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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SINGLE, GAY
ADOPTIVE FATHERS

A dissertation submitted in partial requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
Virginia Commonwealth University

By

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DEDICATION

To my son Xavier, who has enriched my life in indescribable ways

and

To the 16 fathers who gave freely of their time to help me with this project. Your strength moves me, and I have no doubt that the world will be a better place with your children leading us into the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks are given to members of my committee, Drs. Pamela Kovacs, Humberto Fabelo, and Kevin Allison for their support and encouragement throughout the completion of this dissertation. I wish to acknowledge their flexibility in working with me under short deadlines, and thank them for their constructive comments.

I wish to especially thank Dr. Elizabeth Cramer, my major professor for her unending patience, and her constant guidance and support. She believed in me, even at times that I did not believe in myself, and I will always be grateful for the friendship that has been forged throughout this process.

I also wish to thank the faculty in the School of Social Work, especially Drs. Ellen Netting and Mary Katherine O'Connor, who have had a tremendous impact on my experience at VCU. Thanks are also in order my fellow students and friends: Drs. Raphael Mutepa and Jan Ivery, Annette Clayton, and Sue Murdock. Finally, a huge thank you to my family and friends for supporting me in all of my endeavors.

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ABSTRACT

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SINGLE, GAY ADOPTIVE FATHERS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University

By

John D. Matthews, Ph.D.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2004

Major Director: Elizabeth P. Cramer, Ph.D.

This qualitative study expands the existing literature on fatherhood, single parents, and gay and lesbian adoption to include the unique experiences of single, gay men who became adoptive parents after “coming out,” or establishing a gay identity. To illustrate these unique and common experiences, individual ethnographic interviews were conducted with 16 fathers residing throughout the United States, as well as internationally. Specifically, this study explored the participants’ experiences through their reflections of the adoption process, and through their experiences after the family was established.

The participants had experiences to those found in previous studies on gay and lesbian adoption and gay fathers, as well as possessed unique strengths, including tenacity and resiliency. Of particular importance are the strategies that each participant

employed to deal with heterosexist and sexist stigmas, and continue to employ to maintain and protect their families. The participants were highly invested in their parental roles, and indisputably dedicated to the care of their children. Shifts in the participants' support networks to include greater involvement with heterosexual parents were also common. Finally, these fathers tended not to utilize existing support services, such as support groups for a variety of reasons.

The results of this study are a useful addition to the social work knowledge base. On a micro level, the results may be useful for direct practitioners who are often responsible for making decisions regarding the fitness of gay men as fathers. The results may also be of interest to practitioners who work with the children of gay fathers, and are interested in gaining insight into the unique experiences of children raised in this particular family configuration. The results of the inquiry may also be useful to adoption professionals, who are responsible for conducting home studies, as well as for making placement decisions. On a macro level, the results may be useful to administrators who are working to develop programs whose goal is to support the continued development of gay fathers, or by policy makers who are interested in this specific group of gay fathers and their children.

Chapter One

Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

Although the terms ‘gay’ and ‘father’ are often thought to be mutually exclusive, in reality there are many gay men in the United States who are also parents. As with any invisible minority, it is difficult to accurately estimate the number of gay and lesbian parents that exist. Despite acknowledged difficulties, different scholars and organizations have developed estimations.

In a recent study, Stacey and Biblarz (2001) hypothesize that there are between one and nine million gay parents in the United States. The American Civil Liberties Union (1999) suggests that the number is much higher, given their report that 6 to 14 million children in the United States have a parent who is gay or lesbian. Patterson (1995) estimates that between one and three million gay men in America are fathers, or about 20 – 25 % of self-identified gay males in the United States (Bigner, 1996). Finally, according to data extracted from the 2000 US Census, there are 594,391 self-identified same-sex households in the United States. Of these families, 21.8% of male same-sex households have their own minor children (defined as sons and daughters of householders) living in the household, and 22.3% have their own and/or unrelated children living with them (defined as sons and daughters of householders, and other non-related minors). The numbers are even higher for female same-sex households. Approximately 33% of these families report having their own minor children living in the household; and 34.3% had their own and/or unrelated children living with them

(Simmons & O'Connell, 2000). Regardless of the estimations, one thing is apparent. There is a significant number of gay men and lesbians who are also parents.

A recent study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation (2001) solicited information on the experiences of gay men and lesbians. This study found that approximately 8% of the randomly-selected, self-identified gay, lesbian and bisexual adults were also the parents or legal guardians of a minor child residing in the home. Although this study does not provide an exact estimate of the number of gay and lesbian parents, the results do suggest that an appreciable minority of gay men and lesbians are parenting children. This survey also measured the extent to which gay men and lesbians reported an interest in becoming parents. Approximately half (49%) of the respondents who reported that they were not parents at the time of the interview indicated that they would like to become parents one day. These results suggest that as there continues to be shifts in the social and political landscapes of America, gay men and lesbians may assert their right to parent in even greater numbers (Kaiser Family Foundation).

The majority of the existing empirical research studies exploring gay and lesbian families have been cross-sectional design studies that utilized non-random, purposive sampling techniques that yielded responses from largely white and middle-class respondents. The earliest studies of gay and lesbian families focused on the best ways to come out to children, with later inquiry seeking to understand how children are affected by having lesbian or gay parents. In 2001, a comprehensive review of the methods and data analysis techniques of many of the existing studies was conducted. In this extensive project, Stacey and Biblarz (2001) reviewed 21 studies that investigated the effects of parent's sexual orientation on their children. This research project yielded results similar

to other researchers. They overwhelmingly concluded that there are no significant differences between children raised in gay and nongay households with regard to the children's self-esteem, psychological well-being, and social adjustment. The findings of this review are presented in detail in Chapter Two.

The recent social science research focusing on gay and lesbian parenting has shifted from a desire to prove that lesbians and gay men can be good parents and that the children raised in these families develop in a healthy manner, to innovative scholarship that illuminates the ways in which gay and lesbian parents both consciously and unconsciously challenge heteronormative parenting ideals and structures. For example, through their study of gay fathers who came to parenthood after establishing a gay identity, Silverstein and Auerbach (2001) introduce the concept of degendered parenting, and conclude that gay fathers have a great deal to teach non-gay fathers about parenting.

While the literature exploring the experiences of gay fathers has been accumulating since the late 1970's, and has contributed to an increased understanding of the complexity of the lives of gay men, there is still work to be done. Much of the existing literature exhibits several methodological and conceptual problems and biases. The representativeness of samples utilized is questionable, as the majority of studies have drawn samples from support groups and community agencies, thus presenting a bias towards those fathers who are likely to be well-connected to community services and therefore more likely to utilize them. Additionally, the existing studies that focus on gay fathers have tended to include primarily those who are white, highly educated, and middle to upper class. Finally, the majority of these studies have focused on non-custodial fathers who have children as the result of previous heterosexual relationships,

and have not explored the lives of those gay men who chose to parent within the context of an established gay identity.

As society continues to become more accepting of gay men and lesbians, the options for developing families are increasing. For example, the last decade has seen a sharp rise in the number of gay and lesbian individuals and couples who are using alternative means, such as adoption, surrogacy, and foster care to create families (Brodzinsky, Lang, & Smith, 1995; Markowitz, 2000; Savage, 2000; Shapiro, Shapiro, & Paret, 2001; Shernoff, 1996; Wells, 2000). This rise can be attributed in part to the efforts of gay and lesbian advocacy groups, who have helped shape debates about the definition of family in American society and worked diligently to advance attitudes about gay men and lesbians, individually and in family units. One of the outcomes of this effort has been an increased acceptance of gay men and lesbians as adoptive parents by both public and private adoption agencies.

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute recently released findings from a study that investigated the attitudes of adoption agencies towards gay men and lesbians as prospective adoptive families (Brodzinsky, 2003). The researchers conducted a nationwide study that measured the willingness of public and private adoption agencies to work with prospective adoptive parents who are lesbian and gay. This research project also explored the extent to which agencies place children with gay and lesbian adoptive parents, and agency staff attitudes regarding adoption by this population. The most notable conclusion is that approximately over half (60%) of adoption agencies in the United States accept applications from gay men and lesbians, and about 2 in 5 (39%) agencies report having placed children with adoptive parents who they know are gay or

lesbian during the past year. This increased willingness to work with gay men and lesbians supports the notion that there is a steadily increasing number of gay men and lesbians who are choosing to build families through adoption. Finally, the fact that gay men and lesbians are pursuing alternative methods of family creation may assist in the advancement of social thought in American society, which may ultimately lead to the continued transformation of the constitution of the family in the United States (Brodzinsky, 2003).

The composition of the American family has been rapidly changing over the past 20 years. The divorce rate is over fifty percent, meaning that at least one in two marriages will end in divorce. Additionally, Americans are getting married for the first time when they are older, and the percentage of women who are active in the paid workforce is higher than ever before. These factors combine to create the conditions that make families headed by single fathers the fastest growing type of family in the United States (Fields & Casper, 2001).

According to data extrapolated from the US Census Bureau's Current Population Report, the number of families headed by single fathers increased by 62% between 1990 and 2000 (Fields & Casper, 2001). In other words, approximately 2,000,000 of the United States' 105.5 million households (1 in 45) are headed by a single father. While this is the fastest growing type of family in the US, there has been limited investigation into the needs and experiences of this family configuration. Additionally, there has been no empirical study that focuses exclusively on single, adoptive fathers by choice, regardless of sexual orientation.

Therefore, this research project sought to expand the focus of the existing research on gay fathers to include adoptive fathers who initiated the adoption after “coming out” or establishing a gay identity, and were single at the time of the adoption. To this end, a rigorous phenomenological inquiry that examined the unique experiences of this specific group of gay fathers was conducted in hopes of being a valuable contribution to the existing social science knowledge base, and to social workers, and other helping professionals who provide services to this unique family constellation.

Purpose of the Study

There are not many issues that spark as much controversy as adoption by gay men and lesbians. This controversy is often more pronounced when the discussion relates specifically to gay men, especially those who are single. This may be due to the historical stereotype of gay men as predatory, or related to the ways in which society tends to view the abilities of men to be nurturing caregivers. This is an issue with which many individuals in the community wrestle, as do some professionals. For individuals, this may be a conflict between the belief that all children deserve a permanent home, and reconciling this belief with religious or moral values. For professionals, such as social workers, this may be a conflict between personal or religious values, and those of the professional association, which sets forth a code of ethics for professional activity.

This conflict is illustrated in the findings of recent social science research. For example, the Donaldson Institute study explored the different ways that public and private adoption agencies responded to gay men and lesbians wishing to adopt. Almost two-thirds of responding agencies had official policies on adoption by gay men and lesbians; of those, 33.6% reported that a non-discrimination policy that included sexual orientation

guided their work. About one-fifth responded that placement decisions were guided by the regulations of the adopted child's country of origin, and another fifth said that religious beliefs were the basis for rejecting applications from and making placements with gay men and lesbians. Finally, approximately 5.2% reported that state legislation, such as sodomy laws (the Donaldson study was initiated prior to 2003 US Supreme Court ruling that declared these laws unconstitutional) or cohabitation laws, prohibited them from placing children in adoptive homes with gay and lesbian parents (Brodzinsky, 2003).

