasker, 2005; Tasker & Golombok, 1997). However, this researcher believes that beginning a review of gay-father research at this point in time obscures the influence of earlier psychoanalytical studies of gay men and gay fathers on the work that followed. Included here is a more extended historical review divided into three periods: 1) *Early (pre-1979) psychologically oriented studies:* These studies have not typically been included in reviews of gay-father research. This researcher believes that this is a significant mistake because the first studies conducted by researchers sympathetic to gay fathers clearly had a goal of refuting the prevailing pathological perspectives contained in these earlier works; 2) *Gay-father advocacy studies:* As Stacey and Biblarz (2001) note, the majority of studies conducted on LGBTQ parenting have been designed to refute discrimination; 3) *Emergence of studies on intentional gay-father families:* Since 1993, there has been growing attention to the unique family forms that are being created by gay and lesbian parents.

Pre-1979 studies: The psychologically damaged homosexual father

For many years, the most dominant perspective of gay fathers was one that framed them as emotionally damaged homosexual men who married and became fathers in order to cover their homosexual tendencies. This psychologically oriented perspective represented the dominant views of the psychiatric and psychological professions in the mid-twentieth century. Psychiatrists such as Allen (1958), Bieber (1969), Bieber and colleagues (1962), and Imielinski (1969) presented gay men as psychologically damaged. Their views, supposedly based in Freudian theory, claimed that gay men were unable to maintain healthy heterosexual relationships due to emotional wounds that existed between them and their fathers. For these therapists, the etiology of homosexuality was framed as occurring when a male child had an overly controlling mother and a distant father (Bieber, et al., 1962), which supposedly thwarted typical Oedipal development. Bieber (1969) claimed that the homosexual male would marry and have children in order to cover his homosexuality, but that these marriages were doomed to failure without the correct psychological interventions. He asserted that only if the homosexual was able to reframe and create new, healthier, non-sexual relationships with heterosexual men would he be able to enter into recovery (i.e., a life without same-sex attraction).

The early work of Hooker (1961) stands out as a key contribution within the mental-health field that challenged this model. Hooker randomly presented standard psychological profiles of 30 homosexual males and a control group of 30 heterosexual males to three expert clinicians. The evaluators were unable to differentiate between the two groups. Hooker's results led her to assert that previous studies, conducted under the guise of therapeutic assessment, were biased because mental-health workers knew in advance which subjects were homosexual and which were heterosexual.

Most of these early researchers and clinicians based their arguments about the pathological etiology of homosexual men on the clinical and research finding that gay men often report emotionally distant and conflictual relationships with their fathers. And, in fact, studies continue to show that many gay men have more complicated and difficult relationships with their fathers. For instance, in a retrospective study with adults (n=34), Friedman and Stern (1980) compared adolescent relationships among gay men (n=17) and heterosexual men (n=17) and found that gay men had more difficult relationships with their fathers, even in the case of identical twins with different sexual orientations. Friedman and Stern (1980) were surprised to find that Bieber (1969) and Bieber and colleagues' (1962) observations held true about the complicated relationship between gay sons and their heterosexual fathers. In their study, homosexual sons were more likely to classify their fathers as hostile and unsupportive when compared to their heterosexual comparison group. None of the 17 men in the homosexual group reported the presence of a loving father whom they perceived as a suitable role model. The authors conclude, "No homosexual subject can recall a sustained father-son relationship in which each loved and respected the other." (Friedman & Stern, 1980, p. 186). While this research does present a link between gay men and lack of acceptance from their fathers, there is no actual evidence to support the authors' claim that lack of a loving father is the basis for the etiology of homosexuality. Sadly, it appears that an entire generation of researchers and clinicians failed to recognize one of the most basic rules of elementary statistics when they claimed a causal link between correlational data.

One of the first lessons taught for decades to students in introductory research courses is "correlation does not equal causation." However, Friedman and Stern's study does support earlier findings that generations of gay men have reported conflictual and unsupportive relationships with their fathers. Yet what is clearly overlooked in these arguments on the etiology of homosexuality is that it is just as plausible an explanation that conflicts within these father-son relationships are due to heterosexual fathers' inability to accept a son's perceived gender differences or sexual orientation. And so a generation of studies that attempted to prove the etiology of homosexual men as resulting from a distant father may in fact be showing the impact of a heteronormative expectation within traditional families and an inability among heterosexual fathers to provide care and comfort to children whom they perceive as different.

The life histories of the men in Friedman and Stern's study highlight the development of gay men in less-than-accepting family systems. As previously mentioned, the recent work by Diaz and colleagues (2004; 2001) and Ryan and colleagues (2009) is now providing evidence that, in fact, family rejection of LGBTQ people is still present for many, and it is a risk factor for health disparities, including psychological stressors, HIV infection, and suicidality. One must question why none of these early researchers seemed able to hypothesize whether the correlations between homosexuality and parental conflict that they found in their studies could indicate a causal relationship that moves in this opposite direction. The evidence from their own work allows for the possibility that this explanation is just as plausible as the one put forth by an entire generation of psychologists, psychiatrists, and researchers to explain the etiology of homosexuality. However, psychologically based arguments continue to be used to justify a pathological perception of gay men.

This is more than a purely academic debate. The acceptability of gay men and their relationships with children continues to be closely tied to the model of the pathological homosexual male. These ideas, while considered outdated within the mainstream psychological

and sociological research literature, continue to proliferate within American society. It is still common to see pathological perspectives raised in discussions of gay men in relationship to children. For instance, the legal briefs filed in anti-gay marriage and anti-gay adoption court cases continue to rely on these pathologically based research studies to justify the opposition to both same-sex marriage and gay men's suitability to serve as adoptive parents (e.g., Cameron, Cameron, & Landess, 1996; Morgan, 2002; Rekers, 1995; Wardle, 1997).

While this early research included limited empirical work that specifically focused on gay men as fathers, it did include a variety of studies that looked at the experiences of married homosexual men, most of whom were fathers (Ross, 1979, 1983). The work of Laud Humphreys (1970) is particularly important to include here. In his classic study of homosexual men, *Tea Room Trade*, Humphreys found that approximately 50% of the men he interviewed (n=50) were married and did not identify as homosexual, gay, or bisexual. Humphries developed conceptual theories to explain the challenges that these married men faced in negotiating their place within what he characterized as the two competing worlds of the homosexual and the heterosexual. His concept of "the breastplate of righteousness" focused on the incongruence between many of these men's homosexual activities and their religious and political views and activities that stigmatized and punished same-sex desire. Humphreys claimed that these men maintained conservative and highly religious public personas to cover their secret behaviors. Humphreys' work reinforced conceptions of the married gay man as one who was attempting to live in two worlds and who often adopted psychologically defensive beliefs that reinforced negative perceptions of the gay community. Humphreys' findings have been rediscovered to help understand new generations of conservative politicians who oppose equal rights for LGBTQ people and yet engage in surreptitious same-sex behavior.

Stonewall era studies, 1979–1993: The socially tolerated father

As the gay-rights movement progressed, and as the option of living a life based upon an openly gay identity became an option for more people, many previously married LGBTQ parents began to come out of the closet. This period is often referred to as the Stonewall period (D'Emillio, 2002). Simultaneously, the gay-rights movement sparked a call for research on various dimensions of the lives of LGBTQ people and for research that moved away from the earlier pathologically oriented viewpoints and toward more accepting perspectives. As noted, this research built upon the work of Hooker (1961). The work of Kinsey and his associates also influenced these new directions (Kinsey, et al., 1948).

Important research contributions during this period were also made due to the pioneering work of LGBTQ-identified social researchers. One such groundbreaking study was Bell and Weinberg's (1978) investigation of the LGBTQ community. In this study, Bell and Weinberg estimated that 20–30% of the gays and lesbians they surveyed (n=250) in the late 1970s and early 1980s had previously been involved in heterosexual marriages and that at least 50% of these previously married gay men and lesbians were parents.

Most reviews of the literature on gay fathering begin with Brian Miller's study of gay fathers (Miller, 1979a; Miller, 1979b). However, reading these previous studies clearly shows a forgotten link between the Stonewall-era investigations into gay fathering and the work begun by Humphreys with closeted married homosexual men. For instance, the first published research studies about self-identified gay fathers examined the challenges that married gay men and

divorcing gay men faced as they attempted to live in two separate realms: the gay subculture of the Stonewall era and the traditional patriarchal world of fatherhood (Bozett, 1989; Miller, 1979a; Miller, 1979b). These are themes that come directly from Humphries' earlier sociological studies. While Miller (1979b) is credited with conducting one of the first published studies on gay fathers, what is not widely known is that Brian Miller was Laud Humphreys' graduate student (and later life partner). Miller began his work by building on Humphreys' ethnographic research materials (Galiher, Brekhus, & Keys, 2004).

These early gay-father research projects documented the challenges that gay men faced as they attempted to balance their coming-out process with the demands and responsibilities of divorce and fatherhood. The ending of their marriages brought these men (as well as lesbian mothers) and their families under the auspices of the U.S. family-court system. As a result, an important focus of the research conducted at this time looked at issues relevant to family courts and child-custody cases. The research questions of these studies clearly show the legal challenges these LGBTQ parents faced in family courts:

> That sexual orientation of children of their parents is even an issue is indicative of the homophobia and heterosexism present in our culture. Most research in this area has been done to refute the charges and assumptions put forth by the courts and mainstream culture about homosexuality. (Green & Bozett, 1991, p. 198)

Miller's (1979a) research also laid the path followed by many future gay-father studies in that they were designed to refute common homophobic biases leveled against gay parents. Miller structured his research with 40 gay fathers around 4 questions he believed were frequently raised in child custody cases:

- Do gay fathers have children cover their homosexuality?
- Do they molest their children?
- Do their children turn out to be disproportionately homosexual?
- Do they expose their children to homophobic harassment? (Miller, 1979a, p. 545)

Though Miller's study attempted to refute the prevailing stereotypes of his time, few LGBTQ parents successfully maintained custody or even visitation rights with their children in the 1970s and early 1980s; however, their struggles highlighted the need for additional research about gay parenting. Miller's work set the tone for many studies to follow that typically focused on refuting earlier characterizations of gay men as sick and incapable of caring for their children. The majority of these research projects focused on examining characteristics of men who had fathered children within heterosexual relationships. Though only a limited number of studies were completed on gay fathers during the next 20 years, those that were undertaken focused on attempting to compare the newly emerging concept of a gay male father to other types of men. These comparisons were intended, it seems, to demonstrate to policy makers and to judges within family courts that gay men were as capable of being adequate parents as heterosexual fathers. For instance, Bigner and Jacobsen (1989a) compared 33 gay fathers and 33 heterosexual fathers on the Iowa Parent Behavior Inventory. The authors found minor differences in parenting styles between heterosexual and homosexual fathers. Gay fathers were found to be slightly stricter in their discipline styles and to also provide more details explanations for their behavior to their children. In a second study, Bigner and Jacobsen (1989b) compared 33 gay fathers to a

subsample of 33 fathers from an earlier research project regarding their motivations for becoming parents. The authors found few differences between the two groups; however, gay fathers were found to desire children to improve their social status and to promote security.

The work of Frederick Bozett was also important during this period. (Bozett, 1980, 1981a, 1981b, 1982). Bozett studied gay men and the challenges that they faced in managing changes in their social status from heterosexual married men to identities as gay men. His research described gay fathers' attempts to manage the stigmatized role assigned to gay men during this period. Bozett characterized the divergent social statuses of gay men and heterosexual fathers as conflicting "careers" and found in his studies that gay fathers were struggling to integrate these two identities. He noted that gay fathers were met with suspicion from both communities. The heterosexual world viewed them as too dangerous to be allowed to continue as fathers, while many members of the gay community found their previous experiences as married heterosexual men to be a cause for distrust and concern. Bozett's work built upon this finding from Miller's studies. This theme of not fitting into the gay community nor into the world of the heterosexual father was an ongoing topic identified in research as well as in the writings of gay fathers (Bozett, 1981a, 1981b; Miller, 1979a), and it continues into the present period (Brinamen, 2000; Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008).

Over the next 15 years (1980–1995), it seems that there were almost as many reviews written summarizing the limited research studies on gay fathers as the production of new empirical research. This generation of research reviews focused on reinforcing the message that gay men are no different from heterosexual men (see, for instance, Bozett, 1989; Green & Bozett, 1991; Morales, 1995; Patterson, 1992). The prevailing perspective of gay fatherhood that seemed to be at work here was one that characterized the gay father as a man who had experienced earlier psychological and sociological pressures to enter a heterosexual marriage. These men then tried to maintain a heterosexual lifestyle but over time realized that they would find more emotional "congruence" (Bozett, 1989) by merging their gay identities and their parenting roles. Most of this research was focused on promoting the gay father as someone in need of societal tolerance, understanding, and sympathy. Researchers at this time did not characterize gay parenting as something to be desired or that should be available to the majority of gay men, but rather as an unfortunate situation that required social tolerance. Access to reproductive options such as surrogacy, adoption, and the creation of unique family forms for gay families (e.g., two lesbians and a gay father) were not typically conceptualized as options within these studies. Instead, the studies framed the gay father within a psychological model focused on a father's efforts to come to terms with his sexual orientation. For instance, Barret and Robinson wrote one of the first books for the popular press about gay fathers. Their book included a typology of gay fathers. However, neither the first edition (1990) nor the second (2000) included a category within their typology for a planned two-father household with children (Barret & Robinson, 1990, 2000).

However, research during this period did reflect a move away from earlier pathologizing of the gay-father role. This move paralleled efforts that were underway at the time to declassify homosexuality as a pathological condition within the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-III* (1980) of the American Psychiatric Association. The American Psychiatric Association declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder in 1973, and the American Psychological Association followed in 1975. Gusfield comments that the gay rights movement is perhaps "the most salient example of how the ability to mobilize has enabled a subject group to transform its status" (Gusfield, 1996, p. 26). Conrad and Schneider (1980) concur and note that

homosexuality is one of the only negative psychological constructions within modern times that has been successfully removed because of political action (Conrad & Schneider, 1980).

Other researchers have also noted the shift that occurred in research on gay fathers between the 1950s and 1960s, and the research of the post-Stonewall period. For instance, Carrington (2002) comments: "Assuming the reliability of [earlier] findings, lesbigay families before the mid-1970s lived rather different family lives than they did thereafter. The question of whether a behavioral change or an ideological change took place deserves closer attention" (p. 11). To expand on Carrington's observations, we also need to investigate the role that ideological changes about homosexuality and fatherhood played in behavioral changes for gay fathers, a topic that has been largely overlooked in the research on gay fathers.

One recent retrospective work on gay fathers of the 1980s is showing that some gay fathers were living within more modern versions of intentionally formed gay-family structures by the late 1980s. Gerald Mallon's (2004) recent book, *Gay Men Choosing Parenthood*, chronicles the retrospective stories of 20 gay men who became foster or adoptive parents in the New York region in the 1980s. Mallon's research on adoptive fathers in New York shows that gay men were finding creative ways to create intentional family structures far earlier than has been previously recognized within academic research, but that the majority of these fathers concealed their sexuality in order to become fathers.

The emergence of new studies (1993– present): Recognition of new family forms

During the 1980s and early 1990s, while gay men formed the vanguard of the sexual revolution and then coped with its fallout in the AIDS epidemic, the "quiet parenting revolution" was well underway within the LGBTQ community. This revolution included a growing number of parent-child LGBTQ households. These types of families began choosing to create their own family forms, with much of this work guided and based upon strong feminist and counterculture ideals (Weston, 1991). These LGBTQ families blazed a trail in creating families of choice. This quiet revolution has led to what has come to be referred to as the "gay baby boom" (Johnson & O'Connor, 2002) or the "gayby boom" (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). These titles describe the experiences of post-liberation LGBTQ people who intentionally chose to create new families that include biological, foster, and adopted children. While research about intentional lesbian families began to appear in increasing numbers in the 1980s (Golombok, et al., 1983; Green, et al., 1986; Lewis, 1980), the first research studies about intentional gay fathers were not published until 1993 (McPherson, 1993; Sbordone, 1993).

McPherson (1993) studied 28 gay parenting couples compared to 27 heterosexual couples on division of labor and relationship satisfaction. The gay couples were more equitable in tasks and roles and had greater overall relationship satisfaction than did the heterosexual couples in the study. Sbordone's (1993) unpublished dissertation marked the first study of intentionally planned gay fathers. He interviewed 78 gay men who became parents, either through adoption or surrogacy, after coming out and compared them to gay men who were not parents. Beers (1996) compared identity development and self-esteem of gay men who had a desire to parent (n=45) and those who did not wish to parent (n=43). Brinamen (2000) studied identity development and decision-making process among self-identified gay men who chose to become parents (n=10).

Since the early 1990s, the growth in intentional LGBTQ families has shown no sign of abating and may, in fact, be accelerating as barriers are removed that previously limited LGBTQ people's access to fertility clinics, sperm banks, surrogacy services, and adoption agencies (Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; Mallon, 2004; Patterson, 1995a, 1995b). The development of intentionally created LGBTQ families marks a significant diversion from typical American family patterns (Stacey, 2004).

Over the past two decades, studies have begun to emerge that examine these intentionally formed LGBTQ parent-child families. To-date studies have predominantly examined parenting issues related to lesbian fertility and motherhood (see Patterson, 2002; Tasker, 2005 for discussion about lesbian-mother studies). Few of these studies of intentional LGBTQ families have actually included gay-father research subjects. This focus on lesbian parents is not surprising, given the challenges that openly gay men face in becoming parents. However, past barriers are changing, which is leading to more gay men who are fathering children.

A new era in research on LGBTQ families

While there previously were criticisms about the lack of research on LGBTQ people and LGBTQ families, this situation is rapidly changing. Researchers in the past had criticized mainstream academic journals in fields such as social work, sociology, and family research for their inattention to LGBTQ topics and exclusion of LGBTQ families from mainstream projects (Allen & Demo, 1995; D'Augelli, 1994; Martin & Hunter, 2001; Van Voorhis & Wagner, 2002). But the development of new LGBTQ-focused journals such as Haworth *Press's Journal of GLBT Family Studies* and public attention to LGBTQ topics brought about by the recent gay-marriage debates are placing new emphasis on the need for studies of LGBTQ families. Policy makers, legal briefs, and public discourse have all looked to research on LGBTQ families to evaluate implications of changing social policies on gay families. Following is a brief review of the findings from research studies on LGBTQ families, followed by a more detailed discussion of the research on gay-father families.

Research on intentional gay fathering

As noted in the historical review, studies about planned gay-father families began to appear in the early 1990s. While still limited, several important themes seem to be emerging in this developing literature. Two are discussed here: first, research looking at connections between homophobia and gay men's desire to parent, and second, the scant but developing information on the connection between gay fathering and adoption.

Homophobia and desire to parent among gay men. Several studies looking at intentional gay fathers intimate that the pathways toward fatherhood seem to be changing (or at least expanding) for gay men. Changing demographics and shifting priorities within the gay community indicate that a large percentage of openly gay men are beginning to see parenting as an important life option, with large numbers of gay men reporting a desire to become parents (Beers, 1996; Sbordone, 1993). These studies also present correlations between comfort with sexual identity and desire to parent. Sbordone (1993) interviewed 78 gay men who became parents, either through adoption or surrogacy, after coming out and compared them to gay men

who were not parents. He looked at issues related to internalized homophobia, self-esteem, and childhood recollections. Sbordone found few differences between gay fathers' and gay non-fathers' early childhood recollections. However, the gay men who were fathers were found to have higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of internalized homophobia compared to non-fathers. Interestingly, Sbordone speculated that lower internalized feelings of homophobia and higher self-esteem may be a result of, rather than a precursor to, parenting. Beers' (1996) dissertation examined the desire to parent among self-identified gay men who were not parents (n=88). He reported that 51% of the men in his sample indicated a desire to parent. Beers' study also looked at issues related to internalized homophobia. He reported that those men who desired to parent appeared more likely to have integrated their sexuality into their identity as measured on the Homosexual Identity Questionnaire (Cass, 1984), while those who did not wish to parent were categorized as being in a stage still focused on identity acceptance. Those men who reported a reluctance to parent also expressed more concerns about the impact that their sexual orientation would have on the parenting experience.

Brinamen (2000) interviewed 10 gay men who chose to become fathers after coming out. Based on these interviews, Brinamen proposed that men go through five stages in developing an identity as a gay father: 1) coming out, with the assumption that this means a loss of parenting options; 2) increasing confidence as a gay man; 3) recognizing options and strengths of gay families; 4) observation and understanding of research on gay parenting; 5) valuing the unique gifts that a gay man has to offer a child. Brinamen also noted that 8 out of 10 men interviewed expressed fear and concern about losing custody of their child, and this fear affected decisions about how they went about becoming a father. All subjects expressed concerns that their children would face prejudice due to the subjects' sexual orientation (Brinamen, 2000; Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008). Most participants also had some negative reactions from their families of origin over their decision to parent. Brinamen concluded that the social supports given to heterosexual parents are often not available to gay fathers. He asserted that gay men choosing parenthood need additional support for their father role (Brinamen, 2000).

Studies of gay fathers and everyday life. Another approach to the study of families is based on a phenomenological perspective that encourages researchers to study families within the everyday life situations (Hochschild, 1989; Van Manen, 1990). Weston pioneered the use of these techniques in the study of LGBTQ families. Using similar methods, Pash (Pash, 2004, 2008a, 2008b) conducted an ethnographic investigation with 7 gay fathers in Southern California that focused on "alliance building and the nature and quality of the social relationships that are an essential part of defining community life for gay-father families" (Pash, 2004, p. 2). Her fieldwork began in 2002, and by 2004 she had collected 50 hours of interviews with seven gay-father families and more than 102 hours of videotaped data with two families (Pash, 2004, 2008a, 2008b). There was a stay-at-home parent in each of her households. Like many previous researchers, such as Bozett (1981b) and McPherson (1993), she, too, reported a connection between lack of community acceptance for gay fathers, internalized homophobia, and decisions about parenting. She noted that gay fathers' "uncertainty about acceptance, along with differing degrees of internalized homophobia, can lead to circumspection on the part of some gay fathers" (2004, p. 18). Pash suggested that by creating community connections and support systems, these fathers were socializing one another into the parenting role. Similarly, Carrington's sociological study of gay-couple families adapts Hochschild's (1989) methods to the study of gay-father

families and everyday life and presents interesting methodological options for future researchers to follow. He examined how gay couples divide care-giving responsibilities. Building on sociological categories pioneered by Hochschild (1989), he conceptualized these as different types of work, including: "housework," "kinwork," "consumption work," and "divisions of domestic labor" (Carrington, 2002).

Other researchers who have discussed the utility of working within a phenomenological framework to study LGBTQ families include Cohler(2004) and Oswald (2002). Cohler maintains that

> the study of gay and lesbian parenthood must begin with "the recognition that the rapid social transformations of the past three decades have led to dramatic changes in every aspect of gay and lesbian life, including family formation, which is no longer open only to those gay men and lesbians who have been in a heterosexual marriage." (Cohler, 2004, p. 79)

Parents typically experience role strain and stress following the birth of their first child, and gay parents may have these problems "amplified by isolation from supportive kin networks" (Cohler, 2004, p. 80). Oswald (2002) reviews research on family networks and encourages researchers to incorporate social network analysis into studies of LGBTQ families. She advocates for research and social service workers to understand how gay fathers address the conscious process of choosing children, choosing kin, integrating gay and straight support networks, managing disclosure, building community, and ritualizing and legalizing relationships. Oswald also stresses the importance of analyzing how LGBTQ people engage in what she terms the four redefinitional processes they use to support themselves: politicizing, naming, integrating gayness, and envisioning family.

Planned gay families and adoption

Though information is still limited, emerging studies suggest that the majority of planned gay-father families have been created through adoption. Johnson and O'Connor (2002) reported on one of the largest studies conducted to date with LGBTQ parents in the United States (total sample=415, including 79 fathers in 54 households). They found that 46 of the 54 (85%) gay-father households included in their study reported that their families were formed through adoption. It is likely that these intentionally formed gay-father families still represent only a small percentage of all gay-father families and that most gay fathers in the United States still become a parent in the "old-fashioned" way: through involvement in a heterosexual relationship.

To date, only limited data is available that describes percentages of different types of family formation among gay-father families. One study has presented information on different routes leading to family formation among U.K. gay-father families: Barrett and Tasker (2001) surveyed 101 British gay fathers and found that approximately 12% of the men in their sample had formed families after the father had developed a gay identity (come out); 7% through foster parenting, 2% through adoption, and 3% through surrogacy arrangements. It is not clear how transferable this information is to American families, as U.K. adoption rates are likely lower than U.S. adoption rates, due to a more restrictive situation for LGBTQ-adoption applicants. However, Barrett and Tasker's study may provide some information about the ratio of intentionally formed

gay-father families to families formed by gay men during earlier heterosexual relationships. Their findings support conclusions of Stacey and Biblarz (2001) that the likeliest route to parenthood for gay men is still through heterosexual relationships and not via a planned process that occurs after a gay man has formed a gay identity. Although intentionally formed gay-father families may currently comprise only a small number of all gay-father families, it has been noted that these newly emerging families assume "a symbolic significance for lesbians and gay men disproportionate to their numbers" (Weston, 1991, as reported in Stacey, 2003, p. 162). Unlike lesbian mothers, who typically begin their families by making what can be considered private decisions about their bodies, family formation for gay men often challenges traditional public policy precedents. Decisions about who is qualified to become a foster or adoptive parent, while important for all prospective parents, is a particularly critical topic that will dramatically affect the future development of gay-father families.

For a variety of reasons, domestic adoption seems the most likely route toward fatherhood for gay men in the United States. Yet the research on adoption agencies indicates that many are ill prepared to provide unbiased services to LGBTQ clients. Brodzinsky, Patterson, and Vaziri (2002) conducted a survey of 241 adoption agency directors regarding their agencies' policies and practices for a two-year period (1995–1996). These researchers classified adoption agencies (combining both public and private agencies) into one of four types, based on predominant type of placement: 1) infant/toddlers; 2) special-needs children; 3) international adoptions; or 4) mixed variety. Results showed that public agencies and agencies focused on placing special-needs children are the two most likely to place children with LGBTQ parents, while agencies focused on infant/toddler adoptions were the least likely to be making placements with LGBTQ applicants. Special-needs adoption agencies were much more likely to accept applications for adoption from lesbian women, lesbian couples, single gay men, or gay male couples (confirmed with chi square (3) analysis $p<.001$). The authors found that of all types of adoption agencies, those focused on finding homes for special-needs children were the agencies most likely to go beyond accepting applications from LGBTQ people and to actually conduct outreach to recruit LGBTQ parents. Participating agencies reported that of the 22,584 adoption placements made during the study years, 371 children were placed with a known LGBTQ-identified parent. Approximately 1.6% of all placements reported. The authors noted that this number surely underreported data on LGBTQ parents, as there are many incentives within the adoption field for LGBTQ people to hide their sexual orientation during the adoption process. Ricketts and Achtenburg (1987) reported similar findings regarding incentives for LGBTQ parents to conceal their sexual orientation during the adoption process. To address this concern, Brodzinsky and colleagues (2002) asked the agencies to estimate how many adoptions they made with likely LGBTQ parents. Agency directors estimated that they had made about 658 placements with LGBTQ parents, or about 3% of all placements made during the study years. The authors explained that their estimates did not include numbers of private adoptions conducted in the United States. Private adoptions usually go through attorneys and are arranged between birth parents and adoptive parents. The authors stated that, in their experience, many LGBTQ individuals have chosen to pursue private adoptions; however, no data currently exists on the number of these placements made to LGBTQ families.

Brooks and Goldberg (2001) interviewed California child welfare workers (n=10) and LGBTQ foster parents (n=11). Child welfare workers in their study indicated that they were more likely to place special-needs children with LGBTQ applicants, and they reported that there is a recognized hierarchy at work within most adoption agencies that prioritizes placements of

healthy Caucasian infants with: 1) heterosexual two-parent families; 2) single-parent and gay and lesbian families; 3) gay and lesbian individuals. LGBTQ applicants' involvement with special-needs agencies and public-adoption agencies creates an additional issue: that of transracial adoption (Brooks & Goldberg, 2001; Mallon, 2000, 2004), as more than 60–70% of children in most state's public-adoption and foster-care agencies are children of color. This issue is highlighted in Mallon's study of 20 gay men who became intentional fathers in the 1980s (all of whom became fathers through adoption or fostering); he noted that the majority (91%) of the men in his sample parented children of color (Mallon, 2004). Mathews (2004) conducted a dissertation study with single, gay-identified men who had adopted children (n=15). He found that over 82% (n=13) of participants had adopted either transracial or transcultural children.

International adoptions are another avenue that many Americans pursue to adopt infants and toddlers. However, more and more countries are barring adoption agencies from placing children with unmarried individuals and particularly with unmarried men. Consequently, as the interest in adoption increases among gay men, it is likely that they will turn to domestic agencies in their search for adoptable children.

It is likely that for the foreseeable future, then, the majority of gay-father families will be dealing with complex issues associated with children who are placed within the public child welfare system, including transracial adoption, the placement of older children, the adoption of special-needs children, the adoption of children who maintain relationships with bio-kin, and the challenges associated with parenting children from families impacted by violence, trauma, and substance abuse. Little research to date has examined how gay men are coping with the development of these more complicated family structures, although some work is beginning to emerge. In 2005, Erich and colleagues conducted an exploratory study of family functioning among 47 gay and lesbian adoptive families that included 23 gay father families (Erich, Leung, & Kindle, 2005). Sixty percent of the participants in this study indicated that they had self-identified as gay or lesbian during the adoption process. The authors administered the Family Assessment Measure III tests to their sample, and the majority of participants scored within the average range. However, 22% of the participants did present high scores on social desirability and defensiveness subscales (no information compares this to average ratings for heterosexual parents). In a subsequent 2009 study, Erich and colleagues conducted a survey that compared the ability of adolescent adoptees to attach to heterosexual or LGBTQ adoptive parents (Erich, Kanenberg, Case, Allen, & Bogdanos, 2009). Responses were compared from 127 heterosexual parents and 27 lesbian/gay parents. The authors found no differences in family functioning between heterosexual and same-sex families or in the ability of adoptive adolescents to form attachments to LGBTQ parents or to their peers.

Mathews (2004) completed a dissertation study of 16 single gay fathers who had adopted children. He compared his sample to data on all adoptive parents in the United States. He found that his study participants were more likely to have graduated from college, 75% of gay fathers in his sample compared to 33% of all adoptive parents in the United States. Additionally, over half his sample either had or were pursuing advanced degrees. Mathews also found that all unpartnered gay fathers in his study reported that they felt an expansion in their social-support networks after becoming parents and that they had an increased social-support network of heterosexual people and other parents. He concluded that adoption and "parenting may serve to bridge the gaps of understanding and end the self-imposed isolation between the gay and non-gay individuals and communities" (Mathews, 2004, p. 195).

Research on LGBTQ stepfamilies

As noted, Stacey and Biblarz (2001), among other researchers, have theorized that as social views on homosexuality changed and as stigma associated with same-sex relationships diminished, the number of LGBTQ people who entered into heterosexual relationships would decrease, which could lead to a steady decline in the number of children with an LGBTQ parent. There is no real data to indicate whether the numbers of LGBTQ people having children within heterosexual relationships is declining. Social pressures, while diminished, still exist that exert tremendous force on LGBTQ people, encouraging them to adopt a heterosexual lifestyle. As a result, one pathway toward parenting for LGBTQ people will continue to be through traditional heterosexual relationships. It is likely that many of these relationships will lead to divorce and formation of gay stepfamilies. This style of family formation will necessitate development of additional research on stepfamilies and on children born into heterosexual families who then have a parent divulge a different sexual identity. More information will also be needed on how these children fare in LGBTQ stepfamilies.

Few studies have examined gay stepfamilies. Crosbie-Burnett and Helmbrecht (1993) conducted a study with biological fathers, stepfathers, and their children (n=48 gay stepfamilies). The families completed the Stepfamily Adjustment Scale (SAS) among all three requested participants (father, stepfather, and one biological child). As expected, the majority of children in these former heterosexual families lived with their divorced mothers; however, 26% of the children lived with their gay fathers and gay stepfathers, and more sons than daughters were found to be living with their fathers. The authors found that many of the children in the study did not disclose the status of their gay fathers to peers and that many of the stepfathers continued to be very closeted about their homosexuality. The study also found disparate findings on social isolation among the couples. A total of 23% of the biological fathers reported feeling often isolated, and 2% reported feeling almost always isolated. However, 38% of the stepfathers felt often isolated, and 23% felt almost always isolated. No comparisons were reported to scores for heterosexual families on the same measures. Scores on family happiness for gay families were compared to family happiness levels of heterosexual families reported in other studies. Similar scores were reported for both gay and heterosexual stepfamilies. Like heterosexual stepfamilies, the authors found that family happiness is correlated with the "psychological inclusion" of the stepparent into the family (Crosbie-Burnett & Helmbrecht, 1993, p. 260).

Lynch has published a series of papers describing her research on LGBTQ stepfamilies (Lynch, 2000 n=23; 2004 n=35; Lynch & Murray, 2000 n=23). The researcher developed a three stage-model to describe the transition from heterosexual marriage to homosexual stepfamily: 1) discovery; 2) reconciliation; 3) integration and transformation. The author notes that compared with earlier studies in the 1970s and 1980s, the process of discovery and reconciliation of same-sex attraction seems to be accelerating for most people. In the author's 2004 study, she reports that many of her subjects (n=35) went into marriages unaware of their same-sex attractions, but once identified, they divulged identity to their partners, and most had reconciled their sense of acquiring a new sexual identity quite quickly. However, the majority of the subjects were not prepared for the changes in status they would encounter in the final stage of integration and transformation in Lynch's model. The author concluded that the transition to a new sexual identity had minimal impact on self-esteem or suitability as parents, but that most of her subjects "clearly did not anticipate that by integrating their homosexual status they would also be forced to yield the external recognition and approval conferred by their previous privileged heterosexual

status" (Lynch, 2004, p. 101). Or, as the author further explained, "Few recognized that homosexual identity would change others' perceptions of them as acceptable parents" (Lynch, 2004, p. 101).

One of the author's striking conclusions was that the transition to a homosexual identity is less internally stigmatizing and stressful for LGBTQ people who come out after becoming parents than for those who come out at younger ages. "For biological parents who have enjoyed the status of parenthood in a heterosexual relationship, the later acceptance of homosexual identity appeared much less traumatic than for lesbians and gays who confront their status in adolescence, or early adulthood or those who have not experienced parenthood" (Lynch, 2004, p. 102). This information seems consistent with findings being reported by others (Brinamen, 2000; McPherson, 1993) that there may be a positive and protective effect among gay and lesbian parents for both adoptive and biological LGBTQ parents. Lynch did note differences in reports to community acceptance by men and women, noting that there is more social recognition of the mother role and greater invisibility of lesbians. She argued that gay men are more socially visible, and there is more overt homophobia directed to gay fathers, with fears of molestation and AIDS tied to gay men and not to lesbians (Lynch, 2000, 2004; Lynch & Murray, 2000). She also found that there were tensions between gay fathers and the sense of connection to the larger gay community. However, she placed less emphasis on rejection by gay men without children and noted that many of these gay fathers self-selected out of participation in larger gay culture. She states that the gay fathers "rejected involving themselves in the gay community" (Lynch, 2004, p. 104). But she did note that because of both the rejection due to heterosexual homophobia and the distance from the gay community, the parenting experience "yields more isolation and alienation from both" the gay and straight worlds for gay fathers (Lynch, 2004, p. 105).

Research on fathers as full-time caregivers

Researchers have begun to examine issues of gay fathers and connections to images of gender, fatherhood, and ideals of masculinity. Schacher, Auerbach, and Silverstein (2005) conducted focus groups with Christian, Latino, Haitian, and gay fathers who resided in four different cities (Manhattan, a Philadelphia suburb, a Seattle suburb, and San Francisco). All gay fathers had become parents after developing identities as gay men (n=21). This project's key finding was that gay fathers are expanding "role norms in novel ways that may serve as alternative models for all families" (Schacher, et al., 2005, p. 31). The authors posed the following question for their study: *What can all families learn from gay fathers?* Their answers: Gay men experienced heterosexist gender-role strain. Internalized homophobia interfered with their ability to conceptualize the father role and integrate that within a gay identity. The authors took questions such as "Where's Mom?" as signs of this role strain. Gay men often coped with this strain by feeling obligated to act as super-parents. The authors also conclude that as fathers change their practices, "they need to generate a new masculinity ideology" (Schacher, et al., 2005, p. 44). The authors hold out hope that these new conceptualized male roles can help all men to expand conceptions about the role of the father, not just gay fathers.

Conclusion

This chapter began with a review of theoretical perspectives that have been used to study the family as a social institution. It was proposed that research into a topic as politically charged as gay fathering must understand views on the family as well as culture debates about family values. The development of the concept of familism has been proposed as one way to understand these differences. The review also traced how conceptions of the gay father have been framed within popular media and speculated that these new conceptualizations of the gay family have helped to promote the concept of parenting within the gay community. However, past research on gay fathers has shown that there are a variety of opinions on how family values are perceived with the gay community. Many research studies of gay fathers have noted the presence of an ongoing tension between the development of a man's gay identity and perceptions about fatherhood. These tensions, while not clearly understood, seem to be present in research from the late 1970s (Bozett, 1982; Miller, 1979a) and continue on as a theme with popular discussions of gay fathers (Strah, 2003) and within more recent studies of gay fathers (Brinamen, 2000; Marsiglio, et al., 2000; McPherson, 1993; Schacher, et al., 2005). This research project will also examine whether competing perspectives on gay family values, framed within this project as Queer Familism, may be contributing to these ongoing tensions.

This review of the research about gay fathering shows that social constructions of the gay father have changed and evolved sociologically and psychologically. However, it should also be stressed that new sociological and psychological perspectives do not always replace older ones, a situation that can lead to ongoing theoretical battles. This conflict can be seen in the review of past research on gay fathers. Findings and perspectives from each of the three proposed eras of past gay-father research (early pathological perspectives, liberation-era tolerance perspectives, and more modern intentional equality and civil-rights perspectives) co-occur in current research and policy debates about gay fathers. This competition would be consistent with what some scholars such as Kuhn have defined as "paradigmatic conflicts" (Kuhn, 1962). It is still quite typical that within scientific debates, different theoretical perspectives and paradigms co-occur and compete for dominance (Kuhn, 1962). Paradigmatic competition may be at the center of the tensions and conflicts that occur within current social debates about the rights of gay men to become fathers. This competition also continues to occur within analysis of the research on gay fathering. Older perspectives that framed gay fathers as psychologically impaired continue to influence public discourse and policy debates. Views of gay men as predatory, dangerous, and diseased continue to lie at the base of most opposition to gay parenting. And, perhaps consciously or not, many researchers continue to design research studies that are intended to counter these concerns. Decisions about who is qualified to become a foster or adoptive parent and how family courts determine custody and visitation, while important for all families, will continue to be critical topics that will affect the future development of gay-father families. Central to these debates will be the decision of which of the competing social constructions of gay fathering dominates the public discourse.

This review has also attempted to demonstrate that much of what is claimed to be known about gay fathers is based on research conducted with lesbian mothers. Yet few studies have actually compared these two groups to determine if this is a fair or accurate comparison.

Previous studies have also attempted to create stage theories about gay fathers (Bozett, 1981b; Brinamen, 2000; McPherson, 1993). Such work fails to account for the impact that historical and social changes may have on the development of gay-father families. To do that, it is crucial to understand life-course theories, life-span theories, social development perspectives, and the importance of cohort effects. As Parke (2004) notes, " individual and family developmental trajectories are embedded within both the social conditions and the values of the historical time" and the "role of parents, as is the case with any social role, is responsiveness to … fluctuations" (p. 369). Life-history scholars (Cohler & Galatzer-Levy, 2000) maintain that members of a "generation cohort share in common the experience of particular socio-historical changes which interplay both with individual life-circumstances and also such intra-cohort variation as geography, social position, and sexual orientation in determining meaning of these changes for particular lives" (Cohler, 2004, p. 71). What, then, does it mean for research on gay fathering when, due to the previous dearth of research on gay fathers, researchers and reviewers continue to lump together research findings about gay fathers that span more than thirty years? Surely there have been, and are, ongoing changes in the lived experiences and viewpoints of current gay fathers, compared to those of previous generations. It is hoped that this research project will contribute to findings about current gay fathers and that these findings can be compared to those from previous research on gay parenting.

Chapter Three: Methods

This qualitative research project employed methods developed within grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and phenomenological (Husserl, 1980; Schutz, 1967; Van Manen, 1990) frameworks. Interviews gathered self-report data on the experiences and meanings of fatherhood among a sample of gay-identified men. This chapter will present a brief overview of grounded theory and phenomenological methods and how they have been used in this project, followed by a description of the development of this project's research methods, recruitment strategies, and data-analysis methods.

Overview of Qualitative Methods

Grounded theory is a research methodology that is focused on identifying social relationships and research topics that are studied within their natural environments. This type of research does not include the testing of a research hypothesis; instead, it is focused on identifying the themes and developing theories that emerge from the phenomenon under investigation (Padgett, 2008, 2009; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory methodology was initially developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) in their sociological studies of illness conducted while they were on the faculty of the University of California, San Francisco. The methodology is related to sociological methods such as micro-sociology, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Lazarsfeld & Rosenberg, 1955). Glaser was a student of Paul Lazersfeld, and Strauss was a student of Herbert Blumer; the influence of both sociologists' work is evident in the development of grounded theory.