This conclusion is supported by an earlier study that explored challenges experienced by gay and lesbian adoptive families. Specifically, Ryan (2000) surveyed adoption social workers (n=80) in public child welfare agencies to assess their level of homophobia and its impact on their placement recommendations with gay male or lesbian families. The findings of this study indicated that race/ethnic background (African-American), as well as religious upbringing (Christian) are indicative of higher levels of homophobia and a lower likelihood of recommendation placement with gay and lesbian adoptive parents. However, the results also indicate that these attitudes can be impacted by providing training in two areas: gay and lesbian families and child development, and state adoption laws as they pertain to gay and lesbian adoption (14% of social work respondents wrongly indicated that it was illegal for gay men and lesbians to adopt in their state) (Ryan).

This research study was a phenomenological study that utilized individual ethnographic interviews as the primary method of data collection. Given these methods, the end result of this study is an in-depth understanding of the lived experience of sixteen single, gay adoptive fathers. The research project was designed to assist in expanding the

state of the literature base by exploring the collective experiences of single, gay adoptive fathers. Additionally, it contributes to the existing knowledge of fatherhood in general, as well as provides an introduction to both the unique and common life experiences of gay men who become single fathers by choice.

The results of this study are a useful addition to the social work knowledge base. On a micro level, the results may be useful for direct practitioners who are often responsible for making decisions regarding the fitness of gay men as fathers. The results may also be of interest to practitioners who work with the children of gay fathers, and are interested in gaining insight into the unique experiences of children raised in this particular family configuration. The results of the inquiry may also be useful to adoption professionals, who are responsible for conducting home studies, as well as for making placement decisions. The results may help educate these workers on the capabilities and unique strengths of single gay fathers, and further open doors to recruitment with this population, which ultimately benefits the children in need of homes. On a macro level, the results may be useful to administrators who are working to develop programs whose goal is to support the continued development of gay fathers, or by policy makers who are interested in this specific group of gay fathers and their children. Finally, in keeping with the empowering nature of qualitative research, a copy of the study's results were distributed to all participants as they may present new insights to the group of fathers who participated in the study.

Summary

This inquiry explored the lived experience of single, gay men who chose to become adoptive parents after establishing a gay identity. As this is a previously

unstudied population, the results of this inquiry are not only an addition to the growing gay and lesbian parenting knowledge base, but also contribute to the existing research on fatherhood, as well as adoptive and single parenting.

The next chapter explores the various conceptions of fatherhood in the United States in the late 1900's, and intertwines this with the burgeoning gay and lesbian liberation movement. This exploration is undertaken to assist in the facilitation of an understanding of the political and ideological context in which single gay men who choose to parent exist. This chapter also provides a history of adoption in the United States, reviews the literature related to gay and lesbian parenting with a specific focus on the existing social science literature on gay fathers, and provides an overview of the political landscape of gay and lesbian parenting in America. A theoretical framework that incorporates multiple theories is also presented in this chapter. The chosen theories, symbolic interactionism and role theory, are coupled to provide structure while also accommodating the subjective elements of assigning meaning to one's life experience. The profession of social work and its relationship to adoption by single, gay men is also explored in this chapter.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The use of theory in social science research provides inquirers a lens through which a phenomenon of interest can be viewed. As this project sought to understand the lived experience of single gay men who are adoptive fathers, theories that assist in facilitating an understanding of the experiences and sense-making activities of this population are of particular importance.

Walsham (1993, 1995) suggests theories be used as a scaffold, to be discarded when no longer needed. He posits: “In the interpretive tradition, there are no correct and incorrect theories, but there are interesting and less interesting ways to view the world” (1993, p. 6). Walsham also argues that the use of theory in the early stages of interpretive research creates “an initial theoretical framework which takes account previous knowledge, and which creates a sensible theoretical basis to inform the topics and approach of the early empirical work” (1995, p. 76). It is from this perspective that the theoretical framework for this study is explicated.

The theoretical framework for this study was constructed using two theories: role theory and symbolic interaction. Role theory was chosen as it provides a language that is useful for describing the multiple and often conflicting roles that an individual plays throughout his/her life. Symbolic interaction was chosen because it introduces the more subjective elements of identity development and meaning-making into the study. Of

particular interest to this inquiry is the idea that individuals create their own social world by interacting with others.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism was built upon the ideas of George Herbert Mead, a sociologist at the University of Chicago. Mead's theory was initially developed while teaching social psychology, and was explicated in the book, *Mind, self, and society*, which was based on a compilation of his student's class notes. Symbolic interactionism is built upon the traditions of American pragmatism and behaviorism, and is based on three assumptions: 1.) communication occurs through the creation of shared significant symbols; 2.) the self is constructed through communication; and 3.) social activity becomes possible through the role taking process, which is initiated when children begin to pretend to take the roles of others (Mead, 1932). It is through this interaction that individuals learn to see themselves through the eyes of others.

Mead was also interested in how human beings make sense of their world through interaction. This was based on his belief that "humans are the only species that interpret or define each other's action instead of merely reacting to each other's actions" (Blumer, 1969, p. 180). Using the population of gay fathers as an example, the assignment of meaning to an interaction can be demonstrated. For example: a gay father is out with his child in a store and a stranger inquires about the absence of the child's mother. The father may take offense to this questioning and interpret the inquiry as a devaluation of the particular family configuration. The meaning that the father associates with this interaction may become symbolic and influence the construction of the father's view of self. This interaction may also contribute to the father's view of the generalized other,

which Mead (1932) defines as the internalized attitudes, expectations, and viewpoints of society.

Although Mead is often associated with symbolic interactionism, it was actually Blumer who coined the term. Building on the work of Mead, Blumer took the next step of formalizing the ideas and concepts of the theory in the book *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method* (1969). Blumer defines the main concepts of symbolic interactionism as:

- *I*: that which is able to act in the social world
- *Me*: that which reacts to and assigns meaning to interactions
- *Self*: viewed as a process, not a structure.

The ideas of self are only gained through interacting with others. This becomes important in that according to this theory, people can only see themselves in relation to others (Blumer, 1969).

Cooley, also a sociologist, explored ideas related to the development of self-concept in *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1922) and presents a three-step process outlining the development of self-concept. The first phase is presentation whereby an individual imagines how he/she appears to others. The second phase is interpretation whereby an individual imagines how others judge him/her based on other's responses. The third step is when a person develops a sense of self that is based on an internalization of what others think of that person. It is the evaluation of the responses of others in interactions that assists in the development of self-concept (Cooley). This is what Cooley terms the looking-glass self as it is much like looking into a mirror and seeing what one looks like. Thus, Cooley's work expands on the idea of self-in-relation, and provides the

basis for understanding the self-as-reflected. The looking glass self is an especially useful concept for understanding gay fathers. In their article, *The value of children to gay and non-gay fathers*, Bigner and Jacobson (1989) point out that because gay men are stigmatized and marginalized in the larger society, they might have an increased sense of being viewed as adults, or as more respectable in the eyes of the larger society, when they are also fathers.

Finally, symbolic interactionists posit that the social world is active, and that through interaction, individuals are constantly in the process of remaking their social world. Symbolic interactionists embrace the ontological position that through interaction, we create the social world within ourselves. In their view, there is no reality, only perception. Symbolic interactionists do not support the notion that one world view is better than another; they only seek to understand how we come to see the world. For example, the symbolic interactionist sees the gay father interacting with the child. The child responds and the father interprets the response. There is no judgment over the correctness of the interpretations, only observation of the interaction and notation of the symbolic meaning that is attached. It is in this way that symbolic interactionism is particularly useful for understanding how the identity of single, gay adoptive fathers is initially developed and constantly reinvented and/or reinforced.

Role Theory

Role theory is a relatively new sociological theory. Mead's ideas are associated with this theory as well, although Biddle and Thomas were credited as its founders with the publication of *Role Theory: Concepts and Research* (1966). Role theory is based on the idea that individuals play many roles throughout their lives. These roles can either be

ascribed roles (roles that are given through birth, privilege, etc.), or roles that are achieved (those roles that are the result of some action on one's part) (Turner, 1996). These roles combine to make up the role set (in the case of gay fathers, there is among others, the professional role, the role of gay man, the role of father). The role set is often ascribed a value, which makes up a role position (or status). Some authors prefer the term role position as it does not explicitly connote preference or value (Payne, 1997; Turner, 1996). This theory explains maladaptive functioning as role conflict, or a lack of clarity about the expectations of the behaviors associated with playing a role. There are two forms of role conflict.

Inter-role conflict occurs when there are two roles that are seemingly incompatible. An example of this is Bozett's early works (1980, 1981a, 1981b) in which he explored the lives of gay fathers who had children as a result of a previous heterosexual relationship. Throughout his work, he posited that while the roles of gay man and father appear to be incompatible, in reality they are not. Cody also provides an example of inter-role conflict in *The homosexual in America* (1951). He described the married gay man as traveling between two worlds, but fully belonging to neither. He further concludes that in these two worlds that intermingle, but do not co-mingle, the married gay man is an anomaly in both worlds.

The other type of role conflict is intra-role conflict. This conflict occurs when there is not a consensus on the expectations of behavior that are associated with one role (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). For example, acting as a 'father' is a role. While this role might mean one thing to one person, it might mean something else to another person.

This inter-role conflict may lead to uncertainty about how to best perform the role of father.

There are two other concepts associated with role theory that are useful for understanding of the experiences of single, gay adoptive fathers. The first is the concept of role overload. Role overload occurs when one person has more roles than he/she can handle, and that are not complimentary to each other (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). For example, if a gay father was married at one point, he may play the roles of professional, ex-husband, partner in current relationship, father, and gay man. These roles might feel overwhelming to this individual, and result in him not feeling like he is able to meet the demands (or expectations) of each of the roles. The final concept of interest associated with role theory is that of role discontinuity. This occurs when an individual has trouble making the transition from one life stage (and role set) to another (Biddle & Thomas). Within the population of gay fathers, this might take the place of a gay man feeling some sense of role discontinuity upon becoming a parent and leaving behind other roles that may have been associated with an earlier life phase.

Role theory recognizes humans as active agents, although not to the level of symbolic interactionism. The role theorist sees individuals as being active, as evidenced by the concept of role discontinuity. For example, in the case of gay fathers, a gay man may decide that he wants to become a father, and works diligently to navigate the adoption process. In this case, the father is an active agent in the pursuit of becoming a father.