Glaser and Strauss would later end their working relationship over methodological disagreements about the best use of grounded theory. Strauss would go on to write, with Juliet Corbin, a classic text detailing the use of grounded theory techniques: *Basics of Qualitative Research* (1998). Strauss and Corbin maintain that their approach to grounded theory differs from Glaser's, in that their approach emphasizes allowing themes and theories to emerge from the data, as opposed to beginning with a more fixed theoretical orientation. Strauss and Corbin also maintain that the emergent properties of their approach help investigators avoid research bias that can be created by trying to force a theoretical perspective onto a research project.

More recent adherents to grounded theory such as Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) suggest that grounded theory methods are particularly useful in facilitating the development of hypothesis-generating research and contrast this with the value of the quantitative researcher's role in testing hypothesis-based research.

Grounded theory provides a useful basis for a research project with hidden populations or when little is known about a research topic because it has well-developed research methodologies that support the development of data collection, data analysis and theory development. Auerbach and Silverstein state that the grounded theory method uses two basic principles: 1) questioning rather than measuring, and 2) generating hypotheses using theoretical coding methods (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 7). Theoretical coding is the process of constructing an analytic framework among the themes and concepts that emerge from data collected from participants (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 8). Charmaz describes theoretical

coding as a higher-order process in which a researcher specifies possible relationships that may exist between codes and categories (Charmaz, 2006, p. 63). Theoretical coding is that part of the analysis which moves from codes that describe what is on the page toward a process that classifies shared themes and theoretical constructs. The process of theoretical coding is described in depth in Chapter Five of this paper and lays the framework used in the Discussion and Implications section of the report.

This project has also used concepts taken from phenomenological research. Phenomenological perspectives focus on concepts developed by Husserl (1980) and Schutz (1967), which have been expanded upon in recent years through the work of Van Manen (1990). Phenomenology in this project refers to the study of human experience within its natural environment in an effort to understand the lived experience of the research participants. Van Manen asserts that "phenomenology asks, what is this or that kind of experience like?" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9). "It differs from almost every other science in that it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world … and offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9). The phenomenological approach is interested in identifying and describing the meanings that participants ascribe to their lived experience. However, Van Manen also cautions researchers to be careful about the interpretation of findings. He notes that the challenge in this approach is that, for many people, meaning is something that often goes unexamined within their daily lives. For instance, many people may not reflect upon or realize how cultural conditioning and social norms affect the values and meanings they ascribe to life experiences. Padgett suggests that phenomenological methodology is one of the approaches most likely to "reject the use of preexisting concepts in favor of naïve immersion" (Padgett, 2008, p. 141), which Padgett defines as maintaining a focus on lived experience without using predefined codebooks or predetermined theories. Padgett recommends that a qualitative researcher should begin with the goal of building "thick description" and then look to uncover the tacit meanings of cultural beliefs and practices embedded within those descriptions (Padgett, 2008, p. 209). *Thick description*, a term popularized by Geertz (1973) refers to the importance within ethnography and qualitative research of describing what is observed as well as investigating the meaning of what has been observed. Geertz (1973) famously described this as the difference between observing an eye twitch and a wink. A wink clearly conveys different meanings and messages than an involuntary eye twitch. A qualitative research must follow a path that will promote understanding of the differences in meanings ascribed to social acts. The relationship between both grounded theory's theoretical coding and phenomenology's search for meaning, can then be seen as having similar affinities; the goal within both methodologies is to conduct systematic investigations that will identify meanings and frameworks that participants ascribe to a naturally occurring experience.

Padgett (2008) has suggested, that we are in the midst of a "qualitative revolution" (p. xvii). This revolution has been brought about by several contributing factors, including the increased availability of software that supports qualitative data analysis and a desire for practice-based professions such as nursing, education, public health, and social work to identify and explicate the influence of social norms and culture (Padgett, 2008; Sandelowski, 2004). These trends can also be seen in the rise of qualitative doctoral dissertations in European schools of social work (Carey, 2009). Carey (2009) suggests that "qualitative research within a social work dissertation … attempts to explore in great detail themes such as the attitudes, behaviors and experiences of specific social groups" (p. 36). Carey (2009) also stresses that "meaning and context are usually vital elements embedded within qualitative social work research" (p. 39).

Padgett suggests that common reasons for the selection of qualitative methods to investigate a topic include: exploring new topics in areas that need more information, wanting to gain "insider perspectives" by looking at things from within the subject's frame of reference, pursuing a topic that requires sensitivity and emotional depth, and a desire to capture and understand lived experience (Padgett, 2008, p. 22). Patton discusses the advantages of using qualitative research methods to investigate taboo topics, to gain access to hard-to-find study populations, and to facilitate study of issues in-depth and detail (Patton, 2002, p. 14).

An additional value of qualitative research is that these methods allow research participants to present their ideas, feelings, and needs in a more detailed manner and in ways that allow the voices and perspectives of the research participants to be incorporated into the data analysis and report write-ups. Auerbach & Silverstein (2003) note that qualitative research facilitates the emergence of new and unanticipated findings, a process also known as *Emergent Design* (Patton, 2002). Qualitative methods are also useful in areas in which little is known about a topic.

Challenges associated with qualitative methods include limits on generalizability and most researchers' need to limit sample size due to the volume of materials produced in interviews and through participant observations. Another challenge in qualitative research is that, unlike quantitative studies, in which replicability is key, in qualitative research it is very likely that two researchers studying a topic, even if using the same data, might come to very different conclusions. This has resulted in debates that question whether this reflects a lack of rigor or validity within qualitative methods (see Moss et al., 2009; Phillips, 1987) or a strength of the method. Qualitative methods are intended to elucidate new ideas and findings, to investigate unknown areas, and to develop hypotheses. In this process, both the experience of, and the analytic framework used by, the researcher will affect interpretation of research findings. This is often referred to within the field of qualitative research as the researcher serving as the key instrument in the research process (Patton, 2002). Given these challenges, how can a reader evaluate the rigor and validity of a qualitative study?

Validity

The topic of validity has sparked intense debate within the field of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moss, et al., 2009; Phillips, 1987; Sandelowski, 2004; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). This debate highlights differences in epistemological perspectives within the qualitative research field. Authors such as Sandelowski (2004) and Phillips (1987) have characterized these differences as occurring across a continuum with two extreme perspectives on the use of validity within qualitative research. At one end lie those scholars who do not believe that validity is a useful concept for incorporation within qualitative research, asserting that it violates philosophical and theoretical constructs of the qualitative method (Kvale, 2002; Lather, 1991; Moss, et al., 2009). Or as Kvale argues "the validity of the validity question is questioned" (Kvale, 2002, p. 299). Those at the other end of the continuum believe that a focus on validity is essential if qualitative methods are to develop more standardized and replicable research methods (Phillips, 2006 ; Sandelowski, 2004).

Phillips suggests steps that can be taken to resolve differences across the continuum. He encourages researchers to reference John Dewey's pragmatic philosophical emphasis on developing *arguments based in evidence* (Dewey, 1920/1957); Dewey referred to these as

warrants. Toulmin views warrants as links that tie the premises to the conclusion of an argument (Toulmin, 2003). Warrants are of vital concern in evaluating the accuracy of an argument. Phillips maintains that validity, particularly as it is used in practice-based research and qualitative research, is best judged by how, or if, warrants lend support to the conclusions of an argument that a researcher constructs. Phillip defines this as the need to develop "competent cases" that are grounded within the collected data. He comments:

> I think it needs to be stressed that researchers in all fields … are occupied with building competent *cases,* or as Dewey put it, *warrants.* Cases or warrants are chains of argument that competently tie together evidence of different types, and other considerations, in order to support (or reject) some conclusion or hypothesis. Whether the evidence used, or the manner in which it was collected, should be accepted cannot be decided on a priori grounds; rather, it is the way the evidence is defended and used to make a case in the chain of argument that is decisive. (Moss, et al., 2009, p. 512)

Others have encouraged qualitative researchers to solve the validity debates by developing quality indicators that are specifically intended to assess the validity of qualitative research projects. Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001) recommend the development of the concepts of credibility, authenticity, criticality, and integrity as useful indicators to assess validity within qualitative research. *Credibility:* Do the results of the research reflect the experience of participants? Does the explanation fit the descriptive data? *Authenticity:* Has the inquirer exhibited a high awareness of subtle differences in the voices of others? In other words, has the complexity of different voices and different perspectives been included in the analysis? *Criticality:* Has the research looked for alternative hypotheses, explored negative instances, and examined biases? Have ambiguities been recognized and explored? *Integrity:* Are the interpretations grounded within the data (Whittemore, et al., 2001, p. 531)? Secondary quality criteria include congruence, sensitivity, creativity, and thoroughness (Whittemore, et al., 2001, p. 532).

Within this project, both data-as-construction and data-as-findings perspectives have been used. Social construction, or data-as-construction, perspectives were incorporated into the literature review where a historical typology of previous gay-father research was proposed (early pathological perspectives, liberation-era tolerance perspectives, and more modern intentional equality and civil-rights perspectives) and their ongoing impact within current social policy debates was discussed. Data analysis methods that fall towards the "data-as-findings" side of the qualitative continuum were incorporated into development of case studies and thematic analysis presented in Chapters, Four, Five and Six. The quality of the arguments constructed and their underlying warrants is left to the reader's discernment.

Development of Study Methods

This research project described the self-identified experiences and meanings that gay fathers associate with parenthood and family formation. All participants were gay men who had formed their families after they had integrated a gay or queer identity. The researcher defined these

households as *intentionally formed gay-father families.* The research aim was to explore the social phenomenon of gay men choosing to become fathers. Initial questions included:

1. To explore the lived experience of gay men who are raising children.
2. To investigate how gay fathers create and conceptualize their parenting roles.
3. To explore gay men's motivations to parent.
4. To gain information about the social supports of gay fathers.
5. To examine how gay fathers accept and/or modify the social concepts of kinship.
6. To investigate how gay fathers assimilate and resist social norms related to gender, parenting, and the ideals associated with the American nuclear family.
7. To explore how parenting changes gay fathers' sense of connection to the gay male community.

These questions were refined into the following aims:

- To explore the lived experience of gay men raising children;
- To explore how gay fathers adapt concepts of kinship;
- To describe the role of social support in the lives of gay fathers;
- To present emergent and unanticipated topics.

An initial goal of the research project was to explore how gay fathers assimilate and resist social norms related to gender, parenting, and the ideals associated with the American nuclear family. However, due to page limits and time constraints, material on this research topic has not been included in this study. Throughout the project, the goal was to explore how gay men create a sense of family, how they perceive the challenges and rewards of parenting, and the methods they have used to create their families, as well as to examine how the fathering experience influences their identities as gay men. Data was also collected on perceptions of their social-support networks and how the fathering experience changes participants' sense of connection to the gay community. Experiences of gay fathers' interactions with social workers and within the child welfare system was a key unanticipated theme that emerged from the interviews. Details on these topics are presented in the findings chapter, and implications are discussed in the final chapter.

Pilot data

As part of the preliminary work in the development of this project, unstructured, open-ended interviews were conducted with two gay fathers. This work began as part of the required coursework in Professor Ingrid Seyer-Ochi's two-semester Research Apprenticeship course in the UC Berkeley Department of Education during the 2006–2007 academic year. These open-ended discussions with gay fathers were used to develop the semi-structured interview guide for this dissertation research. Based on these two open-ended interviews, a semi-structured interview guide was developed for use in this dissertation project. One subsequent interview was

completed as part of the class coursework. This interview was taped and has been included in the sample studied in this project (case description #1). Some modifications were made to the interview guide, based on this pilot interview. The researcher initially intended to begin the interviews by asking fathers about their coming-out experiences and identity development as gay men. Discussing coming-out experiences has been described as a process that creates a sense of connection among gay and lesbian people because it is a widely shared experience (Meezan & Martin, 2003). These questions were removed from the interview guide, as the data collected did not contribute to the analysis of research aims. In addition, participants talked at length about their coming-out process, leaving little time to discuss parenting questions within a one- to two-hour interview period. The questionnaire was reorganized, and the interviews began by asking participants to each create a genogram (McGoldrick, Gerson, & Petry, 2008). The genogram provided a method to quickly gather rich data about participants' families of origin and also gave the researcher in-depth information about whom the fathers considered to be part of their families of choice and about the relationships that gay fathers were creating with their children's biological kin. This process helped lead the discussions into more intimate conversations about family and the meaning of family. For instance, it was through the development of genograms that the researcher discovered that most fathers had created formal or informal open-adoption arrangements with their children's biological kin.

Sampling and Participant Recruitment

Inclusion in the study required that participants be gay-identified men and that this identity development preceded actions they had taken to become fathers. Participants were also required to have primary responsibility for raising a child, defined as having at least 50% custody of child(ren). All fathers interviewed had children living full-time (100% custody) in their homes. Inclusion criteria allowed a variety of family formations, including: men who had fathered children through surrogacy; men who had adopted children; men who were fostering children with the intention of adoption; men who were co-parenting in nontraditional relationships with women, if they had custody of the children; and gay men involved in kinship care.

Exclusion criteria disallowed: men who did not have at least 50% custody of their children; men who fathered children in heterosexual relationships in the past; and men who identified as heterosexual.

Gaining access

Most recruitment challenges were tied to time constraints. The researcher discovered very quickly that fathers who are raising children and working are very busy. Finding time for the interviews took a great deal of coordination. Most participants were contacted by telephone, and follow-up planning took place through email. The researcher's initial goal had been to conduct a more ethnographic project, but the fathers were reluctant to commit to granting that much time with their families. Child care was offered during interviews in the form of a babysitter accompanying the researcher; however, all fathers declined this offer.

Data Collection

The main data-collection tool used in this study consisted of individual interviews based on a semi-structured interview guide. Padgett (2008) has suggested that training in foundational social-work skills provides excellent interview experience for the collection of self-report information from research participants. She argues that training in skills such as paraphrasing and nonjudgmental engagement is directly transferable from social-work training to work as a qualitative interviewer (Padgett, 2008).

Interviews followed a semi-structured interview format (see attachment B). The questions were designed to begin with introductory topics related to facts about gay fathers' lives and then move the discussion toward more sensitive topics. Respondents were offered a printed copy of the interview guide so they could read as well as hear the research questions. Interviews began with the development of a family genogram designed to facilitate conversations about how fathers were incorporating families of choice into their lives and into their broader social networks. After genograms were completed, fathers were asked how and when they had begun to actively pursue becoming a parent. They were encouraged to recall any key incidents that might have sparked their decision to actively pursue parenting, which was followed up with additional questions about what the process of planning for parenting had been like for them. Information was elicited about their experiences with adoption agencies and parenting classes and their experiences within the social work/child welfare system. The researcher probed for details about previous attempts to become parents. He also asked from whom they had received emotional support during the time when they were exploring parenting options.

From there, questions focused on the transition to parenting, including a discussion about how much time had elapsed between the point at which the fathers learned they would become parents and the time when the child(ren) entered the home. Fathers were also asked to recall the first day their child(ren) came into their home, including what they felt, what they remembered about that day, and who had been present. The researcher then asked what a typical workday was like in their home and what a typical weekend was like. Additional questions asked fathers how they introduced their family to new people. The researcher probed for information about how fathers presented themselves at their children's schools, at church, with neighbors, and with their children's friends and their children's friends' parents.

Questions then focused on how parenting had affected the couple's relationship, including what they saw as the biggest challenges they had faced as parents and what they saw as the greatest rewards to date of being a parent. Fathers were asked how they thought their children saw their families and whether the children asked any questions about being part of a family that they perceived as different from other families. Fathers were asked to explain how their children had phrased these questions and how the fathers had replied. Follow-up probes including gathering more information about how the children introduced their fathers to their peers. Fathers were also asked to share stories about any perceived prejudice they felt they had experienced as gay fathers. Here, probes included looking for details about fathers being corrected in public on their caretaking abilities and whether fathers had been asked in public about the whereabouts of the child's mother. Fathers were also asked about how parenting had affected their sense of connection to the LGBTQ community. The interviews ended with two questions: 1) Is there anything you now know about this experience that you wish you had known at the beginning of

the process? 2) What advice would you give to other gay men who are thinking about becoming parents?

Illustrative vs. leading questions

Some questions utilized a process that Michael Quinn Patton describes as "using illustrative examples in questioning" (Patton, 2002, p. 367). He advises a researcher to be cautious when using illustrative examples within questions to avoid leading the interviewee, but he also suggests that illustrative examples can be of value in helping to put respondents at ease, build rapport with a subject, and signal to the interviewee that the researcher is open to hearing negative or politically unpopular viewpoints (Patton, 2002). At the same time, a researcher should not phrase questions in such a way as to limit or lead the interviewee's response. Illustrative probes were used when asking fathers about their experiences in public places. Illustrative examples based on experiences described within pilot interviews were used and included a range of positive and negative examples. Prior to sharing these illustrative examples, some fathers said they had never had a negative public interaction, but when the researcher probed for more details with an illustrative example, more detailed examples were shared, including negative ones. For example, the researcher asked one couple if they had ever had experiences of their parenting style being corrected in public. At first the fathers said no, but after the researcher gave a range of experiences that other fathers had shared, the dads recalled a situation in which a woman had confronted them while they were on a walk with their two young children and their new puppy. The dads had brought a baggie along to clean up after the pet. The arrangement they had made with the children was that the children would have to accept some caregiving responsibilities if they got a dog. The fathers were confronted while they were showing the children how to clean up after their new dog. A stranger walked past, wearing earphones but yelling at the family. She observed that they had adopted two Latino children, and she shamed the fathers for adopting ethnic children to clean up their dog's mess. This was clearly a disturbing experience for the fathers, one which the fathers would not have shared without the use of the illustrative technique.

Locations of interviews

Three interviews took place in participants' homes: in the East Bay and South Bay areas of Northern California. Some children were present in the homes at the time of the interviews and, in once instance, were in the room at certain times during the interview. During home-based interviews, two of these fathers had infants whom they held during the interviews. One of these families had two teenage sons in addition to an infant. The teens were in another room playing video games during the interview. The third couple had two children, ages 6 and 8, present during the interview. The children played on the floor during much of the interview and, at times, also sat on one of their fathers' laps and answered several questions posed to them by their fathers that were based on the researcher's questions. These fathers eventually had their children go outside to play when sensitive topics about the children's birth mother were discussed. But first, they asked the children to share memories of what they remembered about their first meeting with their adoptive fathers. These fathers also encouraged the children to show the researcher a memory book they kept for their birth mother, which included birthday cards received from her and pictures and letters they had sent to her. The researcher sensed that these

fathers wanted advice and validation about how they were coping with the relationship with the children's birth mother. The children were biological siblings who had been adopted at the same time from their biological mother.

Interviews with three fathers took place in private offices at fathers' places of employment. These fathers stated that this was the only time they had available for the interviews. The researcher scheduled the use of a private classroom at the School of Social Welfare to interview one couple, who both worked near the Berkeley campus. One participant was interviewed in the researcher's home; this was the first interview of this study, and the researcher had hoped that opening his house to the participant would result in an invitation to come to the participant's home. The researcher had several e-mails and phone calls from this participant asking for parenting advice and referrals for his son, but there was no offer to visit his home. Participants were allowed to choose individual interviews or couple interviews. Three couples and five individuals were interviewed for this project. Seven of the eight families included in the study are two-father families. One is a single parent. Interviews lasted between one hour and two-and-a-half hours. Participants signed CPHS-approved consent forms and received study interview descriptions. Participants were also offered an opportunity to read their transcripts prior to data analysis. All declined this offer. In addition to having participants sign consent forms, the researcher verbally explained what was included in the consent form and also verbally reinforced the concept that they could skip or pass on any questions they did not want to respond to. No participant skipped answering any of the research questions.

Data management

All interviews were taped with a digital recorder; the tapes were maintained on a peripheral hard drive that is stored in a secure location. Interviews were transcribed for coding and analysis by a paid transcriptionist. Each transcript consisted of between 45 and 70 double-spaced pages in 12-point type. Other data maintained as part of this study included consent forms, interview guides, genograms, demographic face sheets on each household, digital tapes of interviews, transcripts of interviews, transcripts with coding, code lists and analytic memos. Considerable time was required to manage the volume of data created in this project. Individual participant files were created, which housed consent forms, genograms, transcripts, contact information, and a face sheet with demographic information on each household. Identifying details about individual participants (names, locations, work sites, etc.) will be removed from all retained transcripts.

Data Analysis

The primary research aim of this project was to learn more about the lived experience of gay men who are raising children. The concept of "lived experience" describes a theoretical approach in qualitative research based on a phenomenological approach to the study of individuals (Van Manen, 1990). To move toward this aim, the project also refined and relied on a set of specific research aims. These aims were reviewed and reorganized in several iterations during the research project. They are presented here again in their final refinement:

■ To explore the lived experience of gay men raising children;

- To explore how gay fathers adapt concepts of kinship;
- To describe the role of social support in the lives of gay fathers;
- To present emergent topics originating from participant interviews.

To answer these research aims, methods from grounded theory methodology and the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), Strauss and Corbin (1998), and Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) were used. Additional analytic methods were followed as they have been described in Michael Quinn Patton's text *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (2002), Debra Padgett's updated *Qualitative Methods in Social Work Research* (2008), and Kathy Charmaz's text *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2006). Charmaz's work was particularly useful in defining methods for the actual coding of interview data. This researcher also benefitted from participating in a half-day course on data coding, taken from Charmaz at the 2007 Society for Social Work Research conference. An early step in the analysis process is the coding of data.

Coding

Charmaz (2006) provided guidance on steps in the data coding process, including the use of open coding of data, focused coding, in-vivo coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding. Charmaz states that grounded theory coding has two phases: *initial coding*, an introductory phase involving the open coding of each word, line, or segment of data in a transcript, and *focused coding*, a subsequent process in which the initial codes are organized into code lists and more conceptual codes. These more refined codes are then used to code subsequent interviews, and in iterative processes, these codes are clarified and refined with use. Initial coding is the process "that sticks closely to the data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). Charmaz encourages researchers to focus on development of action-based words (gerunds), particularly during initial coding phases. Speed and spontaneity are the core goals of initial coding. Charmaz also explores Glaser's (1992) initial studies and uses examples from his work to illustrate how the choice of gerunds changes perspectives: she provides the examples of *describing* versus *description*, *stating* versus *statement*, and *leading* versus *leader*. She cautions that the reliance on nouns will turn actions into topics. Topics minimize the incorporation of insider perspectives; or, in other words, they hinder the incorporation of the meanings that participants ascribe to their own experiences. The use of word-by-word coding, line-by-line coding, and comparative coding between similar or related comments from different participants are used to further refine initial codes. One specific type of initial codes are *in-vivo codes*; these are codes which emphasize phrases and names for concepts that are taken directly from research participants' own language and that then become the labels used for research codes. Glaser recently reinforced the importance of line-by-line coding as a key element in grounded theory research. He contrasts open-coding approaches with other qualitative research methods that use preassembled codes based on sociological or psychological theories and states that it is the process of allowing codes to emerge from the data that is an essential component of grounded theory and the process "that ensures that qualitative data can move beyond impressionism" (Glaser & Holton, 2004, para. 50).

In focused coding, the initial codes are then worked into more conceptually based codes. These are then used to work through the remainder of the data in a more analytic search for topics of interest. The process involves the ongoing comparison of data.

After codes are constructed, analysis moves to a process of *axial coding*. Axial coding refers to process in which codes are related to one another and referenced against a pre-existing social or psychological theory. Here the researcher creates a schematic of identified codes and attempts to tie them to pre-established theories. Axial codes have typically been based on preexisting theoretical perspectives (e.g., using a stage-based model of identity development to code the data.). In the process of axial coding, research concepts are linked together; some codes become major theoretical headings, and others become subheadings. In some versions of grounded theory, axial codes are used to compare emergent codes identified in the research data against pre-existing theoretical codes and theories. Charmaz (2006) has criticized axial coding for placing a kind of theoretical straightjacket on research data. Instead of a reliance on axial coding, Charmaz advocates the use of *theoretical coding*. This is a process of defining how codes relate to one another. Charmaz builds on the work of Glaser (1992) to argue for replacing axial coding with theoretical coding and in this way encourages researchers to let the groupings and relationships between identified themes emerge from the data and not from overlaying an existing theory on top of the data. Charmaz argues that theoretical coding more naturally supports the development of a research narrative emerging from the collected data. Regardless of the selected process used, both Charmaz and Glaser argue that "theoretical codes must earn their way into a grounded theory" research project (Charmaz, 2006, p. 64). Charmaz encourages researchers to use theoretical codes to help "clarify and sharpen analysis" but to avoid imposing a forced framework on the research data (Charmaz, 2006, p. 66). Charmaz also encourages the use of memo writing as a process of data analysis, with the goal of defining and articulating concepts in greater detail.

Theoretical coding was used extensively throughout this project. However, some instances of axial coding are also included, for instance the influence of Weston (1991) and her concepts of familism, kinship, and kin of choice reflect preexisting concepts that were included into the theoretical framework for this study. However, Weston's concepts earned their way into this project by emerging from the data. Other theories about gay fathers were referenced in this project because they do not conform to the research findings. Previous reports of stage-based theories of gay-father identity development were compared to data collected here and significant differences were found between these previous theories and analysis of the data collected for this study. This finding will be discussed in subsequent sections of the dissertation.

Moving from coding to theoretical analysis

The work of Carl Auerbach and Louise Silverstein and their book *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis* (2003) were used to move from coding of data to higher levels of data analysis, particularly the process of moving from coding data to thematic analysis. Auerbach and Silverstein provide a step-by-step guide through the data-analysis process based on a grounded-theory approach to qualitative data analysis. Their book uses examples taken from their study of different types of American fathers (conservative Christian, Haitian, Latino, and gay fathers). They state that these methods are applicable for use with qualitative interview data and other types of data-collection methods (e.g., participant observations, individual interviews, content analysis). Auerbach and Silverstein lay out a five-step model for analysis of qualitative data:

1. Search for **Relevant Text** related to a research aim. Auerbach and Silverstein recommend reading through the text and sorting interviews to correspond with research aims. This process makes the large volume of text produced in a qualitative study more manageable.

2. Identify **Repeating Ideas.** The researcher should then code the relevant text, keeping a focus on repeating ideas and asking what connections and/or repeating ideas can be seen across interview subjects.

3. Summarize **Shared Themes**. Repeating ideas are then summarized further into shared themes. Auerbach and Silverstein define themes as theoretical constructs or abstract groupings that help define the repeating ideas. "A theme is an implicit topic that organizes a group(ing) of repeated ideas" (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 38).

4. Construct a **Theoretical Framework**. Shared themes are then organized into a theoretical framework. It can be helpful to present the theoretical framework in graphs and charts to help readers follow the analysis.

5. Write a **Final Narrative**. Finally, repeating ideas, themes, and the theoretical framework are organized into a written narrative.

This researcher found Auerbach and Silverstein's step-by-step model of data analysis helpful in managing the amount of data produced in project transcripts. Using processes described by Auerbach and Silverstein, the researcher searched transcripts to identify relevant text related to each research aim and to conduct analysis through line by line and hand coding of data and in Word documents. The author chose to engage in this process without the aid of qualitative data software, while there are many versions of software being developed for qualitative data analysis, the core functions can be managed within word-processing software (La Pelle, 2004), and, as Patton notes: "Computer analysis is not necessary and can interfere with the analytic process" (Patton, 2002, p. 446). The step-by-step process while time consuming contributed to a clear understanding of data coding and analysis methods used in this project. The process of moving from searches for relevant text to identification of repeating ideas to the sorting and organizing of these ideas into domains (referred to hereafter as *shared themes*) and organizing shared themes into a theoretical framework is presented in more detail and depth in Chapter Five.

Situating the Researcher

Qualitative researchers are encouraged to reflect on how their personal perspectives may have influenced data analysis process. *Reflexivity* is the term that has been developed to describe the process of developing self-awareness to understand the personal perspectives that a researcher brings to the collection and analysis of his/her research data. Patton notes:

> The perspective that the researcher brings to a qualitative inquiry is part of the context for the findings. A human being is the instrument of qualitative methods. A real, live person makes observations, takes field notes, asks interview questions and interprets responses (Patton, 2002, p. 64).

Patton encourages a researcher to undertake a self-examination of "what I know and how I know it" as the basis of reflexivity. Reflexivity requires a qualitative researcher to be explicit about how his/her own "cultural, political, social, linguistic and ideological origins" affect the analysis of his/her work (Patton, 2002, p. 65). To that end, the purpose of this research project was clearly articulated to all research participants, and all participants were informed that the researcher was a doctoral student in the UC Berkeley School of Social Welfare, a gay man, and the father of three children.

The researcher provided clear answers to participants' questions about the goals of the study. Typical questions included: *Who are you? Why do you want to study gay fathers? Who will see the findings? Do you want to talk with my children?* This researcher explained his self-identification as a gay man and also as a father. The goals of the research process were outlined. The researcher identified himself as a social worker working for an LGBTQ community center who was interested in learning how parenting changed the fathers' sense of connection to the gay community. Several fathers had questions about the use of qualitative methods: *Why not a survey?* Why not a more formalized research design? Here the goal of formative research was explained to participants, stressing the concept that formative and exploratory research facilitates the identification of new and unforeseen topics that might have been overlooked in other research studies.

Protection of Human Subjects

An application to UC Berkeley's Committee for Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS) was submitted in preparation for this study. Informed consent and recruitment materials used in this study were prepared as part of the CPHS application (see attachment E). Recruitment materials included an 8.5" x 11" flyer promoting the study and a business-card-sized notice with the name, number, and email address of the researcher. Permission to proceed was granted on June 26, 2008. The study was deemed to be exempt from full committee and subcommittee reviews.

Consent

All participants signed consent forms that described risks and benefits associated with participation in this project. Each participant gave explicit permission to have the interviews recorded and transcribed. The consent procedures followed guidelines developed by the UC Berkeley Office for the Protection of Human Subjects. This included providing a copy of the consent guidelines to each participant, asking participants to sign copies for the researchers records, and discussing and reviewing items included in the consent forms prior to the beginning of each interview, including risks and benefits. Participants were also verbally reassured that they had the right to refrain from discussing any topics they did not wish to discuss. The researcher modeled this behavior for them by saying, "You can just tell me 'let's move on' and we will skip to the next question." No participants skipped questions during the interviews.

Risks

Social work ethics require protection of children and the mandatory reporting of child endangerment or neglect. Participants were informed of this requirement in the consent form. A specific disclaimer was placed after the section on confidentiality, stating: "One exception to this confidentiality agreement is that I am required to report to Child Protective Services any information I receive about child neglect or endangerment." There was a further concern that some questions might bring up difficult feelings of family rejection or other unpleasant memories. This was also dealt with by highlighting this possibility in the risks and benefits section of the consent form.

Benefits

Participants received $35 gift cards as incentives for participation in this study. Reciprocity also included providing information and referrals for other resources, identified during the interviews as helpful, that might be of assistance to fathers. For instance, in one household the fathers were having a difficult time discussing their sexual orientation with their two teenage foster sons. At the conclusion of the interview, they asked the researcher for suggestions on how to discuss this topic with their children. The researcher suggested that the fathers might want to have their sons participate in an event organized by COLAGE, an organization that has been formed by children with gay and lesbian parents. The fathers asked for additional information, which was supplied in email messages sent to the fathers the week after the interview was completed.

Chapter Four: Findings I - Case Studies and
Descriptive Findings

Chapter Four presents descriptive information about the families, beginning with a case study of each family. A genogram is included as part of each case description. A descriptive table summarizes demographic information on the families. The chapter also presents summaries of themes that contribute to a more detailed understanding of the methods used for family formation and the rewards and challenges of parenting experienced by the fathers.

This chapter is then followed in the next chapter with an in-depth thematic analysis of broader topics that also includes an example of the data analysis methods used to organize coded data into repeating ideas and then shared themes.

Description of the Participants

Inclusion criteria for participation in this study included gay-father families that had children residing in their homes at the times of interviews. The men had formed planned families after development of an LGBTQ identity, and their children were not a result of a father's previous heterosexual marriage or relationship.

The study sample consisted of gay fathers residing in 8 households; 7 of 8 households represented fathers in couples, and one household consisted of a single father. In total, the project gathered information on 15 fathers and their 13 children. Twelve men participated in the interviews. All participants lived in the greater Northern California Bay Area. In order to support privacy of participants, actual cities of residence have not been identified. However, it should be noted that none of the participants in this project lived within San Francisco city limits. Several of the participants indicated that they had previously lived in the city of San Francisco, but all had moved to areas with more affordable housing alternatives. These economic issues likely reflect challenges related to raising children in the Bay Area and may reflect differences in the sample if compared to a sample of gay fathers who reside within the city of San Francisco.

Interview Formats:

> 4 cases: Both partners were present and participated in the interviews.
> 3 cases: One partner in the couple participated in the interview.
> 1 case: One single father was interviewed alone.

Family characteristics:

- One family had a child through a surrogacy arrangement.
- One father had adopted a nephew through kinship foster care and then adoption; this was the single (unpartnered) father.
- Six families were formed through adoption. Four had adopted their children through the public adoption system and two through private adoption agencies. No participants had completed international adoptions.

Names used throughout are pseudonyms. For clarity, the names of people discussed in transcripts have been replaced with relationship status. For instance, a quote that referred to "David's school" has been changed to read "my son's school."

Table 1 Summary of Participant Demographics

Code #	Father	Fathers' Ages	Fathers' Ethnicity	Education Level	Household Income (thousands)	Children in Household	Children's Ages	Children's Ethnicity	Special Needs Child	Route to Parenthood
1	R1* R2*	32 34	C C	C C	DS	S	9m	C**	Drug Exposed, Possible HIV+ @ Birth	Private Adoption
2	R1*	47	P	SC	DS	S	10	P/ L	ADHD, Bipolar	Kinship Adoption
3	R1* R2*	37 39	C C	SC SC	DS	S S S	16 14 4m	L L A-A/M	S1: Drug Exposed, Severe Delays S2: Drug Exposed Moderate Delays S3: Drug Exposed	Public Foster/ Adoption
4	R1* D	40 44	C A-A	GS GS	125+	S S	6 2	A-A A-A/C	S1: None known S2: Drug Exposed, Moderate Physical Disabilities	Public Foster/ Adoption
5	R1* D	40 41	C C	GS GS	125+	D	8	C/A	None known	Surrogacy
6	R1* D	55 51	C C	GS GS	125+	D S	5 6	L/M	D: None known S: ADHD	Private Adoptions
7	R1* R2*	41 38	C C	GS GS	125+	S	4	C/A-A/L	Drug Exposed: Sensory Disorder Mild Physical Disabilities	Public Foster/ Adoption
8	R1* R2*	44 43	C L	GS C	125+	D S	9 7	L L	None Known None Known	Public Foster/ Adoption

*	Interview Participant	S	Son
A-A	African-American	D	Daughter
C	Caucasian	GS	Graduate School
L	Latino	C	College
P	Pacific Islander	SC	Some College
A	Asian	DS	Declined to State
M	Mixed	**	Presumed

Brief Family Descriptions

Family 1: *"You grow up and you have kids … it never occurred to me that I couldn't be a parent and be gay."*
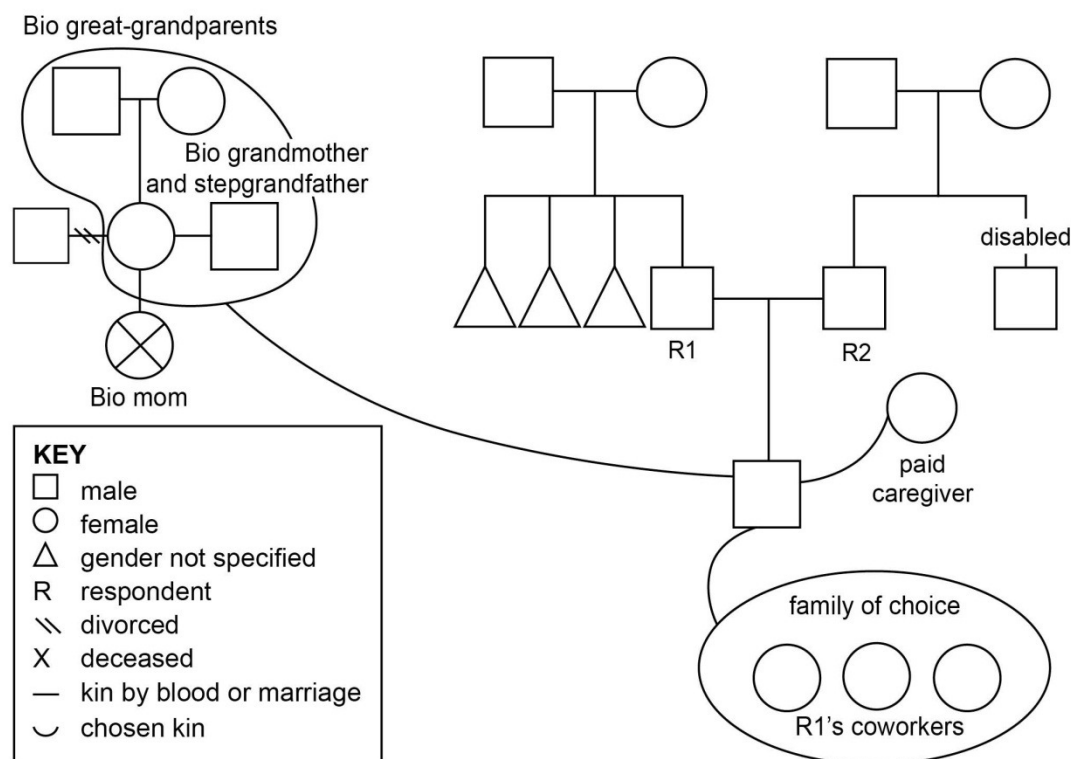
From my field notes: I met Rodney and his partner, Sam, at their home in Oakland. They live on a private road in a working-class section of town. The house is one of about six houses on an unpaved court that is just off of a busy street. I walk past their Volvo station wagon to get to the front door and notice the yellow "baby on board" warning sign in the back window of the car. The fathers greet me at the door and welcome me into their Arts and Crafts era home. It has a warm, cozy atmosphere with lots of baby gear spread out in both the living room and dining room. Rodney is holding their five-month-old son, Alexander. The baby greets me with a happy smile. I am immediately struck by how happy and attached Alexander seems to be to his dads. Rodney is holding him, and Alexander is constantly scanning his dad's face, making lots of eye contact and sending out big smiles to his dad when their eyes meet. Alexander is five months old and looks big for his age. I can imagine my own Jewish grandmother's nod of approval over all of the ripples of baby fat on Alexander's arms and legs.

The couple invite me to sit down at the dining room table to start our interview. Before I can explain the consent process, both of the dads have lots of questions for me: *Why am I doing this study? What will happen with the information?* I get the feeling that they are both worried that I might be looking to criticize gay fathers. There seems to be a lot of hesitancy about the process. This is slightly but not completely overcome when I again tell them about my own experiences as a gay father and tell them about my daughter and my new granddaughter.

The couple begin to tell me the story of their lives. Rodney is from a Midwestern family, and his partner was born in England. Their families are both supportive of the couple, and both parents attended their wedding in 2001. Both sets of parents walked their sons down the aisle. But their parents are getting older, and the sons now have to visit them to maintain contact.

The dads brought Alexander home to live with them when he was one day old. This was their third attempt at adoption, and the couple had some bad experiences with a previous birth mother who scammed them for money over the Internet. But they didn't give up and continued their search for an open adoption. The couple met Alexander's birth mother while she was pregnant, and she selected them to be the adoptive parents of her child. The birth mother had a history of addiction issues and homelessness. She died within six months of giving birth. The couple have maintained a connection with the birth mother's parents. Their son's biological grandparents, both in their 80s, are from Eastern Europe. The dads are proud of their son's European heritage and share stories about the trips they take to Central California to visit these grandparents. They feel that they are creating one unified but blended family.
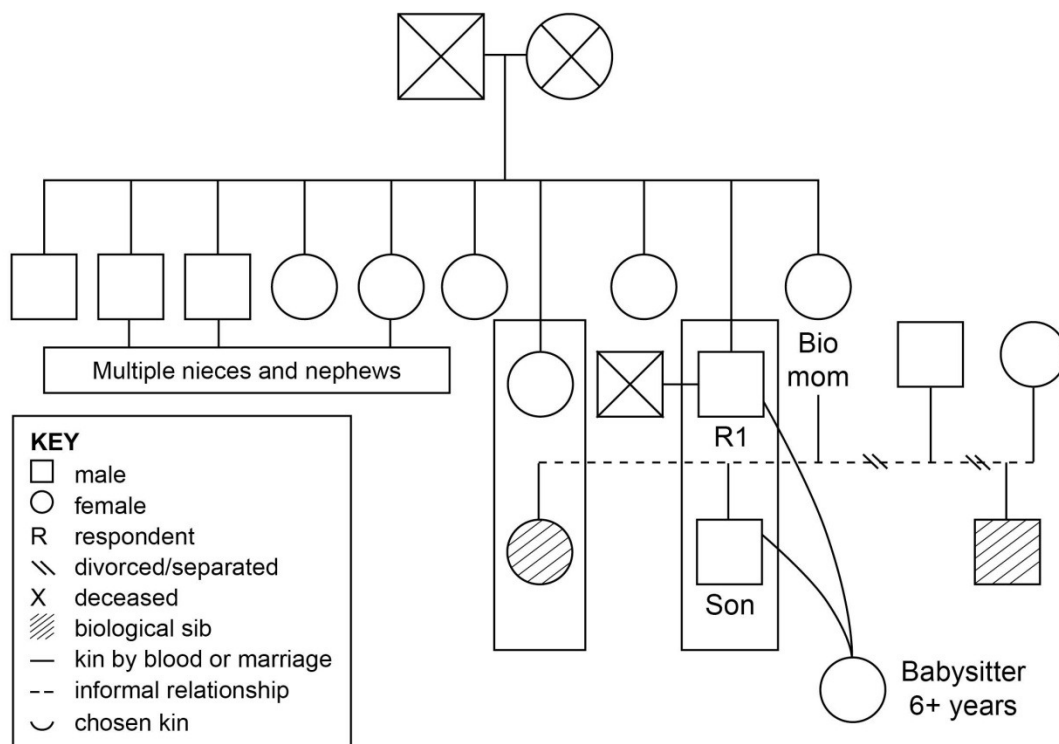
While it appears to me that the child has a mixed-race heritage, the fathers describe their son as "very swarthy" and launch into a long story about his birth mother's heritage. They comment that they thought the mother looked Pacific Islander when they met her and that the adoption agency also made the assumption that the child is likely Latino or Pilipino. But the fathers tell me, "He's European, but yeah, we were open to him being Latino, too, but he's not."

The fathers have made financial sacrifices for Rodney to take time off work to stay home with their son. Rodney took three months off work to be a full-time caregiver, and his partner took six weeks of family leave. Rodney is now back to working part-time, and the couple have hired a nanny to come to their home and care for their son while Rodney is at work. It was important to the dads to find someone they thought would stay in their employment for an extended period of time and who could offer a female role model for their son.

The fathers continue to trade off holding Alexander throughout our interview. Alexander continues to reach up and grab his father's glasses off his face and put them in his mouth. Rodney takes the glasses from Alexander and puts them back on his face, and at other times he cranes his head to keep Alexander from reaching the glasses. I reach out for Alexander's doll that is sitting on the table and do the old bait and switch, redirecting the baby's attention from his dad's glasses to his favorite toy. I wonder how I learned to redirect a baby's attention and who will teach these skills to these dads.

We finish the interview, and I thank the couple for their time and pack up to leave. The dads walk me to the door, and as I am leaving, I have the sense that there is something more they want to tell me. So I wait and listen, and then the fathers tell me more about their son being born addicted to drugs and the challenges during the first month of parenting an infant going through drug withdrawal. They also tell me that the baby's mother died of AIDS and that the adoption agency assumed the child would be HIV positive. They have recently taken Alexander in for HIV testing, even though they do not yet have legal permission to do so, and learned that that his HIV antibodies have cleared and that Alexander is HIV negative. I leave with the realization that this is going to be an interesting project and also with the knowledge that it will take time and patience to gather the kind of in-depth information I hope to gather for this study.

Family 2: *"I never thought I would adopt; I just knew I had a big heart and that I have to help somebody."*

KEY
- □ male
- ○ female
- R respondent
- ╲ divorced/separated
- X deceased
- ▨ biological sib
- — kin by blood or marriage
- -- informal relationship
- ◡ chosen kin

From my field notes: I meet 10-year-old Josh at a community event connected to the LGBTQ agency where I work. I notice Josh among the mostly adult participants. He is shirtless, loud, and boisterous, riding his skateboard through the crowd. He is trying to figure out how to ride his skateboard down a flight of stairs. I am concerned that Josh is going to hurt himself. I go up and introduce myself, initially assuming that Josh had wandered into the event from the neighborhood near the park. I worry what his parents would think if they found their 10-year-old son hanging out shirtless in the middle of a gay pride picnic. One of the event volunteers explains to me that Josh is the son of Adam and that Adam occasionally brings his son with him to community events. I know Adam from his visits to the center but did not know that he was a parent. The volunteer makes several disparaging remarks about Adam's parenting style and tells me that Adam lets "the kid run wild." I watch the father and son's interactions throughout the rest of the day. Josh often calls out for his dad to come watch him demonstrate some new skill that Josh is trying out, such as seeing how far he can throw a rock, how far he can jump from the top of the picnic table, or how many ice-cream sandwiches he can eat and how fast. I feel tired and stressed out just watching Josh. I wonder how Adam is handling parenthood and invite him to participate in my research project. We set a time for a later interview, and Adam agrees to meet with me but only if we can do so in my home. He seems reluctant to let me visit his home.

I learn in our interview that Adam lives with his extended Pilipino family in a large home in one of the far East Bay suburbs. Adam moved to this suburb to be near his mother after he had adopted his son. Josh is the biological son of Adam's sister, who has been diagnosed with schizophrenia. She had two children, a son and a daughter. Adam adopted his nephew after the children had been placed into protective care. The biological father was unable to care for his

children, as he is serving a life sentence in prison for a series of violent crimes. Another sibling adopted Josh's older sister. The family all live near each other, and at times Adam lives with some of his eleven siblings and their children. Family life had centered around Adam's mother, who kept track of all of her children and helped care for her many grandchildren, Josh included. Adam's mother died last year, and the family is now struggling to maintain support for their mentally ill sister (Josh's mother). This sister recently moved back into the family home, which created tensions between the sister and her siblings as well as for their shared children. Adam is also grieving the loss of his long-time partner, who died of AIDS several years ago. Adam is also challenged by his son's diagnosis of ADHD and worries that his sister has passed on her mental illness to her son and that Josh's biological father has passed on his ADHD and violent temperament. Adam shares some of his worries and challenges:

R: He always wants food, he wants clothing, and on top of that, he's very expensive. I'm raising a boy who's high maintenance and ADHD and bipolar and so forth and what have you, it's real expensive. And, I'm single, I don't have a lover, so all the burden falls on me. So, it's a complex situation.

I: *It's a lot to take on.*

R: I have too much on my plate right now. It's a lot to take on.

I: *So, is he on medication?*

R: He is on medication; he's been on medication since he was three years old. He's been on several medications, and they can't figure out what kind of medication he should be on. Because this one will work for six months, and then it won't work. He'll get on another medication. It's just been trial and error for the last seven years. And, so finally, I got tired, I said, okay, well, let's do something totally different. So, that's what we're doing, holistic medication, and so he's been off the prescription drug for the last seven months, I think, seven months.

I: *So, I'm assuming he was probably on something like Ritalin for ADHD?*

R: Yeah. He's been on Ritalin, he's been on Concerta, he's been on Dexedrine, he's been on Adderall, he's been on all these medications, ADHD medication. He's been on psychotic pills, Risperdal. He's been on a lot of medication.

I: *And when did you get a diagnosis that he was bipolar?*

R: He got diagnosed early, as he went to the county hospital and they [his social workers] got in touch with the professionals here, psychologists, actually psychiatrists, and that was before the medication started, so he was really young, close to three years old.

> I: *And has anyone every talked to you about a diagnosis about attachment, what do they call it?*
>
> R: Attachment from parent, something. I took several parenting classes, and they said your son has a detachment something, that detachment, what's the word they used, I can't remember what it is.
>
> I: *An attachment disorder?*
>
> R: Yeah, that's it. Some kind of disorder, an attachment disorder.

The adoption was arranged while Adam was living in San Francisco, and Adam now feels overwhelmed and confused by the child welfare system. He tells me, "I've been dealing with Medi-Cal for such a long time that I just get so frustrated, I don't even try anymore." Adam says he is often forced to make the two-hour round trip into San Francisco in order to get medical and counseling services for his son and that the local county provides no support.

> Where I'm at right now? He's 10 years, he just turned 10. He's at an age where he's very good at gymnastics, he's very good, well, he just started karate, but very good in gymnastics. He's very, very athletic. He loves to swim and he's strong … and sometimes I'm afraid that one of these days he's going to snap, too, [like his biological father] and take it out on me. So, he hasn't done that. I mean, he's not at the age, he's not at the point where I'm afraid of him, but I am afraid of him as he gets a little bit older, as he gets taller, as he gets stronger. I'm afraid that he's going to follow his [biological] dad's footsteps and not mine, and so I'm afraid that he's going to go that route.

He tells me:

> It's tough. It's really hard because I didn't expect this thing to be this hard, to be this difficult. You know, I opened my heart, I opened my arms to him, and I thought I was going to have the time of my life. I'm not having the time of my life; it's very chaotic in my household.

Family 3: *"I guess we are overachievers."*
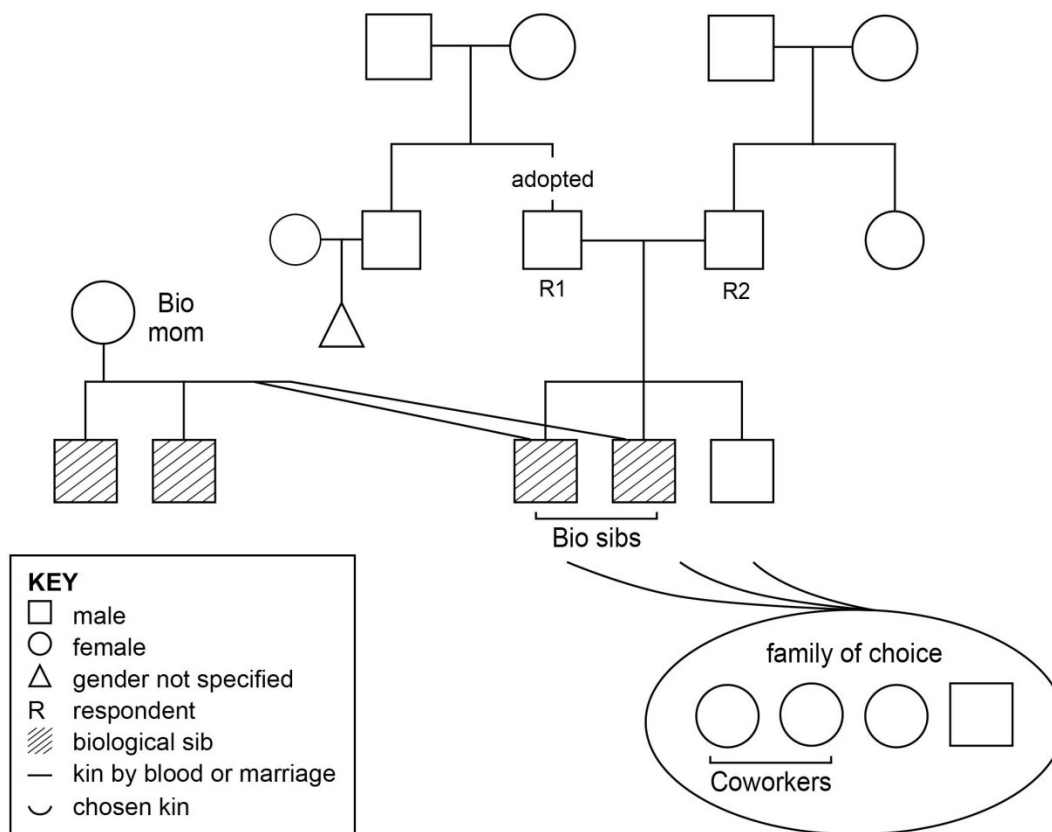
From my field notes: I was invited to Robert and Wade's home in San Jose. The dads live in a small 1950s ranch house in a downtown neighborhood. I can tell that an addition was built onto the house at some point in the past ten years. I can see the dads and two of their sons doing the dinner dishes through the kitchen window as I approach the front door. They greet me and introduce me to their two teenage sons. I notice that one son, Aaron, is visually impaired and has hearing aids in both ears.

The original living room of the house is set up as more of a classroom than a living room. There is a large computer station, and the room is also outfitted as a dining room. The sons are encouraged to finish up the dinner dishes, and the dads invite me back into a newer addition of the home that has a large, comfortable family room. There are multiple couches and a large television. Wade sits in a rocking chair in the corner of the room, and his partner is on an adjacent couch. Just as we begin the interview, I hear a baby cry from a bedroom off the family room. Wade excuses himself to go check on the baby. He comes back with another child, and I am introduced to Joseph, who is four months old and has been living with the dads since he was four days old. Robert has gone to the kitchen and brings back the baby's bottle. Wade seems very comfortable taking care of his newborn son. He takes the bottle and readjusts the baby's swaddling, and the now-quiet infant starts to nurse from his bottle while we continue our interview. The partners have said very little to each other, but clearly they make a good team and anticipate both each other's needs and the baby's. They have been together for four years but only living together for the past year. Wade had started the process of becoming a foster parent before he met his husband. Wade says that he was motivated to become a foster parent because

of his work at a local homeless teen shelter, where he met many LGBTQ and other youth who needed permanent homes. He told me, "I think there was that need to rescue, wanting to sweep up and adopt some of those homeless kids, but, obviously, I couldn't do that."

Wade had two foster sons living with him when he met his husband, but the children were eventually returned to their biological parents. Wade says that it had been a difficult placement and that "we had some difficulty with this social worker, and I felt that the placement wasn't working, so they went to another foster home in the interim, and then they were reunited with their parents." Later in the interview, the couple also describe this social worker as "unsupportive," and then again they refer to her as "a rather dishonest woman." I ask Wade if it was hard to see the first two children leave. He seems reluctant to disclose his feelings:

> There's the disappointment that it didn't work out the way you thought. I thought we were going to all settle down and be a family and blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. They continue to keep in touch with me. When Casey's bored, he continues to call me repeatedly. I don't think there's a lot of grief. I mean, I got to know their mom—not their dad very well—but after talking with their mom and everything, I think it's good that they're back with her … I'm glad for their mom that they're back home.

With prompting from his partner, Wade also reveals that the children were placed in his home very quickly after a high-profile family conflict and that one of the children is medically fragile and has a shunt in his brain.

Six weeks after these two foster sons left their home, the couple requested a new social worker and were quickly matched with their current two teenage foster sons. At the time of the interview, they are in the process of finalizing their adoptions. I ask the dads what it was like to go through this a second time. Wade tells me, "Like I said, after having the first two boys, it was like when I interviewed Aaron and Justin and they interviewed me, we just kind of knew. They've been in the system, I've been through the system."

The couple feel very fortunate to have their new caseworker and feel that he has helped them understand how to deal with their son Aaron's disabilities. Aaron is diagnosed as severely developmentally delayed. The fathers were told that this was due to in-utero exposure to heroin and methadone. They are moving forward with his adoption with the understanding that their son will need a lot of extra support and that he will not be going to college or moving out of the house at 18. They have a detailed plan for his future that includes extra time in special education, special job training, and, at some unknown point in the future, a transition to assisted living. The couple see themselves as very involved with the child welfare system and participate in the local association for foster parents. They feel that they have faced no discrimination due to their gender or sexual orientation.

The couple are very reflective about their experiences being men caring for an infant and involved with the child welfare system, and they talk at length about their own upbringings and families of origin. They also talk about their career goals, in addition to taking care of three children. Both of them continue to work. Wade still works at the homeless teen shelter on weekends. He needs to work twenty hours a week to keep his health benefits. Both dads are also in school; Wade is taking culinary classes, and Robert is finishing up a finance degree.

It was more of a challenge to get the fathers to talk about how they discuss their sexual identity with their children. When asked about this, the fathers have some differences in their viewpoints:

I: *Have you had any encounters where you've taken your kids around a gay event where you felt like the event was too overtly sexual?*

R1:   Yes.

I: *Can you tell me about that?*

R1:   Well, I'm that way all the time. I feel that when people act gay, I get embarrassed that they do that in front of my kids.

R2:   But let's put it this way, we also do not hide that from them. Our kids know we're gay. Obviously, they know that we're two gay men.

R1:   Yeah. I don't like them seeing drag.

R2:   And I'm completely the other way.

R1:   Personally, I hate drag.

R2:   But I'm completely the other way, because I threw a drag show last year as a fundraising event. The boys came and helped me with it and loved it. They had such a good time. I think that it's okay to expose kids to…

R1:   [interrupts his partner] Dildos?

R2:   Well, that was completely unplanned. There was an act that I did not know was going to pull a dildo out, and, yeah, that happened.

I: *Did you tell them beforehand that you were going have your kids there?*

R2:   Yes. That was not supposed to happen, but this, again, is the thing where they are not thinking along the lines of there being kids there. It was inappropriate whether there were kids there or not because we had older women there. It was an inappropriate thing that was done, because I was running the event.

R1:   Not that it was a bad thing, but …

R2:   Well, but I hadn't been pre-warned. I'd been pretty clear, let's keep it, but at the same time, that's part of the gay culture, is that we challenge those boundaries. Who am I? When I was younger and all that kind of stuff, it didn't hurt anybody. It certainly gave me a great opportunity to talk to my kids about dildos, which is not necessarily a conversation I wanted to have, but I had it. The thing is, in most situations that my experience has been raising kids over

the last couple years is, we trip out on this stuff more than they do. We get more wound up about it than they do; and the bigger deal you make out of it, then that's when they start thinking that there's something more to it. My take was to just ask them, what'd you think about that? They thought it was pretty funny.

It is getting late, and I thank the fathers for their time. I turn off my tape recorder and start packing up the interview guides and consent forms. I start making small talk about relationships and ask how they had met. The couple then tell me the story of how they met. They disclose that they are both recovering crystal methamphetamine addicts, and they met in a 12-step program. They talk about what they learned through their recovery experiences and the skills they acquired to help cope with stress and difficult times. They also talk about the transition of moving from being gay men in the sex and drug culture to being a couple with a commitment to parenthood. I receive an email from Robert two days after our interview:

> "Hi, Ben, Thanks so much. Our situation has changed a little. On Wednesday, we got identical twin 3-year-old boys. So the fun just continues..."

Family 4: *"So, we're kind of a mixed-up family."*

KEY
- ☐ male
- ○ female
- R respondent
- ⧄ divorced/no contact
- ▨ biological sib
- — kin by blood or marriage
- -- informal relationship
- ◡ chosen kin
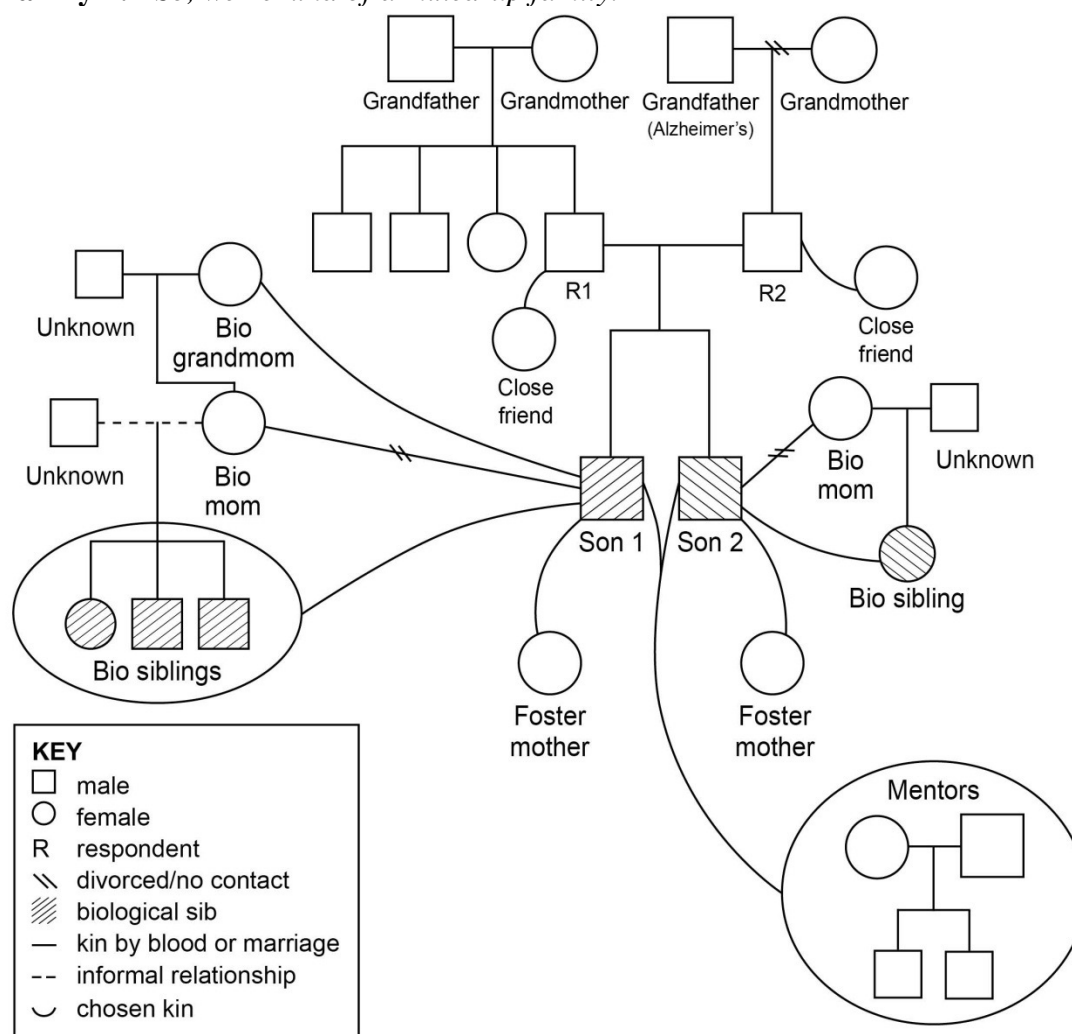
From my field notes: I meet Chuck in his office at work. It has taken many calls and emails to set up this interview. I knock on his door at the set time and hear him on the phone. I can tell that Chuck is very busy; he seems pressed for time and stressed, very kind and very caring but stressed out. I learn in our interview that Chuck and his partner, Damon, are dealing with many time binds related to being caregivers; they are both working full-time in helping professions; they are raising two active sons; and they are helping to care for one partner's single father, who has Alzheimer's.

Chuck's office is neat and inviting, and he offers me a comfortable chair that is the perfect mate to his own. I smile to myself about the thought-out equality behind this decorating choice. Two chairs, a matched set. I think it is a good reflection of how a professional furnishes his office in an effort to communicate equality with his clients. I see pictures of his partner and their children on the credenza behind his desk. There are no pictures of the family together, only posed portraits of each family member. I wonder to myself if the adoption social workers may have matched these parents and children on some facial/physical characteristics. Both sons are of mixed race heritage; one looks very much like his African-American father, and the other looks very much like his Caucasian father. The father explains that his younger son has some mild

special medical needs that were not fully disclosed at the time of his adoption. The child has medical complications in one leg that will require multiple surgeries and that have made it difficult for the child to learn to walk.

Chuck and Damon have identified as partners for the past 12 years. They live in a mid-sized East Bay community that is socio-economically and ethnically mixed. Damon was raised by middle-class African-American parents who placed a strong emphasis on education. His parents are divorced but are cordial with each other. The couple live near Damon's parents and see each of them several times a week. Damon's father has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and Damon is involved in his care on a regular basis. Chuck was raised by working-class Caucasian parents in the Midwest, where his parents still live. Due to their ages and declining health, Chuck's parents are unable to visit their new grandchildren very often. They maintain contact through Chuck's annual visits home with the kids, by sending gifts, and through telephone contact. Both of the fathers have professional experience working within the child welfare system. Both sons were adopted through the public child welfare system. Each was removed from his biological mother's care at an early age. Each child has a foster mother who cared for him prior to adoption. The dads maintain contact with each of their sons' foster mothers. The dads turn to one foster mother in particular for advice on child raising, discipline, and limit setting. As Chuck explains, "I like her no-nonsense approach to discipline." The fathers have also agreed to some level of open adoption arrangements with their sons' biological families. They do not have contact with either child's biological mother, but they maintain ties with their sons' biological siblings and grandmothers. For one son, the fathers travel to another city 60 miles away two or three times per year for sibling visits. Chuck describes incorporating one son's biological kin into their lives:

> We've always been very transparent with him about being adopted, we've always read him books about adoption—we have pictures of his family up in his room, we always talk about them, your sister Anika, your sister Janie, Grandma Maureen. So they're always part of our family discussion, even though we don't seem them a ton.

Chuck tells me that the couple spent a great deal of time planning their family, and he tells me that he picked Damon as a partner in part because he had asked on the second date if Damon wanted children. Damon said yes, which made him "husband material" for Chuck. Like many of the men I have interviewed, this dad was at first unsure of where his motivations to parent came from. I encourage him to take a minute and think about what comes up for him. He explains that he came from a large family and that he always knew that he wanted to be a parent. "I just knew I would find a way to make it happen."

It was also evident that Chuck considered becoming a father as an inevitable part of his life journey:

> Oh, can I say one other thing? People were after my sperm. I had so many friends, lesbian friends ask me for my donation and I didn't give it out in part because I—even before I was a parent, I just—I did not want—I knew my children were going to be adopted and I didn't want them to ever worry that I loved someone else more than them. It was really— and other of my friends have done both and I—and their kids are fine with the whole thing but I just, at that point, I was already thinking like a parent, which I think is good. Which is like not knowing how my child will feel about that, I'm going to be

conservative because I don't—I would imagine an adopted child would already have questions. And I just don't want to do anything that would make them feel that they were anything but my first choice, so I just didn't and I wouldn't now either, but that was interesting, too, because I got those offers while my partner and I were together. And I think he would have supported me being a birth parent, and I probably would have been a somewhat involved dad, but I just didn't feel like that was something that made sense for our relationship or for—our kids, given the way I thought about it at that time. So I was really thinking like a parent in some ways before I became one.

Chuck sums up his family by stating: "So we are kind of a mixed-up family." He uses this statement to describe his family composition, which is a mixture of two generations of bio-kin that includes his parents and siblings, his partner's parents, their adopted children, their children's biological siblings, biological grandmothers, and members of their family of choice, which includes both of their sons' foster mothers. This statement may also have referred to the mixed ethnicities of the family members.

Family 5: *"Biology, on the one hand, is much less important than I thought it would be, and biology, on the other hand, is much more important than I thought it would be."*
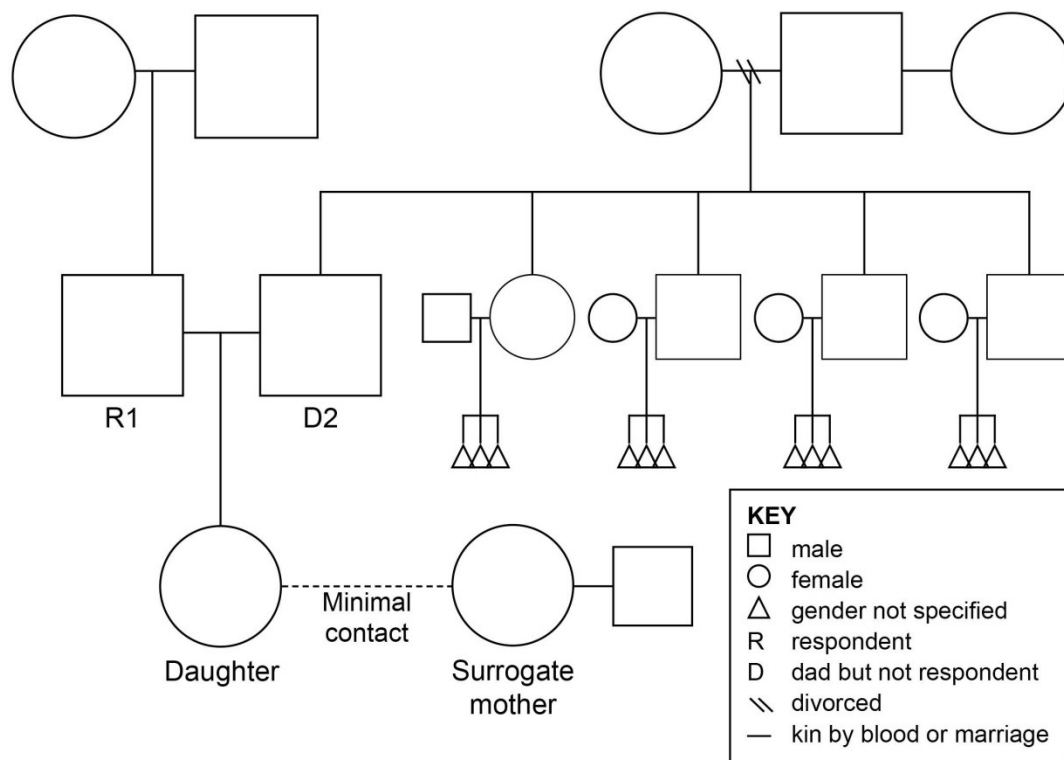
From my field notes: I contacted Karl through email; he was referred from another father in the study. It took a month to find a date for our interview. He apologized but explained that between caregiving responsibilities and his demanding job, it was going to be difficult to find time to meet. We eventually agreed to meet in his office. I call from the lobby, and he came down and escorted me through security to his office. He has a very professional office with an assistant, who offers to bring me coffee. Karl sits behind his glass desk, and I am on the other side. There is one photo of his eight-year-old daughter on his credenza, but I don't see a picture of his partner of 17 years in view.

Karl's story is very different from the other fathers I interviewed, as he and his partner, Fred, had a child with a volunteer surrogate. He tells me that he and his partner met while undergraduates in college and that they were attending graduate school in a conservative southern state. After seven years together, the couple decided to have a commitment ceremony, which prompted a desire to have children.

> I think we got a brochure from Lambda Legal Defense that talked about different ways to pursue adoption and what it looked like within a [conservative state] specific context. Our desire to become parents became strong enough that we were willing to kind of take the risk of adopting, even through the foster-care system, and willing to accept any and all challenges that might come with that.

Then a classmate learned that the couple were preparing for adoption and offered to have a child for them. Karl explains: "She has this really unusual commitment to social justice, and after having known us for a number of years, she felt that if we really wanted to have a family, she should help us." The three spent a year preparing emotionally and legally for pregnancy and then "we did the turkey baster method at home." Both partners donated sperm, and they do not know which partner is the biological father. The mother lived with the couple during her third trimester; the three attended birthing classes together, and the two men participated in the delivery. The mother came home with the fathers for a few days after delivery while the fathers prepared to move to California. They did not tell their health-care providers or attorneys that they were unsure of paternity. Karl's partner was placed on the birth certificate as the biological father. After the mother relinquished her parental rights, the couple found an attorney who agreed to quietly find "the right judge" to take their case, and Karl was granted a second-parent adoption in a state that has laws on the books barring same-sex adoption. I ask if this is legally possible:

> It may not be now, to be honest with you. Back then it was, but it's all on the down low. You get a lawyer who knows the system and who knows everything from which county social worker to come and visit you, who will evaluate you as a potential parent and nothing else, to which judge to work with. We had a wonderful judge, but the records are sealed, and she explicitly asked us not to tell people that she worked with us because judges are elected—at least at the county level in [name of the state]—and she wanted to continue to be able to do this. She had done this for two-mom families previously but hadn't done it for any two-dad families, and she was gratified. You'd look at her and think she was this blue-haired [conservative] woman who wouldn't have ever done this in a million years, but she was great. So it was possible back then. I don't know how it is now, but it was very much kind of underground.

The surrogate mother received no financial compensation for the pregnancy; this was a critical factor because it is illegal to pay a surrogate in the [state].

Karl talks about learning to care for an infant:

> I remember the first time we had to change her diaper and she'd been home all of two hours. We put her down on the bed, undid the diaper ... and we looked at each other … and we're like, "I didn't pay attention when the midwife did this. Did you pay attention when the midwife did this?" I mean literally there was this moment of where you looked down on the bed and there's this little creature, and you're it.

> The baby was colicky and didn't sleep a lot, and it was awful. We didn't sleep; we wore holes in the floor of our house pacing around with her at night. It was really hard. About three months into it, we were playing cards at the table, and I suddenly realized that I'd been playing cards for ten minutes and we hadn't had to tend to her crying. I realized maybe we're going to make it, maybe this is actually going to work out. It was just very, very challenging.

It was also a big time of transition in our lives. I had just finished my graduate program, we were moving to California, and it just felt like having this entirely new frame for our lives was deeply moving, deeply fulfilling. So, as you're sitting in the rocker late at night with your screaming kid, you still feel like you're doing something very significant and very—it just felt very sacred in a way.

The couple chose to move to the Bay Area because they felt that this would be "the place where we would be the least unusual." After nine years, the fathers have recently reconnected with their daughter's surrogate at their daughter's request. Karl reflects on his experience of attaching to a child who may not be his biological child and also his daughter's desire/need to know her birth mother.

Biology, on the one hand, is less important than you think it will be. …it was important to me that both my partner and I donate sperm and that it not be just him because I was afraid that somehow my daughter would be distant from me if she weren't mine. Now, I see how much less that really matters than I ever thought it would. So, biology, on the one hand, is much less important than I thought it would be, and biology, on the other hand, is much more important than I thought it would be. Like, who her surrogate is totally matters to my daughter…. She needs to know about, she wants to know about her. So that biological connection is meaningful to her, at least right now, in a way that I didn't expect it would be.

Family 6: *"I always wanted to be a parent and felt separate from the rest of the world as a non-parent."*

Bio daughter

KEY
☐ male
◯ female
R respondent
D dad but not respondent
▨ biological sib
— kin by blood or marriage
‿ chosen kin

Donor

R1   D2

Bio mom

S.
(close friend)
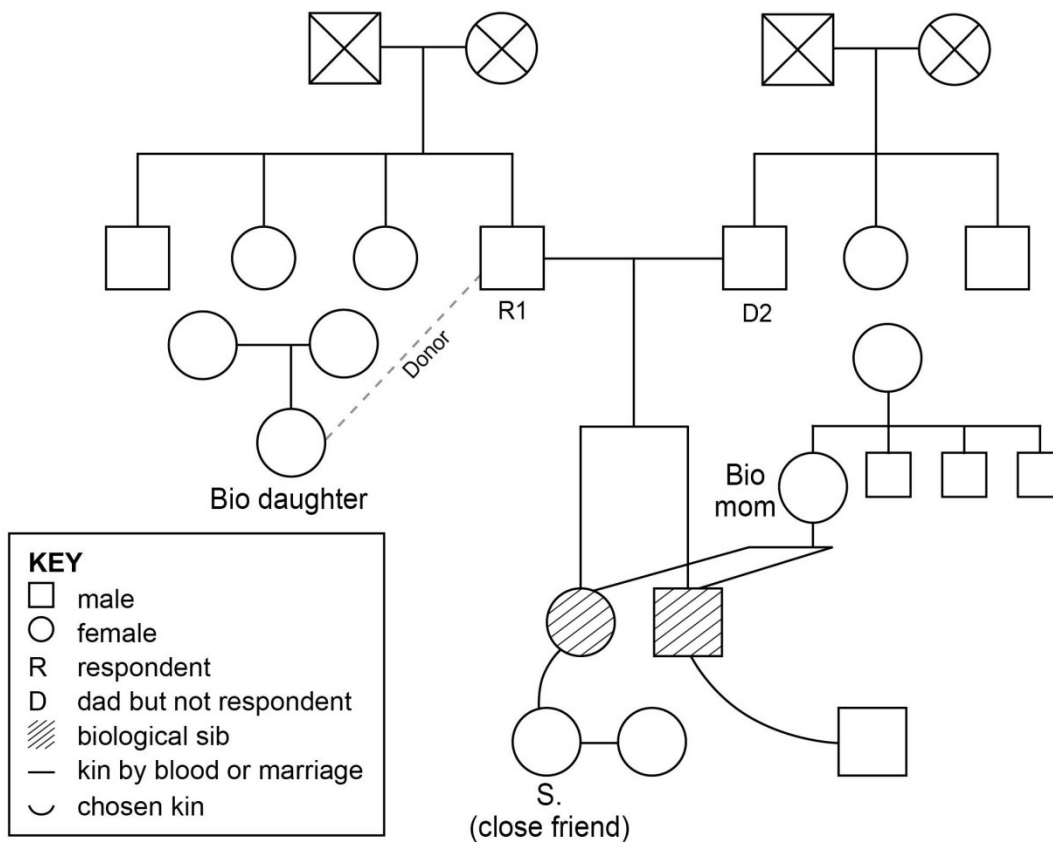
From my field notes: Joe was a father whom I heard about from multiple sources. Several fathers in this study repeatedly told me that I had to contact Joe. He is well known and liked for organizing play groups and potlucks for many Bay Area gay fathers. He has been a long-time advocate within the LGBTQ community, and his training as a Jewish communal worker and social worker is clearly evident in his work to organize gay dads. Like several other busy parents in this study, Joe offered to meet me at his office, not his home. He is the director of a nonprofit social service agency, and his office has a look that I have seen many times among busy nonprofit administrators; in fact, it looks like my own office. The desk is pushed against one wall, and the work table in the center of the room creates a welcoming space for group meetings. The rest of the office is filled with books, files, and materials that appear related to projects underway. Pictures on the walls and materials around the room reinforce the mission of the nonprofit organization. As we start the interview, Joe shares pictures of his six-year-old son and 5-year-old daughter. Both children have big smiles on their faces, but not as large as the smile on Joe's face as he shows me their pictures and tells me about his kids.

He became a parent in his late 40s with his partner, Seth. This is Joe's second long-term relationship. His first partner died of AIDS after they had been together for ten years.

> A big part of my story is that I got together with my first partner when I was thirty-one, and he was HIV positive, and we did try to adopt, we did make some

moves towards adoption, but it didn't happen, and then he got too sick and we had to drop it. And then I was taking care of him, and then I was grieving, and then I was single. And then I got together with my current partner when I was forty-four, forty-three, and so, you know, it's just a very long and winding road, but I was moving through my forties, and I had this big, impossible job, and that job ended, and I just realized like I was either going to do it then or it was never going to happen. So, that was a precipitating event to what finally did work, which was we decided to pursue adoption and to do foster adoption.

He commented on creating a family and a new life as an older father:

> Because we have adopted kids and because all of our parents are gone, I think that we are even more aware of creating family and creating a sense of that around kids so they feel like they have that sense of connection.

Like many of the fathers in my study, Joe was sure he would find a way to become a father. When I ask about his desire to parent, he tells me that: "You know, I came out in my late teens, early twenties, and I never assumed that being a gay man would prevent me from being a parent. I don't know why, but I just always … knew it, I was going to make it happen one way or another." In fact, Joe made it happen in multiple ways; first, he became a sperm donor for lesbian friends in the early 1980s. He has a relationship with this biological child but describes his relationship as more like being an uncle than a father. He also tried to create co-parenting relationships with friends, including being a sperm donor with one friend who conceived but then had a miscarriage. Joe entered into his current relationship with Seth when he was forty-four. Shortly after entering the relationship, he had a career change and decided that he wanted to pursue full-time parenting. He started the foster-adopt process, but then someone in his social network introduced him to a woman who was eight-and-a-half months pregnant and wanted to find a gay or lesbian couple to adopt her child. Joe and his partner met the birth mother; she selected them as adoptive parents, and they arranged an open adoption agreement. She gave birth two weeks later, and the fathers brought home a newborn baby boy from the hospital. Then eight months later, shortly after they had finalized their son's adoption, the birth mother called to tell them she was pregnant again. The fathers agreed to also adopt her second child. The two children are biological siblings thirteen months apart in age.

Joe describes some of the challenges with the children's birth mother but seems very comfortable with the open adoption and the birth mother's role in his family:

> What I can say is that … they know their birth mom … she and her pictures have been around from the start. ... People who do international adoption have an adoption book that chronicles [their birth family], which is really great. But we never had it because we never ... it wasn't separate. I mean, Kira and her family, it's just part of our story, it's part of the whole story, it's not a separate part of the story.

Joe describes himself as the primary caregiver for his children, with many of the relationships challenges and time binds that are shared by many primary caregivers. He wishes his partner were more involved in the day-to-day caregiving:

Well, how can I put it, he made a decision to do it, but it was clearly me who was pushing for it, and so really from the beginning … as difficult, as challenging and relentless as parenting is… there is this very deep way this has been gratifying for me which, it's not like it's not true for my partner, but the difficult parts have been harder for him, you know, less sleep and stress and no time and no privacy, no relationship that involves just us. You know, it's hard for both of us, but there is a way that I just feel like … in shorthand, in terms of like social roles, I am definitely more the mom. I do [enjoy this mothering role] but it would be like many moms you know who wish there was a little more partnership, you know, my partner being a little more tuned into things. It would be great if he were, but he's not.

Joe discusses the challenges of raising children with multi-ethnic identities who are being raised by Jewish and Caucasian fathers. He comments on the questions the family experiences when they are out in public.

Yeah, there is a lot of, "Where did they come from?" Just kind of the assumption that kids who look like them must be from a distant locale, it's like "no, local kids born at (Kaiser) just like your kids."