In much the same way as symbolic interactionism, the unintended consequence of applying role theory to research with gay fathers is that perhaps because of the unique

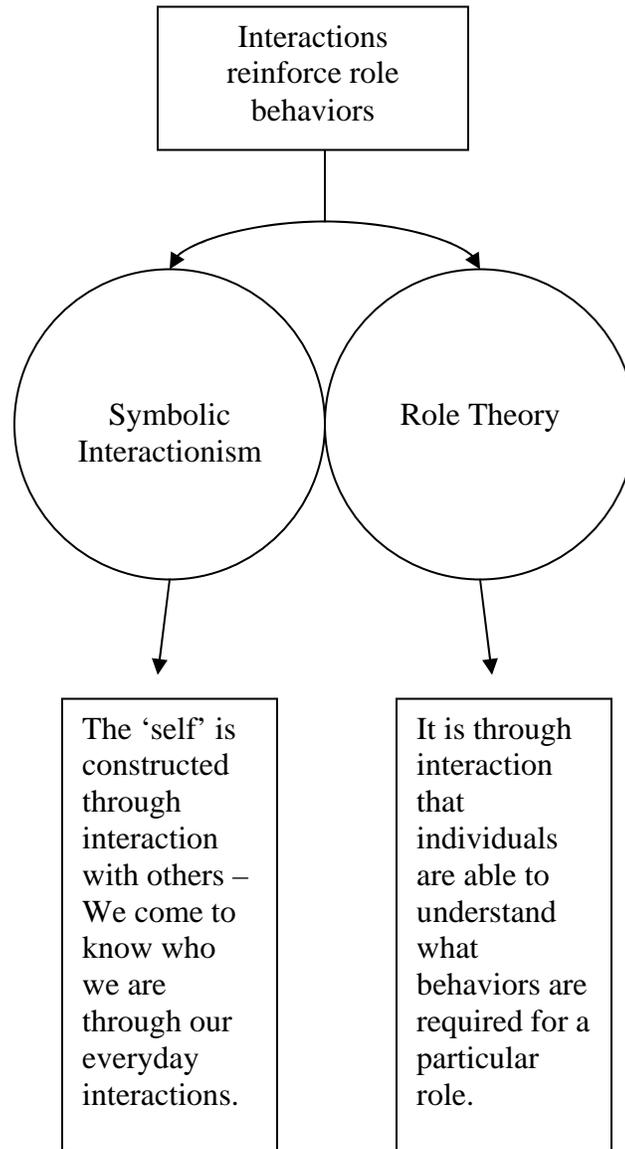
experiences and social and political realities of gay fathers, they may not display the traits often associated with fathers, or behave in accordance with traditional gender role expectations. In American society, different is often equated with wrong, and a researcher who directed an inquiry based solely on role theory might conclude that a group or class of people are maladaptive or less desirable than another by designing their research in a manner that compares a dominant group against a marginalized group.

Summary

Symbolic interactionism and role theory are particularly helpful for understanding the lives of single, gay adoptive fathers. However, as these two theories are both heavily focused on the individual, there is not an extensive focus on the influences of the larger social and political forces that impact the lives of single, gay adoptive parents. Role theory provides the basis for understanding that individuals play many different and often competing roles throughout their lives. Symbolic interactionism provides insight into how the identity of single, gay adoptive fathers is developed through interaction with others. Each of the theories influenced the development of an area for exploration, as well as shaped data collection and analysis strategies of the study.

Figure 2.1

Visual Description of Theoretical Framework



Historical Conceptions of Fatherhood

It has been suggested that the history of fatherhood has yet to be written (Coltrane & Parke, 2002). As most of the research on parenting has focused on the experiences of mothers, there has been limited inquiry into the experiences of men and their motivation for parenting. According to Coltrane and Parke, early studies on fatherhood utilized samples that were largely white and middle class. However, the results of these studies were often generalized to the larger population of fathers. This overgeneralization assisted in the creation of a picture of fathers in America that was based on the life experiences of a select group, and did not include the views and experiences of those from diverse settings. Finally, Coltrane and Parke recommend that in order to gain a more complete understanding of fathers and fatherhood, researchers should focus on inquiry that “increases our understanding of issues concerning contemporary fatherhood including the complexity of popular cultural imagery, the developmental and intergenerational basis for fatherhood, how fatherhood is gendered and entails power relations, how fathers continues to change, and how political contexts shape fatherhood” (p.1).

While there may be limited data on the early history of fatherhood in United States, the body of literature that does exist suggests that fathers experienced a role shift during the 19th century (Parke, 1995). As the United States became an increasingly industrialized nation, fathers moved into a role that has become the norm for the involvement of the father in the upbringing of children: the economic provider (Palkovitz & Palm, 1998). This role has proven to be one in which many fathers have been willing to remain, and one that still exists today. It is also a role that has been

supported by the work of early social scientists, such as Margaret Mead, who argued that motherhood is a biological necessity, whereas fatherhood is a “social invention” (Coney & Mackey, 1998, p. 170).

While the notion of the absent father continues to surround the knowledge base, researchers have begun to move away from this perspective and examine the reasons why men become fathers, their strengths as fathers, and the transformative effects, such as a shift in personal values, that parenting has on men (Palkovitz & Palm, 1998).

In 1992, Mackey, White, and Day conducted a cross-sectional study designed to help identify the reasons that men choose to become fathers. Based on the data that were collected from 90 American men, the authors identified six reasons that men chose to become fathers: psychological, social, bloodline, accidents, economic, and other. Respondents were given 10 chips and asked to distribute them appropriately on a game board, which displayed statements related to the decision to parent. Three examples of statements included in this game are: “(children) are expected by friends and society”; “(children) bring love and emotional satisfaction to the marriage”; and “to carry on the name or bloodline” (p. 435). The results of this study indicated that men become fathers primarily for emotional reasons that are based on psychological rewards, and to a lesser extent, social rewards, and the economic return from the child.

Another study looking at fatherhood investigated the motivations toward fathering in the context of ethnic minorities (Coney & Mackey, 1998). The authors posit through an interpretation of their results that the identified reasons for becoming fathers are similar for Caucasian, Hispanic, and Chinese American men. These groups identified the psychological aspects of their roles, such as bringing satisfaction, as the most important

motivation to father a child. The African American men in this study tended to see their role as a social one, by “providing children to those who want them” (p. 177). The results of this study suggest that various ethnic groups may have differing motivations for becoming fathers.

The differing motivational forces can then be seen as manifesting themselves in the relationships that fathers have with their children. Christiansen and Palkovitz (1998) used Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development as a basis for predicting a father’s relationship to his children. This study explored men’s experiences growing up with their families of origin as a foundation for predicting their involvement in parenting activities. They found that three variables were the best overall predictors of the father’s level of generativity. The first variable was the development of a paternal identity, which was operationalized in the study as the extent to which the parent believes the father’s role is important to child development. The second variable linked to generativity was psychosocial identity, which was operationalized as having a sense of self-awareness. The final variable related to generativity was psychosocial intimacy, which was defined in the study as the ability to develop stable, committed, and loving relationships with others (Christiansen & Palkovitz).

The literature on fatherhood is also beginning to focus attention on how men construct their ideas of what it means to be a father. In their book, *Constructing Fatherhood: Discourses and Experiences* (1999), Lupton and Barclay rely on data from a 16-year longitudinal study to come to several conclusions. First, they assert that modern constructions of heterosexual masculinity are undergoing change, and that the current conceptualization of a “good father” encompasses qualities such as caring and nurturing.

They further conclude that despite their best intentions, the lack of family-friendly workplaces, and the need for outside employment make balancing employment obligations and family involvement difficult for many fathers (Lupton & Barclay). This conclusion illustrates the concept of role discontinuity that was explicated in the theoretical framework section of this chapter. Finally, the views presented in the Barclay and Lupton text are supported in the earlier work of LaRossa (1988) who states, “The culture of fatherhood, or society’s belief and values concerning the role of the male parent is changing as women enter the workforce and have increasing obligations outside of the home” (p. 451).

The final source reviewed on fatherhood is a contemporary text that explores the meaning of fatherhood for black men living away from their children (Hamer, 2000). This text explores the historical, economic, and cultural perspectives on African-American manhood that contribute to the complexity these men experience as fathers. It further explores the personal and societal stressors that African-American fathers face that “discourage their social and emotional behavior as fathers” (2001, p. 195). Throughout this text, Hamer resists the temptation to classify these men as either absent fathers or deadbeat dads. She instead chooses to classify them as distal fathers, who for complex reasons are unable to assume the role of parent. Hamer’s position is congruent with the tenets of symbolic interactionism, which were explicated in detail earlier in this chapter. For example, it seems as though Hamer is aware of the impact of calling these fathers deadbeat dads. Since according to symbolic interactionism, individuals learn who they are from their interactions with others, it can be assumed that she did not want to negatively label the participants in her study as deadbeat, thus minimizing the chance that

she would create a self-fulfilling prophecy, and inadvertently discourage them from becoming fathers who actively participate in their children's lives.

The general fatherhood literature provides a beginning understanding of the reasons that men choose to parent. It also provides a glimpse into both the historic and current conceptualizations of fatherhood in the United States. While this research provides insight into general issues associated with fatherhood, there are some unique issues associated with being a single father that must be explored in order to obtain a complete understanding of the experiences of the participants in this study.

Single Parents

In the past 20 years, the composition of the American family has been rapidly changing. The divorce rate is over fifty percent, meaning that at least one in two marriages will end in divorce. Additionally, Americans are getting married for the first time when they are older, and more women are active in the paid workforce than ever before. These factors combine to create the conditions that make families headed by single parents the fastest growing type of family in the United States (Fields & Casper, 2001).

Common experiences of single-parent families

Single parents, both by circumstances, such as death and divorce, and by choice seem to be especially susceptible to role strain and role overload, concepts that were explored earlier in this chapter. One example of this strain is illustrated by single parents who attempt to balance work and parenting responsibilities. They often find that the working world is not set up for parents. While this is common across all groups of single parents, the experiences of single mothers and single fathers may be different. Women

may encounter a work climate that is modeled on the patterns of men, with virtually no support for those who must maintain dual roles in both the family and work domains (Miller, 1987). Single fathers may also encounter this difficulty in that the established role expectations for male workers and the tasks associated with this identity have not been developed in a milieu that considers the need for a single male to actively participate in parenting tasks. This forces single parents to develop social support systems differently than other parents, in part because they have to meet the responsibilities of multiple disparate roles.

Perhaps the largest challenge faced by single parents is lack of financial resources. According to a recent article in *The Wall Street Journal*, “Child-care costs vary widely based on the quality, type of operator and region. However, average prices are roughly \$6,000 to \$9,000 a year for child-care centers, \$3,600 to \$7,800 for a family child-care home, and \$18,000 to \$30,000 for a live-in nanny. This equates to many families using about 8.7% of their income for child care, on average, though the share ranges as high as an average 25% for poor families” (Shellenbarger, 2002, para. 2). For this reason, some single parents are forced to secure unpaid arrangements, such as friends or neighbors, as alternatives to formal day care. Although this allows the single parent's income to go farther, issues of disparity around the quality of care then become pertinent.

Financial difficulties may also affect the well-being of children indirectly through the negative impact that they have on family functioning and parenting style.

Shellenbarger (2002) posits that financial strain is one of the strongest predictors of depression in single parents (para. 1). Additionally, parents with higher levels of depression have been found to have more punitive disciplinary practices and decreased

parental nurturance, support, and satisfaction with the parenting role (McLoyd, Jayaratne, Ceballo, & Borquez, 1994). These authors also conclude that the strains of poverty combined with role overload increases vulnerability to new life stressors. Because of this, poor single parents are susceptible to feelings of hopelessness and despair, which are detrimental to both themselves and their children.

Despite the challenges facing them, many single parents and their children thrive. Successful single parents function well and are able to promote education, resourcefulness, and responsibility in their children. According to Lindbald-Goldberg (1989), successful single parent families have adopted more adaptive functioning styles including: 1) more available personal resources, which enhances their coping effectiveness; 2) better family organization, which balances household responsibilities and decreases task overload; 3) a positive family concept, which values loyalty, home-centeredness, consideration, communication, and closeness; 4) an ability to highlight positive events and place less emphasis on negative aspects of stressful events; and 5) possessing less stress-producing, supportive social networks. Adaptive families also seem to possess a sense of control over their own destiny and perceive themselves to be effectively dealing with the outside world.