Conversations about race and ethnicity are on Joe's mind a lot these days, as his son is at an age where he is more active, and the family had some difficulties finding a supportive school environment for him:

There are friends that I am comfortable with [who I can talk to about race]. I mean, race is part of the discussion … it's like, "Look, I am white, there are some things that are in my life experience, what do you think about this?" I mean, I can have those conversations with friends, not with whoever on the street, but with people I know … There is a guy I have gotten to know more over the last few months, he is a relatively young African American dad to one of [my son's] friends at school, and we've kind of bonded, actually, it's been sweet. I mean, at soccer practices and whatever, so it's a newer relationship. I think he was checking me out for awhile to see "who is this guy and does he really know what he is doing [raising an ethnically mixed son]?" You know, we have crossed a certain threshold, and he had a very poignant conversation with me after [soccer practice], and he was really expressing his distress about [transracial adoption and racism], so it's, I don't want to say I am naïve about it, I mean, race is deep and there are always issues."

Interviewer: And that sounds very challenging. Some dads said they feel, you know, there is added pressure to do it well, as if they are being watched because they think they have to be the super gay. Do you feel any of that?

Well, maybe some. Yeah there may be some, just proving ... I mean, it is hard to sort out the different issues. I think I might feel more pressure about proving as a white parent that I can be a good parent to these kids of color than I do as a gay man. It's hard, I mean, I have to really think about that, but you know: Are people

watching us to see if we are doing a good job? Probably. Again, I don't want to sound like it's not a problem or that I am naïve that people have those attitudes out there, but really everything is so involving and so exhausting and so relentless that I don't have that much time and space to think about this other stuff. Which is probably a good thing.
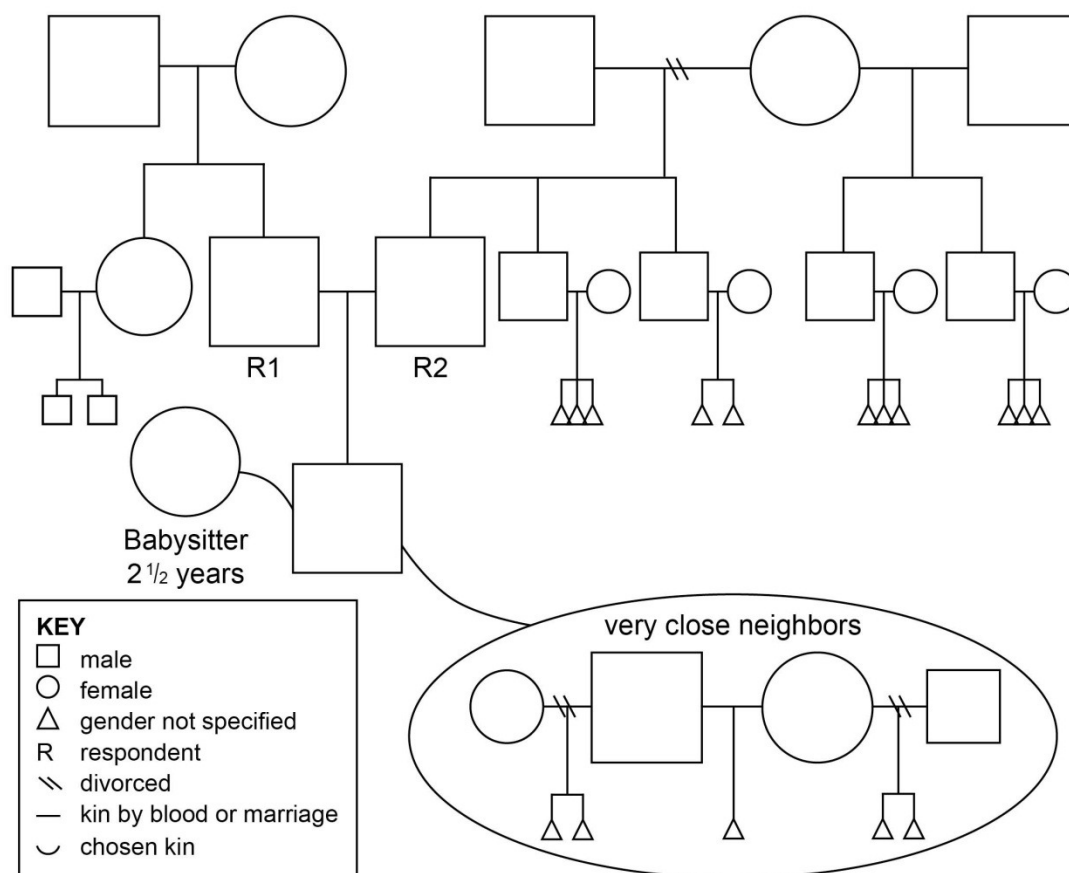
Support from other parents is very important:

But really, my issues as a parent, it's not really as a gay man or as a dad—[it's about] parenting. One of my kids really is challenging, and there have been a lot of issues these days, and I have been very drawn to talking to other parents these days. But, you know, it's other parents of kids who have dealt with ADHD, and so it doesn't have anything to do with gender or race or sexual orientation. There are some added things, I think, for boys of color, and so it has been helpful to talk to parents of kids of color.

On the rewards of parenting:

Oh, you know, they're the greatest kids in the world. It's the best thing I have ever done, and I have done a lot of different things in my life, but I have never done anything that is so demanding and gratifying. I am in love with my kids, and that's the most rewarding. Well, it's more than that because I am somebody who, I always wanted to be a parent, and I felt separate from the rest of the world as a non-parent, I really did, and that was tied to being gay. For me, it was more about not parenting than about being gay, and it feels like I am connected to a part of the human experience in a way that I yearned for and find incredibly transforming and gratifying, and it fills the picture. I felt very incomplete without doing this. It was just really so painful to go for so long without being able to do it, and so I am just thankful every day. You know, things have been hard, and things are not easy with me and my partner, but I just have this deep appreciation every day to just be able to do it.

Family 7: *"We are dads in a moms' world."*

KEY
□ male
○ female
△ gender not specified
R respondent
⟍ divorced
— kin by blood or marriage
‿ chosen kin

From my field notes: Matt and Joe are well-educated activist parents. After long careers as LGBTQ activists, they have taken that experience into the realm of adoption activism. They have a four-year-old son who came into their family when he was three weeks old. Both fathers took family leave time from their jobs and were stay-at-home fathers for the first six months with their son. Matt went back to work after six months, and Joe went back as a part-time employee. Their son is now four, and Joe is back to working at 80% time. The couple are very supportive of each other, and this is evident during our interview. It also makes for a challenge interview, as the couple often finish each other's thoughts and sentences. This is reflected in the excerpts from the interview below.

The couple made the decision to pursue adoption through a foster-adoption agency. They found that a lot of the training through their adoption agency was geared toward heterosexual families and did not meet their needs.

> Joe: We both have master's degrees and have been in therapy, so it wasn't at a level where we felt like we got a lot out of it. It was more like we just have to do it because that is the process.

The couple also experienced homophobia at the adoption agency from other prospective foster parents in training. I asked the couple to describe their experiences with homophobia within the foster-care agency:

> Joe: She [another foster parent] said something really homophobic about you're not supposed to have kids or something. It was the first day of the class, and she said [similar] things a couple of times throughout the class, some sort of anti-gay comments to the group, and they weren't challenged.
>
> Matt: I thought… okay, here's a hurdle that I have to go through and meet, and how long is it going to take me? And it's annoying because it takes me away from work and everything else that I am trying to do.

After some time spent waiting to be placed with a child, the couple took matters into their own hands and went around their social worker and found a child to adopt. The fathers saw a high-profile media case about a child left at a local hospital as one of the first foundlings surrendered under a new California safe haven law.

> Joe: Matt just knew that that was our child. He contacted the social worker in the county that we had been working with, which is not the official process…
>
> Matt: In fact, we got reprimanded for doing it.
>
> Joe: We got reprimanded for going outside the process, but what I learned is that this works, so why would I not go outside the process? I thought… you didn't help me get a kid—we only got a kid because he called the social worker.

The fathers have taken their experiences and become strong advocates within the child welfare system. They describe their work on behalf of foster children:

> Joe: I ended up getting very involved in the foster care, foster-parent advocacy world through this. Actually, I am drafting and shepherding through two new laws to change state law around foster care. And I would say the level of all foster-care agencies making up rules and laws and not really knowing what they are and sort of the power, a lot of foster-care agencies and counties have, and they don't like sophisticated, educated parents….Foster parents had absolutely no power. The county could come in at any time and just remove a kid, and they don't even have to state a reason. At least now we changed the law—not how we wanted, but once a child has been with you for six months, they have to have a court hearing before they can remove a kid. That's not how it used to be before we helped change the law. The fact that foster parents are the parents of these kids and often,

especially with the younger ones are the only parents they have ever known, yet we have no legal rights and what happens still to this day, and this happens in our county, they will remove kids, either because a child of color is with white parents, that's a typical thing, or homophobia with a social worker, or they will go to a county family or a public foster family because it is cheaper for them. It cost them a lot of money to place with a private agency, whereas if it is its own county family, it's a lot cheaper. So anyway, those sorts of things happen, and it's supposed to be, under federal law, in the best interests of the child, and that's not in reality what happens. I think until there is a class action lawsuit by a number of families with proof of that, it's just not going to change.

Matt: Yeah, it's going to make me a Republican. This whole system is going to make me a Republican.

The couple describes the challenges of learning to care for an infant:

Joe: It was Labor Day, so I had the day off work. I had to bring him back to the foster home, and I didn't really like the foster home, where he was sitting in a car seat in front of the T.V. all day, at two weeks old, and I couldn't get the car seat back together, well it was more than that. It was like, I was leaving and he pooped, and I had to change his diaper, and then he peed all over me, and then he needed a bottle, and then he pooped again. So by the time I got him in the car, I couldn't get the car seat to work, so I called Matt crying that he had to come home from work to buckle him in. Plus, I hadn't slept at all that night, I was up feeding him every two hours. I got so exhausted that I could just sleep having a conversation, but I was up because I was too nervous to go back to sleep. What if he stops breathing right? Like any new, first-time parent. And the next time, it will be different, like ah, whatever, I am sure.

Matt: It was good. It was amazing, it was wonderful. Lots and lots of people helped us out. We had seven days to turn the office into a kids' room because you don't know what age or when, and you don't want to have an empty kids' room sitting there. So there's a lot to do in that period of time, and my brother-in-law and my nephew drove down with baby stuff and put it together, literally with my partner walking in the door with the baby. My brother-in-law just finished putting together the crib. So it's just this amazing thing where things just happened to work out great.

The couple discuss how parenting has transformed their relationships with others:

Joe: I would say we are also closer as a couple, not as individuals, but as a couple to our families. My parents were okay with me being gay, but it wasn't like… but now we are just like everybody else, now it really did make the difference in terms of like "oh, you really are just like all my other kids, there really is no difference, and, you're more fun." But I think that, and even your parents who always been wonderfully accepting and even spoke [in a public hearing] about domestic partner benefits, I still think they…

Matt: No, they're much closer.

Joe: They're much closer, and that supports the relationship, the fact that you have so much familial buy-in for your relationship, and I would even say our neighbors. I would say…

Matt: Oh yeah.

Joe: I would say even though we lived in our neighborhood for nine years…

Matt: Same block, same street.

Joe: Same block, same street, before we were in an apartment, and then we bought a house on the same block. We weren't really noticed and involved like we were once we had a kid. So that helps the relationship because you know that thing about social support for your relationship is so important for longevity and happiness.

Family 8: *"Everyone wants to be our friends, you know, like, oh, the gay couple with the kids."*
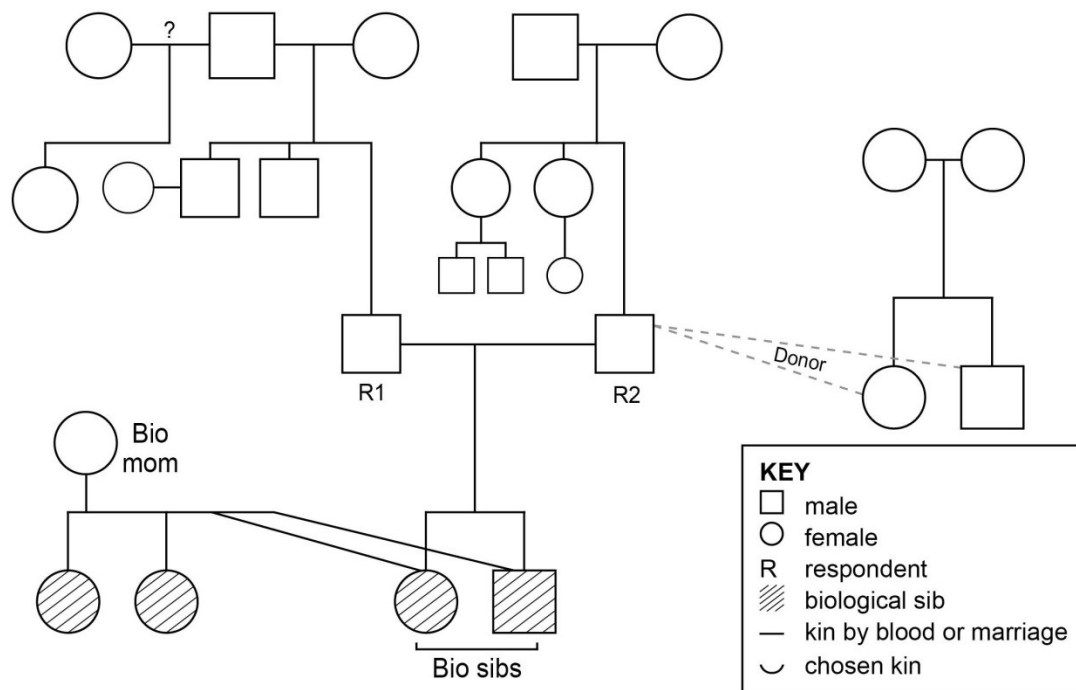
From my field notes: I met Jeff and Oscar through other fathers in this study. Like many of the dads, they were somewhat reluctant to meet with me. They had many questions about my project: *Who was I? Why was I studying gay fathers? Why had I selected qualitative methods when we needed more concrete studies on gay fathers?*

The day of the interview, I drive up to their house. They live in a section of the East Bay hills that I had only approached once or twice in the past, an area where I knew several of my long-time professors lived. These are the legendary streets of Berkeley, with homes built by now-famous architects in the 1920s and views out across the Bay to the Golden Gate Bridge. Jeff meets me at the door and welcomes me into their home, which is casually furnished and very well decorated with an interesting mix of collectibles and comfortable furniture. I am not surprised when Jeff tells me he is a designer for a major home-furnishings company and that his job for many years has included traveling the world to find furniture and collectibles for the company to sell in their catalogs and stores. The couple's home would fit as an image in the company that Jeff works for.

Jeff and Oscar make an attractive multicultural couple. Oscar seems more uncomfortable with the interview process, and I feel that I am intruding on both his time and territory. He introduces himself and then tells me that he has to leave to get the kids' lunch. He takes his partner's and the kids' food orders and leaves to pick up the food. While Oscar is gone, Jeff introduces me to their children and invites me into the living room, where I set things up for our interview. Their children come and go and take turns sitting on their father's lap as we talk and start the interview. We begin by discussing the makeup of the family, and things quickly get complicated. I learn that the dads adopted two siblings when they were eighteen months and four years old. The children have two older biological sisters, who were adopted by another family,

and these children now live in Central California. The fathers make an effort to get the children together with their biological siblings at least twice a year, once in the summer and once during the holidays. I then learn that Oscar also has two biological children from a relationship with two lesbians in which he served as the sperm donor. Oscar maintains a relationship with these children as well, and the fathers see Oscar's biological children usually one or two weekends a month. Oscar's biological children include a son who is eleven and a daughter who is nine, the same age as the fathers' oldest adopted daughter, Monica.

Jeff discusses his longstanding desire to parent:

> I always wanted to parent—there was never a question in my mind whether or not I wanted to do it. I always wanted to, so that was easy for me. And then when I met my partner, and obviously he was interested in parenting and agreed to be a father through the moms, and it was set up that they would be the primary parents and he would be involved secondarily. So when we met and started dating and we were a bit older, we both had had other relationships. So when we met, we were, I think thirty-four, thirty-five, or something, so we pretty much knew that we both wanted kids right off the bat. So we started researching adoption before we got married, even. And we got married two years after we met, and we were matched with the kids a few months after that, and they moved in. So we were pretty sure about it.
>
> But there wasn't any one point in time when I knew that I wanted to parent. I just knew that I did, and we checked out the options for adoption in terms of internationally, private foster. We also looked briefly at the option of using a surrogate and an egg donor. And we ended up seeing a movie called *Daddy & Papa.* And that was kind of the clincher for me, that that's the route we would pick for adoption, based on seeing that movie and seeing for the first time a successful story of two dads who adopted through foster care, and so that worked for us.

After Oscar returns home, the fathers discuss the challenges they encountered in the public adoption system and conflicts with the children's foster parents:

Jeff: Our daughter's foster family included a biological son who was probably eighteen or nineteen; they had our daughter and her two sisters and another foster son. They were longtime foster parents and they were Christian, and they were very upset that our daughter was being adopted by a gay couple. So they made the visitations difficult—they would cancel on us. And then it was out of their control who the social worker and the county chose to place for adoption. So we don't keep in touch with them. They weren't thrilled with us; they did ultimately have us come into their home, pick our daughter up, take her for a visitation as we were getting to know her. And then we got a call that she [their daughter] had gone into the hospital and we needed to come—either come and pick up Monica that day or that she's going to go into an emergency foster home. And we didn't want another

placement, so we left work and went [to Central California] and picked her up at her preschool that day—not ideal, a box of stuff on the porch—and then we picked her up at school, and that was it and the kids moved in. So we don't keep in touch with them, and then something else happened. Our daughter said some things about them hitting her, so we had to disclose that to our social worker. So they did an investigation, and we don't know the results of that. So based on all those circumstances, we didn't feel like it was a relationship we wanted to maintain.

The fathers discuss their experiences being identified as a two-dad family in public. One father is from Central America, so the fathers have experiences in the U.S. and in South America identifying themselves as a two-dad family:

Jeff: So I know I notice it, and people don't usually say anything, but I'm aware of it often. I mean, now we're really used to it so I kind of view us as being advocates for two-dad families. Like, I definitely don't ever try and hide anything, and I think, well these people who are observing us don't know us, so I might as well socialize them to the fact that we exist as a family. And then they will have at least seen, especially in Central America or different places we go, that idea will have crossed their minds, and they will have seen people functioning in that role, whether they agree with it or not.

Oscar: We have had a few circumstances ... remember we were in Southern California, we took the kids camping, and we were driving in the San Simeon area, and a male host at a restaurant, when we were going in, said, "Oh, mom stayed home, great, you know, good—dad's out with the kids." And I let the first one go because he was getting the menus and walking us to the table, and then he came out a little while later bringing drinks, and he says, "So, great that you guys are giving the moms a break today." And we were like, "Well actually, no. We're a two-dad family. These are our children, and there aren't moms that we're giving a break to." And he was completely shocked that that would even exist.

The couple discuss life in the Bay Area and multiculturalism:

Jeff: It's more noticeable. We kind of live in a bubble in the Bay Area in that it's so multicultural and there are so many kids that don't look like their parents. There are a lot of adopted kids, and then there are a lot of kids who, because of who the two biological parents are, may or may not look like the other parent. So that part of it is very common around here, and we also feel like we live in a community where we're actually celebrated more—the more different you are, the more people here like you around here. Like all of our neighbors, you know, love us

to death, and they kind of want to be our friends, you know, like, oh, the gay couple with the kids, you know, they think that's cool. So in a way, we're sheltered from maybe a lot of what other people in Salt Lake City, for example, would probably feel that we don't really feel. We feel very supported. Right across the street, the house out the window is two moms with a baby. And so we have people around us and at our daughter's school ... she has a lesbian teacher this year, she had a gay male teacher in first grade, and the president of the PTA is a lesbian. There are three or four other lesbian teachers in the elementary school. We're the only two-dad family, but there are a lot of families with two moms.

Chapter Summary

The genograms created for these case studies help to illustrate graphically how fathers are creating unique family formations that include their families of origin, their families of choice, and members of their children's biological and foster-care families together as social support units that help to create a sense of family for these fathers.

The case descriptions illustrate that gay fathers are experimenting with a variety of methods to form parent-child families. Gay fathers interviewed in this study have created families through public foster/adoption, private adoption, surrogacy, and kinship care. Two fathers also become parents through sperm donor relationships. Among the fathers interviewed in this project, donor relationships did not meet the level of involvement hoped for by the fathers. The fathers explained that they did not feel that their biological connections provided sufficient opportunities to parent, so they proceeded to find other avenues to become parents. In one additional case, a father declined to enter into a donor or shared parenting arrangement because he anticipated becoming an adoptive father in the future and was concerned about the effect that having biological children might have on his adopted children.

Genograms and case descriptions also illustrate that fathers are both accepting and modifying traditional concepts of kinship. Fathers accept biological connections as a basis for kinship ties, as can be seen in the ties that child raising creates between fathers and their families of origin. The genograms also illustrate that the fathers also work to create kinship ties between their children and their children's biological families, even when that requires the fathers to adopt nontraditional perspectives on kinship, such as developing relationships with their children's biological siblings who live in other homes and who were not adopted by the fathers in this study.

Chapter Five: Findings II - Results of Thematic Analysis

This chapter presents the repeating ideas and themes that emerged from a thematic analysis of the content obtained during interviews. A discussion of themes and implications for research and practice follows in the final chapter of the dissertation (Chapter Six). Data analysis was guided by the project's final research aims:

- To explore the lived experience of gay men raising children.

- To explore how gay fathers adapt concepts of kinship.

- To describe the role of social support in the lives of gay fathers.

- To present emergent and unanticipated topics.

As described in Chapter Three, the methods used in the analysis process were based on Auerbach and Silverstein's (2003) approach to grounded theory analysis. Steps in the process included:

1. *Search for relevant text* tied to research aims. For this project the search for relevant text began with line-by-line reading of the 300 pages of interview text in a series of searches as they related to each specific research aim. The identified relevant sections of text were then grouped together in new text documents.

2. *Identify repeating ideas*. Group text was assembled into repeating ideas based on a data coding process that began with line-by-line reading of text and an open coding process. Open coding means that codes were not taken from a preselected code book; rather, they emerged from close reading of selected text (Charmaz, 2006; Padgett, 2009; Patton, 2002). When possible, *in vivo* codes were used as summaries/labels for coded data segments. *In vivo* codes use the interviewees' own words to summarize key ideas contained within the selected text segment (Charmaz, 2006; Padgett, 2009; Patton, 2002).

3. *Summarize shared themes*. Through an iterative process of grouping, coding, and sorting, the statements that had shared characteristics received a final name (code). Where possible, *in vivo* codes, or concepts based as closely as possible on participants' words, were used to create names for the repeating ideas. As new ideas were encountered in subsequent transcripts, new repeating ideas were added, or new conceptual groupings were created. Through this iterative process, a framework of repeating ideas began to emerge.

4. *Construct a theoretical framework* that describes the relationships between repeating ideas and themes, and that is tied to the project's research aims. Repeating ideas were then assembled into a theoretical framework presented in Table 2 below.

For this research project, forty-seven repeating ideas were identified through the data analysis process that were related to the research aims of this project. These repeating ideas were organized into a theoretical framework with nine domains, referred to throughout as *shared themes*.

Themes and repeating ideas are identified and summarized in this chapter. Each research aim is presented, followed by an identified domain or overarching theme that is intended to provide detailed information about the specified research aim. Presentation of each research aim is followed by listings of related repeating ideas with sample quotations. The full assemblage of quotations that were grouped together to form themes and repeating ideas are not reproduced in this dissertation, but salient examples are given that represent the repeating ideas and their groupings. A short summary then follows the presentation of each repeating idea. Below, research aims, identified themes, and repeating ideas are presented in tabular form, followed by more detailed presentations.

Table 2 Research Aims, Themes and Ideas

Research Aim: To explore the lived experience of gay men raising children	
Theme 1: *Method of Family Formation and Desire to Parent*	
Repeating Idea	Kinship care
	Surrogacy
	Public adoption
	Private adoption
	Donor arrangements
	Open adoption
Theme 2*: Challenges of Parenting*	
Repeating Idea	Negotiating roles and duties
	Finding time for coupleship
	Our days are full: juggling work and home
	Stresses of full-time caretaking
	Special-needs children
	Interracial stressors
	Pressure to be super-parents
	Need for mental health services
Theme 3: *Rewards of Parenting*	
Repeating Idea	I am in love with my kids
	Parenting strengthens our bond
	Caregiving and parenting are gratifying and transformative
Research Aim: To explore how gay fathers adapt concepts of kinship	
Theme 4: *Kinship Is About Connection*	
Repeating Idea	Kinship includes fictive kin/family of choice
	Family of choice can include paid caregivers
	Connection with gay fathers' families of origin
	Kinship includes children's biological kin
Theme 5*: Biology Is Less and More Important Than I Thought*	
Repeating Idea	Fathers incorporate children from donor relationships into their family
	Biology is less important than emotional connection
	Biological connections are important for my children

Research Aim: To describe the role of social support in the lives of gay fathers	
Theme 6: *Importance of Non-Kin Social Support*	
Repeating Idea	Support from neighborhood and geographic communities
	Support at work
	The importance of being recognized as a couple
Theme 7: *Change in the Sense of Connection to the Gay Community*	
Repeating Idea	Rejection from gay friends
	It was never my world anyway
	We have totally different interests now
	Divides between gay dads and lesbian moms
	Managing gay culture with children
	Parenting has changed sense of gay identity
Research Aim: To present emergent and unanticipated topics	
Theme 8: *I Always Knew I Would Be a Dad*	
Repeating Idea	I never thought being gay would stop me from being a parent
	I'd thought about parenting for years
	I had experience caring for other children
	So we had a second date
	I always wanted to help and care for someone
Theme 9: *Experiences with Social Welfare System*	
Repeating Idea	We get in a lot of arguments with the world
	Support from social workers
	Need to receive full information about children
	Confusion and frustration with the child welfare system
	Understand limitations: know your bandwidth
	Quality of adoption training
	Changes in social work policies and methods
	Fear of disclosing limits and problems to social workers
	Advice for fathers new to the social work system

The following presentation is based on the analytic processes previously described in this report. The presentation and development of themes and an analytic framework marks an important point in the research process in which analysis moves from a summarization of data and codes into the presentation of a theoretical organization of the research data. While this may sound like just another step in the research process, in actuality this step marks a key moment when a qualitative researcher moves from coding what is on the page and what is contained in observations, transcripts, and text, and toward his/her own search for meaning of the collected data. Patton has called this process *modern alchemy.* He notes, "Medical alchemy aimed to transmute base mental into gold. Modern alchemy aims to transform raw data into knowledge, the coin of the information age." (Patton, 2002, p. 432)

Research Aim: To Explore the Lived Experience of Gay Men Raising Children

Based on coding and analysis procedures, three themes were identified that provide more detailed information about the lived experience of gay men raising children. Theme 1 is titled *Methods of Family Formation and Desire to Parent.* The identified repeating ideas describe fathers' experiences of forming their families; through their pursuit of these methods, more is also learned about the dedication and persistence involved in their desire to parent. The second theme under this research aim, *Challenges of Parenting,* describes different types of stressors tied to the parenting experience. The third theme included under this research aim is labeled *Rewards of Parenthood.* The data include tabular formats with detailed discussion and interview excerpts following.

Theme 1: Methods for family formation and the desire to parent

This theme presents information about the methods of family formation for fathers in this project. Their selected methods included surrogacy, private adoption, foster-public adoption, and kinship care.

Theme 1: *Desire to Parent/Method of Family Formation*	
Repeating Ideas:	Kinship care
	Surrogacy
	Public adoption
	Private adoption
	Donor arrangements
	Open adoption

While the methods of family formation are presented as final choices, it should be stressed that all fathers investigated a number of routes to parenthood before choosing to pursue one main strategy. Following is an excerpt in which one couple describe the process of reviewing their options:

R2:   [Sighs] Well, at the time, there was one particular symposium that was held through our church. They had a meeting and sort of a panel discussion around family creation. And there was a couple there, a gay male couple, that had adopted internationally.

R1:   But more and more countries were changing their laws and not allowing single men to adopt. So, we just never really [considered it], and also because we had already begun exploring an open adoption. *Interview #1*

This couple also commented on their investigation into surrogacy:

R1:   We looked at this option very briefly, and that was $100,000, and that was out of the question, …and then also, my mom was a foster child, so that

was always something that was part of my life of normal ways of making families. And my partner and I talked about it, and … [adoption] just felt like it was a better match for who we are and the fact that there are kids who need families, rather than create a kid because we had some, from our perspective, egocentric need to have a biological genetic connection to a child. *Interview #1*

Below are details on the final methods that each father used to create their family.

Repeating Idea: *Kinship care*

The father involved in kinship care made a decision to adopt his nephew. This father represents a type of gay father who has often been overlooked in previous studies of gay fathers. He is working class and a member of an ethnic community. He describes the decision to notify CPS:

It all started, the CPS got involved because when my son was born in San Francisco, my sister was not—well, I reported her. I reported my sister because there was some neglect… I said, oh, I've got to do something about this—this just is not right. And so when my son was born, there was more abuse, not so much physical abuse or sexual abuse … Neglect, that's the word, neglect. There was a lot of neglect. She got arrested because she did something stupid. My son was about four months old at the time. They took the kids and put them in foster care. I'd go visit him at the foster home, and he was always sick, and he didn't look good. He was skinny, he looked like he hadn't eaten in days, and I was really upset about that situation, so I asked to bring him home. *Interview #2*

Repeating Idea: *Surrogacy*

The fathers who created their family through surrogacy also had a strong emotional connection with their child's birth mother. They were pursuing a public adoption when they were approached with an offer from a friend willing to carry a child for them:

A friend of ours at the time offered to carry a child for us. In a nutshell, all of her conditions and concerns were perfectly complementary to our concerns and wishes. She didn't want to be a parent to children of her own, we didn't want to co-parent with anybody, and she wanted to help us. She felt like, after having known us for a number of years, that if we really wanted to have a family and she had the wherewithal to make that possible for us, and if she really believed that we should be parents, she should help us. After she broached this with us, we spent a year talking with lawyers and counselors and social workers, trying to get our ducks in a row and talking with family and friends after a certain point. We got as clear as we could about what we all wanted to happen, knowing that all bets could be off at any time. We did the turkey-baster method at home, and my partner and I both donated. ... Our friend lived with us for the last trimester of her pregnancy, and we went to the birthing center together and all came home

together, and then we actually left that state about three months after and moved to California. *Interview #5*

Repeating Idea: *Public adoption*

Other fathers were very committed to the idea of creating their families through public adoption and helping children in the public child welfare system. The following father explains his African-American partner's desire to adopt African-American children through the public child welfare system:

> My partner felt really strongly, super strongly, that he wanted to be a foster adoptive parent and because he felt—well, he knew that there were so many African-American kids waiting for a permanent home that he couldn't imagine going another route himself. So we just sort of always knew. … I think we had that parenting conversation on the second or third date; I think he announced that that was the way that he wanted to do it. I just began to imagine myself doing that. I didn't have another picture, if that makes sense. *Interview #4*

Another father describes his choice to adopt older children through the public system:

> R1:   Well, when I started this process, I needed kids who were fairly self-sufficient, because single men don't have babies and work, or if they do, I don't know how they do it. It just seemed like the natural way to go. *Interview #3*

Repeating Idea: *Private adoption*

Two fathers had birth mothers select them as adoptive parents. One father described the process that occurred while he and his partner were preparing for a public adoption:

> We got a call from an old friend who, third hand, heard of this woman who was eight-and-a-half months pregnant and wanted to give her baby up for adoption and preferred a gay or lesbian couple. We met her, and we totally clicked, and she chose us, and our son was born a couple of weeks later. … We were there when he was born, and we brought him home from the hospital, and … And then eight months later, we finalized things at court, and then two days after that, the birth mom came over for a visit and told us that she was pregnant again. It was kind of a complicated situation, but we ended up adopting her second child. *Interview #6*

Repeating Idea: *Donor arrangements*

As indicated in the discussion of kinship formations, two fathers had attempted to create families through sperm donation in partnership with lesbian mothers. In both cases, the fathers indicated that they were not satisfied with these parenting relationships, which motivated them to adopt children in order to become full-time parents.

Yeah, and in fact, being a donor is part of what made me realize how much I wanted to be a parent because I was so unsatisfied. You know, I mean, I am grateful I do have a relationship with my biological daughter, but you know, it's limited. I mean, I am her dad, but I am not one of her parents—I never was—and I have opinions about the mistakes they made and stuff. But whatever—she is who she is, she is twenty-five and she's launched, but no, it's not the … I am really grateful in retrospect that I did not end up co-parenting because it would have been hard for me, emotionally, not being a full-time parent. I mean, as hard as it is, it is like, I would not want to be separated from my kids. *Interview #6*

Two other men disclosed that they had been asked to be sperm donors but said they had declined because they did not feel that they would have enough involvement in parenting the children. As previously presented, one father declined being a sperm donor because he knew he would be an adoptive father one day, and he did not want to make his future children feel less connected to him than biological children.

Repeating Idea: *Open adoption*

Open adoption is a term with many meanings within this study. It has been used to described informal relationships between adoptive parents and their children's birth kin. The majority of the families in this study (7 out of 8) had made some kind of arrangements to include relationships with their children's biological family. Two fathers in this study pursued what would be considered open adoptions. These fathers entered into discussions with birth mothers and then completed private adoptions. In one instance, Family #6, the fathers were approached through mutual friends and were introduced to a birth mother who was looking for a gay family to adopt her child. In the second case, Family #1, the fathers felt very committed to pursuing an open adoption.

The following description provides information from this family:

R1: At that point we had really started going down and talked about the adoption path. And especially the concept of open adoption, and the more people we talked to about that and the importance of what that means to a child, having access and an ongoing relationship with their birth families ... their birth families, that was just something that really resonated with us a lot. *Interview #1*

Open adoption does come with unique challenges. These fathers described the two-and-a-half years they spent looking for a birth mother:

I: *Did you have any half starts?*

R2: Many, many, many, many.

R1: And that's pretty common in open adoption because in most cases you aren't being matched through an agency, you're making your own matches. And especially now in the day of the Internet, anyone can, and

they do, unfortunately, approach adoptive parents for any number of motivations. I mean, sometimes it's money. In our case, every time that we got scammed, it was an emotional scam. And we were a little bit newer in the process, and our agency that we used, we were not happy with them at all. So, we of course, not having expertise in this area, the questions we should ask or the stop signs we should look for, red flags, we're just kind of going on our merry way and things were happening. Eventually we did have a match with our son's birth mom, who had already given birth to him by the time we got matched. But yeah, we did have really painful experiences. We were matched for four months with a young woman in Kentucky, so we had gone back to meet her, and she stood us up, so we had some very painful experiences. And then most recently, right before we met our son's mother, we were talking with a woman in Colorado who was a professional adoption scammer, who, again, we made plans to meet her, and as soon as we started getting to firming up the details, she disappeared, and we learned after that, that that was kind of her … M.O.

R2:   It's a journey.

The fathers also described some of the barriers that limit gay parents' access to open adoptions:

R2:   In terms of advertising and putting ourselves out there for birth moms to approach us, the biggest, like the absolute, like the amazon.com of the adoption on the web, which is adoption.com. They refuse to allow any nontraditional families. So that's like sixty percent of the advertising cut out from us. *Interview #1*

Summary: Theme 1: Methods of family formation and desire to parent

How did the gay fathers interviewed for this project form their families, and what can we learn about their life experiences from their stories of this process? Analysis revealed that participants in this study utilized multiple methods to form families that were created outside of traditional heterosexual relationships.

As we observed, one father in this study formed a family through *kinship care* by adopting one of his sister's children, who had been placed into the child welfare system. This father was raising his son in a home environment that consisted of an Asian/Pacific Islander multi-generational kinship network. It is likely that this father represents an ignored and unstudied population of gay fathers. Research reports prepared by the Urban Institute and others on nongay samples report that approximately 60% of all children in kinship care in the U.S. are members of ethnic minority groups (Jantz, Geen, Bess, Andrews, & Russell, 2002). As such, kinship care represents a pathway to parenthood that is more common within ethnic communities. Also, as noted in this project's literature review, census datasets report that Black, Hispanic, and Asian same-sex couples (both gay men and lesbians) are more likely to be raising children in their households than Caucasian same-sex couples. Further research is needed to determine how many gay men may be creating families through kinship arrangements. Information on this topic is

missing from the literature and is an area in need of further exploration, as is research on all aspects of men of color as gay fathers.

One family in this study created their family through *surrogacy*. Several other fathers investigated this option but found it too expensive and time consuming a method of family formation. The one family that successfully completed a surrogacy arrangement had established a prior emotional connection with their daughter's birth mother. As discussed by the father participating in this study, the surrogate route to parenthood has many legal and ethical complexities. This method of family formation typically requires access to significant financial resources. In addition, surrogacy requires that the fathers have internal resources such as skills in building and maintaining relationships with birth mothers and in managing the anxiety and waiting periods while the birth mother relinquishes her parental rights to the child. The story of Family #5 in this project also provides an example of an overlooked and interesting finding, which is that some women are making choices to place their birth children within LGBTQ family environments. *Adoption* and interactions with family court systems were common experiences among all fathers interviewed in this study. All eight families interviewed had some type of interaction with child welfare and family courts. Interestingly, the family that had produced a biological child through surrogacy was not exempt from interacting with the family court system. The fathers first interacted with the courts while the birth mother relinquished her legal rights, and then later to complete a second-parent adoption.

Public adoption appears to be the most common route to parenthood that self-identified gay men are using to form their families. Five of eight families included in the study had adopted children through placements facilitated through the public child welfare system. This finding is consistent with findings from Johnson and O'Conner's survey of gay fathers (2002), which reported that 85% of the gay fathers surveyed had created their families through public domestic adoptions. An implication of public adoption and one illustrated through the development of genograms reported in Chapter Four is that gay fathers are creating very complex family constellations that include special-needs children, adoption of sibling groups, adoptions of older children, and transracial adoptions. An additional unanticipated finding of this study was the high level of fathers' frustration surrounding their interactions with the child welfare system (a topic discussed in more detail under the final research aim of this chapter).

Two fathers in this study completed *private adoptions,* and the family that had a surrogate mother also completed a private second-parent adoption. Fathers reported that private adoptions create unique stressors for families. For instance, one couple (Family #1) reported that it took them 2.5 years to find a successful match with a birth mother. They had multiple failed connections along the way, including being drawn into an online fraud in which they were solicited to send money to a potential birth mother. The story of Family #1 also suggested that there are still many barriers in place for gay fathers who wish to pursue private adoptions. According to Family #1 in this study, there is one primary online service that provides connections between waiting adoptive families and birth mothers looking to place their children through private adoptions. However, because of their conservative religious orientation, the owners of the website do not allow gay people to participate in the service. The impact of this stance is that prospective LGBTQ families lack adequate access to online private adoption services. Eventually, these fathers did find a birth mother who was interested in placing her child with gay fathers. A second family in the study (Family #6) also was selected for a private adoption because the birth mother wanted to place her child within an LGBTQ family. The

fathers involved with surrogacy also had to enter the family court system to complete a second-parent adoption. These fathers navigated the family court system in a very conservative state that has not traditionally supported gay adoption.

An intriguing topic revealed by these stories is the decision among three birth mothers to select gay families over other types of families as a preferred placement for their child. No research has been conducted with birth mothers who prefer to have their children adopted into LGBTQ homes, but these case studies do highlight the fact that some biological mothers may have a preference for placing their child for adoption within a gay father home.

All but one family in this study had created some form of *open adoption* with their children's biological kin. The one exception to this was Family #7, which did not have an open adoption arrangement with their child's biological family. The mother of their adopted son had surrendered her parental rights. All the other fathers had created some kind of linkage and connection with their children's biological kin.

Two fathers in the study had also served as *sperm donors* and had biological children who were being raised in lesbian households. The fathers had gone on to adopt other children, as their biological relationships had not provided the parenting experience the fathers had hoped to create. Three other fathers in the study indicated that they had considered creating a family through sperm donation but had decided not to pursue this option. One father explicitly linked his decision to not become a sperm donor to his future plans to adopt children. He explained that he was concerned that his future adopted children would feel less loved if he also had biological children. Discussion of sperm donors highlighted two important topics for the study: first, that most fathers had been planning and investigating family formation for many years before embarking on the actual process, and second, that fathers were creating unique new family forms that included arrangements with lesbian mothers.

As noted by Weston (1991) and Chauncey (1994), gay men have historically incorporated fictive kin into their families of choice. Given the frequency of the development of these types of relationships within LGBTQ social networks, and based on information collected in this project, it appears that gay men are now expanding their development of families of choice to also include children as well as the biological kin of their adoptive children. It was evident in the development of the genograms constructed with the fathers that they are creating connections and constructing new types of family formations that cross difficult divides of race, class, and the social divisions related to acceptance of same-sex relationships. The development of genograms and the information from these fathers' stories highlight the complex relationship that gay fathers create with their children's birth mothers and biological families.

The case descriptions also revealed that these fathers often pursued multiple methods of family formation and that many experimented with and tried multiple ways to include children in their lives. In part, this may be a result of both the resiliency of well-educated men and the skills that gay men develop to creatively navigate social barriers that attempt to limit life choices, be they barriers that attempt to block same-sex marriage, fatherhood, or other life opportunities.