Strengths of single-parent families

Although much of the existing scholarship focuses on the deficits and challenges faced by single parent families, there are also strengths that can be identified in this family configuration. For example, a single parent may have the flexibility to spend more time with his or her children without the demands of a spouse or partner. This is in part because single parents often do not have to concern themselves with a partner's

needs or schedule. Additionally, the stressors that have been discussed throughout this section encourage families headed by single-parents to become more interdependent, and work to find creative solutions to the challenges that present themselves. Finally, children of single parents are often more involved in the family decision-making and problem-solving process. This may cause them to feel as though they are valuable and contributing members of the household.

Conclusions

While the American family has undergone much structural change in recent history, some of the conceptualizations of and conclusions about the viability of single-parent headed families remain the same. For example, most existing sociological and behavioral theories presume a two-parent household is the norm, and promote this type of family as the healthiest. The end result of perpetuating this stereotype is that families headed by single parents may be labeled as: broken homes, deviant, abnormal, and unstable. Because these labels get assigned almost uniformly, single parents in American society are viewed as transgressing the boundaries of what is normal. This may be felt even more strongly by single fathers, as male single parents are dealing with the common stressors faced by all single parents, as well as having to actively challenge the often unspoken assumptions about the abilities of men to be primary caregivers.

Single Fathers

A Growing Phenomenon

According to data extrapolated from the US Census Bureau's Current Population Report, the number of families headed by single fathers increased by 62% between 1990 and 2000 (Fields & Casper, 2001). In other words, 2%, or approximately 2,000,000 of

the United States' 105.5 million households are headed by a single father. This breaks down to approximately 1 in 45 families in the United States being headed by a single father. While there has been a rise of single father-headed families across the board, there are cultural differences that were noted in the data.

The increase in single father-headed families has been smaller among African Americans than among whites and Hispanics. In 2000, 9.9% of African American single parent families were headed by fathers, compared to 20.7% and 16.7%, respectively, of white and Hispanic families headed by single fathers. There are also differences that can be seen among different ethnic groups by analyzing longitudinal data. For example, the percentages of both white and Hispanic families doubled between 1980 and 2000, but grew by about 33% for blacks (Fields & Casper, 2001).

Finally, children who lived with single fathers were more likely to be living with a never-married father (40.6%) than with a divorced father (34.9%) in 2000, a shift from 1998 data, which suggested the opposite. In African American families, children of single parents were more likely to have lived with mothers (64.8%) or fathers (48.9%) who were never-married than with divorced mothers (17.1%) or fathers (21.2%) (Fields & Casper, 2001).

It is important to note that due to the choice in response categories, and the continuing stigma associated with gay and lesbian relationships, some of the men who report being never-married fathers may be cohabitating with a same-sex or opposite-sex partner. This is supported by Fields and Casper (2001), who assert that "respondents may be reluctant to classify themselves as such (cohabitators) in an interview situation, and

may instead choose to classify themselves as roommates, housemates, or friends not related to each other” (p. 12).

Categories of Single Fathers

Single fathers can be categorized into two categories. The first category is single fathers by circumstance, which includes those fathers who are divorced, separated, or widowed. The second category is single fathers by choice, which includes those single fathers who came to parenthood through foster care, adoption, or surrogacy. While these groupings provide one way to distinguish between the different types of single fathers, there are undoubtedly individuals who will fall into both categories. An example of this would be when a father with biological children becomes a widower. He may choose to remain single, but turn to adoption to continue family building. This is rare as supported by statistics extracted from the 2000 Census. According to Kreider (2003), there are 808,000 families comprised of both biological and adopted children in the United States. Since single father-headed families make up two percent of all US households, approximately 16,000 households will fall within the bounds of both categories of single fathers.

Single fathers by circumstance. The largest number (913,000) of single father-headed households in the United States are created due to dissolution of a marriage. Additionally, there are also 88,000 households headed by single fathers who are widowers and 350,000 where the single father is separated from an absent married spouse (Fields & Casper, 2001).

Single fathers by choice. There are also single men who come to parenthood through foster care, adoption, and surrogacy. There are no statistics on the number of

single men who utilize surrogates. However, as the costs associated with this method of producing a child are prohibitive for many, it is hypothesized that this number would be relatively small. According to staff members at Growing Generations, a company that specializes in surrogacy for the gay and lesbian community, the costs of producing a child via surrogacy can range from \$45,000 to over \$70,000 (Personal Communication, August 18, 2003). Finally, as the children conceived through this method would be biologically related to the householder, it is impossible to extract these numbers from the Census data.

There are also single men who choose adoption as a route to parenthood. As previously noted, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) estimates that approximately 33% of adoptions of children from foster care are completed by single parents, and that 2% of all adoptions in the United States are completed by single men (CWLA, 2003, foster care sect.). As discussed in the section detailing the different types of adoption that appears later in this chapter, these adoptions may be domestic, international, special needs, or relative adoptions. While single, gay adoptive fathers would fall into this category of single fathers by choice, a separate section that explores this unique family configuration appears later in this chapter as this is the population on which the current study is focused.

There are currently over 568,000 children in the foster care system in the United States (Child Welfare League of America [CWLA], 2003, foster care sect.). The desire to provide a home for children in need may lead some single men to become foster parents as a method of family building. However, as there is no national reporting system or data collection mechanism in place to determine the characteristics of foster

parents in America, it is impossible to provide an accurate estimate of the number of single men who take this path to parenthood (P. Pecora, personal communication, October 26, 2003).

Issues related to Single Father-Headed Families

The US Census Bureau's Current Population Survey yields information about the conditions of families headed by single fathers. Analyses of these data reveal that over 75% of single fathers are raising one child, and have incomes higher than the federal poverty threshold. Additionally, the majority of single father-headed families live in their own homes, and more often reside in metropolitan areas (1,635,000) than in nonmetropolitan areas (409,000) (Fields & Casper, 2001).

In addition to this national data source, there is a small but growing body of social science literature focusing on the life experiences and needs of single fathers. For example, the results of a recent study indicate that children living in homes headed by single fathers are the most likely to have no health insurance. Specifically, it was reported that "In the one million homes where a single father raised two or more children, 17% had all children uninsured, compared with 11% of the 5 million single-mother homes with two or more kids, and 7% of the 17.4 million comparable married couple homes" ("Single-father homes most likely," 2003, p. 719).

Other researchers have looked at the long term effects of being raised in a single parent household. Downey, Ainsworth-Darnell, and Dufur (1998) extracted data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study. The analysis of these data indicated that while there were some contrasts between children raised by single mothers and single

fathers, it is not appropriate to conclude that the gender of the single parent was a determinant of the well-being of the child.

These results are supported by a recent study that compared the role demands, relationships, and child functioning in single mother, single father, and intact family households (Hilton, Desrochers, & Devall, 2001). The results of this inquiry indicate that single fathers had better financial resources than single mothers, more positive parenting techniques (willingness to talk, encouraging, etc.) than married fathers, and relied more on friends for support than did married parents. They further report that single fathers had more education, more prestigious jobs, higher incomes, and less economic strain than single mother-headed families (Hilton, Desrochers, & Devall).

Another study investigated the factors associated with depression in single parent-headed families. Hill and Hilton (1999) found that single mothers were significantly more depressed than single fathers. The authors then conducted regression analyses to predict depression in single mothers and single fathers using changes in income, role set, role satisfaction, and locus of control as predictor variables. Satisfaction with the parenting role and perceived locus of control were found to predict depression in both single fathers and mothers.

Finally, there are issues that are presumed to be universal among all single father-headed families, regardless of how they came into creation. These issues are highlighted in the book, *The daddy track and the single father* (Grief, 1990). Although this text was written for single fathers who are divorced, it covers some of the common issues faced by all single father-headed families, including childcare and dating. For example, the author discusses the anxiety that many fathers feel when they decide to return to dating, and

offers suggestions for introducing their children to the person they are seeing. The text also provides suggestions for securing appropriate child care, as well as provides a list of questions to ask potential providers.

In summary, although the number of single fathers has increased dramatically in the last two decades, questions and doubts remain. In American society, individuals are socialized into gender roles from birth. Many times, this socialization process teaches individuals that the mother is the nurturing parent and the father is the breadwinner and disciplinarian. Therefore, it only stands to reason that society will be reluctant to accept and adjust to a phenomenon such as single fathers. But with one of every two marriages failing, and with the ever increasing number of children in the foster care system waiting to be adopted, someone must provide children with a stable home. Sometimes the person to best do that is a single father, regardless of sexual orientation.

Lesbian and Gay Male Parenting

Estimates of the number of men and women in the United States that identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual vary considerably. This variation makes it virtually impossible to determine the exact number of gay men and lesbians who are also parents. However, some researchers and organizations have offered estimates. In their recent study, Stacey and Biblarz (2001), estimate that there are between one and nine million gay and lesbian parents in the United States. Additionally, Patterson (1995) estimates that there are between one and three million gay men in the United States who are fathers, or about 20 – 25 percent of self-identified gay males in the United States (Bigner, 1996). Finally, according to data extracted from the 2000 US Census, there are 594,391 self-identified same-sex households in the United States. Of these families, 21.8% of male same-sex

households have their own minor children (defined as sons and daughters of householders) living in the household, and 22.3% have their own and/or unrelated children living with them (defined as sons and daughters of householders, and other non-related minors). The numbers are even higher for female same-sex households. Approximately 33% of these families report having their own minor children living in the household; and 34.3% had their own and/or unrelated children living with them (Simmons & O'Connell, 2000).

A recent study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation solicited information on the experiences of gays and lesbians (2001). The investigators involved with this study acknowledged past difficulties in obtaining a random sample of gays and lesbians, but still desired to collect data from a representative, random sample of respondents. To accomplish this, they contacted a random sample of households located in 15 major U.S. metropolitan areas. All households were asked a series of questions inventorying household member characteristics, including whether there was any adult living in the home who is gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

The results of the study are based on the responses of 405 randomly selected, self-identified gay, lesbian and bisexual adults. The researchers found that 8% of the participants were parents or legal guardians of a child under 18 who lived in the home. While this study does not provide concrete evidence of the numbers of gay and lesbian parents, the results do suggest that approximately 8% of gay men and lesbians are parenting a child under the age of 18. This survey also measured the extent to which gay men and lesbians reported an interest in becoming parents. Among the 92% of respondents who reported that they were not parents at the time of the interview,

approximately half (49%) reported that they would like to become parents one day. These results suggest that as there continues to be shifts in social thought in America, gays and lesbians may assert their right to parent in even greater numbers (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2001).

As gay and lesbian families continue to become more visible in American society, there has been an increased opportunity to conduct research with this population. The first studies on gay and lesbian families were conducted in the late 1970's. The majority of these studies centered on coming out to children (Bozett, 1980; Harris & Turner, 1986; Miller, 1978, 1979a, 1979b). In addition to the focus on the best way to come out to children, two studies explicitly looked at identity formation of the gay father identity (Bozett, 1981a, 1981b). These studies, like many of the early studies, were based on the same sample. Instead of conducting three studies with three different samples, many of these studies utilized the same sample, only looking at different aspects of the data.