Theme 2: Challenges of parenting

Fathers described the challenges they had encountered as parents. The challenges, which are presented below, have been classified into three layers or types of challenges. The first

challenges are stressors that might be encountered by either heterosexual or same-sex parents. These challenges are associated with time-binds and other situations tied to juggling work, home, and childcare. These have been characterized as challenges that are likely faced by most modern families, as described by Hochschild (1989).

Additional challenges were identified that are associated with caring for adopted and/or special-needs children. These include challenges associated with fathers' attempts to find treatment or services for their children, who may need additional supports to promote attachment or remediate effects of drug exposure or other problems that may be associated with placements within the child welfare system. Adoptive challenges are also associated with adopting children of different racial backgrounds than the fathers.

Finally, a third level of challenges were identified that are related to fathers' sense that they are representing the vanguard of the gay community as parents, It is proposed that this pressure likely creates an additional layer of stressors related to gay fathers' desire to present themselves as model representatives for their minority group.

Shared Theme: *Challenges of Parenting*	
Repeating Ideas:	Negotiating roles and duties
	Finding time for coupleship
	Our days are full: juggling work and home
	Stresses of full-time caretaking
	Special needs children
	Interracial stressors
	Pressure to be super-parents
	Need for mental health services

Repeating Idea: *Negotiating roles and duties*

Fathers discussed the challenges of negotiating roles and responsibilities with their partners:

> Well, how can I put it, he made a decision to do it, but it was clearly me who was pushing for it. So really from the beginning, as difficult, challenging, and relentless as parenting is, there is this very deep way that it has been gratifying for me which, it's not like it's not true for my partner, but the difficult parts have been harder for him, you know—less sleep, the stress, and no time or privacy, no relationship that involves us. *Interview #6*

It also appeared from some of the fathers' comments that caregiving responsibilities may not always be shared equally between both partners:

> Yeah, but I think when we're both here, I try to be sharing with my partner. … I took off completely from work for the first three-and-a-half months, so I was with him every day. … Although I really try my best, sometimes not successfully, but I really try my best to not step in and help my partner do the diaper changing or

whatever and give him his space to bond and bath time and stuff, and so it's pretty much shared now. *Interview #1*

This father described challenges of sharing caregiving duties:

In shorthand, in terms of social roles, I am definitely more the mom. I do [enjoy this mothering role], but it would be like many moms who wish there was a little more partnership, you know, my partner being a little more tuned into things. It would be great if he were, but he's not. *Interview #6*

In addition to negotiating roles of work and childcare, some of the fathers were also caring for aging parents, which created added stressors for the family. Two mentioned living near aging parents, and others discussed traveling to check on or stay connected to aging parents. One father was involved in weekly care for his father, who was divorced and diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

Well, can I add one other stress, too, like my partner's dad has pretty bad dementia, and he does a lot of caregiving for him, so it's not just the kids that stretch us, it's also his dad. And he probably spends eight hours a week giving care to his dad in addition to working full-time and having two kids and me. And that time that he's doing that is time I'm usually doing household things or things with the kids, which is fine—it's what needs to be, but that's another major stressor. *Interview #4*

Repeating Idea: *Finding time for the coupleship*

Like most parents, gay fathers find it challenging to maintain their relationship while also working and providing child care. Several couple also discussed the changes in their interpersonal relationship:

That's really hard for us. We are not good at that. That's our weaker area. What we do is—every Thursday, we go to dinner without the kids, and my partner's mom babysits for us. And it's just a couple of hours, but it's really important. And we just talk about, nothing grand, but our days or our work lives, our friends, what's going on with our friends' lives or family, or we might talk about a problem with the kids but they're not present. *Interview #4*

R2:   We don't have as much sex. We don't get anywhere near the quality amount of time together as a couple that we used to, and when we do get time together, we are exhausted. *Interview #7*

In terms of other things—dates—our sex life has definitely been impinged upon, and it could be better, we could carve out more time. So it's also hard because our youngest son is not adopted yet, and there are all these rules about babysitting, and anyone who babysits him has to be fingerprinted, and we're not going to run babysitters through that. So we just really have my partner's mom, but in February when he's adopted, my little plan is to get a regular babysitter. … So I

really feel like we need to kind of get a plan around a little more protected time. *Interview #4*

Bonding earlier in the relationship helps some fathers cope with parenting pressures:

One thing I would say is we did have that time before, which my partner insisted on. He had a lot of forethought because I think that time was really important for us, and I don't feel like we never did that, I feel like we did that. And I feel like we will be able to do that again. But just right now, it's not going to be the way it was, but I feel very confident that when the kids are a little older, we will resume that. My partner would probably tell you that he feels more worried about that. I don't. I just feel like when the pressure's off a little more, that stuff will take off. We've had this experience—we're really good traveling together, we like to travel, and we just fall into this great rhythm when we travel together. We travel together so easily, and we're so different. When you meet him, you'll be like, how do those two…? But we just—it works, traveling works, and our daily life works really well. *Interview #4*

This father reflected on what has helped the partnership survive these challenges:

I think what we've figured out is why would we fight about petty things when we're dealing with so much. And I think we go out of our way to be kind—I think we're probably even nicer to each other now because we're under pressure than we were when we didn't have pressures. So I feel really proud of that because we don't [fight]. We're really in a groove now, so that gives me hope, too. I feel we've gotten really good at that. I don't think it came naturally—we really worked at it. Like we didn't start there, we've worked really hard in our relationship, and we've not been an easy fit in some ways, but that doesn't matter to me. What matters to me is that we've gotten to the place where we're working as a team. We're doing the best we can to support each other. *Interview #4*

Repeating Idea: Our days are full: juggling work and home

Fathers discussed how they juggle work and child care and the challenges of managing their time:

R1:   Our days are very full, like any household where both parents are working.

R2:   We are both full-time. We both work in nonprofit or quasi-nonprofit settings, so we have flexibility—thank God—to take her to the doctor or you know, again, I work from home one day a week, and I'm able to go into the classroom for an hour because of that. *Interview #5*

These dads reflected on the difference between work and childcare:

R1:   You know, it's harder than work, you know.

R2:   It makes work easy.

R1:   For me, the greatest challenge of being a parent is just, it's literally changing hats. It's going from: I am a professional right now, and now I've got to change in about fifteen minutes and pick up my kid and become a parent again. Then … now my husband is home, and I've got to be a parent and a husband. So it's trying to change those hats. I think that is the biggest stress in my life—just trying to fully be in each place that I need to be present, so I think that's for me the biggest challenge. *Interview #7*

Repeating Idea: *Stresses of full-time caretaking*

Some fathers feel stressed by the demands of caring for children full-time:

He's pretty easy to be around, and he does sleep reasonably well, but the issue with my son is that he's so social that he wants to interact with you every second and him—in terms of like, even now, as a six year old. The idea of him playing by himself for 20 minutes is still hard for him to grasp. So that part of it is socially exhausting because I have a very social kid. I do think I need that private time, and with him, I just couldn't figure it out right then and there. It was also I just felt like he needed me and…But I went way beyond what was healthy for me, and then I ended up short-changing him, too, so there's that…there's that balance you have to find. If I'm not happy, you're not going to be happy. *Interview #4*

R1:   You know, because it is a whole new level of social interaction and the advocacy bit and the whole other aspect that has to come in. It's challenging because kids know your buttons, and they know your weaknesses, and they know everything else, so it is challenging. *Interview #7*

Repeating Idea: *Special-needs children*

Several fathers indicated that they had adopted special-needs children. Some fathers had very clear understandings of the special needs of their children early on in the adoption process, and for others it was more of a realization that unfolded as their children grew older.

This father discussed learning that his son was diagnosed with ADHD:

He does have ADHD, and he is a very active guy and big for his age. We wanted to send him to our neighborhood public school, and we spent a lot of time there before we realized it was not going to work, at least initially. He was just going to be one of those little boys of color who got in trouble every day and got more and more pressure to do things that he wasn't going to be able to do, like sit still. It's pretty unrealistic to a lot of five-year-old boys anyway, but more so for him. So

we applied to a couple of private schools, and we settled on two of them, and neither worked out because of structure, because of him being socially immature, all of which was true, and then we did some more calling around and found the school where they are going now, and everything fell into place, and everything just clicked because we needed a particular balance between structure and breathing room, and it's been great. It's going completely crazy financially, and I don't know how we are going to do it for the long term, but we had to start him in a place that was going to work for him. *Interview #6*

Other families shared their experiences with special-needs children:

R1: So we have a behavioral plan we need to do with him.

R2: A sensory diet and sensory integration, I don't know if you know what that is, but if you Wikipedia it, it's like, describes him to a T. It's hard, we can't have a kid in school for eight hours a day or nine hours a day like other parents get to do. He wouldn't, he couldn't do it. So my partner is missing out on a career opportunity right now because our son can't be in school for more than six hours a day. *Interview #7*

R1: So in our case, we had our son in a private school. The private school was not the right situation because it was too general and…

R2: Well, because he was special needs.

R1: He was special needs, and we needed a more structured way, and we actually went to a public school, and we got in because of our IAP, but he is a separate kid because he is not in Head Start, so every other kid has had Head Start but him, and then we pay extra, and there is just this nightmare of bureaucracy and figuring out how it works. If he were a foster kid, they would have accepted him, and there would be no problem. *Interview #7*

R2: It's a lot more work to have a special-needs kid. I know lots of people are studying gay and lesbian parents now, and I am just hoping they are controlling for special needs because so many of us are taking kids from foster care, which means we've got a much bigger population of kids with special needs, and people don't even know it yet. *Interview #7*

Some fathers did not seem prepared for the full challenges of parenting a special-needs child:

My son is on medication; he's been on medication since he was three years old. He's been on several medications, and they can't figure out what kind of medication he should be on. Because this one will work for six months, and then it won't work. He'll get on another medication, and then it's just trial and error for the last seven years. And, so finally I got tired, I said, well, let's do something totally different. Let's do holistic medication. So, that's what we're doing, holistic medication, and so he's been off the prescription drug for the last seven months.

Right now, my son has problems socially. He's not accepted very well in the community or in the school, in the family with my brothers and sisters. There's still a lot of animosity toward him because he doesn't know how to act in public. I've set a lot of boundaries, I've put a lot of boundaries on him, and I take away his privileges, no going to the store, no having ice cream or something like that, you can't have TV because you cuss at somebody or you punched someone. Because, like I say, he's physically strong and he can really hurt someone. He's been kicked out of three schools. *Interview #2*

This father talked about his fears for the future:

He's 10 years, he just turned 10. He's at an age where he's very good at gymnastics. He just started karate. He's very, very athletic. He loves to swim, and he's strong as an individual, physically, and sometimes I'm afraid that one of these days he's going to snap, too, and take it out on me. So, he hasn't done that. I mean, he's not at the point where I'm afraid of him, but I am afraid of him as he gets a little bit older, as he gets taller, as he gets stronger. I'm afraid that he's going to follow his biological dad's footsteps and not mine, and so I'm afraid that he's going to go that route. *Interview #2*

These fathers also commented on how pervasive they believe special-needs issues are within the gay-father community:

R2:   You know, we go to these gay dad picnics every now and then. I notice things about the similarities with these kids that I don't notice when he is in a general population of kids. And then you look around, and almost every kid is adopted from the foster-care system, and they were pretty much all drug exposed. And so, I am noticing stuff that I know, that the literature doesn't show. Like one of the things is that our son has glasses. He started with glasses at seven months old, amblyopia. It's amazing how many little kids have glasses…

R1:   Or how many we have picked out who don't…

R2:   …how many we have picked out who need them, and I am convinced that there is a correlation between meth exposure and amblyopia and eye development. There is no doubt in my mind, just like his OT is convinced that there is a…

R1:   A correlation…

R2:   A correlation between meth exposure and sensory integration, frontal lobe development. But there is no literature on this, but I am sure of it. I bet you anything, so those are…

R1:   Well, I think there are a lot of hyperactive kids…

R2:   …and they are saying, "oh, they are just boys" and you know … and I am like, "no they're not." *Interview #7*

This father discussed his challenges in providing care for his special-needs son:

It's tough. It's really hard because I didn't expect this thing to be this hard, to be this difficult. You know, I opened my heart, I opened my arms to him, and I thought I was going to have a time of my life. I'm not having the time of my life; it's very chaotic in my household. *Interview #2*

Repeating Idea: *Interracial stressors*

This father discussed the challenges he and his African-American partner have faced in dealing with racial issues within their relationship and in their parenting approaches:

R1:   We've had really different experiences of life, and that comes up with the way we perceive things. It's come up a lot, and it comes up with certain values around parenting, although we have more values in common around parenting, but there may be certain ways we see things slightly differently that probably has to do with our racial experience. And I think it's been, at times, a sort of hot issue between us. … To be really honest, I think my partner probably would say that there are certain things about him that he feels I don't get the way he would like, even now. And he'd probably be right, I mean, I wouldn't take that away from him, he'd probably be right.

            One example—this was not a fight that we had but one interesting difference that we had with our son: manners are obviously very culturally determined, and in my family you always say please and you always say thank you, and sometimes multiple times, and that's just the way I was raised. And my [African-American] partner was raised very polite in his own way, but by different rules, and one of the things that he was raised is, you don't need to grovel and sometimes please or thank you was implied. And he is very polite, but we have different rules around it and so—and occasionally we fought about that, like I felt he needed to say please or thank you more, and he's like, ahh, it was implied. But with our son, it was interesting because I would be like, uh, you need to say please or you need to say thank you. And my partner said to me, not in a hostile way, but he's like, uh, you know we're raising a black child here. Meaning this is a way that you need to let it be my way, and I was like, well, we're raising a black child, but he's in a black and white world, and I think he needs to know both ways. And my partner's like, well that's a good point, and then we moved on.

            I think our philosophy would be that we are expecting our son to know both ways and to learn when to be what, which is not easy. But I think we are outfitting him to be able to move in a lot of different worlds, and I don't think my partner feels that makes him less black, meaning it

doesn't make our son less black because we are not outfitting him to move only in the white world. I think we're preparing him to move in the two worlds and to be able to codeswitch—this is what African Americans call it—pretty effectively, and I think he does already codeswitch as a kid. And so it'll be really interesting to see what crew he chooses to be friends with when he's older and what his friends look like. *Interview #4*

Another father talked about helping his children navigate the racial divides:

Our kids are multiracial. Their mom is Latino, both birth dads are biracial white and African American. They, well, you've seen my kids. So talking about skin color and everything is very much out in the open in our family, but yeah, there is a lot of you know, "where did they come from?"

And people always ask you all kinds of questions, and one of them is often "Oh, where were they born, where are they from?" [I tell them] Berkeley. "Oh, well, I mean, where are they from?"

Just the assumption that kids who look like them must be from a distant locale, it's like, "No, local kids, born at Kaiser just like your kids." *Interview #6*

Repeating Idea: *Pressure to be a super-parent*

Many of the above-mentioned challenges and stressors are experienced by many, if not most, people who become parents; the demands of juggling career and home, work, and relationships are faced by all parents. However, it was also observed that many of the fathers in this study are also experiencing other, more subtle challenges and pressures related to becoming gay fathers. The label for these challenges has been termed *pressure to be super-parents.* The observed phenomenon here is that many fathers seem to be dealing with pressures to present themselves as model minority representatives. Fathers were asked about any pressure they may feel to try and minimize or conceal challenges they face as parents or any deficits they feel they have as parents.

R2:   I think that there may be a level of [anxiety in] why we try to do as much as we do. I think we do it because we enjoy it at the same time.

R1:   I don't know how much it has to do with being gay, though.

R2:   I'm not looking at it as being gay. I think it's all wrapped in just us being male, raising kids. I think that the gayness is, that's just a part of who are, but I think it's more about us being male; and I think that we tend to … we are trying to fulfill all the roles.

R1:   Well, we felt like we had to impress to get the baby.

R2:   Well, we still do because, if we want more kids … I feel like we really have to be showing how good we're doing with the baby.

R1:   We have to be the model foster parents.

R2:   There's a part of me that feels like if he's not just really developing and doing wonderful and ahead of wherever they think he should be [developmentally] that, are we going to get another kid? Because we want another baby. We've already got the license for it.

R1:   We've already got the crib set up. We just changed our license to six, so we can take three more.

R2:   But, yeah, there's artificial pressure there, I think. *Interview #3*

This father talked about his discomfort with his daughter discussing differences in their family structure:

> I am sometimes self-conscious around our straight friends when it's clear that my daughter's having some mommy issues, and I will sometimes cringe when they see that because I'd rather it always be true that we don't have those issues. When my daughter was, I think, four years old, we were on a trip down to L.A. with another family that we're very close to, and they have a girl the same age and a little boy who's a year younger. We were waiting in line to go into the science museum, and out of nowhere my daughter turned to our friend and said, "Can I call you Mommy?" and in the moment, our friend was like, "Sure, yeah. Fine. That's okay." Probably that was the right thing to do, but I was mortified. Mortified. So every now and then, something will happen like that. *Interview #5*

Repeating Idea: *Need for mental health services*

The stress of caring for children, negotiating responsibilities with partners, and juggling work and home life can lead to stress and frustrations for some fathers. Two fathers in the study discussed difficulties with diagnosis of depression within the first year of becoming fathers. Two other couples discussed returning to counseling to work on relationship issues. This father described his challenges with depression.

R1:   My greatest challenge was what I mentioned around the post-adoption depression. Like, just being completely in transitional crisis about the role acquisition, you know, just really not understanding the magnitude of what kind of sacrifice I had made. And having to completely reconfigure the way I thought about life and my privacy and time.

      … I will say that my partner and I had really different reactions. My partner adjusted much more quickly—he made an adjustment really quickly to parenting, and it took me eight or nine months. I mean, it was

just like a postpartum [depression], and I've talked to other adoptive parents who've had like a post-adoption [depression]. I actually got depressed, and I love my son and I love being a parent, but I was overwhelmed, and I just didn't appreciate the magnitude of what I'd taken on. I mean 24 hours on duty, how bored I was, because I took like four months off, and I was so bored, I just wanted to—I would talk to anybody out there in the world because it was so boring to be with him. It took me a long time to get over that and then sort of—be happy.

I: *Hmmm, I can see even in your eyes right now, I can tell just as you talk about this; it sounds like it was a really difficult experience.*

R1:   It was really difficult because I didn't expect that, and that's one of the things I think—I thought I had really prepared for parenting, you can't—it's like preparing for a disaster, you can prepare for it but the reality of it … But the second child, this second child has been fine. This time I was expecting something, like depression or just the overwhelm—and I would say that I definitely felt on the edge at times, but it was nowhere near what is was that first time. I think it's just that you have to give up so much of your own life, and it was such a rude awakening, but I'd already given it up for my first son, so I just give the little remaining shard. *Interview #4*

Another father discussed his challenges with self-care and his need to seek mental health services:

R2:   It was a lot to juggle, and I actually went back to therapy in June because I was just like, I am going to reach my breaking point if I don't have someone to talk to. I went in there, and I took an anti-depressant, which I never thought I would. It was a very low dose, but just enough to notice a difference.

I: *Well, just sleep deprivation, you know, can bring on some of those issues.*

R2:   I think that was part of it, so you know so you are worrying about your kid when you really should be sleeping.

R1:   Or you were making up on work because you were doing something else with the kid during the day. *Interview #7*

R1:   For a long time, he would sleep for two to three hours a day, so that's fine—I can work while he sleeps.

R2:   So anyway, so it's hard, but our son has a therapist that we actually talk to, too. I went back to therapy, I mean, this drove me back to therapy.

R: Well…

R2:   Well, plus my own health issues.

R: And work.

R2:   And work—it all came together. *Interview #7*

R1:   I took off completely from work for the first three-and-a-half months, so I was with him every day, which made it very difficult to go back to work. I was a wreck, cried every day [returning to work], and also because I grew up around babies, so it was always easier. *Interview #1*

This father described how small vacations have helped him cope with the demands of parenting:

> My partner did this great thing for me two summers ago. He said, "You really need to go away by yourself for like, four days." And I said, "Okay. I'm not going to argue with you," And those four days were like heaven because I slept whenever I wanted and I did what I wanted to do all day long. Every minute I would just be like, what do I want to do now?—it was amazing and so we learned from that, that I just need these little two days, even just once a year, that are just mine, and I can do the other 363 days just fine with the compromising and balancing. *Interview #4*

Summary: Theme 2: Challenges of parenting

Once gay fathers successfully find a method for forming their families, they are then faced with the realities and challenges associated with the day-to-day work of caring for their children and managing the time demands of careers, coupleship, social relationships, and parenting. As presented above, data analysis and coding on topics related to the challenges of parenting resulted in eight repeating ideas: negotiating roles and duties; finding time for coupleship; juggling work and home; stresses of full-time caretaking; special-needs children; interracial stressors; pressures to be super-parents; and need for mental health services. It is proposed that these stressors can be characterized as occupying three layers of challenges related to parenting: 1) challenges associated with negotiating roles and duties; 2) challenges associated with parenting adopted and special-needs children; and 3) challenges tied to pressures to be super-parents and gay men's desire to present their families as model minority representatives for the LGBTQ community.

Many fathers were very aware that their parenting experiences are part of the process of creating new role models and new opportunities for how gay men may live their lives. For some gay men, this came across as a need to present themselves as perfect parents and as a pressure to minimize or conceal personal parenting challenges for fear that they would discredit themselves or other gay fathers.

Also related to the desire to represent the LGBTQ community well, some fathers appeared to be actively aware of the need to take on advocacy and education work on behalf of other gay and lesbian people. Some fathers seemed to consciously see themselves as agents of change. Most

notable was Family #7, where the fathers have actively engaged in lobbying efforts to create policy changes within the child welfare system and in their corporate work environment. In other cases, the fathers did not seem to fully appreciate their advocacy or educational work. Many fathers made nonchalant comments during the interviews about how they have incorporated this advocacy work into their daily lives. Fathers shared stories about serving on diversity committees and policy groups at their children's schools, in their churches, and in their workplaces. These situations included some fathers purchasing two-father or LGBTQ children's books that they would donate to their children's schools. The fathers have incorporated teaching people at their children's schools and even total strangers about what it is like or what it means to be a father-only or gay family, and many see this as second nature. For instance, many fathers described educational interactions with grocery-store clerks, restaurant workers, people in airports, and even people in foreign countries when they are on vacation, as just part of their routine public interactions. However, the fathers often smiled or shrugged their shoulders when activities such as these were presented to them as advocacy work. Instead, the actions were just viewed as part of the daily work they do to help ensure that their children live in affirming environments. But to an outside observer, many of these fathers appear to be important LGBTQ ambassadors for themselves, for their children, and, in fact, for the entire LGBTQ community.

The interactions of these three layers of challenges created parenting stressors that may have an affect on the mental health of some fathers. Two fathers reported that they had experienced significant episodes of depression that required counseling and medication. Both of these fathers discussed challenges they had faced in dealing with stress and depression and adapting to being fulltime caregivers. One father also discussed his reluctance to disclose these challenges to his child welfare social workers. Two other couples discussed challenges and pressures of childcare that had led them to seek couples counseling. Two additional fathers shared information that, in a clinical setting, would likely be considered symptoms requiring additional testing for the presence of anxiety or depression.

Fathers who discussed emotional and mental health challenges were very surprised about encountering difficulties during their transition to parenthood and as full-time caregivers. Depression is not uncommon among new heterosexual birth parents, and depression has also been identified among adoptive parents. As is the case with all parents, gay or nongay, depression is perceived as a counterintuitive response to the joyful arrival of a child and, as such, a topic that warrants ongoing education and awareness among new parents. Further research would be needed to make any comparisons between rates of depression among gay and nongay parents. However, even given the presence of parenting stressors, overall all fathers seemed very comfortable with their capacity to serve as primary caregivers and their ability to manage the challenges and stressors of parenthood.

Theme 3: Rewards of parenting

While many challenges are tied to parenting, fathers also reported significant emotional satisfaction and rewards associated with the parenting process. First and foremost among these was the strong attachments these men had formed with their children. The emotional attachments were clearly visible in the ways that fathers described their feelings for their children, their enjoyment of spending time with them, and the satisfaction they received from providing care

and support. Following are brief summaries of repeating ideas/repeating topics identified across interviews.

Shared Theme: *Rewards of Parenting*	
Repeating Ideas:	I am in love with my kids
	Parenting strengthens our bond
	Caregiving and parenting are gratifying and transformative

Repeating Idea: *I am in love with my kids*

For most participants, the greatest reward of parenting was in the bond they were creating with their child(ren). Fathers discussed the emotional satisfaction they experienced from these relationships. Quite often, fathers became very emotional during this part of the interview; this included large smiles, tears in their eyes, and other emotional displays.

> In terms of reward, an image comes to mind of both kids, like with my older son, an image of bedtime and him telling me—he's not very open about emotional things—but sometime at bedtime, when I lay down with him, he'll tell me something that's pretty significant, very occasionally. And I love it, like when that happens it's really beautiful, so that's just a great moment with him where I feel like he's letting me in. And—I don't know, I feel like really close, those are nice times when we're—it's bedtime and he's sort of snuggly, he's not a snuggly kid, but at bedtime he's snuggly. And with my younger son, it's also bedtime where he's sort of—he has this intense gaze, and he'll be sucking on his bottle, and I'll be holding him, and he'll be staring right into my eyes really deeply and intensely. And I can tell like, wow, he's really needing me, you know, like it's just the reality that he loves me and he needs me and that intensity, it's all in his gaze, it's not verbal. And those are like the times that I feel like what I'm doing here is so important, and I like being taken out of my selfish adult life. I think that's made me a better person, so even though that—it's the sort of the opposite side of what was hard, right. Make sense? *Interview #4*

> Oh, it's just every, I mean, they're the greatest kids in the world. It's the best thing I have ever done, and I have done a lot of different things in my life, but I have never done anything that is so demanding and gratifying. It's just, you know, I am in love with my kids, and that's the most rewarding. *Interview #6*

Repeating Idea: *Parenting strengthens our bond*

Fathers also discussed the benefits that accrue to their relationship from parenting together:

R1:   I would say it has brought our relationship to a deeper understanding and value, at least for me.

R2: Yeah, absolutely, and I think we are definitely more committed now, I mean, not that we weren't committed before, because we were, but…

R1: There is a lot more purpose, I mean it is always that, I was having this conversation yesterday; I was looking at the psychology of, you know, people don't go crazy in prison if they actually taking care of someone else outside of them, and so raising a child for me is ... it just takes you to another level. It's not about just me or my wants or maybe about my wants or my husband's wants. Suddenly we are focused on this kid's needs and his interactions in life and, you know, it's an honor to do it, and it's a lot of responsibility, and I think it's brought us closer. *Interview #7*

Repeating Idea: *Caregiving and parenting are gratifying and transformative*

For some fathers, the rewards moved beyond love for children or establishing stronger ties with their partner:

R1: Absolute joy watching his mind grow, watching him become who he is and like things and not like things and laugh. Watching the three of us together, his joy of doing happy family things, when he says "I have a daddy and a papa." And he will just out of the blue say, "I love you daddy, I love you papa." You know, that's the greatest joy, it makes it all worth it.

R2: We have a lot of fun. He's a very fun kid, and we have fun together, the three of us, and all the stuff, the activities and the things we do, we have a lot of fun, we enjoy it. *Interview #7*

R2: I think we both know that we're learning every single day. There's something that's happening; so for me, at least—I'll speak for both us here—I think a lot of it is, part of the joy is just getting through it and realizing that we can do this. *Interview #3*

Oh, you know, they're the greatest kids in the world. It's the best thing I have ever done, and I have done a lot of different things in my life, but I have never done anything that is so demanding and gratifying. I am in love with my kids, and that's the most rewarding. Well, it's more than that because I am somebody who, I always wanted to be a parent, and I felt separate from the rest of the world as a non-parent, I really did, and that was tied to being gay. For me, it was more about not parenting than about being gay, and it feels like I am connected to a part of the human experience in a way that I yearned for and find incredibly transforming and gratifying, and it fills the picture. I felt very incomplete without doing this. It was just really so painful to go for so long without being able to do it, and so I am just thankful every day. *Interview #6*

Summary: Theme 3: Rewards of parenting

As the information shared by these fathers makes clear, while there may be challenges associated with becoming parents and managing childcare, these challenges are offset by the emotional satisfaction and rewards of parenting. Data analysis resulted in identification of three repeating ideas associated with fathers' rewards of parenting.

The first, *I am in love with my kids*, describes the deep attachments fathers had formed with their children. Even the one father who was having significant challenges with his son's behavioral problems discussed his strong sense of attachment to and love for his child. All fathers interviewed for this project discussed the emotional satisfaction they experienced as a result of being a caretaker to a child. One of the fathers in Family #4 tried to put into words the emotional rewards of parenting and his strong sense of attachment to his children:

> In terms of reward, an image comes to mind with both my kids. With my older son, it is an image of bedtime and him telling me, he's not very open about emotional things, but sometime at bedtime, when I lay down with him, he'll tell me something that's pretty significant. And I love it, when that happens, it's really beautiful, and so that's just a great moment with him where I feel like he's letting me in. And—I feel really close, it's bedtime and he's sort of snuggly, he's not a snuggly kid, but at bedtime, he's snuggly. And with my younger son, it's also bedtime—he has this intense gaze, and he'll be sucking on his bottle, and I'll be holding him, and he'll be staring right into my eyes really deeply and intensely. And I can tell he's really needing me, you know, it's just the reality that he loves me and he needs me and that intensity, it's all in his gaze, it's not verbal. And those are the times that I feel like what I'm doing here is so important, and it's just, you know, I like being taken out of my selfish adult life. I think that it's made me a better person, so it's sort of the opposite side of what was hard, right. Make sense? *Interview #4*

Most fathers also discussed how parenting helped *strengthen the bond* in their relationship with their spouse. Fathers shared experiences of having found new respect for each other and that they appreciated the opportunity to see different aspects of their partners. However, some fathers also discussed the fact that parenting can bring new stressors into their relationships. For instance, the father interviewed in Family #6 talked about wishing that his spouse was more engaged in the parenting process. So parenting cannot be assumed to automatically strengthen the bonds between partners, and, of course, this is a reality with both gay and nongay couples. The single father who participated in the study reported the opposite effect: the parenting experience heightened his awareness of not having a spouse, and parenting put a spotlight on the fact that he was "going it alone."

Fathers attempted to sum up the overall rewards associated with the parenting experience by discussing how caregiving and parenting are *gratifying and transformative*. Parenting created a new sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. The quotation from the father in Family #6 summarizes this sense of purpose very elegantly and is included here again:

For me, it was more about not parenting than about being gay, and it feels like I am connected to a part of the human experience in a way that I yearned for and find incredibly transforming and gratifying, and it fills the picture. I felt very incomplete without doing this. It was just really so painful to go for so long without being able to do it, and so I am just thankful every day. You know, things have been hard, and things are not easy with me and my partner, but I just have this deep appreciation every day to just be able to do it. *Interview #6*

Research Aim: To Explore How Gay Fathers Adapt Concepts of Kinship

Based on the coding and analysis procedures, two thematic titles were selected to help organize research questions related to how fathers have adapted traditional concepts of kinship. For the first grouping, the theme *Kinship Is About Connection* was selected to describe the concept of how gay fathers define their sense of family and who is included as members of their family. For the second grouping, the theme *Biology Is Less and More Important Than I Thought* is used to examine how biological perspectives are contained and understood within the fathers' formation of their families. The data is presented in a tabular format, with more detailed discussion following.

Theme 4: Kinship is about connection

When fathers discussed whom they perceive as part of their families, their discussions and examples included families with amalgamations of traditional and non-traditional kinship relationships.

Shared Theme: *Kinship Is About Connection*	
Repeating Ideas:	Kinship includes fictive kin/family of choice
	Family of choice can include paid caregivers
	Connection with gay-fathers' families of origin
	Kinship includes children's biological kin

Repeating Idea: *Kinship includes fictive kin/family of choice*

As discussed in the literature review, families of choice become an important source of social support for many LGBTQ people. Following are examples of descriptions of fictive kin relationships that were described by gay fathers:

My friend Leslie is family; we owned the two flats together in San Francisco. She's a lesbian and a single mom, and she decided to have a child when we were living together. And so we had two flats, but open kitchen doors; we visited each other regularly. And so she got pregnant and had a daughter Betsy, so I've known the baby since she was born. I babysit and help out and have been pretty involved. And then when my partner and I adopted our two children, they grew up downstairs from Betsy for the first year and half, and they were all very close.

And then when we all moved to the East Bay together, they moved to the same town as well, and they still live a few blocks away, and so we're very close. Like we'll take the kids over there and they sleep over. If my partner and I are going out to dinner, she'll watch them and vice versa. So it's kind of like a, you know, cousin kind of relationship that the kids have with each other. *Interview #8*

I have a best friend that I confide in who's been, actually … he was my first lover when I came out in San Francisco in 1984. He was my first partner and, we were dating for about a year, and then he was diagnosed with diabetes and so we ended it because he couldn't really give me enough TLC because he had to take care of himself. But we became friends, and we're still friends. Our anniversary is in January of this year, 25 years of being friends with him. I'm in love with, not in love with, but, you know, I love him because he's been there for me. … Yes, as part of my extended family. *Interview #2*

My friend, [Ann] [on the genogram], we've known each other since 1986, and so we see each other two or three times a year. She lives in Philadelphia, but I talk to her almost every day on the phone, so even though she doesn't necessarily interact with the kids all the time, she's always interacting with me and hearing about the kids. And my partner has a friend like my friend [Ann] [Jean] that he talks to a lot. She lives in L.A. So a lot of our connections are sort of—our closest intimate connections are somewhat scattered, so we do a lot of cell phone. That's how it is today; it's really weird. But they're part of—they feel like they're a part of our life. *Interview #4*

R2:   So we have some very close friends, neighbors who fall in that category [chosen family], who are, in fact, if we were to die, you know … trustees of our estate, and our son would go with them. They are a married couple, they have one kid of their own, and they each have two kids from previous marriages, and they are a straight couple. *Interview #7*

R2:   I'd say sort of the closest circle in some of these homes would be friends and people we know locally, those that, you know, I'm thinking some of the straight female friends we have, you know, I'm thinking, you know, Suzie, Kathy, people who just would come over and babysit in a heartbeat. Sort of like we call them family of choice. *Interview #1*

Not all close social supports are considered family of choice. One father clarifies the distinctions he makes between who he considers part of his family of choice and who is part of his social support system but not perceived as kin.

Actually, one of them [support network] is a heterosexual couple, Jean and Jane. They have two kids; they've been married about the same length of time. We see them quite a bit, actually; we probably see them once a month. They live about an hour from us, so our families get together once a month, but we—like we'll just go to their house and spend the night, our whole family will sleep out in their family room, and you know, we just really hang out with them and enjoy them a

lot, and they're really great with our kids. And our kids and their kids get along great, so they're definitely a key support. So they would probably just be a little outside the inner circle. *Interview #4*

Repeating Idea: *Family of choice can include paid caregivers*

Three fathers described relationships with paid female caregivers and described these relationships in terms that went beyond paid employees. These fathers included these paid caregivers as members of their family of choice. They viewed these workers as important sources for providing female role models for their children.

R2:   I mean, I am sure we are not the only gay male couple with a child or children who will talk about the importance of having …

R1:   … female role models and …

R2:   … a female role model so we have worked very hard to …

R1:   … have him have those …

R2:   He's had this one babysitter for two-and-a-half years, and we do our best to make sure she is happy and paid well so that she is consistent in his life. *Interview # 7*

R: Patricia, I've known for about six years. She became my son's only babysitter in this county since he was four years old. So, I've known her for six years, and she's been very, very nice to me. I mean, whenever I have something to do, you know, she's picking up my son, she's taking him somewhere, getting him to see movies, take him swimming. You know, she's like my best friend, you know, someone that I can confide in, someone I can trust with Jason. Jason is high maintenance—he has ADHD and is also bi-polar, so that's a very challenging situation that I'm in right now. But Patricia knows Jason because she's the type of person, she's licensed by the state, and she's also specialized in kids who have special needs. So, that's how we got connected through the county. There's a program at his childcare center, and that's how I got through to Patricia.

I: *And so, does he, go there after school, or … ?*

R: Yeah, after school, the bus picks him up from the school and then takes him to Patricia, and then I pick him up after I get out of work.

I: *So, it sounds like Patricia is a real important person.*

R: I tell her everything. You know, I tell her the most private things about my life. I mean, she's really like a mom to me. She's just a wonderful woman,

and when my mom died, before my mom died, she was my best friend, and now she's no longer here, so I turned to Patricia when my mom passed away. I couldn't reach out to my family as much as I did to Patricia. *Interview #2*

R1:   Well, we have a very set schedule now, so we have a nanny who's a lesbian, but just by coincidence, not by design, although it's an added bonus. We love her, and our son adores her. Her name is Marge, and she watches him for us all day on Monday and Wednesday.

R2:   I'm home on Tuesdays.

R1:   I've been working from home and then I'm off, just off on Thursdays and Fridays so, you know, and we think that that's really important, too, that he have a primary caregiver, even if it's just two days a week with a woman, since he doesn't have that with us even though, you know, obviously we're not into like gender stereotypes and stuff. I mean, I think it's just important for him developmentally. *Interview #1*

Repeating Idea: *Connection with gay fathers' families of origin*

All fathers in the study had maintained contact and relationships with their parents. Many noted that being gay had created distance in the relationship with their families of origin but that they still desired to build and maintain some type of relationship with their families of origin, even if the quality of these relationships was not as close or accepting as they desired:

R1:   "[My partner's] family is in [Central America]. We go every year, and [our kids are] very close with their cousins … And then my family, we're all very close, too. My parents are very involved with the kids, and so we see them at least twice a month. They sleep over a lot up there and visit and so—yeah, and particularly with a two-dad family, having my mom being so involved as a female in [my daughter] and [son's] life is really important. And she loves that role, and they love her, and so that's all worked out really nicely. And they're her only grandchildren, so she loves the fact that she has grandchildren." *Interview #8*

R2:   "Well, for me, I was adopted anyway, so my family has been nothing but supportive from day one, maybe a little amazed, but completely supportive…..Most of them are in Colorado, and I have a sister in Oklahoma.

R1:   My family's from Ohio. It's [gay adoption] illegal there.

R2:   I think it's illegal in Oklahoma as well.

R1:   My family doesn't really understand.

R2:   My mom is 87 years old—and that's her, right there [points to a picture of his mother]. There's only so much about being gay that she's ever going to understand or even want to understand. She accepts me for who I am, and she loves me for who I am. She loves my partner to death. I think for her, she just loves the fact that kids are in our lives. She understands that, and I think they get that. [talking to his partner] Your family is, your mom is completely on board, for the most part.

R1:   Well, now that [baby's name] is here, she's a little more on board. Babies are pretty amazing that way." *Interview #3*

The following single father explains how he sees the differences between his family of choice and his family of origin. He describes the limits he faces in discussing his feelings as a gay man with members of his family of origin and how his family of choice helps provide affirming support and place where he can talk about being a gay father. Interestingly, the person he discusses gay life with is not a member of the LGBTQ community, but she is open and affirming of his sexual orientation:

"Mila (subject's biological sister) is a good resource as well. My sister, Ilona, is a good resource, too, but no, my sisters, I can't talk about my intimate feelings, my gay stuff, my gay life. I can't talk about that with my family but with Ray [a close friend] and Patricia [his paid careworker], they're okay." *Interview #2*

Several fathers also discussed how becoming parents has changed their relationships with their families of origin:

R2:   One interesting thought is, so many gay men and lesbian women, you know, we get rejected from the family, break away from family types, and you get to the point where you create your families of choice, and it becomes easy to keep crafting that family to become as comfortable and nice as possible. You can cut people out. You don't see your parents because it's just too painful, whatever the reasons are, but through adopting kids—I mean, I've seen like just, you know, re-embracing our own families, not that there was sort of a huge separation. *Interview #1*

R2:   I would say we are also as a couple, closer, not as individuals, but as a couple to our families. I would say that my parents were okay with me being gay, but it wasn't like [pause], but now we are just like everybody else, now it really did make the difference in terms of like "oh, you really are just like all my other kids, there really is no difference, and, you're more fun." But, even your parents [talking to his partner] who have always been wonderfully accepting and even spoke [in a public hearing] about domestic partners benefits, I still think they …

R1:   No, they're much closer.

R2:   They're much closer, and that supports the relationship, the fact that you have so much familial buy-in for your relationship, and I would even say our neighbors. I would say … *Interview #7*

Repeating Idea: *Kinship includes children's biological kin*

Seven of the eight households in the study were created through adoption. Of these, two were private adoptions, four were public foster-adoptions, and one was arranged through kinship adoption. The eighth family was created through a surrogacy arrangement. Of the six families created through adoption, five have established some kind of ongoing interaction with their children's biological family. Which of the children's biological kin varies by family; for some, it includes birth mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandparents, and in others it includes connections to adoptive children's siblings who have been adopted into other families or who still reside with biological family. Family #1 discussed the challenges and rewards they have experienced in the process of creating an ongoing relationship with their son's biological great-grandparents:

R2:   And suddenly we've got this family that we've become an instant part of, and we're trying to navigate another family. It's challenging enough to navigate your own families, but now we've got this other family, so it's just interesting tackling some of these issues, which in a different life or, you know, other people might run away from; so it's just interesting, you know, being faced with other people and other issues.