As people began to become more comfortable with the idea that gay parents existed, there was a noticeable shift in the focus of research. Social scientists increasingly were concerned with the affects on children of having lesbian and gay parents. During this period, Patterson began to extensively publish on gay-headed households, and continues to be a major contributor to the literature today (see, Patterson, 1992; Patterson, 1995; Patterson, & Chan, 1996; Patterson & Redding, 1996). Through her research findings, Patterson has shown that gay male and lesbian parents are capable of meeting the needs of children and that their children are able to demonstrate healthy childhood development. In 2001, Stacey and Biblarz reviewed the results of 21 studies that looked at the effects of parent's sexual orientation on their children. This extensive

research project yielded results similar to other researchers: (a) There are no significant differences between children raised in gay and nongay households on children's self-esteem, psychological well-being, and social adjustment. (b) There are no significant differences in gay and nongay parents on parental self-esteem, mental health, or caring for their children. (c) The differences that were found in studies comparing children raised in gay and nongay households show that lesbian co-mothers share household and childcare tasks more equally than heterosexual parents, that lesbians allow for more gender nonconformity in their children than heterosexual parents, and that lesbian parents are more likely to discuss and be accepting of their children's sexuality than nongay parents. (d) The differences in children raised in gay and nongay households are that children raised in lesbian and gay-headed households display less stereotypically gendered behavior in their play and career choice; they are more likely to experience same-sex attraction and to question their gender identity; they are able to communicate feelings without as much reserve; and in the case of male children, they show less aggressiveness in their play (Stacey & Biblarz).

The majority of the existing empirical research studies exploring gay and lesbian families have been cross-sectional design studies that utilized non-random, purposive sampling techniques that yielded responses from largely white and middle class respondents. There are few longitudinal studies on lesbian and gay parenting. In one study, researchers conducted initial interviews with both heterosexual and lesbian mothers and their children in 1976-1977 and conducted a follow-up study in 1991-1992 to determine if there were any adverse effects on children of being raised in lesbian families (Golombok, Spencer, & Rutter, 1983; Golombok & Tasker, 1996; Tasker &

Golombok, 1991). A second longitudinal study (the National Lesbian Family Study), which is still in progress, is using quantitative and qualitative methods to understand the experiences and issues of lesbian families with children conceived via donor insemination (Gartrell et al., 1996, 1999, 2000). The topics of interest include: physical and mental health status of mothers and children; experiences with parenting, including division of labor; relationship quality, including affects of having a child on the relationship; social support from family, friends, and neighbors; childcare and educational issues for the children; and preparation for and experience with homophobia.

The recent wave of scholarship in the area of gay and lesbian parenting has shifted from a desire to “prove” that lesbians and gays can be good parents and that their children can develop in a healthy manner, to scholarship that illuminates the ways in which same-sex couples challenge heteronormative parenting ideals and structures. In the results of their study of 21 gay fathers who came to parenthood within the context of an identified gay identity, Silverstein and Auerbach (2001) conclude that gay fathers have a great deal to teach non-gay fathers about parenting. They posit that gay fathers have assisted in the creation of degendered parenting. It is through this deconstruction of socially prescribed roles that gay fathers are opening the “possibility of negotiation between equals rather than automatically replicating the male/female subordination of the broader culture” (p. 366). Additionally, Dalton and Bielby (2000) found that because lesbian and gay couples do not have access to the same institutional supports and social rituals to legitimize their relationship as heterosexuals, their journey to parenthood is “a more deliberative and less socially scripted process” (p. 59).

Summary

Gays and lesbians are asserting their right to parent in record numbers. This can be attributed in part to advances in social thought in American society. This advance in social thought may have been impacted in part by the results of over 20 years of social science research, which have overwhelmingly concluded that sexual orientation is not related to effective parenting. While there are many different types of families that are being led by gay and lesbian parents, there are similarities amongst the diversity of experiences. According to Martin (1993), “As gay and lesbian parents, we are all under the stress of knowing that some people harbor violently negative feelings about our families. It is an awareness that may remain a mere whisper in the dim recesses of our consciousness or move to the foreground with frightening clarity, but it is an ongoing part of our lives...Each time we address the issue of our visibility, we balance our ideals, our politics, our hopes for support, and our parenting goals against our caution, our need for privacy, and our fatigue” (p. 308-309).

While the gay and lesbian parenting literature provides a partial picture of the needs of families headed by gay men and lesbian, there are specific issues that must be explored in order to gain a full understanding of the needs of gay fathers. Therefore, an in-depth exploration of the literature related to this population follows.

Gay Fathers

Early Works on Gay Fathers

The 1970's were a time of change in America. The gay and lesbian movement was beginning to take hold, and gay people were slowly moving from the periphery of society. America had begun to become more acquainted with the notion of gay and

lesbian people being members of the larger society, and as such gay men were no longer such an invisible minority.

In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed homosexuality from the official Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), removing a major barrier to social acceptance (American Psychological Association, 1995). With the removal of homosexuality from the DSM, the professional literature also showed signs of development in its regard for gay men as both individuals, and in family units. Whereas many previous studies attempted to understand the sexual behavior of gay people, some scholars began to try to understand the complexity and diversity that exist within the gay community. The majority of literature reviewed from this period centered on two concepts: the coming out of gay married men, and the identity development of gay men as fathers who had conceived children in the context of a heterosexual relationship.

The earliest accounts of gay fathers centered on personal impressions, with only a few empirical investigations (Miller, 1978, 1979a, 1979b). Table 2.1 (p. 48) presents the characteristics of some of the earliest works on gay fathers. The table contains data on the sample size, mean age or age range, sample source, geographic location, data collection strategy, and methodology.

The sample size in these studies ranged from seven (N=7) (Dunne, 1987) to 30 (N=30) (Skeen & Robinson, 1984). The ages of the respondents varied from 28 (Bozett, 1980, 1981a, 1981b) to 64 (Miller, 1978, 1979a, 1979b). The majority of the samples were developed using participants involved in support groups for gay fathers (Bigner & Jacobson, 1992; Bozett, 1980, 1981a, 1981b; Dunne, 1987; Harris & Turner, 1986; Skeen

& Robinson, 1984; Turner, Scadden, & Harris, 1980). The chosen methodologies were both quantitative and qualitative, and utilized standardized instruments, interviews, and clinical observations.

The majority of these studies centered on coming out to children (Bozett, 1980; Dunne, 1987; Harris & Turner, 1986; Miller, 1978; 1979a, 1979b; Wyers, 1987). In addition to the focus on the best way to come out to children, two studies explicitly looked at identity formation of gay fathers (Bozett, 1981a, 1981b). It is important to note that these studies, like many of the early studies were based on the same sample. Instead of conducting three studies with three different samples, many of these studies utilized the same sample, only looking at different aspects of the data.

The majority of the existing empirical research studies exploring gay father-headed families have been cross-sectional design studies that utilized non-random, purposive sampling techniques that yielded responses from largely white and middle-class respondents. Although these studies have methodological shortcomings, such as small redundant samples, they were the first to acknowledge the presence of gay men as fathers. These studies were responsible for bringing gay fathers into the professional literature, and laid the groundwork for the next wave of studies, most of which were published prior to the “Gay-by boom” (a term used to signify the increase in gay individuals’ interest in parenthood) in the early 1990’s.

Table 2.1

Selected Gay Father Research: The early works

Studies	Sample Size	Age*	Sample Source	Geographic Location	Data Collection	Methodology
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Bigner & Jacobson, 1989	24 gay fathers, 29 gay men	M = 41.5	Support Group	Western US	Standardized Instruments	Comparative Study
Bozett, 1980, 1981a, 1982b	18	R = 28-51	Support Group	Western US	Interviews	Grounded Theory
Dunne, 1987	7	M=43	Support Group	Northeast US	Clinical Observations	Qualitative
Harris & Turner, 1986	10	M=37	Support Group	Western US	Questionnaires	Comparative Study
Miller, 1978, 1979a, 1979b	40	R= 24-64	Snowball	Cross-national (US and Canada)	Interviews	Life History
Skeen & Robinson, 1984	30	M = 41.4	Support Group	National (United States)	Questionnaires	Descriptive
Turner, Scadden, & Harris, 1990	10	M = 37	Support Group	Western US	Questionnaires	Comparative Study
Wyers, 1987	32	M = 40.1	Advertising	Northwest US	Interviews	Comparative Study

**Note.* Age is either reported as mean (M) or range (R) depending on how it was reported in the original publication.

What about the Kids? – The Middle Works

While the fitness of gay men as fathers had come to the forefront of the discussion earlier in the exploration of this phenomenon, it is important to recognize the body of literature that propagated stereotypes about gay fathers, and the research that shed light on the effects of being raised in a gay household. The majority of researchers focused on showing the differences between gay fathers and heterosexual fathers while others opted to show the similarities that exist within all family constellations. This research assisted in bridging the gaps in understanding the desire to parent that exists in many men, regardless of sexual orientation. The works explored in this review of the literature centered on the effects of children living in a gay household (Patterson, 1992; Patterson, 1995; Patterson, & Chan, 1996), parenting styles (Bigner & Jacobson, 1992), attitudes toward parenting by gay men (Crawford & Solliday, 1996), and the strengths and abilities of gay fathers (See Table 2.2: The early 1990's: Works on gay fathers, p. 55).

During this period, Patterson began to extensively publish on gay-headed households, and continues to be a major contributor to the literature today (see Patterson, 1992; Patterson, 1995; Patterson, & Chan, 1996; Patterson & Redding, 1996). Her voice has been instrumental in challenging the ways that gay-headed families are viewed, and contributed to the transformation of gay families from being viewed as unhealthy to being viewed as both respectable and capable of meeting the needs of children. In 1992, Patterson reviewed research evidence centering on the personal and social development of children with gay and lesbian parents.

Through a thorough review of the existing literature, Patterson (1992) concludes that there is no evidence that suggests that “the development of children with gay and

lesbian parents is compromised in any significant way” (p. 1025). She further concludes that now that there is empirical evidence confirming the abilities of gay parents, child development researchers can begin to explore a broader range of issues relating to different kinds of gay and lesbian headed families.

While Patterson is one of the most well-known researchers whose work focuses on gay and lesbian families, there are other researchers whose extensive scholarship has provided valuable information on families headed by gay and lesbian parents. Bozett was one of the first researchers to look at gay men within the context of parenthood (See Bozett, 1980; Bozett, 1981a; Bozett, 1981b; Bozett, 1987; Bozett, 1989; Bozett, 1993).

In the chapter *Gay Fathers*, Bozett (1993) reviews the existing literature on gay fathers, including more than 20 studies that explore various issues pertinent to gay fathers. Additionally, he compared parenting between gay and heterosexual fathers and found no differences between the two groups in problem solving, providing recreation for children, or in encouraging autonomy. Interestingly, gay fathers were found to be less traditional, demonstrated greater nurturance, had more investment in their parental role, and viewed their paternal role more positively than did heterosexual fathers.

During the first half of the 1990's, other researchers began to explore different aspect of gay male parenting. The majority of this research centered on two themes: the effects of a gay man raising a child, and the sexual orientation of the sons of gay fathers. Bailey, Bobrow, Wolfe, & Mickach (1995) explored the sexual orientation of adult sons with gay fathers. Data were collected through interviews and questionnaires administered to 55 gay fathers and their 82 sons living in the United States. The majority of these sons were conceived in the context of a previous heterosexual relationship, rather

than through alternative methods that many gay men are using today, such as surrogacy, adoption, or foster care.

The researchers were interested in determining whether there is a higher incidence of homosexuality in the sons of gay fathers. This notion relates to the long held stereotype that “gayness” is learned behavior, and that gay fathers will produce gay sons. The researchers found no evidence to support this fact. Rather, they found that almost 10 percent of the sons identified as gay, a figure that is quite similar to the generally accepted notion that roughly 10 percent of the United States population has a primary sexual orientation that is either gay or lesbian (Bailey et al., 1993).

As gay fathers became more visible in the late 1990’s, the literature base began to expand to include research on different types of gay father family constellations. There was a move away from focusing on the effects that having a gay father has on children, as well as a shift in focus from fathers who became parents within the context of a heterosexual relationship. The literature began to recognize that gay men were coming to parenthood through other means, such as surrogacy, and through foster care and adoption. This recognition of the expanding diversity of gay father families led one researcher to label these men as “The New Gay Fathers” (Schacher, 2002, p. 1).

Table 2.2

The early 1990's: Works on gay fathers

Study	Purpose	Sample size	Age	Sample source	Geographic location	Data collection	methodology
Bailey, Bobrow, Wolfe, & Mickach, (1995).	Explore the sexual orientation of adult sons with gay fathers	55 fathers, 82 sons	Fathers, M= 35.5 Sons, M= 25.3	Advertisements	National (US)	Questionnaire, interview	Descriptive
Bigner & Jacobson, (1992)	Compare father's responses on child behavior, and attitudes toward parenting	Gay father, N = 24; Non-gay fathers, N=29	M= 41.5	Support group	Western US	Standardized instruments	Comparison
Crawford & Solliday (1996)	Attitudes of undergraduates toward gay parenting	N = 97	M = 19.4	Convenience	Midwestern US	Standardized Instruments	Descriptive, comparative

Today's Gay Father

In the 1990's, gay men began to assert the right to parent (Barret & Robinson, 2000). Whereas the early works on gay fathers centered on those who came to fatherhood via heterosexual relationships, the majority of the current work being conducted is focused on gay men who have identified as gay from an early age, and are coming to parenthood through adoption, surrogacy, or by serving as foster parents.

This focus on gay men who are coming to parenthood as gay men does not seek to discount the experiences of married men who come out as the political and social climate continues to change for gay men in the US. Undoubtedly married men will continue to come out, and thus bring a resurgence to the dialogue about coming out to wives and children, and managing the identity development process at a later stage in life.

Empirical works as well as personal accounts of men choosing to parent were reviewed during this phase of the literature review. Two books reviewed provide different perspectives of the ways that gay men are coming to parenthood. Additionally, these books are written from two differing viewpoints: that of a gay father, and that of a gay man who enters into a relationship with a man who already has a son through adoption.

In *The Kid: What happened after my boyfriend and I decided to get pregnant* (2000), Savage details his, and to a lesser degree, his partner's experience in becoming fathers. This book serves as a resource manual as well as provides a historical account of the adoption experiences of this gay male couple. Explicit in this account is evidence of the homophobia that gay men, either consciously or unconsciously, have internalized

throughout their lives. This is evident as Savage is certain that no birth mother will ever choose a gay male couple to parent her child.

The second theme that was evident in this book was the recent transformation of societal values regarding gay men as parents. Savage (2000) and his partner openly presented themselves as a gay couple to the agency with whom they chose to work. While they were initially concerned about the responses of the agency personnel, it is quite evident that they felt supported and encouraged by their social worker in their quest to become parents. The experience reported in the Savage text does not appear to be isolated, and is supported by evidence from a recent study conducted at Rutgers University. Based on the responses of 214 completed surveys from public and private adoption agencies in 45 states and Washington DC, sixty-three percent (63%) of U.S. adoption agencies indicated they would approve adoptions by gay male or lesbian adults. According to Chibarro (2002), Brodzinsky (the study's principal investigator) concluded, "We still have some major barriers to parenthood and adoption for lesbian and gay individuals. Lots of stereotypes and prejudice still exists, and there is a long way to go, but we found that most agencies are willing to accept gay and lesbian applicants" (p. 1).

In *The Velveteen Father: An unexpected journey to parenthood*, Green (1999) provides an account of his decision to become involved with a gay man who was also an adoptive father. This book provides insight into the interpersonal transformation that occurred as he and his future partner met and decided to pursue a relationship. While similar to Savage's text, this account focuses on the experiences of a man who had believed that parenting was reserved for heterosexuals, and had therefore dismissed the idea of ever becoming a parent.

One of the most important themes in this text was the assimilation and internalization of the role of father. Green eventually pursues a second-parent adoption of his partner's child, and they decide to adopt a second child together as well. One of the other important themes was the sense-making activities that occur when a gay man chooses to assume a role that makes him a member of a double minority.

Consistent with many of the historical works on gay fathers, Green (1999) recounts the ways in which his relationships with his gay friends either ended or evolved as he assumed the role of parent. He discussed the initial need to separate out his two primary roles: gay man and father. Initially, he felt the need to keep these roles separate, as evidenced by his once weekly trips to participate in "gay" activities with his friends. As is common when managing multiple roles, Green was able to integrate these seemingly mutually exclusive roles, and integrate his sexual orientation into his unique strengths as a parent, as well as incorporate personal characteristics that were enhanced by parenting into his role as a gay man.

In addition to the texts, scholarship that continues to expand understandings of the experiences of gay fathers was also reviewed. These studies inquired into diverse areas, such as the social reconstruction of gender roles (Auerbach & Silverstein, 1999), gay men and lesbians as foster parents (Brooks & Goldberg, 2001), the experiences of gay fathers (Peterson, Butts, & Deville, 2000; Schacher 2002), and social workers' placements with gay families (Ryan, 2000) (See Table 2.3: Selected Research on Gay Fathers).

In the results of their study of 21 gay fathers who came to parenthood within the context of an identified gay identity, Silverstein and Auerbach (2001) conclude that gay fathers have a great deal to teach non-gay fathers about parenting. They posit that gay

fathers have assisted in the creation of degendered parenting. It is through this deconstruction of socially prescribed roles that gay fathers are opening the “possibility of negotiation between equals rather than automatically replicating the male/female subordination of the broader culture” (p. 366).

While this study centered specifically on the benefits of gay fathers to the larger society, other studies have focused on the global experiences of gay men who choose to parent. In their qualitative study of three gay fathers, Peterson, Butts, & Deville (2000), used a semi-structured interview format to uncover the reasons that gay men decide to parent, their experiences of fatherhood, the relationships they have with their children, and the coming out process as a father.

Peterson, Butts, & Deville (2000) identified five themes in their interviews with these fathers. All of the themes identified in the results “reflect a sense of personal growth” (p. 517). One of the themes that was shared by all of the fathers was the notion that the parenting process has put them in touch with their masculine and feminine side. This theme is one that is found in other recent scholarship as well (See Auerbach & Silverstein, 1999; Silverstein, 1996; Schacher, 2002)

This researcher also had the opportunity to speak with an adoption agency executive recently about the adoption process as it applies to gay men. This dialogue assisted in developing ideas for future inquiry that seeks to deepen understanding of the processes of gay-headed families by exploring the similarities of the identity development process of gay men and their adopted children (L. Edwards, personal communication, October 2002). Although no research to date has focused on the similarity of the identity development or coming out process that may be similar for both

gay men and their adopted children, this is an area of the literature that could be the focus of future inquiry.

As more gay men come to parenthood via alternative means, such as adoption, foster care, and surrogacy, they assist in breaking down assumptions that family is a concept related to heterosexuality and/or biological relationships. In a study of 21 self-identified gay fathers, Schacher (2002) found that every man in the sample “stated without reservation that their bond of love with and commitment to their child transcended biology” (p. 2). She also found that over half of the men in the sample had adopted a child whose ethnicity was different than their own (transracial adoption). This may provide further evidence of the transformative effects that gay men can have on society’s conceptualization of kinship and family.

Finally, as societal attitudes towards gay and lesbian parenting continue to evolve and as the existing knowledge base on gay and lesbian parents continues to grow, there is opportunity for researchers to reanalyze the existing empirical works surrounding this phenomenon. In 2001, Stacey and Biblarz reviewed 21 studies that looked at the effects of parents’ sexual orientation on their children. In the discussion surrounding the reanalysis of data, Stacey and Biblarz (2001) point out that with rare exception, most research is conducted from a defensive position that accepts heterosexual parenting as superior, and investigates whether the families of and parenting by gays and lesbians are inferior. They conclude that “while we disagree with those who claim there are no differences between the children of heterosexual parents and the children of lesbian/gay parents, we unequivocally endorse their conclusion that social science research provides

no grounds for taking sexual orientation into account in the political distribution of family rights and responsibilities” (p. 179).

Table 2.3

Selected Research on Gay Fathers (1996-2002)

Author	Purpose	Sample size	Age*	Sample source	Geographic location	Data collection	methodology
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Auerbach & Silverstein, (1999)	Social reconstruction of gender roles	N= 23	M = 39	Advertisements	National	Focus Groups, Interviews	qualitative
Brooks & Goldberg (2001)	Gay men and lesbians as foster parents	N = 10 (social workers); N= 11 (gay parents)	M = 36	Advertisements, snowball	Not identified	Semi-Structured Interviews with social workers	exploratory
Peterson, Butts, & Deville (2000)	Experiences of gay fathers	N = 3	R = 35-55	Advertisement	Not identified	Interviews	Qualitative
Ryan (2000)	Social workers placements with gay families	N = 86	M = 37.89	8 public welfare agencies	National	Standardized Instruments, open-ended questions	exploratory
Schacher (2002)	Experiences of gay fathers	N = 21	Not Reported	Advertisements	Major Metropolitan Areas	Interviews	Qualitative
Stacey & Biblarz, (2001)	How does the sexual orientation of parents matter?	N = 21 (reviewed studies)	Various	Various	Various	Various	Secondary data analysis

*Note. Age is either reported as mean (M) or range (R) depending on how it was reported in the original publication.

History of Adoption in the United States

The practice of adoption transcends all cultures and has existed over centuries. It is about the provision of families for those children who cannot be cared for within the families into which they are born, and it is about the experience of parenting. Adoption is most commonly defined as the legal and social process whereby a permanent parent-child relationship is established between persons (usually) not related by birth due to the birth parents' inability or unwillingness to care for the child (Downs, Costin, & McFadden, 1996; Triseliotis, Shireman, & Hundleby, 1997). While this definition does capture the essence of adoption, it seems to present adoption as an event, and not a process. As social scientists' and practitioners' understanding of adoption has evolved, so have the definitions associated with it. Watson (1994) offers an expanded definition of adoption that is inclusive of the view of adoption as a lifelong process:

Adoption is the means of meeting the developmental needs of a child by legally transferring ongoing parental responsibility from birth parents to adoptive parents, recognizing that in the process we have created a new kinship network that forever links those two families together through the child that is shared by both. This kinship network may also include significant other families, both formal and informal, that have been part of the child's early experiences. (p.2)

This expanded definition of adoption more inclusively reflects social scientists' and practitioners' understanding of the effects of adoption on all members of the adoption triad, which is a term used to describe the interrelationship of the parties involved in the adoption process, without connotation of a tightly knit relationship between the parties

(Amadec & Pierce, 2000). Additionally, Watson's (1994) definition incorporates society's current view of adoption and is telling of the values associated with the complex and often controversial practice of adoption. Adoption often acts as a mirror for the social changes taking place within the society in which it is practiced. It is a process that has evolved over time and is reflective of the understandings surrounding the best ways to meet the needs of children.

Although adoptions have occurred in some capacity in all cultures throughout history, legislation that addressed this issue was only developed in the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century. The first adoption statute was passed in Massachusetts in 1851, and became the model for adoption legislation in other states. The Massachusetts statute provided for: "1.) the written consent of the child's biological parent; 2.) joint petition by both the adoptive mother and father; 3.) a decree by a judge, who had to be satisfied that the adoption was fit and proper; and 4.) legal and complete severance of the relationship between the child and the biological parents" (Kadushin & Martin, 1988, p. 535).