R1:   I mean, I don't think it's my right to decide whether or not [our son] should be an integral part of his birth family. It's his decision, and until such time as he's old enough to say "I don't want to see my grandma and grandpa as much anymore," which I don't think he will, but, you know, it's [up to him], he has every right to be a part of that family, too; and I mean, in a simplistic way and how we kind of try to explain it to people who are kind of freaked out by the idea of open adoption is, you know, do you honestly believe that you could ever have too many people that love you? And his birth family loves him very much, and so who would we be to say that he can't experience that for himself? And then if he wants to ask some questions about his background or why he adopted us, which is what we say, he can ask them. You know, rather than have those questions and gaps and holes and feeling, you know, all these unanswered questions and things, he can ask them himself. *Interview #1*

Family #6 discussed integrating the children's biological mother into their family:

What I can say is that, they know their birth mom, her pictures, she and her pictures have been around from the start. We don't have a, you know, especially people who do international adoption have like an adoption book that chronicles their experience, which is really great, but we never had it because we never, it wasn't separate. I mean, Sara and her family, I mean, it's just part of the kids'

story, it's part of the whole story, it's not a separate part of the story. So I don't want to idealize it, but I think that our kids have some advantages." Interview #6

Summary: Theme 4: Kinship is about connection

Most gay-father families studied in this project included *fictive kin* in their nontraditional family relationships as part of their kinship networks. Several referred to these relationships as "families of choice." Their families of choice included close friends, ex-lovers, and other emotionally close social relationships. For at least three of the gay-father families interviewed in this project, their family of choice also included *paid female caregivers;* the fathers valued the fact that these paid relationships provided their children with female role models and female caregivers. Fathers often had strong emotional connections to the female caregivers in their children's lives. This was particularly true for the single father interviewed in this project. While these relationships did provide their children with female role models, it was striking that the fathers did not seem to have concerns about the role of the female caregiver being filled by paid employees.

Most fathers still had living parents, and they discussed their feelings about acceptance by and rejection within their *families of origin.* For some fathers, their desire to become parents was associated with first helping care for their siblings' children, and some discussed having close relationships with nieces and nephews. Fathers discussed the fact that they felt that having children in their homes had enhanced the connections with their families of origin, including both siblings and parents. One father shared that his mother had not been very accepting of his partner and their relationship, but she had changed her interactions with them once they had adopted an infant and she was now a grandmother. As this father explained, "Babies are amazing that way." Several fathers discussed how having children had created new incentives for them to reestablish closer relationships with their parents and siblings. The fathers also described how parenting had helped their families see the fathers' relationships as more valid and acceptable.

It was also evident in interviews that these fathers expend considerable energy working to incorporate their *children's biological kin* into the fathers' kinship networks. The majority of the fathers interviewed in the project seemed to have a strong desire to incorporate their children's bio-kin into their sense of family, and some gay fathers felt a sense of closeness with their children's biological families. There was a sense that the gay fathers did not want to exclude their children from understanding biological family connections; perhaps because many of these gay men have experienced rejection from society or from their own families, they appeared to be very sensitive to reaching out to bio-mothers and bio-family to avoid repeating this type of rejecting behavior.

Connection was a word used repeatedly when fathers discussed whom they identified as part of their families. The concept of who is family is tied to perceptions of connection to fathers' biological kin, children's biological kin, family of choice, and broader social networks. However, a key difference between *traditional kinship* and what will be referred to here as *queer kinship* is that, quite often, gay fathers' kinship ties lacked legal or biological justifications. The overarching concept at work within these families was that kinship is based on fathers' sense of emotional connectedness. Fathers were focused on creating emotionally connected lives for themselves and for their children. Use of the concept of connection seemed to convey an unspoken value being placed on social support and acceptance among these gay-father families.

Acceptance included the fathers' need to have their relationships validated as a family, even when there was no biological or legal basis for these relationships. It also connoted a desire to maintain affirming relationships that supported their sexual orientation and recognized their primary emotional relationships.

Within the theme of connection, fathers are creating amalgamations of different types of kinship, based on their definitions of connections. *Biological connections:* Fathers make significant effort to involve their own biological families and the biological families of their children into their concept of family. *Emotional connections:* These connections were defined by whom the fathers perceived as offering emotional support to them and to their children. Much of the emotional connection seemed to be evaluated on the basis of who spent time helping care for the children and which friends were willing to spend time listening to fathers discuss the challenges and rewards of parenting.

Theme 5: Biology is less and more important than I thought

While fathers displayed a wide ability to push the boundaries of traditional concepts of kinship to include friends, partners, former partners, and other nontraditional arrangements such as children born through surrogacy, the fathers were also often dealing with how to incorporate more traditional concepts about biological ties into their definitions of kinship.

For some fathers, biological ties became a less important consideration in their own sense of love and attachment to their child than they had anticipated. At the same time, many fathers found themselves dealing with the paradoxes and unanticipated consequences that an understanding of biology was more important to their children than they had anticipated.

Other fathers also discussed that they did not seem particularly concerned with having a biological connection to their children. It was particularly telling that the two fathers who had children through donor relationships with lesbian mothers had found these biological relationships less emotionally fulfilling than they had hoped for and so they pursued adoption as a means to raise children.

Shared Theme: *Biology Is Less and More Important Than I Thought*	
Repeating Ideas:	Fathers incorporate children from donor relationships into their family
	Biology is less important than emotional connection
	Biological connections are important for my children

Repeating Idea: *Fathers incorporate children from donor relationships into their family*

As noted in family descriptions, two fathers have also had children through donor relationships with lesbian mothers. In both cases, the fathers are working to incorporate these children into their current family systems. But these fathers also described an emotional longing for more active participation as parents. There was a sense that these relationships did not provide the personal rewards they had hoped to find in the parenting experience. These donor

relationships also illustrate that some fathers have experimented with multiple methods to create their families. One of the donor fathers was explicit in describing his dissatisfaction with the donor relationship. He loved his child and the connection he had with her, but he explained that he had desired more involvement in child-raising decisions and that this had prompted his decision to adopt his children, which highlights the concept discussed in more detail below that involvement and emotional connection were more important to these fathers than biological connection.

Both men who had fathered children through sperm donation have integrated non-custodial biological children into their concepts of kin and family. However, neither father has formal custody, legal rights, or visitations rights. Both relied on informal agreements with their children's mothers to maintain kinship ties with their biological children.

Two different fathers describe their relationships as follows:

> R1: "We should probably touch on that because my partner has two biological kids, too. So, he fathered two children for a lesbian couple that live in [other Bay Area county] that he's friends with. And so the son is now 11 and his daughter is 9, the same age as our adoptive daughter, and we see them regularly, usually one or two weekends a month." *Interview #8*

> "I was a donor; I have a biological daughter who is 25, so … my daughter, she has two moms, so … like I said, I was a donor, my daughter was born in the 1980s, so I had done that, and I had been in a number of co-parenting conversations with lesbian friends and that, none of those ended up happening, although later on, one did happen and we did conceive, and then she miscarried, so then it ended up falling apart." *Interview #6*

Repeating Idea: *Biology is less important than emotional connection*

For other fathers, there were fewer concerns about creating a biological connection with their children.

> R1: My mom was a foster child. When she was five, she went into foster care. So that was always something that was part of my life of normal ways of making families. And my partner and I talked about it, and the more we really decided, it just felt like it was a better match for who we are and the fact that there are kids who need families, rather than create a kid because we had some, from our perspective, egocentric need to have a biological genetic connection to a child.

> R2: And then we also looked at our families, and we both have parts of our families where we don't know the genetic history for various reasons, and the parts of our families where we do know the genetic history, well, we might as well take a gamble on someone else's genes, because ours are not good. *Interview #1*

Repeating Idea: *Biological connections are important for my children*

While the majority of fathers indicated that they placed more emphasis on emotional connections with their children and less emphasis on biological connections, it was also evident in interviews that these fathers spend considerable energy working to incorporate both their own biological families and their children's biological families into their kinship networks. Fathers seemed to want to incorporate their children's bio-kin into this sense of family, and some gay fathers felt a sense of closeness with their children's biological families. There was a sense that they didn't want to exclude their children from having connections to their biological family members. Perhaps because many of these men have been excluded from kinship ties, they were very sensitive to reaching out to their children's bio-mothers and bio-family to avoid this type of rejection.

For instance, this quotation from one father describes how he views his children's relationship with their biological mother:

> My daughter has gone, not so much lately, but about a year ago, she was going through a lot of really identifying with the birth mom as part of "she's our mom," I mean, calling her a mom, which is fine with me. I just felt it was her need. One thing that's interesting in a gay dad family is that adopted kids can have that stuff around their birth mom, and I don't really feel threatened by it. It's not like "oh, you know, she's the 'other mom.'" And also what would happen, over and over, is that my daughter would express this longing for her birth mom, but when she was actually there, she held back a little bit and was pretty shy, and if anything, she was more clingy with me. But the idea of her birth mom is really important to her, and that's fine, I mean, that's something she needs. We haven't seen her birth mom since last February. We kind of had a little blowout about something, and she has kept her distance, but the kids haven't expressed distress about it. Their birthdays are coming up in the next few months, so if she doesn't come back around for that, then they will notice that. *Interview #6*

The following quotation from the father who had a child with a surrogate sums up the duality of biological connection in very clear terms. On one hand, the father has discovered that he does not need a biological connection to feel emotionally connected to his child, but he has also discovered quite unexpectedly that his daughter needs to understand her own biological ties to her surrogate mother.

> R: Biology, on the one hand, is less important than you think it will be. ... It was important to me that both my partner and I donate sperm and that it not be just him because I was afraid that somehow my daughter would be distant from me if she weren't mine. Now, I see how much less that really matters than I ever thought it would. So, biology, on the one hand, is much less important than I thought it would be, and biology, on the other hand, is much more important than I thought it would be. Like, who her surrogate is totally matters to my daughter. That may not matter to someone else's daughter, but this is something that my daughter needs to know about, she wants to know about. So that biological connection is

>   meaningful to her, at least right now, in a way that I didn't expect it would
>   be.
>
> I: *It sounds like at the same time, your own biological connections are less*
>   *important than you'd expected they would be, too.*
>
> R: Yes. Absolutely.
>
> I: *So the attachment and the bond to the child kind of takes over?*
>
> R: Yes—and who it is that is waking them up every morning and putting
>   them down every night is what makes you close to a child, not whether
>   she has my eyes or [my partner's] eyes. *Interview #5*

Summary: Theme 5: Biology is less and more important than I thought

The fathers in this study expressed a tension and dichotomy in their sense of the importance of biological ties as a basis for kinship. Many fathers seem to have entered into family formation with minimal concerns about the fact that their families often lacked legal or biological connections. For instance, using a push/pull analogy, fathers push against traditional views of kinship by creating families that may lack the legal right to call themselves a family and by incorporating fictive kin and children with whom they do not share biological ties. However, both the desire of their own children to understand their biological stories and the impact that children have on a father's biological family pull the fathers back toward biologically defined kinship ties. As seen in case descriptions, fathers devote time and effort to incorporate their children's biological kin into their sense of who is a part of their family. Most fathers expend considerable effort to help create connections for their children with the children's biological kin. Fathers may take their children for regular visits to bio-kin, maintain correspondence, and, in some instances, even drop off their children for unsupervised visits with the child's biological kin. The fathers seem quite comfortable navigating through race, class, and gender divides that are often difficult to navigate within our society. Fathers seemed very comfortable and in control of the relationships that they have established with their children's biological kin.

As noted, two fathers also had children through donor relationships with lesbian mothers. In both cases, the fathers are working to incorporate these children into their current family systems. But it also seemed that these biologically based donor relationships did not provide the kind of parenting experience that the fathers had hoped to create, again highlighting the push and pull relationship with biologically-based definitions of kinship. One of the donor fathers was explicit in describing his need for children was about more than a biological connection. He explained that he loved his biological child created through IVF and the relationship they had established. But his need for family required more involvement in child-raising decisions and this had prompted his decision to adopt children.

How do gay fathers accept and modify concepts of kinship? For participants in this study, the term *kinship* is an amalgamation of both traditional and personal perspectives. Kinship is one lens used by gay fathers to conceptualize their social support networks. Among gay fathers who participated in this project, the concept of kinship appears to be broad, vague, and in flux.

Analysis of interviews reveals that gay fathers simultaneously accept and modify traditional concepts of kinship within their family support networks. One of the best descriptions of these differences between queer and traditional family structures was presented by a father who described the view that gay families create "family webs" as opposed to traditional "family trees." The different types of connections established by the gay fathers are used to create a "web of support" that surrounds the gay-father family. A key value of kinship among gay fathers is that kin provide support, nurturing, and protection against judgment and lack of acceptance.

Research Aim: To Describe the Role of Social Support in the Lives of Gay Fathers

The fathers' relationships with their bio-kin were discussed in the preceding section within the analysis of whom fathers perceive as part of their kinship networks. In addition to kinship ties, fathers also discussed the importance of creating broader social support systems. Analysis revealed that these relationships create both support and stressors. . The repeating ideas on non-kin social supports were divided into two themes: *Importance of non-kin social supports* and *Connections to the gay community*. As part of the first theme, analysis reports on how parenting has changed the fathers' sense of social support they receive from non-gay sources, including interactions within their neighborhoods, with their children's schools, and through their work environments. All fathers in relationships reported that they felt that they had established stronger ties with non-gay community members. Also, among the partnered couples, their status as a couple had been enhanced through their parenting experience, and having children had encouraged them to develop more relationships outside the gay community. The second theme discusses analysis that found the fathering experience creates new stressors/challenges in gay men's sense of social support from within the gay community. Details on these themes follow.

Theme 6: Importance of non-kin social support

In addition to changing and strengthening social bonds between partners and with fathers' families of origin, becoming a family also seemed to increase the amount and types of social supports that gay men found in their lives. Gay fathers described finding social support in their neighborhoods and geographic communities, more social support at work, and enhanced recognition as a family and as a couple.

Shared Theme: *Importance of Non-kin Social Support*	
Repeating Ideas:	Support from neighborhood and geographic communities
	Support at work
	The importance of being recognized as a couple

Repeating Idea: *Support from neighborhood and geographic communities*

Some fathers discussed the importance of moving into neighborhoods that were open and welcoming. Fathers felt that the Bay Area provided safety and support for LGBTQ families:

R1:   We have a very active community. So our street is very active, there are twenty-five kids on it, we chose that street, our neighbors are on a [phone] list, we do street parties, so one of the things we looked at in adopting our son was to make sure he had lots of consistent connections, and then I would say we have other active friendships, people across the Bay that we get together a lot with. *Interview #7*

R1:   Again, I go back to our neighborhood and our…

R2:   Whereas our neighborhood, which, by the way, has three other gay male couples with kids on our block, which is important.

R1:   Which is amazing, so that was important, too. At different ages and stages and everything, so he can see that. *Interview #7*

R1:   We feel very supported, I mean, we have a ... right across the street, the house out the window is two moms with a baby right across the street. And so we have people around us and at our daughter's school, she's already had ... she has a lesbian teacher this year, she had a gay male teacher in first grade, the president of the PTA is a lesbian. There are three or four other lesbian teachers in the elementary school so ... and a lot of families with ... well. we're the only two-dad family, but there's a lot of families with two moms.

R2:   And so we're in a unique situation in the Bay area that's wonderful.

R1:   I know, it's wonderful and I purposely went and lived somewhere raising kids in this way where they would be, you know, in a situation where they were made to feel bad about their family and would rather live somewhere…

R2:   Your friends Abraham and…

R1:   …and Wade, yeah, they live in [city in South America].

R2:   …and Wade in Mexico, they just literally, they live behind bars.

R1:   Yeah.

R2:   They're afraid of people's reaction or, you know ...

R1:   And that's very hard for them. *Interview 7*

R1:   We were always very active in the neighborhood in different ways, but we joined a whole other culture by having kids, and we all need each other. You need each other to raise kids, you know, you need to talk things out,

you need to think about things, you know, switch off, have them play together, all that stuff needs to happen. *Interview #7*

Repeating Idea: *Support at work*

Work is an import source of support for gay fathers. As presented in the discussion on kinship, some fathers look to coworkers for ongoing support, which can mean including coworkers as parts of their families of choice. Fathers also identified the importance of being in family-friendly work environments as a source of support.

> R1:   It was good. It was amazing, it was wonderful. Lots and lots of people helped us out.

> R2:   They had a baby shower for us in the president's conference room, one hundred mostly women showed up and gave us like thousands of dollars' worth of gifts.

> R1:   And we changed our son on the conference table …

> R2:   It's just utterly shocking to me. I might just start crying, you know, how people sort of came out to support us through this process. *Interview #7*

The following father describes the support he and his partner received from coworkers:

> I will also say that I think another really critical component was the circle of support that we had. Who ... we just had people coming and visiting us a lot, there were a lot of people excited to see my daughter come along. It was really great to just have a lot of people coming to see us. We had another colleague of mine—he and his wife had recently had a baby, and unbeknownst to us, she's a nurse, and she pumped two weeks' worth of breast milk for us, so we had breast milk for my daughter.… So it just really felt communal, and I think that helped us a lot as well. *Interview #5*

Repeating Idea: *The importance of being recognized as a couple*

Part of the value of being parents is that fathers' relationships receive more recognition and support from others:

> R2:   I would say we are also closer as a couple, not individuals, but as a couple, to our families. my parents, they were okay with me being gay, but now we are just like everybody else, now it really did make the difference in terms of like, "Oh, you really are just like all my other kids, there really is no difference, and, you're more fun." But, I think that even your parents who always been wonderfully accepting and even spoke our for our domestic partner benefits, I still think they …

R1:   Yes, they're much closer, and that supports the relationship, the fact that you have so much familial buy-in for your relationship, and I would even say our neighbors. I would say …

R2:   Even though we lived in our neighborhood for nine years …

R1:   Same block, same street.

R2:   Same block, same street, before we were in an apartment, and then we bought a house on the same block, we weren't really noticed and involved like we were once we had a kid. So that helps the relationship because you know that thing about social support for your relationship is so important for longevity and happiness, right? I mean, at least I believe that.
        Interview #7

Summary: Theme 6: Importance of non-kin social support

As noted in discussion of the last research aim, which explored how fathers conceptualize kinship, this researcher found that kinship is based on fathers' sense of connection, and connection is based on who fathers perceive as welcoming and accepting of their sexuality as well as in fathers' attempts to incorporate traditional biological views on kinship into their definitions of family. Theme 6 explores how the parenting experience also creates links and connections to the larger heterosexual world for gay fathers. In the interviews, all fathers reported that becoming a parent increased their interactions within nongay social worlds, and fathers in relationships reported that becoming parents enhanced the recognition of their coupleship among nongay community members as well as within their families of origin. For instance, fathers discussed being welcomed into new territory as gay men, such as in their children's schools and afterschool programs and in larger social contexts such as their neighborhoods.

Fathers also discussed that being men caring for children is still an unusual enough occurrence that gay-father families draw attention when they are out in public. This creates situations in which fathers developed more confidence in identifying themselves as gay people in nongay social settings and an increase in importance of the support faathers' found within mainstream settings such as their *neighborhoods and other geographic settings*. For instance, the fathers in Family #7 talked about the difference between living on the same street without and then with children. When they didn't have children, they felt less conspicuous but also less socially connected. After they bought a house and adopted a child, they noted the development of a stronger social network and an environment in which their neighbors made a more concerted effort to get to know them and create social connections.

What fathers appear to be describing here are some of the ways that parenting creates a passport to "normalcy" for them. Becoming a parent encourages gay men to venture out of their gay social worlds. The fathers interviewed were very thoughtful about how they enter these mainstream arenas, and they choose their social environments very carefully, for instance, by evaluating school and preschool environments that will be welcoming and accepting of

themselves and their children. Most fathers also put a great deal of thought into where they were going to live, taking into account both financial factors and concerns about safety and support.

During interviews, the fathers also reflected on their *support at work*. For many fathers, their coworkers were important sources of emotional support during their transition to parenthood as well as in sustaining their parenting work. For instance, the interview subject in Family #1 shared a story of how his coworkers rallied around his family when they adopted a newborn. His coworkers arranged a baby shower, and it was his nongay coworkers who made visits to the home during the first weeks when the fathers were learning to parent. The coworkers also offered to babysit and get involved in family activities. The fathers commented that they were surprised to find more of their support coming from their nongay coworkers than from gay friends. The father in Family #6 described how touched he was when the wife of a coworker pumped breast milk for the fathers when they brought their newborn home from the hospital. This was another act that moved beyond expectations of the kinds of support that the fathers expected they would receive from coworkers.

The fathers in Family #7 also shared stories about the level of support they had received from coworkers. These fathers told stories about how their coworkers organized a work-time baby shower that was held in the organization's corporate boardroom and how they were encouraged to change their infant son's diaper on the conference table in the large corporate conference room. This was seen as an important symbolic act for the fathers, one that represented a transgressive action that broke organizational norms about the use of the corporate space and acceptable roles for men within a large hierarchical, corporate setting.

It is an interesting and intriguing finding of this study that gay fathers' sense of social supports are found in different sites than one might expect to find in other groups of parents, such as heterosexual mothers. For instance, it appears that these gay men are adapting worksites as places that help them find positive support for their parenting roles, and they report feeling supported as parents by their coworkers and within employment settings. This support does not negate the resistance gay fathers have encountered at work; the challenges of juggling work and childcare are likely present for gay and nongay families alike. Fathers also discussed the fact that some female coworkers were not as supportive as they had expected when they attempted to access parental leave. One of the fathers in Family #7 worked to change parental leave policies within his corporate setting.

Both kinship ties and social supports are related to the sense of connection that fathers described in Theme 4, where it is proposed that kinship is tied to fathers' emotional and biological connections. Here this concept of connection is expanded to incorporate geographic connections and broader views on acceptance. Information from the fathers also reveals more about how the concept of connection is tied to fathers' feelings about acceptance and being welcomed and recognized as gay fathers within broader social systems. In addition, acceptance is involved in how fathers navigate mainstream social worlds and in how their decision to become parents changes their sense of welcome and acceptance from other gay men.

As mentioned in other parts of this discussion, fathers are often taking on the work of adapting current systems to meet their needs in their daily lived experience, but they seem to spend little time evaluating the broader implications of these acts. The fathers blaze trails, incorporating what they need to sustain themselves within these settings with minimal reflection

on how these acts are steps in transforming the meaning of work settings or the role of fatherhood. They just do it.

By becoming parents, fathers gain increasing *recognition as a couple,* and that recognition and encouragement sustains their relationships. For some fathers, this was quite obvious. The fathers in Family #8 observed that they are living in a very liberal community, where being the gay dads on the block brought a great deal of attention and a desire on the part of people to provide support. As the fathers observed, "Everyone wants to be our friends."

Theme 7: Change in the sense of connection to the gay community

One specific aspect of social support is changes in the sense of connection to the gay community that are experienced by gay fathers, as discussed in the literature review (Bozett, 1981a; Mallon, 2004; Miller, 1979a; Strah, 2003). This is a longstanding finding of previous research. Many researchers have reported that gay fathers feel as if they are navigating between two worlds. Fathers in this project reported similar feelings.

Shared Theme: *Change in the Sense of Connection to the Gay Community*	
Repeating Ideas:	Rejection from gay friends
	It was never my world anyway
	We have totally different interests now
	Divides between gay dads and lesbian moms
	Managing gay culture with children
	Parenting has changed sense of gay identity

Repeating Idea: *Rejection from gay friends*

Many men reported a sense of being rejected by their gay male support system once they became fathers:

R2: I was at my first boyfriend's birthday party in San Francisco, and it was sort of the first time I had been out since we'd had our son, and he said to me, "Well, it's been nice knowing you. I'll see you when the kid is eighteen." And it was sort of like, "Yeah, you're absolutely right." *Interview #7*

R1: (Sighs) It's been kind of hard. We have, I think a lot of our support that we thought we would have from our friends in the gay community has evaporated, even people who have been friends for years and years and even decades, and that's been hard. It's been really hard. I think still, even now, a lot of the gay male community is centered around bars and going out.

R2:   And the friends of ours who have the disposable income are spending it on remodeling kitchens or on the latest outfits. We're like, okay, we went shopping at Target this weekend, and we bought diapers. They can't relate. *Interview #1*

R2   I was supposed to be at my friend's wedding that day, and I am like, "I have a two-week-old child that I have to take care of. I have been up all night, and I can't drive out to Napa for your wedding." And I lost … my friendship over that. I mean, to this day. *Interview #7*

R2:   I'm just thinking back to even this past weekend. We were at a dinner party with a couple with kids, a straight couple with kids, and then a gay single friend, and he held our son for much of the evening, and the baby fell asleep in his arms, very doting, very loving. And then end of the evening he handed him back, and there was no sense of, oh, come around and babysit or, you know, let's do a coffee date at some point. The straight friends with the child, they were like, we'll babysit anytime. Give us a call day or night, just let us know. We'll be happy to do so. *Interview #1*

R2:   The dynamics have changed. Most gay men are not interested in child rearing.… What I discovered is that if we come to them, or if we come to events, they fully accept us. They love the kids. The boys know them all by first name. We do do some things with these people. It's just that these guys don't seek us out to go do things. Let's put it that way. We don't get a lot of calls saying, hey, you want to go to a movie, or, hey, you want to go do something this weekend? *Interview #3*

R2:   I think of our straight friends, even our single straight friends just sort of get it more and they're like, how can we help? I'll come over and babysit. And I can't think of too many of our gay friends. I'd really have to wrack my brains of those that have stepped forward and said, we'll babysit. Go for a night out. *Interview #1*

R2:   And that is the one exception that I was thinking of, um, more of a friend of a friend than a close friend of ours. He wrote us a very, very kind e-mail, just asking how's it going, you getting any sleep, etc. He said, I know how alienating it can be as gay male parents.

R1:   Meaning from the gay community.

R2:   From the gay community.

R1:   And that was like, wow, yeah, you're right.

R2:   Yeah, we were just like, wow, someone gets it. Yeah. *Interview #1*

Repeating Idea*: It was never my world anyway*

Other men relate their lack of connection to the gay community to their sense that they never really fit within the stereotyped gay party world, and they therefore self-selected out of that setting.

R2   Because, you know, we weren't the clubbing go-out-and-take-Ecstasy people, or meth, or whatever people do … *Interview #7*

I know those people, but that was never my close circle anyway. So it's not like I am cut off from that world; I never really felt part of it. It made individual relationships harder to sustain just because that's what happens to every parent, but it didn't make me feel cut off in the gay community in a different way. *Interview #6*

My partner and I … were always the kind of people to be the first to go home if we went out dancing with anybody else. We always left before everybody else, so we were never the stereotypical promiscuous, partying gay man. *Interview #5*

Repeating Idea: *We have totally different interests now*

Fathers discussed changes in their interests after becoming parents, which accounts for much of the change in their friendships with other gay men and their move toward closer relationships with heterosexual parents.

R2   It's really interesting because the subset of men that we are friends with, that we stay in touch with, has become very small, where the group of women that we know has been expanded. I have tons of female friends in my life now that I didn't have before, and I don't know that I would have had. *Interview #3*

I do think that there are some segments of the gay community that we're marginalized from now, but I still enjoy talking with a single gay friend about their adventures at Steamworks or whatever, and I feel like I can connect in some way still, but it's different now. *Interview #5*

R1:   Yeah, I mean, I am sure you have heard it already as a story, but you know, most people we relate to are people with families and kids, and they tend to be straight.

R2:   And we have totally different friends than we used to. *Interview #7*

Parenting young kids is just so absorbing. Even if you have time to be with other people, it's like you are in a different world, and the things that are interesting or engaging ... other people don't really want to talk about naps a lot or whatever, let alone diapers…. My kids are the main thing I think about. So … I don't have a lot

of single gay male friends who never had kids and never thought about it and never wanted to. We are just in this other world. *Interview #6*

R2:   It's a totally different life, and my closest friends here in the Bay area, I talk to them occasionally, maybe e-mail them on Facebook or something, but we don't see them anymore.

R1:   On a day-to-day basis, the conversations that we have are predominantly focused around raising kids and/or being in a life that you raise kids and have everything else that is related to that. *Interview #7*

We're home most of the time, and it's hard, I think, for straight people, too, who make that transition, but there's at least more of an expectation, and you can have community, and I think we're lucky here in the Bay Area that we have that [sense of community] with the LGBTQ community or with our friends who are straight, but it's like now I find … more of our friends that we count on as our support network or even just people that we count on within our social network now are couples with kids, and most of them are straight. Because we relate more to them and the daily challenges that they're going through and supporting one another through sleepless nights and diaper rash and all of those things that you have as a parent, regardless of your sexual orientation. *Interview #1*

R2:   We used to go out for dinner and the theatre and have dinner at 8:30 …

R1:   … and travel.

R2:   … and travel with people and go with other people to places …

R1:   And work a lot and, you know ...

R2:   ... and go to the gym with gay friends and go to the parties that start at 9:00 at night, and go to whatever in the Castro.

R1:   We are ready for bed at 9:00 now.

R2:   Yeah, if I don't fall asleep with the baby. *Interview #7*

It just kind of feels like those moments where you meet someone and you realize that all you have in common is the fact that you're both gay and that's it, and that gives you about three minutes of small talk and then you're done. That's kind of what it feels like. *Interview #5*

Repeating Idea: *Divides between gay dads and lesbian moms*

Some fathers expected that the change in interests and focus on parenting would help them to create closer relationships with lesbian mothers. However, for most fathers, this has not actually worked out as they had hoped.

> I believe readily that there are some dads … who will say that maybe that don't feel welcome at lesbian organized parenting events. *Interview #5*

> R1:   I think some of the lesbian thing is just that energy, you know. Yeah, but they didn't want the male energy around, so we couldn't really fit in there. *Interview #7*

> There aren't really any two-mom families with whom we're particularly close socially. There are a couple of two-mom families at our school who we love seeing and we will linger with each other at the playground, but we don't have each other over for dinner, and they're not in our inner circle. *Interview #5*

> Well, you know, let me say so even at [summer camp for gay families], where it is 90% women, so we're hanging out with the women mostly and we totally love it. We love those women, we just don't see them outside of [the event]. *Interview #5*

Another couple discussed the relationship they had established with a lesbian couple:

> R1:   In fact, we have become very close with Ann and Amanda and their son.

> R2:   Yeah, Ann and Amanda have a son who is a year and a half older than our son and another one who is twenty-two who has ADHD. *Interview #7*

It is interesting that the lesbian couple whom these fathers established a relationship with also has a child with a learning disability. One reason for felt divisions between gay fathers and lesbian mothers may be related to the high percentage of fathers raising special-needs children and the fact that most lesbian mothers are not dealing with these challenges. This topic was not explored in this study, but it would be an interesting topic to explore in future research.

Repeating Idea: *Managing gay culture with children*

Two interview topics that were difficult to discuss with gay fathers related to their discomfort around exposing their children to the sexualized community activities that exist within the gay male community. A shared cultural event that highlights these tensions is the San Francisco Gay Pride Parade. Fathers were asked to describe their involvement with the event. Some fathers had taken their children to march in the parade or to the children's play area that is part of the Pride Festival accompanying the parade. Through these questions, fathers began to discuss the challenge of talking openly about gay issues with their children.

R2:   You have to get to the kids' thing through the drunken masses, so we weren't going to do that this year. It's just not appropriate to bring a child into that environment. Why is it not appropriate? I mean, kids should not be seeing naked people on the street, and drunk people and violence and people like, pulling someone around by a collar. I think it's great that that exists, but that's not going to be where I am going to bring my kid. *Interview #7*

You know, a lot of the events are parties and alcohol, and my partner and I like to drink and go out and dance, but those are not things we would take our kids to. I just don't want them to be around a lot of drinking and stuff. But we take them to Pride Parade. We do a Gay Family Camping Weekend, which we love. We've done that three years now, and that's just a weekend, and we just sort of figure out other community activities that are more family friendly and do those. We do the YMCA Gay Family Night ... you know, we look at their schedule, we don't go to a lot, but we go to the things that are closest [to home] and that work with our schedule. *Interview #4*

R1:   There's only so much in the culture I can take now.

R2:   Yeah. He's probably a little less tolerant of that than me. I tend to still like some of the gay culture, just the campiness, the different things like that.

I: *Do you go to Gay Pride? Do you go to a gay bar?*

R1:   I've never been to a Gay Pride.

R2:   I've been to plenty of Gay Prides and still go, but usually, I go now to work, doing some type of fundraising or something; so I've gone from being the little party boy and all that kind of stuff to now being more on the fundraising side, working side, doing stuff with the community side. But he has no use for that.

R1:   Well, I'm that way all the time. I feel that when people act gay, I get embarrassed that they do that in front of my kids.

R2:   But let's put it this way, we also do not hide that from them. Our kids know we're gay. Obviously, they know that we're two gay men. *Interview #3*

Here the conversation moved into a more personal topic between the fathers around a specific incident:

R1:   Yeah. I don't like them seeing drag. To me, it's inappropriate.

R2:   And I'm completely the other way.

R1:   Personally, I hate drag.

R2:   But I'm completely the other way because I threw a drag show last year as a fundraising event. The boys came and helped me with it and loved it. They had such a good time. I think it's okay to expose kids to that.

R1:   [Interrupts his partner with a challenging question] Dildos?

R2:   Well, that was completely unplanned. There was an act that I did not know was going to pull a dildo out, and, yeah, that happened.

I: Did you tell them beforehand that you were going to have kids there?

R2:   Yes.

R2:   That was not supposed to happen, but this, again, is the thing where they're not thinking along the lines of there being kids there. It was inappropriate, whether there were kids there or not because we had older women there. It was an inappropriate thing that was done, because I was running the thing.

R1:   Not that it was a bad thing, but ...

R2:   Well, but I hadn't been pre-warned. I'd been pretty clear, let's keep it … but at the same time, that's part of the gay culture, is that we challenge those boundaries. Who am I to stop that? When I was younger and all that kind of stuff, it didn't hurt anybody. It certainly gave me a great opportunity to talk to my kids about dildos, which is not necessarily a conversation I wanted to have, but I had it. The thing is, in most situations in my experience of raising kids over the last couple years, we trip out on this stuff more than they do. We get more wound up about it than they do; and the bigger deal you make out of it, then that's when they start thinking that there's something more to it. My take was to just, ask what'd you think about that. They thought it was pretty funny. *Interview #3*

On the gay parade: It's fun, you know ... we hang out with the family contingent, and we play in the family garden, and that's what we do. And we see our friends. I mean, I have been kind of explaining what is going on. It's very colorful and fun and then it's like, "Oh, look, that person forgot to wear their clothes today." And that kind of stuff, and so some of it kind of goes over their head, but it's pretty fun. I mean, there is a lot of color and energy and walking down Market Street and having people applaud you is kind of a neat thing, especially for my son. It's part of their life, you know.... Explaining what gay means, I would be curious to touch base with them right now, you know, if I just asked them what gay means, what they would say. But they get that two men get married or two women get

married or two dads or two moms, and so they kind of get that. I don't think they know why it's such a big deal, honestly. *Interview #6*

Fathers also discussed the challenges of including their children in activities within the LGBTQ community and finding ways to address some of the overt sexualization that occurs in gay environments:

Well, I am not that comfortable with it. I mean, well, the naked part, it's just like, it's somebody's body, it doesn't invite, that being equated with sexuality. It's kind of funny, they think it's funny, somebody is walking around naked, it's like, "Oh my God, somebody is walking around naked," but I think that they haven't really seen people getting led around on a leash. We would have to talk about it. I mean, it's not like I like it or am comfortable with it, but that's part of going to Pride Parade. If you are not prepared to deal with it, you shouldn't go. And like I said, we are mostly with the family contingent, and we are hanging out in that one little area, and so there is a lot of stuff that we don't really see and ... I don't know any other event that we would go to. *Interview #6*

I: *Do you take your daughter to Gay Pride?*

R: Yeah, we do.

I: *So tell me what that's like and how you navigate through all of that.*

R: It's a little challenging every year. You know we march, which I think is a big difference from watching, and it's the same dynamic with my parents. It's great to march with my parents in the parade, not so great to stand there with them and watch it because then you see everything. We teach her that it's a wonderful celebration of the gay community and that the word *gay* means more to her each year. This year, for the first time, she noticed some of the naked people walking around and pointed them out to us. For her at 8 years old, it's mostly just tee, hee, hee and funny and silly. She loves drag queens, she's drawn to them. I think that's beautiful. Yeah, so we really like it. Again, it's a very sort of, for lack of a better term, *sanitized* experience in many ways. We watch a little bit of the beginning, we jump in the gay families group, and we march. She loves it, and she gives out candy to all the kids on the sidelines, and then we wind up at the playground in front of San Francisco City Hall and play. So what's not to like about Gay Pride, you know? It's just a great thing for her. But it's a very particular slice of what's happening. *Interview #5*

This father discussed how he saw the impact of his own internalized homophobia and how he admired other fathers who are more comfortable with being gay and addressing gay issues in front of their children.

You know, honestly, I think something I've seen in some other two-dad families that I admire and wonder if we could do a better job at around specifically the gay

thing, is they just seem kind of just more cavalier and a little bit less fraught about it than my partner and I are. They're either quicker to be really campy with their kids or even to make comments about how hot they think some guy is that's walking past the car, whereas my partner and I are just a little more puritanical in that regard. So I sometimes wonder if those kids are going to grow up and just ... It's just really not going to be as much as an issue for them because their dad's more kind of [opened] up about it. *Interview #5*

Repeating Idea: *Parenting has changed sense of gay identity*

Fathers also discussed how parenting has changed their sense of identity as gay men. There appeared to be ambivalence about how much of these changes were related to the choice to become parents and how much the perceived changes were related to changes in the gay movement over the past ten years.

I: *So does that change the way you feel about a connection to the queer community?*

R2:   Yeah, I mean, I wouldn't say that I am identified with the queer community anymore. I am identified with the mainstream gay and lesbian, bisexually, even transgender community. Whereas before I was proud to be queer, I was in Queer Nation, I was sort of, queer was the right thing, but no, what queer stands for doesn't include children. I would say.

I: *Okay, so how do you think movement should juggle all of that?*

R1:   How you make your identity in all that is difficult. I guess I have always kind of felt more on the outside anyhow. So for me, it has been easier to kind of come in and out of ... it wasn't a loss.

R2:   I was changing before, but I have changed even more since and because of having a child … *Interview #7*

R1:   But what it means to be gay today is very different than what it meant in, you know, 1987 or 1997 or 1970.... I mean, the kids these days are identifying as gender queer and all of these other things and they're, you know, taking on identities all over the map, and I think it is creating some issues, or interesting possibilities, as well as cause for conversation within the gay community. So I think this decision that we made to become parents is in line with all of those other decisions that have been made by lots of people before us and will continue to be made by lots of people after us; but I think it's just giving people more opportunities to realize their full potential of what it means to be, you know, happy and fulfilled; and, you know, having a child for us, for me was not about being gay. It was about what it means for me to be human and what's important to me as a person and my personal goals in our relationship. *Interview #1*

I am in many ways normalized as a gay man because I have a kid, because I have a partner and a kid, and don't have to deal with a level of stigma or scrutiny that a single gay man or a partnered gay man without a child has to deal with. I can talk about, you know, swim team and aftercare and crap like that, and that's a way to be normalized, for lack of a better term. So I sometimes have to check myself and kind of not leave behind the rest of the gay community in my own mind because I need to stay deeply connected to those people. *Interview #5*

R1:   And I would never, ever presume that our family, now that we have a child, is any more valid or valuable as a family than, you know, a gay couple or lesbian couple or straight couple or whatever, who decide that they don't want to have children; but we should absolutely have that right and be supported in that decision, as much as I feel it's my responsibility to support my gay brothers and sisters who may not choose that path. I think it's about choice, and I think, if anything, what the gay liberation movement was about was freedom to choose how you identify and how you wanted to create family and relationships, and if we can't have that same respect, then I think the gay rights movement has failed, absolutely failed in its mission and in its lofty goal of true liberation. *Interview #1*

Summary: Theme 7: Change in sense of connection to the gay community

Tensions between gay fathers and gay men who are not parents (Bozett, 1981b; Miller, 1979a) is a longstanding topic in studies of gay fathers. Bozett noted that it is difficult for gay fathers to find "congruence" within their identities as both fathers and gay men and asserted that "it is especially difficult for gay fathers to . . . articulate both [identities] because each of their separate worlds tends to reject the other identity" (Bozett, 1981b, p. 90). He characterized these tensions as a competition between the two "careers" of the gay and father identities. He proposed that integration is possible over time if gay men find acceptance of both identities. Bozett proposed a theory of "integrative sanctioning" as the process that either supported or blocked integration of the gay and father identities (Bozett, 1981b). He defined sanctions as responses that indicate either acceptance or rejection of the two identities within their social contexts. As seen in the discussion of Theme 6, the *importance of non-kin social supports*, the integration of the gay and father roles appears to be facilitated by gay fathers' interactions in the mainstream culture. The support received by fathers during their involvement in the nongay world appear to confirm Bozett's findings that positive social sanctions such as support at work, within families of origin, and in the broader social realms do help to support the development and integration of fathering and gay identities. This integration has likely been supported by changes that have occurred in mainstream society over the past thirty years that have increased acceptance of same-sex identities and relationship.