By 1929, every existing state in the United States had developed adoption legislation (Downs, Costin, & McFadden, 1996). Although these laws varied from state to state, the overarching goal of all adoption legislation was to promote what was in the best interests of the adopted child. It was also during this time that the sealing of adoption proceedings and records became commonplace. During this time, it was thought that the sealing of records and the issuance of a new birth certificate would protect the adopted child from the stigma of illegitimacy, and to ensure that the adoptive

family unit would be protected from interference from the birth family (Triseliotis, Shireman, & Hundleby, 1997).

The notion that the child and adoptive family should be protected from the birth mother is indicative of how some conceptualized women who chose to make an adoption plan for their unborn children. As Buck (1963) asserts, “The woman may give her child away and then go free, too, except for the personal sense of guilt, if she has any” (p. 13). While adoption practice has evolved over time, it was historically a process that exemplified “incremental social engineering, where the ruffling of feathers of deviance were smoothed and out-of-place child and mother reinserted in their respective social category, thereby reproducing the dominant social order” (O’Shaughnessy, 1994, p. 16). Thereby through adoption, influential members of society are able to define what constitutes an exemplary parent and family setting. This reinforces the notion that some individuals and living situations are superior to others, which assists in the creation of the norm, or most desirable type of parent.

Closed adoptions were the norm in the United States until the mid 1960’s, and were generally a process whereby a married, middle-class, Caucasian couple adopted a healthy white infant, which were the only children considered adoptable up until this time (Downs, Costin, & McFadden, 1996). This limited understanding of the needs and adaptive abilities of adopted children was due in part to the work of Bowlby, who concluded that the child must be adopted by the age of three if there was to be any hope of bonding with the adoptive family. However, as social scientists and adoption professionals began to see that not only white, infants who were adopted at birth were

able to adjust; the definition of adoptable children was expanded to include children of color, older children, or those with special needs.

Prevalence of Adoption in the United States

Many organizations, including the federal government, collect data on some aspect of adoption in the US. However, as the collected data serve a specific reporting purpose, they do not easily combine to create a composite picture of adoption in the US. For example, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) is designed to provide uniform, reliable information on children in the child welfare system by requiring each state to provide data for each child who has been adopted during a six-month reporting period of the year to date (US Department for Health and Human Services: Administration for children and families, n.d., Data and Info Systems section). While these data are useful for gaining an understanding of the number of minors involved with the public child welfare system who were recently adopted, this collection system does not provide insight into the number of children who were adopted through other methods such as international and independent adoptions.

However, when those charged with designing the instrument used to collect data in the 2000 Census included 'adopted' as a response category on a question that inquired about the relationship between the householder and the child in the home on the Census, a new data source was created. Subsequently, data from the 2000 Census now provides the most complete picture of the prevalence of adoption in the US, as well as provides information on the characteristics of the children and those who adopted them. While this is the most complete descriptive dataset in existence, there are several limitations that will be briefly discussed before the data are summarized.

First, the response category adoption includes all types of adoption. These data do not distinguish between relative and non-relative adoption, or between domestic and international adoptions. Secondly, it is important to note that it is completely impossible to eliminate error from the data collection and analysis process. However, the data released from the 2000 Census have undergone “statistical testing and all comparisons are significant at the 90-percent confidence level” (Kreider, 2003, p. 22). Additionally, the question that collected data on the relationship between the child and the householder (EX: adopted, biological, stepchild) was only used on the long form, which was sent to approximately 1 in 6 US households (Kreider). Therefore, the sample parameters that are presented may “differ somewhat from the 100-percent figures that would have been obtained if all housing units, people within those housing units, and people living in group quarters had been enumerated using the same questionnaires, instructors, enumerators, and so forth” (Kreider, p. 22).

The Census 2000 Special Report: Adopted children and stepchildren: 2000 (Kreider, 2003) analyzes data that were extracted directly from the most recent US Census, which is the only national-level data source on adopted children and their families. The remainder of this section summarizes data contained in the report, and is presented to provide an understanding of the prevalence of adoption in the US, as well as gain a picture of households in the US that contain adopted children.

The Face of Adoption in the US

There are approximately 2,058,915 adopted children under the age of 18, and 472,911 adopted children over the age of 18 who continue to reside in their adoptive homes in the United States. These 2.5 million adopted children make up approximately

2.5% of the total population of children in the US. Approximately 40% of adopted children (987,622) are under the age of 11. However, due to the selection of response categories, there is no way to know the type of adoption completed or the length of time the adopted child has resided in the home. While this limitation is apparent, the data do show that there are approximately 42,000 children under the age of one in adoptive homes in the US, thus providing one approximation of the number of infant adoptions in the US annually (Kreider, 2003).

Adoptive families can be found in every state in the North America. While the distribution of the data shows higher concentrations of adoptions taking place in some states, the numbers do not differ drastically by region (Kreider, 2003). The majority of children adopted in the US are Caucasian (64.2%) or African American (16.0%) (Kreider). Approximately 11% of adopted children have at least one disability, which is defined by the census as being sensory, physical, mental, or self-care related (Kreider). Finally, the number of foreign-born children who reside in adoptive households in the US has risen from 7,000 in 1990 to over 18,000 in 2000 (US State Department, 2003, Intercountry Adoption Section). Almost 50% of the 257,792 foreign-born children in the US were born in Asia, with Korea being the most active (56,825) country for international adoption (Kreider).

Characteristics of Adoptive Households in the US

The majority of adopted children in the US live in homes headed by Caucasian (75.6%) or African American (14.6%) householders. While the majority of families adopt a female child of the same race or ethnicity as themselves, over 376,000 children live in families where the householder is of a different racial or ethnic background than

the adopted child. The average age of the householder in adoptive families is 43.1 years, which is 3 years higher than the age of the average householder with biological children. This is understandable as heterosexual couples often come to adoption after attempting to produce biological children, and singles often wait until they are secure in their careers and have a sense of security about raising children without a partner (Kreider, 2003).

The Child Welfare League of America estimates that 2% of adoptions are completed by single men (2003, single parent section). However, as highlighted in the section of this chapter that discusses the political and ideological landscape of gay parenting, some of these men who present as single may in fact be a partner in a gay relationship. According to the 2000 census data, 5% of adopted children live in homes headed by a male householder with no spouse present (Kreider, 2003). This figure takes into consideration those men who are separated, divorced, widowed, living with an unmarried partner, as well as those 10,529 adoptive fathers who report never being married (Kreider).

Over 78% of adopted children lived in households headed by married householders. Over 50% of these householders earn over \$50,000 per year, and over 33% of them have completed a bachelor's degree or a graduate/professional school degree. Over 77% of adoptive families live in homes that they own, and over 81% are actively in the workforce. Finally, contrary to popular opinion about wealth and its relationship to suitability for adoption, over 187,000 adopted children live in homes with income-levels that fall below the federal poverty threshold (Kreider, 2003).

Types of Adoption

In the United States, there are several different routes that couples and singles can take to adopt a child. While each of the routes have differing processes, costs, wait times, and will result in the adoption of a different type of child, they all share the requirement of a homestudy, which is the first step in the adoption process and certifies the family is approved to adopt a child. The homestudy is conducted by a licensed child-placing agency that has general guidelines for exploring the prospective adoptive individual's or family's history, characteristics, and strengths. However, each agency or worker may alter the guidelines depending on its own policies and procedures. Although there are general components that are included in all studies, every homestudy will look somewhat different since each family is unique. General elements that are required by one state child-placing agency include (State of Ohio, 2003, Homestudy and Assessment Process section):

Education/Preparation. Prospective adoptive families, both singles and couples, are generally required to participate in educational sessions designed to provide an overview of the similarities and differences in adoption from the adoptive parent's point of view, as well as through the eyes of the adopted child. These sessions may also include individual meetings with the social worker, group exercises in a classroom setting, reading articles, and meeting with other adoptive families and adopted children.

Personal History. In order to help prospective adoptive parents gain insight into how past experiences may affect their adoption experience, families are asked to write a personal and family biography. Some of the more common topics covered include: life and educational experiences, fundamental values and beliefs, expectations for the adopted

child, disciplinary styles, personal successes, and history of coping with problems.

Families are often also asked to describe their experience with children, as well as their relationships with family, friends, and co-workers. If the prospective family is a couple, they may be asked to describe their relationships with their partner. A description of the family's lifestyle and current relationships with extended family members may also be requested. The process of writing the biography is designed to help the prospective adopter(s) figure out the types of people with whom they best relate/connect, as well as yield information about the family's communication and problem-solving styles.

Home. The agency worker must be assured the family home meets basic health and safety standards. Contrary to many people's perceptions, this is not a white-glove test where the social worker is checking to see that the house is in perfect condition, or judging the family's taste in décor. The worker only wants to ensure the home is safe to live in, and that that it will adequately meet the needs of an adopted child or children.

Family Income and Employment Status. Prospective families are required to submit evidence that their income is adequate to meet the basic needs of the existing family members. Families will also be asked about their employment history, as well as be required to provide verification of employment for all family members who are active in the paid workforce.

Health. The adopting person needs to be physically able to meet or arrange for a child's basic needs. Therefore, each adult living in the home is required to have a physical examination that certifies that the individual does not present with any significant health concerns, is free of communicable diseases, and does not have a history of serious mental illness.

Documentation of Identity/Status. Each family member is required to submit proof of identity and legal status. Depending on the type of adoption, families may also be asked to provide: copies of birth certificates, citizenship documentation, marriage license, divorce decree, and other legal papers pertaining to legal status of each family member.

Child Protective Services/Criminal Record Check. Child-placing agencies are also required to conduct a background check of each person living in the home. The purpose of this investigation is to identify individuals who have been accused of abuse or neglect of children, or those who have been convicted of certain serious or violent crimes, such as child abuse and neglect or sexual assault.

References. Finally, the prospective adoptive family is asked to provide the names, addresses and phone numbers of individuals who can attest to the character of the prospective family, and provide insight into the family's experience with children.

At the completion of the homestudy process, the agency worker and the potential adopter jointly arrive at a decision as to the readiness of the potential adopter and the type of adoption and characteristics of the child (ren) most appropriate to the adoptive parent's skills and strengths. The completed homestudy approves the family to specifically adopt a child with certain characteristics, and often via a particular route. For example, an approval may read: The agency recommends John Doe for the adoption of one child, of either gender, up to the age of one year, from the United States. He is approved for an African American, Caucasian or Hispanic child or any combination of these ethnicities. This approval provides the placing agency with some guidance on the type of adoption that the family should pursue. Using the example from above, it is clear that the adoptive family

is approved to adopt a child from the United States, which limits the possibilities to an agency, independent, or identified adoption.

Agency adoptions involve the placement of a child with adoptive parents by a public agency, or by a private agency licensed by the state agency charged with administering child welfare programs. Public agencies generally place children who have become wards of the state for reasons such as abandonment or abuse. These adoptions generally have very few costs associated with them. Many of the children available for adoption are older, are part of a sibling group, and/or have special needs (NOLO: Law for all, 2003, Types of Adoption section). These children are often eligible for state and federal adoption assistance subsidy programs, such as Title IV-E which are designed to promote adoption by families who may otherwise not be able to afford the specialized services needed by these children (North American Council on Adoptable Children [NACAC], 2003, Adoption Subsidy Section).