As noted, past researchers and writers have identified gay culture and gay men who were not fathers as rejecting and distrustful of gay men who become fathers (Bozett, 1981b; Mallon, 2004; Miller, 1979b; Strah, 2003). An aim of this project was to examine if this sense of tension with non-parenting gay men had also changed over time. Analysis supported previous findings, as fathers in this project did describe *rejection from gay friends* as something they had experienced in the process of becoming parents, as the fathers in Family #1 observed when they adopted their

child and one of their longtime gay friends commented, "See you when your kid turns 18." While the source of these tensions was not explored in-depth in this study, it was clear in the interviews that the fathers appeared to be angrier and more distressed by the rejection and judgment received from other gay men than by rejection and judgment they experienced from nongay community members.

Past published studies examining tension between gay fathers and other gay men have typically focused on the gay fathers' feelings of rejection from peers (Bozett, 1981b; Miller, 1979a; Miller, 1978). However, in interviews with the fathers in this study, a more complex picture emerged. While some fathers did feel a distancing and rejection from what they perceive as the mainstream gay community (a concept self-defined by the fathers in this project), discussions with these fathers suggested that this distancing was at least in part due to their own actions, as indicated in two of this study's repeating ideas: *It was never my world anyway* and *We have totally different interests now*. Both of these repeating ideas highlight the fact that the gay fathers in this study participated in the process of self-selecting out of participation in what that they perceive as mainstream gay culture. For some fathers, this separation was not a new experience, as expressed by those who shared the view that "It was never my world anyway." Other fathers, who at one time saw themselves as part of the gay social world, now either viewed parenting as one reason to step away from these interests or noted that the parenting process changed the amount of time they had to participate in social settings or changed their interests. For these fathers, parenting led to changes in who they wanted to spend time with and how they spent their time. Parenting gave them a different focus and different needs and priorities.

Also of interest, not only did the fathers report that they felt different from non-parenting gay men, but many of the fathers reflected that becoming parents had not lessened *divides between gay fathers and lesbian mothers*. One logical assumption would be that parenting among gay men would increase a sense of connection between gay fathers and lesbian mothers, but most fathers interviewed in this study reported that they felt separated from lesbians with children. These differences affected gay fathers' involvement in organizations formed to provide support for Bay Area gay and lesbian parents. Fathers reported that when they attended these gay parenting meetings, the groups were dominated by lesbians whose needs as parents seemed to be so different that the gay fathers felt out of place or unwelcomed. It is likely that some of the lack of affiliation with lesbian mothers may be tied to the differences in family formation between gay men and lesbian mothers. Lesbians predominantly have biological children and are not adopting children at the same rates as gay fathers. Also, for some fathers, their sense of being outsiders may be related to adopting transracial children and children with special needs. One father in the study described his differences with lesbian mothers and attributed them to gender-based differences in parenting approaches between gay fathers and lesbian mothers. He felt that the lesbian mothers he knew were much more focused on dialogue as a parenting method and that gay fathers were more likely to expect their children to conform to rules and limits set by the fathers. More research would be needed to confirm this observation, but it presents an interesting question for further exploration.

An additional contributing factor to changes in gay fathers' connection to the gay community is likely tied to the challenge of *managing gay culture with children*. Fathers discussed their challenges in navigating gay settings, which often included overtly sexualized behaviors. Some fathers showed great skill in navigating these divides, such as the father in Family #6 who normalized the experience of his daughter seeing a naked man walk down the street during San

Francisco's Gay Pride celebration by commenting, "Oh, look, that person forgot to wear their clothes today." He then diverted his child's attention into the family-friendly children's section of the Pride Festival. However, other fathers appeared to be very uncomfortable discussing these sensitive topics of gay identity and gay sexuality with their children. For instance, some fathers discussed their decision not to take their children to the San Francisco Gay Pride Parade as one tangible example of these tensions. The provocative discussion this researcher observed between the two fathers in Family #3 discussing the appropriateness of the appearance of a sex toy (dildo) during a gay drag show attended by their teenage foster sons also highlights these tensions. One father related that he had attempted to prescreen the event with his peers and that he had been assured that the evening would be appropriate for children to attend. The second father in this family did not appreciate his children witnessing this display. Conversations with other fathers confirmed similar comments that gay men who were not parents lacked an understanding of gay fathers' desire to limit their children's involvement in sexualized discussions and environments. This may contribute to some fathers' decisions to withdraw or limit their involvement with the larger gay community.

Beyond choosing to distance themselves from gay culture, some interview participants discussed their feelings that *parenting has changed the sense of their gay identity* or perhaps the value or importance they placed on their gay identity. This appeared to be linked to their feelings about changes in their collectivist spirit or ability to find commonalities based on a shared sexual orientation.

While the fathers in this study seemed acutely aware of the sense of rejection they felt they received from gay men who were not parents, they seemed to overlook their own judgments toward other gay men. The fathers displayed their own judgmental views, which moved from acts of distancing themselves from interactions within the gay community toward actions that labeled gay men who were not parents as selfish, self-absorbed, or lost in long-term adolescences filled with drugs, sex, and rampant consumerism. As the fathers in Family #1 explained: "And the [gay] friends of ours that have the disposal income . . . are spending it on remodeling kitchens or on the latest outfits. We're like, okay, we went shopping to Target this weekend and we bought diapers. And they can't relate." So perhaps it would be better to view the sense of rejection, lack of support for the gay father role, and conflicts around the sanctioning of the father role within the gay community as a transactive process between gay fathers and gay men who are not fathers. These interactions appear to be more complex than previously published studies suggest (Bozett, 1981a). It is likely that judgment and rejection are occurring on both sides of this conflict within the gay community; nonparents may feel judged by gay fathers and vice versa.

Also, what appears as an unspoken assumption in these discussions are views on what constitutes gay culture. For many of the fathers interviewed, it appears that gay bars and sexualized realms constitute the central organizing space within their sense of the gay community. The fathers reported that they felt that the common view of the gay community is still center around sexualized environments where the focus is on meeting partners and exploring sexual liberation as key roles in creating a gay identity. The tensions and conflicts that the fathers have with their sense of connection to the gay community seem to be tied to these narrow definitions about what constitutes the core of the gay male community and what it means to be gay. These tensions can be seen in both Family #1's frustration with the changes between his choices and those of childless gay men in his social network. His comment that these men are

using their disposable income to remodel their kitchens and buy designer outfits was said with a great deal of emotion, as was his sadness at losing longstanding friendships. The unspoken questions that this father and other gay fathers are grappling with in these reactions to the gay men's community include: *What does it mean to be a gay man today? Why are my choices for family creation not more embraced and celebrated within my community? Why is the community life still so centered around sexualized environments and within sexual expression?*

This unacknowledged tension can be characterized as a competition in meanings of family and underlying values connected to the sense of family. As discussed in the literature review, the term *familism* was suggested as an analytic frame to investigate values and norms connect to the meaning of family. *Familism* refers to an ideology or theory describing the types of family bonds, traits, and values deemed most desirable within a family system and society.

The identified tensions between gay fathers and their sense of connection to the gay community can be characterized as a competition between two definitions of familism that influence gay fathers' views about family. The first is a traditional definition of familism that places a high value on the nuclear family, and the second is the proposed term *public familism* or *queer familism,* which refers to the value of the collectivist spirit that supports the creation of new family forms within the LGBTQ community to help community members cope with rejection and discrimination. A potential conclusion from this researcher's interviews with gay fathers is the identification of gay fathers' struggles to balance the needs of their own nuclear families with the expectations of the collectivist spirit of the gay community. While there are well-recognized conflicts over the contested meanings of the term *familism* between liberal and conservatives, it is likely that there are also contested meanings of the term *family* and family values within the LGBTQ community. So the struggle among gay fathers regarding their sense of connection to the gay community can be characterized as a competition among these two options for social support: the group or the nuclear family.

Research Aim: To Present Emergent and Unanticipated Topics

An additional goal of this project was to present unanticipated topics that emerged from discussion with participants and that highlight unmet needs and participant concerns. During interviews with fathers, two topics emerged that presented interesting and unanticipated findings. First, fathers discussed their longstanding desire to become parents. Second, although it was not a research aim of this project to gather information on gay men's interactions with the child welfare field, many fathers had a great deal to say about their interactions with social welfare workers and child welfare institutions. It is likely that this researcher's disclosure as a social worker prompted these discussions. Following are themes and repeating ideas developed on these topics.

Theme 8: I always knew I would be a dad

Previous researchers of gay fathers have developed stage-based theories about gay-father identity development (Bozett, 1981b; Brinamen, 2000; Lynch, 2004; Sbordone, 1993). Much of this research began with studies of gays and lesbians who had been in previous heterosexual relationships. The stage-based theories posit that gay men go through a series of steps in their

identity development as a gay father. It has been claimed that one of the first stages in gay-father identity development is accepting that coming out as a gay man will mean the loss of opportunities to be a parent. This researcher anticipated that most fathers interviewed in this project would support this previous finding. However, the majority of interview participants did not support this viewpoint. The majority of fathers in this study reported that they always knew they wanted to be a parent and that they felt that their sexual orientation would not be a barrier to parenthood.

Shared Theme: *I Always Knew I Would Be a Dad*	
Repeating Ideas:	I never thought being gay would stop me from being a parent
	I'd thought about parenting for years
	I had experience caring for other children
	So we had a second date
	I always wanted to help and care for someone

Repeating Idea: *I never thought being gay would stop me from being a parent*

Some of the participants were adamant that assumptions that being gay would be a barrier to parenthood did not match their experience. The majority of fathers reported that they always believed they would find ways to become fathers. This included Interview #6, the oldest father in the study, who became a full-time parent in his early 50s. He had gone through many difficult challenges in his life and career, including caring for a partner who had died of AIDS. This father was quite adamant that he always knew he would be a parent:

> For some reason, you know, I came out in my late teens, early twenties, and … I never assumed that being a gay man would prevent me from being a parent. I don't know why, but I just always thought, it's like I always wanted to be a dad. I knew I was going to make it happen one way or another.… In fact, I was even a donor when few gay men were considering this back in the mid-eighties in San Francisco. *Interview #6*

The majority of other fathers in the project agreed with this perspective. Others shared similar viewpoints, including:

> I couldn't imagine my life not being a dad. It was sort of like a foregone conclusion. I've always wanted to be a parent, and I looked for a partner who I knew would want to be a parent and whom I thought would be a good parent. *Interview #4*

> R1:   Well, a little bit of background; I have always wanted to be a parent, since I can remember, since I was a child.… And it never, ever occurred to me that I couldn't be a parent and be gay. I don't know why, I mean it probably should have, but it just never occurred to me that I couldn't have kids. I mean, just because that's what you do. You grow up and you have kids, and in my family that was just the way things were done, and it just

never occurred to me that [being gay] would be an impediment. *Interview #1*

Repeating Idea: *I'd thought about parenting for years*

The desire to be a parent is something that many of these fathers carried with them for many years. Some explained that they began thinking like a father years before the time when they actually brought children into their homes. For example, Interviewee #4 explained that he had been approached by several women to be a sperm donor but that he had declined these offers because he was thinking about how this choice would affect his future adopted children.

> I had so many friends, lesbian friends ask me for my donation, and I didn't give it out in part because even before I was a parent, I knew my children were going to be adopted, and I didn't want them to ever worry that I loved someone else more than them … like not knowing how my child will feel about that, I'm going to be conservative because I would imagine an adopted child would already have questions. And I just don't want to do anything that would make them feel that they were anything but my first choice, So I was really thinking like a parent in some ways before I became one. *Interview #4*

> R1:   I had actually talked about it many years ago and then just kind of let the idea fall by the wayside and never really thought about it again. It just kind of reared its head again in recent years. *Interview #3*

Repeating Idea: *I had experience caring for other children*

Fathers also discussed the fact that they had experimented with parenting by helping to care for siblings' children and that some had also been godparents.

> R1:   We were very active uncles, we also made a point to see family and to spend time with nieces and nephews and to be active in their lives and to babysit and to do things like that. I think for both of us, that was trying out parenthood to a very small degree and kind of saying, is this something for our lives ... And I think we both knew that kids would be in our lives, it was just not clear in what shape or form. And so I think that built up for each of us to see each other with kids and to say, you know, this is the person that I want to raise a kid with, they are good with kids and everything else. *Interview #7*

Repeating Idea: *So we had a second date*

The longstanding desire to become a parent was also evident in other behaviors. These men's desire to be parents affected life choices for many years before they became parents. For most fathers, dating and partner selection were tied to their long-term goal of parenting.

R1: I [knew I] wanted to be a parent. So it was very important to me in finding a partner who shares that goal…. When I met my partner, I asked him on our first date. "So, what do you think about having kids?"

R2: "Yeah, sure. Yeah, I'm open to that." I passed the test.

R1: So we had a second date. [laughter] *Interview #1*

I've always wanted to be a parent, and I looked for a partner whom I knew would want to be a parent and whom I thought would be a good parent. I remember being on a second or third date with my partner and just sort of dropping, "Oh, I would really like to be a parent someday," and I sort of watched for his response, and I saw him go, "Really? Me, too." And so we had a conversation—it was not why we continued dating, but it caused us both to evaluate the other with a little more interest. *Interview #4*

Repeating Idea*: I always wanted to help and care for someone*

While not all gay fathers recalled an early desire to parent, most reported having longstanding desires to be involved in people's lives as caregivers.

My lover [now deceased] and I discussed someday taking care of someone, whether it's a parent, whether it's another person ... I just knew that I have a big heart, that I have to help somebody. So, that's how it came about…. My nephew needed to be placed, and I came forward. *Interview #2*

Another father discussed his growing awareness of his desire to become a parent, which he attributed to his maturation process:

R1: I think part of it was being able to give something back to society, so rather than just being a taker, actually giving. I think, as you get older, you start to think about having family around in your old age. I mean, what do you work for, to spend your retirement years alone? So, you want kids; you want grandkids. *Interview #3*

Summary: Theme 8: I always knew I would be a dad

An interesting and unexpected finding that emerged during interviews was that participants in this study indicated longstanding desires to become fathers, and most reported that they never believed their sexual orientation would keep this from happening. The reports from these research participants challenge earlier findings on the topic. Previous studies have created stage-based theories about gay-father identity development (Bozett, 1981b; Brinamen, 2000; McPherson, 1993). These stage-based models attempt to explain the process of same-sex identity formation. Brinamen notes that his research is based on earlier work on stage-based models of gay identity development proposed by Troiden (1989) and Cass (1979, 1984), which posit that a gay person's identity development includes a period of "alternately questioning, addressing, and

rejecting (as well as accepting) previously held stereotypes and fears" (Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008, p. 536). Building on these perspectives, researchers have proposed models that describe stages in the development of gay men's awareness of their desire to parent. These stage-based models suggest that most gay men begin the process of desiring to parent by believing that acceptance of their gay identities will result in loss of opportunities to become parents. Brinamen (Brinamen, 2000), for instance, characterized the first stage of parent development as a time when the gay man surrenders the idea of parenting. Similarly, Berkowitz and Marsiglio (2007) have described the coming-out process as a time when many gay men initially see limited options and opportunities for parenting; they note that many of the men in their study approached the coming-out process with a belief that "the coming out process is synonymous with the realization that they will not be fathers" (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007, p. 372). The authors also note that this perception is stronger among men over the age of 35. Given these well-documented findings, it was assumed that the majority of fathers in this study would support these previously published findings. However, the majority of gay fathers of all ages interviewed in this project did not support this finding, summarized in the repeating idea: *I never thought being gay would stop me from being a parent*. The majority of men interviewed in this study reported that they had always considered parenting as an anticipated life development and something they had *thought about for years*. Many fathers reported that they investigated parenting options by helping to care for friends' and relatives' children, and in two cases by serving as sperm donors. Their assumption that they would eventually become fathers was also reflected in the role that the desire to become a parent played in their dating habits and partner selection, summarized in the repeating idea: *so we had a second date*.

As noted in the analysis on family formation, the investigation into how fathers formed their families suggests that fathers in this study have been on long-term quests to create families and become parents. For most of the men interviewed, their partner selection was tied to their desire to parent, and these relationships were formed years in advance of the time they decided to actively pursue becoming parents. Their multiple experiments, failed attempts, and investigations of different options for family formation highlight that the majority of fathers interviewed had long-term interests in forming families.

What can be said about the discrepancy between results from men interviewed in this project and previously published research reports? It is likely that earlier stage-based models about gay men's desire to parent reflect findings based on earlier cohorts of gay men. Given the volatility in the social acceptance of gay marriage and gay families, it is very likely that views on life options and the desire to parent are changing rapidly within generations and across generations of gay men. These changes highlight the importance of incorporating systems theory and other approaches to help increase our understanding of how social and historical forces affect life choices. As Parke notes, these macro-level perspectives need to be included into analysis of the family; he notes that "individual and family developmental trajectories are embedded within both the social conditions and the values of the historical time" and the "role of parents, as is the case with any social role, is responsive to … fluctuations" (Parke, 2004, p. 369). It is very likely that changes are underway between current gay fathers and earlier cohorts of gay men.

Caution should be taken in applying research based on earlier cohorts, as life choices for marriage and family are rapidly expanding. Also, proposed developmental models based on earlier cohorts of gay men may no longer apply. It is quite possible that previous findings contained in these stage-based models are based on cohort effects related to discrimination

against gay men in earlier eras and that as same-sex relationships and public consciousness around fathering and gay men's options have expanded, fewer self-identified gay men will perceive routes to parenthood as completely closed to them.

Theme 9: Experiences with social welfare system

Perhaps because the fathers interviewed for this project were informed that this dissertation was being prepared for a school of social welfare, they had a great deal to say about their interactions with the child welfare system and their interactions with social workers. This information was not solicited. The fathers seemed to have very strong opinions as well as many frustrations with the child welfare system, and they had a need to discuss these feelings. In addition, 3 of the 15 fathers included in the study are master's-level social workers. Two were interviewed for the project. Following are excerpts from all the fathers' conversations about their views on social workers and the child welfare system.

Shared Theme: *Experiences with Social Welfare System*	
Repeating Ideas:	We get in a lot of arguments with the world
	Support from social workers
	Need to receive full information about children
	Confusion and frustration with the child welfare system
	Understand limitations: know your bandwidth
	Quality of adoption training
	Changes in social work policies and methods
	Fear of disclosing limits and problems to social workers
	Advice for fathers new to the social work system

Repeating Idea: *We get in a lot of arguments with the world*

It became apparent in the conversations that several fathers were drawing on their past experience as LGBTQ advocates and were now applying skills learned in LGBTQ advocacy towards creating change in child welfare arenas.

R1:   I'll have to hand it to my partner … he is just such a good advocate, which is good and bad. Well, it's … great because he is really good at it, and it's bad because we get in a lot of arguments, not with each other, but with the world. *Interview #7*

R2:   I ended up getting very involved in the foster-parent advocacy world through this…. I am drafting and shepherding through two new laws to change state law around foster care. The law is, until we changed it, foster parents had absolutely no power; the county could come in at any time and just remove a kid, and they don't even have to state a reason. At least now we changed the law, not what we wanted, but that once a child has been with you for six months, they have to have a court hearing before they can

remove a kid. That's not how it used to be before we pushed this new policy. *Interview #7*

Fathers' sense of being middle-class males within the child welfare system may also give them the confidence to challenge current rules and regulations. One father explained his reaction to the way he was being treated as a foster parent:

R2: And I don't mean to be classist about it, but it is definitely not an experience that we are used to. *Interview #7*

Repeating Idea: *Support from social workers*

Some fathers felt that they had received positive encouragement and support from social workers in the process of adopting their children:

R: There was a lot of encouragement from the county because it was a county adoption through San Francisco County. They were very good about supporting a family placement. I had social workers who, you know, kept track of me, and we did all the things that they're supposed to do, you know, like, check backgrounds, make sure you're not a sex offender and all that, criminal records and all that. But, other than that, after that initial thing that happened, basically the social worker, they came to the house to interview me. They asked me, what's going on, how you feel, and what are the things that he can do at school and do this and go to parenting school before you become a foster parent. So, they were preparing me for a lot of things and it was kind of good, it was very good to have that support. Because I didn't have support from my family about this.

I: *Did the social workers know you were gay when they were visiting your home?*

R: I hid that away from the social worker, and then I come to find out that everybody was gay. It was just, like, WHOOEE, you know. Everybody was gay, my social worker was gay, actually, my social worker at first was transgender, and her boss was lesbian, and then I was introduced to another social worker; she was also lesbian, and in 2001 I found out everybody was, everybody in the world who was working on my case was either gay or lesbian, GBLT, and then all the way to the judge, he was gay. I said, oh my god, it was a gay adoption from beginning to end, and I guess they figured me out already, but I didn't tell them anything until I met my son's first social worker, who was transgender, about the other stuff before I got him, before I became a foster parent to him, I didn't tell them about my life. I didn't tell them I was gay. I didn't tell them I had a lover who had just died. I didn't tell them any of that.

I: *And were you afraid that if you had told them that ...?*

R: I felt that if I had told them that, I would lose my son. They would discriminate against me. Yeah, because I was gay, and I always had that in the back of my mind that some day they're going to take him away because I'm gay, because I am an unfit dad or an unfit person and I'm single and so, a couple of strikes against me. But, lo and behold, when I found out everybody was gay, that everybody backed me and supported me whatever I did, the 18 months I had him, it was a wonderful experience. Yeah. *Interview #2*

R2:   Yeah. That's one area where, if I had to give them high marks, as a gay male, I have never felt in the least bit that there was any discrimination whatsoever.

R1:   Well, the thing is, I think we're well liked, so I think we have cheerleaders at the county, and I think that's how we got the baby—because our social worker has been our side. *Interview #3*

Repeating Idea: *Need to receive full information about children*

Fathers discussed the interactions with child welfare workers and the quality of information that they received from the workers:

I: *And do you feel like the social workers were honest with you about the kids' backgrounds—did you feel that they were honest and basically gave you the truth and access to the information you needed?*

R1:   With our first son, I do feel that our social worker was very, very honest, and everything she told us turned out to be true—I mean, just her assessment of him and his personality. I wrote down almost word for word what she said, and it was amazing what a clear picture she gave of him. But he also has had very few needs. He was removed at birth, he was drug exposed, but you know, he was never neglected or harmed, and, you know, his personality is a very likeable personality, a little devilish, like he needs some fences but short of a lot of redirection, he's actually a pretty likeable kid. But with our younger son, actually, we were told he had a minor cosmetic problem, which is that he had a very large vein in his leg, which was like what do we care about that. But once I saw the vein, I was like, that is not—I don't believe that's simply cosmetic. I just sort of intuitively—it was—it's huge and it's—I'm like, you know—and he's walking with a limp so I'm like, that—you know that part wasn't told to me. It was made to seem like it was a cosmetic problem. So as it's come to pass, now that he's in our home, we've got him evaluated, and it is actually a medium-level problem that he is going to have a disability, and he is not going to walk normally but—and he's going to have chronic pain even, but it's not life threatening and we can manage it. But that's not what we were told. *Interview #4*

R2: I think the foster-care agencies don't talk about special-needs children like they should. They don't bring it up. They sort of mention it, but because they make money, this is how they survive, so they don't want to turn people away. I would still do it today—there is no question in mind I would adopt my kid again, and we knew there were risks. … Our son was exposed to cocaine, and he was also exposed to an anti-depressant, so we did that research. But … I think a lot of gay men are in denial over the kids they are currently parenting, and that is sad for me to watch. *Interview #7*

R2: And they don't give all the information that they really know, even for our son, when we got the file …

R: Oh, they set us up big time.

R2: … When we were finally adopting him, there was stuff that they should have given us, and by law they are supposed to that they didn't, and not that there was anything in there that …

R1: ... would have changed our minds.

R2: … would have changed it. And that is about to happen to Doug and Mike, I bet you anything they will give …

R1: There is stuff in there.

R2: … they will give them stuff about drug exposure for Sam that they didn't have.

I: *Is this another gay couple that has adopted?*

R1: Yeah, another gay couple.

R2: I am positive that that's what is going to happen when they get the file, but by law you are supposed to get all medical information, and drug exposure is relevant because it does predispose kids to ADHD, that's a proven fact. *Interview #7*

Repeating Idea: *Confusion and frustration with the child welfare system*

Fathers discussed frustration and confusion about their efforts to navigate the child welfare system. There were few complaints about individual social workers but many frustrations about the overall system. Some fathers were confused about how different parts of the system related to each other. For instance, this couple are foster parents who work directly with a county child welfare agency, but they don't understand how other families work with independent foster agencies:

I: *Okay, so you went through the county. Did you work directly with a county social worker? So there wasn't a nonprofit agency involved?*

R1: There are other families who go through some of these other agencies. In fact, to this day, I still don't understand what the difference is because we're all called by the shelter; but basically, I think I just searched online and found their [county child welfare contact] information. *Interview #3*

The following excerpt describes this father's frustrations and confusions about moving from one county jurisdiction to another and how the move has complicated getting services for his son.

And I've been dealing with Medi-Cal for such a long time that I just get so frustrated, I don't even try anymore. There were supposed to be services for my son in school. I said I want this for him, he needs it, can we get it for him and, again, with his health insurance through the county, they won't make that transition. They won't compromise. So, now he has no services in our county. There are plenty of services in San Francisco, but like I said, I don't want to drive to San Francisco every time we need something. You know, I said that, I did have a choice at one time. I said, okay, we'll go to San Francisco, but it was half a day of my time spent on the road, and then when we get there it's still another hour or two of wasted time. *Interview #2*

Other comments and frustrations about the child welfare system included:

R2: It's not the way the law reads, but social workers have complete control and power of who they place families with, so they are saying, "Oh, I will place this kid with this nice white, straight couple living in Walnut Creek.… Oh, this kid has drug exposure, so I will put him with the gays." *Interview #7*

R2: And I would say the level of all foster-care agencies sort of making up rules and laws and not really knowing what they are and the power a lot of foster-care agencies and counties have, and they don't like sophisticated, educated parents. *Interview #7*

R2: Part of that whole bureaucracy that I think was very frustrating for us and still continues to be for me, the lack of [recognition for] the fact that foster parents are the parents of these kids and often, especially with the younger ones, are the only parents they have ever known, yet we have no legal rights. And what happens still to this day, and this happens in our county, they will remove kids, either because a child of color is with white parents, that's a typical thing, or homophobia with a social worker, or they will go to a county family or an agency family because it is cheaper for them. It cost them a lot of money to place with a private agency, whereas if it is its own county family. it's a lot cheaper. So anyway, those sorts of things happen [but]… it's supposed to be, under federal law, in the best

interests of the child, and that's not in reality what happens, and I think until there is a class action lawsuit by a number of families with proof that it's just not going to change.… *Interview #7*

Repeating Idea: *Understand limitations: know your bandwidth*

Fathers discussed the need to understand their own strengths and weaknesses. One father described this as "knowing his bandwidth," in other words, knowing how much capacity he has to handle the stressors that can come with caring for a special-needs child.

R1:   Well, as awful as it sounds, I was little more selective [second time around]. I didn't jump at the first opportunity. It's a sad thing because there were several kids that I turned down and …

R2:   But I think you were smarter about what you were capable of at that point.

R1:   Yeah, that's the thing; it's what I was capable of at that point.

R2:   I don't think it was a matter of turning kids down because you just were turning them down. I think that you honestly knew at that point what your bandwidth was.

R1:   Well, yeah, and one of the boys [their first set of foster children] was medically fragile. He had that shunt in his brain and it just ...

R2:   And you were still trying to do it all on your own at that point, so it was hard.

I: *Those kind of problems you are describing could overwhelm biological parents, and I think what you're telling me is that some men are so eager to become parents that they jump in and don't necessarily understand all of the consequences of their choices.*

R1:   Well, I jumped the first time. They said, we have these boys; it's a high-profile case; we need to place them immediately. I'm like, got it.

I: *Do you feel that they prepared you for what you experienced?*

R1:   As best they could, yeah. But it takes experience. *Interview #3*

My partner has worked in foster care—I was advantaged to have him as a partner.… I have seen so many social-work couples get overextended in the adoption process because they just feel like, oh, we can handle all of that. And he said, "I don't want to handle all that at home, I handle all that at work." And he was clear about certain severe risks that he was not willing to take, and it was

great because I probably would have been more likely to say that I would take them, but in reality I probably would have been unable to handle it. I think I would have had problems in that area, but I trusted him and knew that he had better judgment in that area than I did. He has much better general judgment around stuff, and he doesn't bite off more than he can chew, and he's really measured. So he drove that one, and I didn't fight him. But on my own, I might have gotten into trouble in that area. *Interview #4*

I: *Can you talk a little bit about what you think might be behind the desire to take on more than you can handle?*

R: Well… I think just guilt about saying no to a child. You know, and feeling like—I didn't like the idea of shopping for a child…. And there were a couple of kids that, you know, their histories were just so severe, and my partner was like, absolutely not. Like, we're not going to be able to handle that, and I was like, "Oh, come on," and he would be like no…. I would have been completely—even though I'm a social worker, I haven't worked in child welfare and I'm not—I've never been a child-focused social worker, I've always been adult-focused, so there's a lot that I didn't know. And I probably [would have] made the mistake that a lot of social workers would make, is thinking you know more than you do know about this problem. But I would have been in big trouble if I hadn't had a partner who was really knowledgeable in that area and really able to self-assess and assess me and be like, "We really need to say no. And, you know, there'll be a child that'll come along that will be what we can handle and still have special needs." So that's basically what we did for the two kids, and you know, they each have some special needs, but they're very manageable. *Interview #4*

R2:   I talked to other foster parents who had adopted who were very clear with me that you've got to have a list of requirements, and no matter what they tell you, you cannot stray from those requirements, and you've got to push to get—by law, they have to give you all the information they have about the kid for you to consider placement, and you've got to push to get it because they often won't do it. So that kept ringing in my mind. *Interview #7*

R2:   No, there are a lot of kids that we didn't take.

R1:   We did a big risk/benefit analysis.

R2:   There were like five kids we didn't take before we…

R1:   I think we went through eleven placements…

R2:   Maybe it was eleven, I don't know.

R1:   … for various reasons or various levels that we either opted out of or didn't get picked for or whatever else, I was depressed doing that.

R2:   I mean, there were a couple of kids that there was no question that we would have gotten them if we had said yes.

R1:   We did give the deaf and hard of hearing kid, though the … We should have gotten him.

R2   One was like a four year old boy, one was a … And one was a kid, one was a kid who I am pretty sure was HIV positive, based on meeting his…

I: *So it sounds like you had some maybe not-good matches pushed in front of you?*

R2:   Absolutely.

R1:   Absolutely.

R2:   And they still do. *Interview #7*

R1:   You can tell the difference—he's very law oriented, logical, and I'm on the touchy feely, qualitative side in the house. My mom was a teacher of deaf and hard-of-hearing children for many, many years, and I worked in her class, and what we saw over the years is that it changed from hereditary to drug exposure, so it wasn't deaf and hard of hearing, it was deaf and hard of hearing plus twenty other things. So the population changed dramatically over the period, and I saw my mom go through that as a teacher, and I saw the kids, and I saw you know, what it takes. So I had a sense of what it is and what it isn't, and I think every single case I looked at that, and I had a couple of things [on my mind]. It's like, in this I don't want to lose my husband, I am happy, I like, you know, I don't want to lose any of that. And so every single time, I was weighing out, is this going to affect our lives more than we can handle and break us? …. And so for me, it was always using that and knowing, just knowing really well what I could handle and I what I can't handle. *Interview #7*

This father also discussed the pressures on the couple to take a special-needs child or a child who might not be the best match for the parents:

> …it's very hard to do [say no] because you want a kid and you are getting older, because that is the thing I am finding with so many gay couples is that because we do nest later in life, for lots of complicated reasons, than straight people do, you are older and you are sort of like, "My time is ticking here." *Interview #7*

Repeating Idea: *Quality of adoption training*

Given the pressures on the fathers to take children and the challenges of adopting special-needs children, there is a need for orientation and training. Following are fathers' perceptions about the usefulness and quality of the training they received from their child welfare agencies. Their experiences varied, based on past experience within the child welfare system and the agency presenting the trainings.

> I think it's called a family training—it was a 40-hour training. It seemed to be mostly about understanding children's experience of adoption. It wasn't really about general parenting—it was really much more about examining your values, thinking about why you're adopting, getting at what adopted kids need in terms of their identity development and the kinds of attitudes and behaviors they need from parents around their adoption to be comfortable with adoption. And I found that really—I loved it because I hadn't really thought about it enough. You know, like I was open to it, but I don't think I had really thought what it meant to a child to be adopted and the questions that they would have throughout their life and how to help them with those questions in a way that followed their lead. So I feel like I learned a lot and shifted in seeing what being an adoptive parent meant, how it was different from being a birth parent. *Interview #4*

This same father then gave an example of how the adoption training had helped him cope with challenges brought up by his adoptive son:

> This weekend, my son said something really interesting to me, which I would not have been prepared for had I not been in that training. I was giving him some limits, and he said to me, and for the first time he's ever said, and he said, "You're not my real father," which was totally interesting, but it didn't bother me at all. I thought it was more interesting that he would throw that out because I saw it for what it was—he was trying to make me feel bad for setting a limit. And so…. my partner was in the other room, and I went, "Hey, come here," and I was like, "Our son just told me that I'm not his real father," because I wanted him to hear it. And … my partner looked at me like he was amused because we totally see as ourselves as his real fathers. And … my son said, "My parents are sick, and they wouldn't do this to me." And I said, "Honey, you do have other parents, but we are your parents," and I just sort of humored it, but I didn't fight with him about it, but it didn't hurt me in the way that I think he wanted it to. And I think if he had, he would have kept it up, you know—but it was—I forget exactly what I said, but I felt like, oh, I handled that pretty well, because I didn't dispute that, but I also didn't fall for it. And I think before this adoption training, I would have probably freaked out with him saying something like that. *Interview #4*

The fathers also discussed the part of adoption curriculum that is focused on helping heterosexual parents cope with infertility. The fathers in this study found that this is one aspect of adoption that differs considerably for adoptive gay fathers.

R2:   There is a whole grieving thing that goes on for straight couples that can't have a birth child, but we didn't have anything parallel to that. *Interview #1*

R2:   I think we felt the class was not very helpful. I mean, we learned a little bit about the [adoption] process, but that could have been done in an hour.

R1:   We mourned the loss of not being able to have children. *[said very sarcastically with fingers making quotation marks]*

R2:   Yeah, we did spend a lot of time on that, which wasn't really an issue for ... I mean, it wasn't at all an issue for us.

R1:   We grew up knowing we can't have children so okay, next. *Interview #7*

The fathers also discussed the lack of quality training on issues of race and ethnicity:

R2:   And I just felt like the basic level, the level of what they did on race issues and attachment issues and child development was all so basic, and we were so…

R1:   And we were so like, okay, move on.

R2:   I mean, we both have master's degrees and have been in therapy, and so it wasn't like at a level where we felt like we got a lot out of it—it was more of like we just have to do it because that is the process. *Interview #7*

There were wide discrepancies in how agencies handled including LGBTQ families and nontraditional families in their training sessions. These fathers describe their experiences with homophobia in their training classes:

R2:   And I also, can I also say that there was a little bit of uncomfortableness on our part by some of the homophobia, some of the homophobia…

R1:   Sure, there were homophobic…

R2:   …participants in the class.

I: *Can you give me any concrete examples?*

R1:   Sure, you are the one who had it on the opening go-around session with that older….

R2:   I can't even remember.

R1:   We did, and she said something really, she said something homophobic about you're not supposed to have kids or something.

R2:   Yeah, and it was sort of like the first day of the class, and she did a couple of times throughout the class, said some sort of anti-gay comments to the group, and they weren't challenged.

R1:   Well, they were challenged a little bit, I think, by some other people.

R2:   But not by the facilitator—she was not a good facilitator. I just think she sort of probably did an analysis in her head, "Those two aren't going to be that upset by her comment."

R1:   We talked to her after.

R2:   We talked to her after, she just, she said that she had other concerns about her than just this, that she maybe wasn't the best foster parent. Anyway.

I: *So that's a lot to maneuver through as you are trying to figure out how to, you know, if you want to adopt a child or take a foster child.*

R: I would say that, I mean, if you want, that did nothing for me to make my decision whether to adopt or foster a child. It was, okay, here's a hurdle that I have to go through and meet, and how long is it going to take me, and is it annoying because it takes me away from work and everything else that I am trying to do. *Interview #7*

Other fathers felt that their adoption agencies were very welcoming and accommodating:

I: *Were there other gay couples in the—did you do this as a couple, did you go through program as a couple?*

R1:   Yeah, oh yeah. There was a single gay guy, a lesbian couple, and two straight couples, and a single woman, so it was a very small class.

I: *Okay, so it sounds like a lot of diversity in the parents in the room.*

R1:   Yeah.

I: *So it wasn't like you and nine straight couples.*

R1:   No, no, no, it was very diverse. *Interview #4*

Some fathers also credit the adoption training with helping them prepare for the challenges of adopting children with exposures to developmental delays:

Mm-hmm. That was another good thing about the adoption training—it's sort of like letting go of your notion of the perfect child, which I obviously—I think a lot of parents have this fantasy notion, and I definitely continue to be disabused about it—like I can't—you know what I mean, like to a certain extent, I still hold on to things that are like, where'd that come from? But it definitely moved me to seeing that instead of wanting a child that had no risk, which you just don't get in foster adoption, moving me to a more realistic sense of what the possible exposures the children would have that I would be adopting. And what kinds of services they might need and what, you know, educationally or healthwise and emotionally, and just that they would just require a different kind of parenting maybe, and that you wouldn't know. But you couldn't—it's kind of like you can't really assume that they're going to be totally normal, but you can't also assume they're going to be completely messed up. You kind of have to wait and see, and there's an unpredictability. *Interview #4*

Repeating Idea: *Changes in social work policies and methods*

Fathers discussed the kinds of changes they would like to see in the child welfare system and in training for social workers:

So we had a great social worker. She was wonderful, and we really felt like she was just there to evaluate the house and me, and it was terrific. And there was one thing she said that I would amend, knowing what I know now, and I don't fault her for it in the least—but she really treated us like adoptive parents, and as a result, she said "My two cents is don't give your daughter more information than what she's asking for because she won't ask for something until she's really ready to digest the information." I think it's different for two-dad or two-mom surrogate families because there's so much more unspoken stuff. I think it's important for me to not always wait for my daughter to ask questions, but really sometimes to preemptively, based on our intuition as parents, give her some of the narrative, even if she's not asking for it. So, case in point, we're going to offer her the opportunity to see—for all of us to get together with her surrogate. She's yet to ask for that. She's said she wants her to live with us, she said all these things, but never "Can I see her?" So I would suggest to social workers that they maybe think a little bit about the extent to which kids who—I don't want to stigmatize two-dad or two-mom families—but those families come with extra layers of narrative that other families don't. Because of that, some of the conventional wisdom about what you say to an adopted family doesn't necessarily apply. *Interview #5*

This father had more specific advice for social workers working with families created through surrogacy:

Another way in which the narrative for adoptive kids doesn't apply to my daughter is that it's really easy, we think, for our two-dad friends who have kids they've adopted out of the foster care system to build this narrative of "my birth parents loved me, but mom was a drug addict and couldn't take of me" or "Dad

went to prison and. . ." you know, whatever. "So it's not that there's anything wrong with me. I came to live with my dad and pop because they wanted a family, and they wanted to take care of me." That narrative doesn't exist for kids from surrogates, and my daughter has struggled to understand that she's here with us not because there was this storybook relationship with her birth mother once upon a time and then her birth mother decided she couldn't raise her daughter or she got in trouble with the law, but rather it was just that her dad and pop wanted her from the beginning. And her birth mother helped us. So, I think social workers, to the extent that they'd ever get involved in the surrogacy process, and I don't know if they would, I think it's important that they be attentive to those nuances. *Interview #5*

Repeating Idea: *Fear of disclosing limits and problems to social workers*

Fathers discussed their anxiety about revealing stressors and parenting challenges to their social workers. For many, there was a fear that if they admitted that they were feeling stressed or anxious, that it would reflect negatively against their evaluations.

> No, it definitely took me a while to get in tune with the whole cycle of parenting and—but I did so, but that was definitely unexpected, and I did not find the social workers that helpful because I didn't want to tell them so much because they were evaluating me. *Interview #4*

And then there was the impact of saying no to a placement:

> R1: I was completely depressed that we had eleven possible placements…
>
> R2: …oh, it was hard…
>
> R1: …it was excruciating, I mean, because you feel guilty, why am I not taking this child, can I not love him enough to take him, you know, why am I so selfish that I am not doing this? And telling the social workers who look at you….
>
> R2: …and we actually had an experience…
>
> R1: … "Why aren't you taking this kid?" you know.
>
> R2: They offered us a second child. And she was really great … but, we actually, we had to make up our mind like in an hour, so I said yes, we said "yes" and then we actually went and saw the therapist that morning at 8:00 am…
>
> R1: We talked about it all night and went to a couple's therapist in the morning, made a final decision, and called them back and said no.

R2:   And [because we] said no, we were blacklisted.

R1:   Yep.

R2:   The social worker said, "Never work with them again, and how dare they." We made the right decision and decided … we were not ready.

R1:   And we were talked to, and…

R2:   We could have done it, yeah. Would we still be together? Yeah. But it would have been really hard.

R1:   But we made a decision.

R2:   With all that we've gone through with our current special-needs son over the last year and we bought a house and re-did a house, and that process too, it would have been...

R1:   It would have been hard.

R2:   It would have been really hard, yeah.

R1:   Anyway, so we made the right decision. Should I just say yes and do this and maybe I am not fully there for this child? That's a stupid choice. *Interview #7*

Repeating Idea: *Advice for fathers new to the social work system*

Fathers were asked what they wished someone had told them at the beginning of their family formation process and what they would like to make sure that other gay men know about becoming parents:

I: *If you had any advice for a new couple considering going through foster/adopt, what would you tell them about how to begin that process?*

R1:   I think the best thing is to talk to people and get involved in the organization and learn from people. As I was just saying, it's good to know that you can kind of hold out for what you're really looking for and not have to settle just for the sake of, "Oh, there's a child, I gotta get this child."

R2:   Well, you need to be clear about why and what you're doing. If you're going into it to just take transitionary kids, then I think that you approach it from a certain way, because you're not looking at a permanent situation, and maybe you don't have to be as selective or you don't have to try and match what you're looking for; but if you're looking to provide a long-

term placement or a potential long-term placement, I think you need to be clear about... you don't have to have every little thing checked off, but you need to have a framework of what you want your family to look like and be like—not necessarily for you, but for the kids, because they've already been through… Sometimes it's better to let them stay in the shelter a little bit longer and get a better placement than to bring into your home and have it not fit and then have to recycle, go through something, because these kids are already fighting that. *Interview #3*

Summary: Theme 9: Experiences with social welfare system

Perhaps because this researcher identified himself as a social worker and noted that this research project was being conducted within a school of social welfare, the interview participants felt it important to share their experiences with, and concerns about, child welfare institutions. Most fathers had much to say about their interactions with professional social workers. Analysis of these discussions resulted in the development of this emergent theme and in the identification of nine repeating ideas.

The fathers reported that they were often surprised at the level of control exerted by professional social workers and the lack of respect and courtesy shown to foster and prospective parents. These reports led to the development of the repeating idea *we get in a lot of arguments with the world*. This refers to the social change actions that many fathers assumed on behalf of gay families and on behalf of their children. It became apparent in the conversations that several fathers were drawing on their past experience as LGBTQ advocates and were now applying skills learned in LGBTQ advocacy toward creating change in child welfare arenas. Fathers' sense of being middle-class males within the child welfare system may also have given them the confidence to challenge current rules and regulations. One father explained his reaction to the way he was being treated as a foster parent: "And I don't mean to be classist about it, but it is definitely not an experience that we are used to." One family in particular expressed high levels of frustration about their interactions with social workers and with workplace policies. For this family, their frustrations motivated them to become strong advocates working for change in social welfare policies in California. These fathers had engaged lawyers and fought for their rights within the legal system, and when these tactics had not created the desired levels of change, they then pursued state-level policy changes. They were successful in convincing the state legislature to enact new laws supporting the rights of foster parents. These fathers also worked within their corporate setting to change family-based policies within their workplace. While these fathers represented the most assertive version of advocacy work, they were not the only fathers engaged in advocacy work. Other fathers also adopted strategies related to their frustrations with social welfare workers. For instance, Family #1 adopted more covert tactics to challenge the system, such as seeking medical support and HIV testing for their newborn son without the knowledge of their son's assigned caseworker. The fathers in Family #3 expressed their disdain for an assigned caseworker and characterized her as a "dishonest person."

Some fathers did find *support from social workers,* and they reported that they felt that they had been encouraged and supported by these relationships. The father involved in kinship care noted that as social workers recognized his sexuality, many of them also disclosed their LGBTQ identities. This father noted that by the time of his formal adoption, he realized that everyone

working on his case was a member of the LGBTQ community. As the father noted: "It was a gay adoption from beginning to end, and I guess they figured me out already." For this father in particular, the acceptance and support he received from caseworkers was especially helpful.

A key area in which fathers noted a need for strong relationships with social workers was related to the *need to receive full information about children.* Fathers expressed concerns that they had not received full disclosure about their children's neonatal drug exposures and risks related to abuse and neglect. There was a wide range of experiences related to this topic, with some fathers reporting that they received excellent support from their social workers and others feeling that information had been withheld from them at the time they were matched with their children. Fathers felt that some social workers minimized children's risks, as the father in Family #4 relayed during his interview. His younger son has a "medium-level" congenital disability that will affect the child's ability to walk normally and will cause chronic pain. While the father felt capable of helping his son cope with these challenges, he did not feel that the social worker presented these risks adequately.

While there were few complaints about individual social workers, fathers expressed overall *confusion and frustration in navigating the child welfare system.* Some fathers were confused about how different parts of the system related to each other and lacked an understanding of differences between public and nonprofit agencies or between public and private adoptions. These confusions were then further complicated by the lack of adequate cultural competency training among the social workers with whom they were matched. Some fathers related stories of being forced to sit through parenting courses that did not address their needs or during which they experienced uncomfortable encounters with homophobic foster parents. The fathers noted that there was wide variation in the *quality of adoption training.* They expressed a belief that it was important for social workers who taught foster and parenting courses to be well versed in group techniques and to be able to set boundaries and limits on the amount of homophobia and judgment expressed by other foster parents within group settings. The skill or lack thereof among group leaders affected the fathers' ability to participate fully in parent training programs.

The majority of fathers interviewed noted that child welfare agencies need to do more to help prospective parents establish trusting and stronger relationships with social workers, work to reduce gay men's fears about disclosing sexual identity to social workers, and help fathers understand and cope with confusion and frustration with the child welfare system.

Another impact of lack of trust and variations in quality of relationships with social workers was that some fathers expressed *fear of disclosing limits and problems to social workers.* The fathers noted that they knew they were being judged and evaluated, which limited their willingness to disclose problems or ask for assistance.

The fathers also discussed the fact that they felt pressured to take children with significant special needs. The fathers were often reluctant to discuss this issue during the taped interviews. Some fathers described a sense that they were fearful of being judged for "shopping" for a child. With prompting, two of the couples interviewed discussed this topic in some detail. The father in one family expressed his concerns that this was not an appropriate topic to discuss publicly, as it might create a negative perception of himself and other gay men if it seemed that gay men were out shopping for children. And as discussed in the literature review, gay men have been accused of using children as "trophies" (Morgan, 2002). There was an undercurrent of issues tied to fears that the fathers would be judged as viewing children as a commodity or a status symbol. These

fears appeared to be complicated by other issues about adoptive and new parents needing help to understand their own strengths and weaknesses. One couple described the education and support they received from a social worker, who helped them let go of the need to find the perfect child. This education seemed very helpful for the couple and allowed them to let go of fears about parenting a child with disabilities. Other fathers related that they felt that their social workers viewed gay men as the last best hope for severely impaired children, as if the social workers were thinking: *Here are families with the financial resources and interpersonal skills to challenge and navigate medical, social and child welfare systems on behalf of these children.* While it is true that many children in the foster and public-adoption systems need strong advocates, it is very likely that some gay fathers will end up becoming fathers to children who require help beyond their limits and coping abilities.

This is not to say that gay fathers can't manage and won't find rewards in caring for children with special needs. The fathers in Family #3 interviewed in this study are a good example of parents who clearly seem to thrive and find rewards in caring for special-needs children and teens. These fathers have taken five sons into their home, including three drug-exposed infants and two special-needs teenagers, one of whom will need lifelong care. However, they made this decision with what appears to be an honest assessment of their strengths and limitations. These fathers also seemed able to assess their own limits, as can be seen by a decision not to pursue adoption or foster parenting with an earlier set of siblings placed in their home. Two of the fathers in the study noted that they had concerns about gay fathers' ability to accept special needs or disabilities in their children. These fathers both had observed gay fathers who they felt were in denial about their children's health or behavioral problems. In addition, a third father noted in his interviews that he is frightened about his relationship with his son and fears that as his son ages, he may become violent.

Who will help these gay fathers make appropriate matches? Where will they turn for support and advice? Much is lacking here and is critically needed. Given the lack of consistent support from social workers, the fathers in this study advised prospective parents to understand their own strengths and limitations, or as one father characterized this, adoptive fathers need to *"know their own bandwidth,"* meaning that they need to understand the kinds of challenges and risks they feel equipped to cope with during the long and challenging parenting experience. One father, who is an MSW, noted that if he had not received guidance from his partner, who is also an MSW and a full-time child welfare social worker, he might have ended up adopting a special-needs child who would have been too challenging for his personal coping skills.

As noted, even fathers not involved with the public child welfare system had encounters with social workers. This included fathers involved in private adoptions, and even the surrogate fathers were involved with the family courts, due to the need to complete a second-parent adoption. These experiences highlight the finding of this project that the majority of gay fathers will be involved with family courts and the social welfare system.

This likelihood of over-involvement with family courts and social welfare systems also reinforces the need for greater cultural competency training within schools of social work and within child welfare agencies on how to work with LGBTQ families. This training is particularly important in light of fathers' acknowledgment that they often hid their challenges in coping with parenting demands in their interactions with their social workers.

Fathers encouraged social workers to help new parents develop narratives and explanations about their families. The father in the surrogate family felt that the conventional wisdom of waiting until one's children ask questions was an inadequate strategy for gay fathers. His advice was that fathers need to develop narratives that help children understand the differences in their families and that social workers and parents should not wait to develop these narratives.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Implications

The intent of this study was to explore the experiences and meanings of fatherhood among gay-identified men who have created parent-child families outside of traditional heterosexual relationships. Four specific research aims guided this investigation:

- To explore the lived experience of gay men raising children;

- To explore how gay fathers adapt concepts of kinship;

- To describe the role of social support in the lives of gay fathers;

- To present emergent and unanticipated topics.

An additional aim of this project had been to explore questions about how gay fathers assimilate and resist social norms related to gender, parenting, and the ideals associated with the American nuclear family. Data was collected on these questions; however, analysis is not included in this dissertation report. Findings on these topics will be analyzed in a subsequent project.

Participants were recruited through a snowball sample resulting in 8 gay-father households that included 15 gay fathers and 13 children. In total, 12 gay fathers participated in the project interviews. Seven out of the eight households included two-father families, and one household consisted of a single gay father, his adopted son, and an extended kinship network. Information collected also included details about the 13 children being raised in these households (10 sons and 3 daughters). The number of children residing in the homes ranged from one to three. Two families were actively working to increase the size of their families and looking to adopt additional children.

Using a semi-structured interview guide, data was collected in face-to-face interviews. Interviews also included development of a genogram of extended kin, family of choice, and social support networks. Transcripts were prepared of each interview and totaled more than 300 pages of 12-point font, double-spaced, typed text pages.

Data analysis began by preparing individual family descriptions, which included a graphic reinterpretation of the genogram developed with research participants. From case descriptions, analysis moved to phenomenological and grounded theory analytic methods, which included a multi-level coding process as detailed by Charmaz (2006) and Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). Data codes were summarized and organized into repeating ideas, the 47 repeating ideas were then grouped into 9 related themes.

Descriptions of themes were presented within a framework of the project's research aims:

Research Aim: To explore the lived experience of gay men raising children. Analysis resulted in 17 repeating ideas that were organized into three themes: 1. Desire to parent and methods of family formation; 2. The challenges of parenting; and 3. Rewards of parenting.

Research Aim: To explore how gay fathers adapt concepts of kinship. Analysis resulted in seven repeating ideas that were grouped into two broader themes: Theme 4: Kinship is about connection; and Theme 5: Biology is less and more important than I thought.

Research Aim: To describe the role of social support in the lives of gay fathers. Analysis resulted in nine repeating ideas and two themes: Theme 6: Importance of non-kin social support; and Theme 7: Change in the sense of connection to the gay community.

Research Aim: To present emergent and unanticipated topics. Analysis resulted in 14 repeating ideas and the emergence of two themes not specifically preselected in the research project but revealed as important topics presented by the interviewees: Theme 8: I always knew I would be a dad; and Theme 9: Experiences with the social welfare system.

Following are short summaries of the project's four main research aims and key findings.

Key findings from Research Aim: To explore the lived experience of gay men raising children

As discussed in the methods section, one reason to conduct qualitative research is to gain insight into how people experience their world and the meanings they attach to actions and events. This perspective was incorporated into the development of this project's interview guide as well as the analysis processes. The desire to parent, the challenges of parenting, and the rewards of parenting are all fundamental and foundational aspects of gay fathers experiences raising children. The first topics explored in this study and asked of participants during interviews revolved around the question *How did you form your family?* Other questions asked during the interview process included *What have been the greatest challenges and greatest rewards you have experienced as a father?* Analysis of these questions resulted in the development of the following three themes: Theme 1: *Desire to parent/methods of family formation*; Theme 2: *Challenges of parenting*; Theme 3: *Rewards of parenting*.

Perhaps a more in-depth question than *how* these fathers formed their families is what analysis of family formation tells us about gay men's quest for parenthood. These fathers' shared stories revealed longstanding desires to become fathers. Their stories show a pattern of men engaged in lifelong pursuits to become fathers and who were unwilling to accept social and policy barriers that, in previous generations, limited gay men's ability to form parent-child families. These fathers pursued their life goals in innovative ways and have been rewarded with the development of unique family forms that help them meet their needs for attachment and for connection and social support.

Key findings from Research Aim: To explore how gay fathers adapt concepts of kinship

Kinship is an important topic that is a contested area within the American culture wars (Hunter, 1991). Who has a right to define themselves as part of a family and who is entitled to preferential social policies that support families are important topics within many current

academic and political realms. As noted in the literature review, anthropologists have viewed kinship as a key organizing principle of a society and as a social product that shapes the perceptions of family, kin, gender, and sexuality (Levi-Strauss, 1967, 1969; Rubin, 1975; Schneider, 1968). The fathers in this study are attempting to create families at a time when there is as yet no clear consensus about their rights to claim the use of terms such as *family* and *kin.*

Key findings from Research Aim: To describe the role of social support in the lives of gay fathers

As noted in the literature review, systems theory is the most prominent current theoretical approach to understanding families (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Parke, 2004). Systems-based analysis encourages researchers to look at how families are embedded within support systems and to also look at how meso- and macro-level cultural influences such as extended families, informal community ties, and organizational and cultural institutions influence family development. Questions were included in the research instrument that attempted to explore how fathers perceived social supports. Questions on this topic explored where fathers turn for encouragement and support in their parenting roles. Data on these topics was collected during the development of the family genograms and in the development of the semi-structured interview questions. These discussions helped to identify fathers' perceptions of social support and to also identify the boundaries between who fathers perceived as part of their kinship networks and who they perceived as part of their larger extended social support systems. Exploration of social support in the fathers lives resulted in development of two themes: Theme 6: *The importance of non-kin supports* and Theme 7: *Changes in fathers' sense of support from within the gay community.* Overall findings were that parenting acted as a passport to normalcy and acceptance for most gay fathers by increasing their acceptance and recognition as a couple among their families of origin and in the broader social realm. While parenting increases support for gay fathers in the nongay world, parenting continues to create tensions and divisions between gay fathers and gay men who do not parent.

Key findings from Research Aim: To present emergent and unanticipated topics

One aspect of qualitative research is to investigate topics that require more in-depth understanding and to explore perspectives that have not been well researched. Part of this analytic process includes identification of new and emergent perspectives. Analyzing interviews with this perspective in mind resulted in the identification of two themes that were not anticipated as research aims at the beginning of this project. Theme 8: *I always knew I would be a dad* presents unanticipated findings on fathers' perspectives on the desire to parent. Unanticipated findings included the identification of discrepancies between previous research that proposed stage-based models which suggested that most gay men begin the process of desiring to parent by believing that acceptance of their gay identities will result in loss of opportunities to become parents. However, the majority of gay fathers of all ages interviewed in this project indicated that they always expected they would become fathers. Theme 9: *Views on the social welfare system* presents fathers' discussions about their interactions with the social

welfare field. Analysis of these discussions resulted in the development of this final emergent theme which is explored in more depth in the implications and recommendations below.

Limitations

Limitations of this project include challenges related to the small sample size. The sample was kept small in order to allow more in-depth analysis of participants' responses. In addition, the non-random nature of the sample limits the ability to generalize findings from this sample to larger populations of gay fathers.

The sample also is likely to have underrepresented men of color who are gay fathers. The majority of participants in the study were Caucasian. It is likely that experiences of men of color who are raising children may be quite different from those reported here. The experiences of single fathers were also not adequately addressed, as only one single father participated in this study. Also, the majority of families included in this study earn incomes over $100,000 per year, which does not represent the full spectrum of gay fathers. The sample also did not include men who are parenting in nontraditional family structures, such as those who may be engaged in shared parenting relationships with single heterosexual women or cohabiting with lesbian mothers. Earlier reports did indicate these types of family structures (Barret & Robinson, 1990). However, none were identified during recruitment efforts for this study. The sample for this project represented gay men who lived in the greater Bay Area but did not include men who lived in San Francisco.

Given that the sample consists of men who live in a single area of the United States and a unique area that draws many gay and lesbian people from across the county to live in what many find a more tolerant community, the findings cannot be generalized to other locales.

Given the non-random sample, there may be bias in participants' viewpoints or responses; for instance, fathers who are less comfortable with their sexual orientation may have refrained from participating in the project.

In addition, time limitations only allowed for one interview with each family; the opportunity to spend more time with participants, either in follow-up interviews or by employing ethnographic methods such as participant observations, would have enriched the findings.

Despite these limitations, it is hoped that the project contributes to the knowledge about gay men who are raising children. These fathers and their families provided important insights into new perspectives on gay male identity and on the changing nature of the role of fathers.

Implications and Recommendations

Western societies are engaged in a series of culture clashes, and one central conflict involves the meaning of the term *family* and who has a legitimate claim to use this term to define their social support system. These conflicts will continue for the foreseeable future while legal claims about same-sex marriage move through state and federal legal systems. It is likely that there will be a growing interest in research on LGBTQ families and that this research will receive a great deal of scrutiny in legal briefs, court testimony, and the court of public opinion. As noted in the

literature review, three competing perspectives frame the research on gay fathering: pathological perspectives, tolerance perspectives, and equality and civil-rights perspectives. These perspectives continue to compete for influence within policy debates about same-sex families. This competition is consistent with what scholars such as Kuhn have defined as "paradigmatic conflicts" (Kuhn, 1962). Pathological perspectives that framed gay fathers as psychologically impaired continue to influence public discourse and policy debates. Views of gay fathers as diseased, predatory, and dangerous continue to lie at the base of most opposition to gay parenting.

This paradigmatic conflict is of particular concern for gay fathers, as family formation for gay men involves methods that increase their interactions with public institutions, including family courts and social welfare organizations. It would appear that the majority of families formed by gay men involve some type of adoptions, as the fathers in this study demonstrated.

Decisions about who is qualified to become a foster or adoptive parent, while important for all families, will continue to be critical topics that will affect the future development of gay-father families. Access to second-parent adoptions and court scrutiny of surrogate relationships and private adoptions will continue to be areas in which there will be increasing public attention on gay-father families. Closely tied to issues of family formation are the same system's involvements in family dissolutions and their power to determine child custody and visitation rights. Central to all these debates will be the decision of which of the competing social constructions of gay fathering is the accepted standard in public discourse.

As noted, efforts have been made to use social research to refute questions about gay men's suitability to be parents. However, if the questions here are fundamentally about equal rights and the rights of an individual in a democratic society to create their own family systems, then social research cannot answer the questions under review. Do people have a right to be different? Do these rights extend to adopting children and raising them within nontraditional environments? Do families have a right to organize their social supports in nontraditional ways and receive state and federal recognition for their families? Social or psychological research cannot provide answers to these ethical and legal debates.

As noted in the literature review, some scholars have attempted to participate in these debates by studying LGBTQ people and producing data demonstrating that LGBTQ parents are no different from other parents. However, some researchers and LGBTQ rights advocates have become critical of research projects that seek to compare gay and nongay families (Allen & Burrell, 1996; Andressen, et al., 2002; Benkov, 1995; Clarke, 2002; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). For instance, Benkov (1995) and Andressen and colleagues (2002) encourage LGBTQ researchers to think carefully before producing comparative studies on gay families. Clarke notes that past studies that showed no differences between lesbian and heterosexual families likely helped secure child custody and legal rights for lesbian and gay parents. She states that comparative "no difference" studies are effective in addressing bias because "they do not question taken-for-granted norms about the family" (Clarke, 2002, p. 217). However, she and others have argued that "no difference" findings challenge commonsense ideas about gay and lesbian parents (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). For instance, lesbian parents may be more likely to adopt feminist beliefs and, as such, may be less inclined to reinforce traditional gender norms among their children. These differences may lead to differences in child outcomes. Indeed, in Stacey and Biblarz's (2001) review of the past research on gay and lesbian families, they argue that differences do exist between some heterosexual and same-sex families but that this information

has been minimized in published studies. Stacey and Biblarz use the term *No Differences of Social Concern* to distinguish their views. They describe these as the types of differences that "democratic societies should respect and protect" (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001, p. 177).

However, if researchers honestly present differences, they may endanger LGBTQ families by increasing criticism against them. This has, in fact, happened, as can be seen in the way many anti-gay marriage groups and anti-gay adoption groups have used Stacey and Biblarz's findings on child outcomes as arguments against granting gay parents legal rights (Morgan, 2002; Rekers, 1995; Wardle, 1997). One way to address these comparative dilemmas is to focus on studies that explore broader meanings about family and parenting (Benkov, 1995; Clarke, 2002; Golombok, 2000). Clarke also urges researchers and practitioners to look at research questions that explore how homophobia and social oppression affect LGBTQ families. She suggests exploring questions such as: *How is LGBTQ acceptance discussed within gay (and in heterosexual) families?* She encourages more research into questions such as: *How comfortable are LGBTQ parents in discussing their relationships with their children? Are gay and lesbian posters, books, and records left on display at home?* (Clarke, 2002, p. 321).

Before more comparative studies are conducted, researchers need to ask how and why they are being asked to produce this type of data? How will this information be used, and who will consume it? For example, what does it mean if a research study finds that children of lesbians and gays are exposed to more stress and school-based bullying? Does that mean that gays and lesbians should not be allowed to parent? Or does it mean that parents need to increase efforts to stop social harassment of their children or select their children's schools carefully? Given these arguments, the recommendations made here focus on two topics: first, recommendations about future research on gay-father families, and second, lessons learned about the needs of gay fathers to be supported and strengthened in their role as parents.

Recommendations for future research

Information about men of color: As reported, information from the 2000 census, while incomplete, has highlighted the fact that many men of color are involved in caring for children (Cianciotto & Lopez, 2005; Dang & Frazer, 2004; Yan, et al., 2004). Sadly, no specific research about LGBTQ people of color as parents has been published. The preliminary data from the 2000 census reveals that men of color may be significantly more likely to be involved in childcare relationships (Cianciotto & Lopez, 2005; Dang & Frazer, 2004; Yan, et al., 2004). It is not known whether gay men of color are raising biological children from previous heterosexual relationships or in intentionally formed gay-father families. The reasons for men of color's higher parenting rates are unexplored but may be connected to their involvement in extended kinship networks. Further research about these families is needed.

Information about depression and difficulties in the transition to parenthood: It is likely that concerns among researchers have limited studies on the challenges of parenting experienced by gay fathers. As noted in this study, research participants displayed a reluctance to discuss challenges related to their parenting experience. However, parenthood challenges all individuals' coping skills and creates stressors that can lead to relationship difficulties and negative mental health outcomes, such as depression. Future research on these topics would be useful for social workers and other clinical providers. Most parents, including gay fathers, would benefit from further education on the impact of childcare on mental health. As observed in this study, fathers

face stressors such as: stimulus overload, sleep deprivation, caring for special-needs children, managing open adoptions, and coping with intrusions from the child welfare system. These are all highly stressful experiences. Most fathers in this study seemed to navigate these stressors with ease, but little research attention has been placed on how such situations might be affecting relationships and mental health among gay fathers.

Gender and gender variance: What do gay fathers have to teach us about cultural norms about caring for children? These fathers are taking on childcare responsibilities that have traditionally been assigned to mothers. Are there gender-based differences in these fathers' parenting practices? If so, what can they tell us about parenting?

Also, the majority of men in this study are raising sons, and the majority of these boys will be heterosexual. What types of future interactions will gay men have with their heterosexual teenage sons? How will they help their children understand gender expectations? How will they address homophobia? Again, there is important material here that will provide information for broader fields of studies on men and gender.

A key challenge here is that most of the interview participants in this project did not seem comfortable discussing topics related to race, class, and gender. Research methods that would assist in the examination of these topics need development and refinement.

Studies examining cohort effects among LGBTQ individuals: As noted in discussions about gay men's desire to parent, the findings based on earlier cohorts of gay men do not seem to conform to the viewpoints and opinions of gay fathers who participated in this project. It is very likely, that earlier findings on identity formation as defined in stage-based development models may not apply to contemporary cohorts of gay men. It should be expected that access to fuller participation in social institutions such as marriage, domestic partnerships, adoption, and military service will affect how more recent cohorts of gay men perceive their life opportunities. Additional studies are needed that examine how social acceptance is changing identity formation and how these changes will be incorporated into the theories and models on gay men's identity development and mental health.

Longitudinal studies with gay fathers: The majority of fathers participating in this study had been fathers for fewer than ten years. We would all benefit from knowing how these families develop over time. For instance, the open adoptions these fathers have created may seem easy to navigate when a child is three or four and the adoptive parents can set parameters around the visits. But the fathers' feelings about open adoption may change as the children enter their teen years and desire more autonomous interaction with their biological family members, particularly if these families are still dealing with impacts that placed the children within the social welfare system.

Raising special-needs children: Some fathers in this study asserted a belief that many of their peers were parenting special-needs children. The fathers expressed concerns that some gay fathers appeared to be minimizing or denying developmental delays and impacts of drug exposure on their children. More research is needed to determine the validity of these observations.

Gay fathers' interactions within the gay community: Parenting may reflect new life opportunities that are opening up for gay men, and both marriage and parenting reflect the inclusion of additional life stages and social roles being developed among gay men. A generation

ago, gay bars and sexualized realms were perceived as the only real or visible segments of the LGBTQ community, and it appears that most fathers in this study continue to identify these environments as the center of "the gay community." Gay fathers expressed anger and frustration about their interactions with gay men who are not parents. This an area in need of further research.

Gay men's interactions with social welfare institutions: The frustrations expressed by gay fathers around their interactions with social workers and child welfare institutions highlight the importance of helping prepare social welfare institutions to provide culturally competent services for gay fathers. To do this, social welfare institutions will need to increase their cultural competency training for social workers. This will require better baseline assessments of current practices and competencies.

Research on biological mothers' preference for gay families: Another intriguing topic for future research would be to explore biological mothers who choose to place their children for adoption with gay fathers. In this study, 3 of the 8 families included birth mothers who displayed a preference for placing her child(ren) with gay men. Two families in this project (Families #1 and #6) arranged private adoptions in which the biological mother selected the fathers for placement. In a third family (#5), a friend stepped forward and offered to be a surrogate without payment. The reasons for these mothers' choices and their relationships with gay fathers is another area in which additional research would be helpful and interesting.

Recommendations on services for gay fathers

Moving from research to practice, following are some key suggestions for development of services for gay fathers.

Training and education for social workers: As noted, while there were few complaints about individual social workers, fathers expressed overall *confusion and frustration in navigating the child welfare system.* It would be helpful for social workers to develop clearer explanations for prospective parents about the various roles of social welfare and child welfare institutions. Some fathers were confused about how different parts of the system related to each other and lacked an understanding of differences between public and nonprofit agencies or between public and private adoptions. These confusions were further complicated by the lack of adequate cultural competency training among the social workers with whom they were matched.

The fathers' experiences within traditional adoption agencies varied greatly; some fathers found adequate support and champions who guided their parenting decisions, while other fathers experienced either benign neglect or disapproval. Some faced outright homophobia, either from social workers or because the social workers lacked adequate training to set limits on how gay fathers were treated by other parents in the adoption agencies' parenting courses. Additional work is needed within the field of social welfare to address needs of LGBTQ clients.

The fathers noted that there was wide variation in the *quality of adoption training*. They expressed a belief that it was important for social workers who taught foster and parenting courses to be well versed in group techniques and to be able to set boundaries and limits on the amount of homophobia and judgment expressed by other foster parents within group settings. The skill or lack thereof among group leaders affected the fathers' ability to participate fully in parent training programs.

The majority of fathers interviewed noted that child welfare agencies need to do more to help prospective parents establish trusting and stronger relationships with social workers, work to reduce gay men's fears about disclosing sexual identity to social workers, and help fathers understand and cope with confusion and frustration with the child welfare system.

Another impact of lack of trust and variations in quality of relationships with social workers was that some fathers expressed fear of disclosing limits and problems to social workers. The fathers noted that they knew they were being judged and evaluated, which limited their willingness to disclose problems or ask for assistance.

Training and education for gay fathers: Gay men who desire to parent would greatly benefit from receiving more support and education. Gay men would benefit from finding more support as they as navigate the child welfare system. Fathers in the study did not seem to understand the differences between working with private adoption agencies and public child welfare institutions. Also, the foster/adopt system in particular posed specific challenges for middle class men who were not accustomed to the limits being placed on them by social workers. In some circumstances, the fathers hired attorneys and became agents for change, working to enact new policies and laws that strengthened the rights of foster parents. In other cases, the fathers engaged in more covert forms of resistance, such as finding unapproved HIV testing for their child. These acts of resistance and advocacy highlight both the positive and negative experiences that gay men may experience with their encounters with child welfare social workers. The fathers would benefit from training on how to exercise their rights as foster and prospective parents and how to work to create change within child welfare institutions.

Gay fathers will also need support in evaluating their ability to parent special-needs children. As identified by fathers in this study, some fathers may be minimizing the signs of their children's physical and cognitive impairments. Direct social work practice needs to include more focus on educating fathers about special-needs children and helping them master the emotional work of giving up the idealized dreams of raising the perfect child. Fathers will need support in learning to accept each child for him- or herself and helping their children reach their full potential. This is a challenging job for all parents, but there is an added layer of challenges in these families. As seen in the research analysis, gay fathers may have unacknowledged pressures to represent themselves in a manner that covers or minimizes their challenges and stressors. These pressures may make it more difficult for some gay fathers to acknowledge their children's special needs or their own stressors, particularly if the children's behavioral problems or emotional difficulties do not surface until they have been in their parents' care for many years.

Gay fathers also require help and guidance to cope with pressures from social workers to adopt special needs children. For instance, fathers in this study discussed their discomfort and embarrassment with the process of finding the correct parent-child match. One father explained that he did not want to be viewed as "shopping" for children. There was an undercurrent of fear that the fathers would be judged for viewing children as a commodity or status symbol. These fears can eclipse the importance of adoptive and new parents needing help understanding their own strengths and weaknesses and choosing children who fit their parenting and coping strengths. For some social workers, gay men may seem like ideal candidates for placing special-needs children into permanent homes. Social workers likely see many gay fathers as prospective parents with financial resources and life skills that can help them navigate medical, educational, and child welfare systems on behalf of special-needs children. Many of these special-needs children would benefit from having strong advocates, but some gay fathers will end up taking on

responsibilities for children that will test (and exceed) their limits and coping strategies. This is not to say that gay fathers can't manage and won't find rewards in caring for children with special needs. There were fathers in this study who are outstanding examples of parents who clearly thrive and find significant rewards in caring for special-needs children. For instance. Family #4 has now taken five sons into their home, including three drug-exposed infants and two special-needs teens, one of whom will need lifelong care. The fathers made these decisions with what appears to be a frank and honest assessment of their abilities to manage their children's special needs. These fathers also honestly set their own limits, as can be seen by a decision not to pursue adoption or foster parenting with an earlier set of siblings placed in their home. For many other gay fathers, the decisions about the level of special-needs children they can adequately cope with is going to be a very important process. Who will help them make these choices? Where will they turn for advice and guidance? Additional services are critically needed.

Also, from a practice perspective, gay fathers need examples and role models that demonstrate how other fathers have navigated these issues. This topic also highlights the need for gay fathers to have role models in movies and in online and print materials that provide narratives that help fathers address these these unique combinations of parenting challenges and rewards.

Resolving tensions within the gay community: As discussed throughout this study, gay fathers reported feeling tension and rejection from gay men who were not parents. It is proposed that one reason for this tension may be that gay fathers continue to view gay bars and gay dating behavior as the central site of "the gay community." How constrained would life opportunities be within the heterosexual world if dating environments such as fraternity and sorority houses or spring-break activities defined what it meant to be a heterosexual? While these heterosexual environs are realms that support initial investigations of heterosexual people's social skills and support them in learning about sex and dating, imagine a culture in which these types of settings were perceived as the only visible sites for social interactions across the lifespan. This appears to be the current perspective of the men interviewed in this project, even among gay fathers who are personally developing broader life choices. It would appear that few role models exist that display gay role models across the lifespan. Gay fathers perceived and reported feeling judged and excluded by gay men who were not parents. However, analysis revealed a situation in which many gay fathers also engaged in judgments and critiques about the life choices of gay men who choose not to parent. It appears that gay men on both sides of the assimilation/liberation debates may be overly personalizing these tensions.

In conclusion, parenting reflects new roles and broader opportunities that are opening up for gay men. Both marriage and parenting reflect the inclusion of additional life stages and social roles being developed among gay men. It is hoped that these fathers' stories have helped to illustrate that LGBTQ families have the potential of helping to transform how all of society thinks about and defines kinship, family, and parenting.

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Appendix A – Recruitment Flyer

Volunteers Needed for a
Study about Gay Fathers

Who is Eligible?

Gay, bisexual and queer fathers who have formed parent-child families after "coming out" are eligible to participate in this research study.

Why Participate?

The purpose of this research project is to explore the experiences of gay men who are choosing to become fathers. Questions to be explored include: How do gay men conceptualize their identities as caregivers and fathers? Are gay men assuming traditional roles of fatherhood or creating new meanings and new roles?

Other topics include exploring the challenges and rewards of parenting; resources gay men access to learn how to parent and solve family problems; and information on how gay men are arranging adoption, foster-parent, surrogacy and shared parenting relationships.

What is Involved?

Agree to participate in at least one interview about your family.

Benefits and Risks?

It is unlikely that you will experience any direct benefit or any significant risk from participating in this study. The primary benefit is to gain new knowledge about gay fathers. Taking part in this study will help develop knowledge about the kinds of services that gay men need as they form families. Each participant will receive a $35 thank you gift card for participating in the project.

Appendix B - Interview Guide

Key Informant
Interview Guide
This is a semi-structured interview guide. You may skip any questions you do not want to discuss.

1. When did you decide to actively pursue becoming a parent?
    - Was there a key event that sparked your decision?

2. Can you tell me about how you planned the process of becoming a parent?
    - Where did you get your initial advice?
    - What were your most helpful sources of information?
    - Least helpful?
    - Most helpful sources of support?

3. Did you interact with any social service systems (e.g., adoption agencies, fertility clinics, or surrogacy services) during the planning phase?
    - Did you attend classes? Were these interactions helpful?
    - Did you experience support or homophobia?

4. Did you explore informal parenting arrangements (e.g., talking with a female friend about having a child together)?

5. Tell me what the pregnancy period was like for you. Did you have time to anticipate your child(ren) coming into your home?
    - What kind of preparations did you make (decorating the baby's room, etc.)?
    - Who helped you with these preparations?

6. What was the first day like when your child(ren) came into your house?

7. What is a typical work/school day like for your family?

8. What is a typical weekend/day off like for your family?

9. How do you introduce your family to new people?
    - At your child's school or day care?
    - At church or community groups?
    - In your neighborhood?
    - With your child's peers and their parents?
    - To your siblings/family's friends?

10. How do you think your child sees his/her family? Do they have questions about their family being different from others? How have they phrased these questions?

11. How has your relationship with your primary partner been affected by parenting?

12.   What have been your greatest challenges to date as a parent?
    - Possible topics to explore: financial, family support, homophobia, parenting skills, children's learning needs

13.   What would you describe as your greatest rewards to date as a parent?

14.   How has parenting affected your sense of connection to the LGBTQ community? To the broader community of gay men?

15.   There are a lot of prejudices out there about gay men becoming parents, both because of their sexual orientation and because of their gender. Have you encountered these issues and, if so, how have you addressed them?

16.   What similarities do you think gay families share with more traditional types of families? Are there things that you think make gay families different from traditional families?

17.   Is there anything you know now about the parenting experience that you wish you knew at the beginning of the process?

18.   What advice would you give to other gay men thinking about becoming parents?

19.   Any other thoughts?

Once again, thank you for sharing your ideas and perspectives. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this project!

Appendix C – Demographic Form

Gay Father Research Project
Demographic Sheet / Intake Sheet

Date:

Interviewee (first, last): _____Age: ____
Ethnicity: Occupation:
Education: (HS, Some College, College, Graduate School)
Household Income: $20,000-$45,000
                      $45,000 - $65,000
                      $65,000 - $85,000
                      $85,000 – $105,000
                      $105,000 - $125,000
                      $125,000 - $200,000
                      $200,000 +

Partner (first, last): _____Age: ____
Ethnicity: Occupation:
Education: (HS, Some College, College, Graduate School)
How long have you been partners? _____

Child 1 (first): _____Age: ____
Age when joining your family _____
Ethnicity _____ Special Needs? _____

Child 2 (first): _____Age: ____
Age when joining your family _____
Ethnicity _____ Special Needs? _____

Child 3 (first): _____Age: ____
Age when joining your family _____
Ethnicity _____ Special Needs? _____

Child 4 (first): _____Age: ____
Age when joining your family _____
Ethnicity _____ Special Needs? _____

Would you like a copy of the transcript of our interview?   Yes   No
How would you like to be contacted (phone, email, letter)?

Contact Number _____Email_____

Mailing address _____

Appendix D – Genogram Form

Gay Father Project
Family Genogram

A genogram is a way that social workers gather information about people's families. It is like creating a picture or organizational chart that tells us about your family. We will use squares for males and circles for females. Can you help me create a genogram that shows what your family looks like? Let's start with you and then include your children and your partner (if applicable). From there, we will include other people whom you define as part of your extended family. This might include your parents and siblings, any of your adopted children's bio-kin, and members of your family of choice—especially if they have close relationships with your children.

_____

Appendix E – Consent Form

Gay Father Research Project
Consent to Participate in Research

My name is Ben-David Barr, I am a doctoral student in the UC Berkeley School of Social Welfare. I invite you to participate in a research project exploring the rewards and challenges experienced by gay, bisexual and queer men who are forming parent-child families.

Purpose
The purpose of this project is to explore the social phenomenon of gay, bisexual & queer men choosing parenthood. I am interested in exploring how men form their identities as parents and create a sense of family. Other topics to be explored include the challenges and rewards of parenting as well as information on how gay/queer men are arranging adoption, foster-parent, surrogacy or shared parenting relationships.

Procedures
You are being requested to participate in the project as a key informant. This will include participating in at least one in-person or telephone interview. An interview usually lasts between one and two hours. Topics to be covered in the interviews include: general descriptions of your current family; discussion about your family of origin; your coming-out experiences; your decision to become a parent; and the process you went through to become a father. Other topics include talking about your experiences with adoption service agencies and the reactions you have experienced since becoming a father from your family, neighbors, and community. We may also talk about how you prepared to take care of your child and the types of resources you have used to learn about caretaking and parenting. In addition, I will collect some general information about your age, living situation, income, and education. A copy of my interview guide will be made available to you.

You have the right to end the interview at any time or skip any of the questions you do not want to discuss.

Risks and Benefits
There are no known risks from taking part in this research. There will be some discussion of topics that may be socially uncomfortable for some people, such as talking about income or family conflicts. You may choose to skip any questions during our interview. There are no foreseeable direct benefits to you, either. However, it is hoped that the research will create new insights into the experiences of gay-father families and help create more culturally appropriate services for gay and queer families.

Gay Father Consent Form – Page 2

Confidentiality

Information collected in the interview will be kept confidential. I will be the only person who knows your real name and the names of your family members. Tapes and notes from your interview will be securely stored. Neither your name nor other identifying information about you will be reported in the analysis of the research or in any publication. I may include direct quotes in project reports, but your name and descriptive information about you, such as the city you live in and your occupation, will be changed.

One exception to this confidentiality agreement is that I must report to Child Protective Services any information I receive about child neglect or endangerment.

Compensation/Payment of Subjects

You will receive a $35 gift card as a thank you for participating in this project.

Costs to Subjects

There may be a financial cost associated with this project if you need to hire child care during the time of our interview(s). No other costs are anticipated for your participation in this project.

In addition:

- I am requesting permission to tape your interview. However, you have the right to say no, and we can still conduct the interview(s).

- After this research is completed, I will keep audio tape recordings for one year. I will keep indefinitely my notes and transcripts of our interview for use in future research. However, the same confidentiality guarantees given here will apply to future use of any materials developed from our interviews.

- I am also requesting permission to contact you by telephone or email if there is a need to clarify your comments or perspectives.

- You are entitled to a copy of this consent form.

For questions about this research, you may contact me at (925) 286-6858 or benbarr@berkeley.edu. You may also contact the chair of my dissertation committee: Professor Eileen Gambrill, at (510) 642-4450 or gambrill@berkeley.edu. If you have any comments regarding your treatment or rights as a participant in this research project, you may also contact the University of California at Berkeley's Committee for Protection of Human Subjects at (510) 642-7461, subjects@berkeley.edu.

I have read this consent form and I agree to participate in this study.

_____   _____
Signature   Date