Adoptive families who wish to adopt an infant generally use a private agency, which are often operated by religious or social service organizations. Children placed through private agencies are generally brought to the agency by parents that have or are expecting a child, and wish to place that child for adoption. Agency placements fall along a continuum from being closed, where the adoptive and birth families have no relationship, to completely open, where the adoptive and birth families agree on a plan for ongoing contact with the adopted child that includes phone calls and visits. The service fees for this type of adoption vary greatly, depending on the expenses incurred by the agency as well as the needs of the birthmother (NOLO: Law for all, 2003, Types of Adoption section)

Another option for a domestic adoption is an independent adoption (or private adoption) where a child is placed with adoptive parents without the involvement of an agency. Some independent adoptions involve a direct arrangement between the birthparents and the adoptive parents, while others involve an intermediary such as an attorney, doctor or adoption facilitator. Although independent adoptions are permitted in most states, some states do bar the use of intermediaries in the adoption process (Adoption Navigators, 2003, Types of Adoption section).

A final option for a domestic adoption is an identified, or designated, adoption. This is a type of adoption where the adopting parents locate a birthmother, and then contract with an adoption agency to handle the rest of the adoption process. In this way, this type of adoption is a combination of the independent and agency adoption. Prospective parents avoid the waiting lists of agencies by finding the birthparents themselves, but have access to the benefits of agencies, such as their expertise with adoption legislation, paperwork required by the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, and finalization of adoption. Finally, identified adoptions provide an alternative for parents residing in states that ban independent adoptions, and may increase the comfort level of everyone involved by including an experienced child-placing agency in the process (NOLO: Law for all, 2003, Types of Adoption section).

The homestudy may also approve the family to adopt a child through an international adoption, where the adoptive family adopts a child who is a citizen of a foreign country. Each country has their own requirements, and exclusionary criteria regarding who may adopt children from that country. For example, some countries are not open to single men, while others require that couples be married for a specified period

of time, or fall within a certain age range. In addition to satisfying the adoption requirements of both the foreign country and the parents' home state, the parents must also obtain an immigrant visa for the child through the U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) (formerly the Immigration and Naturalization Service). The BCIS has its own rules for international adoptions, such as the requirement that the adoptive parents be either married or, if single, at least 25 years old. The BCIS also requires adoptive parents to complete paperwork and submit a favorable home study report. Finally, adoptive parents must apply for United States citizenship for the child, and are strongly encouraged to re-adopt the child in the American court system (Adoption Navigators, 2003, Types of Adoption section).

Adoption by Gay Men and Lesbians

The last decade has seen a sharp rise in the number of gay and lesbian individuals and couples who are using alternative means, such as adoption to create families (Brodzinsky, Lang, & Smith, 1995; Markowitz, 2000; Savage, 2000; Shapiro, Shapiro, & Paret, 2001; Shernoff, 1996; Wells, 2000). This rise can be attributed in part to the efforts of gay and lesbian advocacy groups, who have helped shape debates about the definition of family in American society and worked diligently to advance attitudes about gays and lesbians, individually and in family units. One of the outcomes of this effort has been an increased acceptance of gays and lesbians as adoptive parents by both public and private adoption agencies.

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute recently released findings from a study that investigated the attitudes of adoption agencies towards gay men and lesbians as prospective adoptive families. The researchers conducted a systematic, nationwide

analysis of whether public and private adoption agencies work with prospective adoptive parents who are lesbian and gay, the extent to which agencies place children with them, and agency staff attitudes regarding adoption by lesbians and gays. Approximately 50% (n = 895) of adoption agencies in the United States were targeted for inclusion in the study, and the response rate was 41.2%. Therefore, the results of this study are based on the input of 369 public and private adoption agencies throughout the United States.

The most notable conclusion is that approximately 60% of adoption agencies in the United States accept applications from gays and lesbians, and about 2 in 5 (39%) agencies report having placed children with adoptive parents who they know are gay or lesbian in the past year. One interesting finding is that the majority of these agencies focused on special needs or international adoption. However, this increased willingness to work with gays and lesbians supports the notion that there is a steadily increasing number of gays and lesbians who are choosing to build families through adoption (Brodzinsky, 2003).

While significant shifts in adoption agencies' attitudes toward gays and lesbians as adoptive parents were well-documented in the study, some ideological difficulties accepting this family form persist. For example, religion and its perceived acceptance or disapproval of homosexuality continues to be a barrier to an adoption agency's acceptance of gays and lesbians as prospective parents. For example, all Jewish-affiliated agencies that were surveyed reported that they were willing to work with gay and lesbian clients, as were the overwhelming majority of public agencies (90%), private agencies with no religious affiliation (80.2%), and most Lutheran agencies (66.7%). The rest of the agencies with religious affiliations were much less willing to accept applications from

gays and lesbians, although a minority of Methodist and Catholic agencies did. Another identified barrier to gay and lesbian adoption was related to the attitudes of the birthparents. About one-quarter (24%) of agencies responding to the survey indicated that prospective birth parents have objected to placing their child with gays or lesbians, or have specifically requested their child not be placed with homosexuals. However, approximately 15% of all agencies reported that birth parents had requested or chosen lesbian or gay prospective adoptive parents for their child on at least one occasion (Brodzinsky, 2003).

Finally, differences were noted around the way that agencies responded to gays and lesbians wishing to adopt. Almost two-thirds of responding agencies had official policies on adoption by gays and lesbians; of those, 33.6% reported that a non-discrimination policy that included sexual orientation guided their work. About one-fifth responded that placement decisions were guided by the regulations of the adopted child's country of origin, and another fifth said that religious beliefs were the basis for rejecting applications from and making placements with gays and lesbians. Finally, approximately 5.2% reported that state legislation, such as sodomy laws (this study was conducted prior to 2003 US Supreme Court ruling that declared these laws unconstitutional) or cohabitation laws, prohibited them from placing children in adoptive homes with gay and lesbian parents (Brodzinsky, 2003).

This conclusion is supported by an earlier study that explored challenges experienced by gay and lesbian adoptive families. Specifically, Ryan (2000) surveyed adoption social workers (n=80) in public child welfare agencies to assess their level of homophobia and its impact on their placement recommendations with gay male or lesbian

families. The findings of this study indicated that race/ethnic background (African-American), as well as religious upbringing (Christian) are indicative of higher levels of homophobia and a lower likelihood of recommendation placement with gay and lesbian adoptive parents. However, the results also indicate that these attitudes can be impacted by providing training in two areas: gay and lesbian families and child development, and state adoption laws as they pertain to gay and lesbian adoption (14% of social work respondents wrongly indicated that it was illegal for gay men and lesbians to adopt in their state) (Ryan).

While there has been a large increase in gay and lesbian families, social scientists have yet to fully explore these unique family configurations. A brief literature review yielded few empirical studies exploring the experiences and well-being of gay and lesbian adoptive families. This literature search specifically focused on adoption by gays and lesbians, and was conducted separately from the general gay and lesbian parenting literature review presented earlier in this chapter.

The first article focusing on adoption by gays and lesbians explored the parental perceptions of attachment in 15 lesbian couples who had adopted internationally (Bennett, 2002). In this qualitative study, 30 mothers were interviewed to obtain information surrounding the hierarchy of parenting bonds, the division of labor in the household, time with the child, and the legal status of each of the mothers. The findings indicate that the children developed bonds with both adoptive mothers, but that 80% had primary bonds to one mother despite shared household and childcare responsibilities. The quality of maternal caretaking was found to be a contributing factor to the child's

primary attachment. There was no significant relationship between legal status of the parent and the child's primary attachment figure.

Another article focused specifically on gay fathers who decided to parent within the context of a pre-established gay identity. Based on a small sample of three gay, adoptive fathers, Peterson, Butts, & Deville (2000) sought to uncover the reasons that self-identified gay men decide to parent, their experiences of fatherhood, the relationships they have with their children, and the coming out process as a father. The researchers conducted qualitative interviews with participants and used grounded theory methodology to develop content and process themes from these data. The preliminary data analysis resulted in the identification of content themes in four areas: decision to parent, experiences with fatherhood, coming out as fathers, and what researchers need to know about gay fathers. Additionally, the researchers identified two process themes: expressing pride in adopted children and protecting the time they had with their children. Although these studies contribute valuable knowledge to the small base of literature that exists, much more work that is empirical is needed to gain a complete understanding of adoptive gay and lesbian parents and their children.

Finally, in a study currently being conducted from Florida State University, adoptive families headed by a gay or lesbian parent are being surveyed using a multi-method sampling strategy including direct advertising through popular media, specialized media outlets, a project website, and the use of snowball sampling to recruit additional participants via word-of-mouth. Surveys have been returned from adoptive families residing in 30 States (including the District of Columbia), making this the largest study of adoptive families headed by a gay or lesbian parent. In addition to collecting parent and

child demographic data, the survey instrument focuses on areas such as family constellation, family functioning, social supports, adopted child history and current functioning, the adoption process, pre and post adoption services, parenting styles and others. This study remains in progress, with data still being collected from families throughout the US (E. Cramer, Personal Communication, November 6, 2003).

Adoption by Single, Gay Men

An extensive review of the social science literature yielded no published studies that exclusively focused on the prevalence or needs of single, gay men who choose to build families through adoption. There are no dependable statistics on the numbers of gays and lesbians in American society. Therefore, there are no accurate statistics on the numbers of single, gay men who pursue adoption as a method of family building.

A review of published adoption research from 1986-1997 yielded only six articles focusing on adoption by single parents. None of these studies included a majority of fathers in their samples, and no study inquired about the sexual orientation of the adoptive parent. Thus, this study's focus on the experiences of single, gay adoptive fathers will expand the existing literature base by contributing knowledge about the experiences of single adoptive fathers who are gay. While there is a dearth of empirical information on the unique characteristics and needs of this population, there are experiences that are shared by all single adoptive parents, regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

In the recent book, *Adopting on your own: The complete guide to adopting as a single parent*, Varon (2000) provides a comprehensive guide to issues related to being a single adoptive parent. Varon posits that "single people who adopt choose to parent

because they want to love, nurture, and form a deep relationship with the child. They want to create a family. They feel that parenting will give them a sense of fulfillment” (p. 8).

There are several issues that all prospective single parents must consider before pursuing adoption. For example, there are often intense emotional anxieties about single parenthood that may be influenced by an individual’s own family background, as well as by cultural stereotypes about adoption, sexual orientation, and single parenting.

Additionally, while some single parents are preferential adopters, meaning that they have not attempted to produce a biological child, but instead chose adoption as a preferred method of family building, others come to adoption after being unsuccessful at other methods of family building. For example, some single gay men may come to adoption after failed attempts to produce a biological child. This loss may result in grief issues that need to be addressed before pursuing adoption. Finally, all prospective single adoptive parents have concerns about time management, employers, finances, and other logistics that are specific to raising a child alone (Varon, 2000).

This text also explores the idea that preferential adopters who are single may encounter rejection from their friends or family of origin, and may be forced to develop a support network, or purposefully expand an existing one. This is one area where single, gay adoptive fathers may have an advantage over their heterosexual counterparts. As gay people may have experienced hostility or rejection by their family of origin, thus mandating that they create a family of choice. Therefore, they may be more likely to come to adoption with experience in developing social networks of supportive individuals. Additionally, Varon notes that adoptive children often feel like outsiders,

and have a fear of not being accepted. Once again, a single, gay adoptive father may have an advantage over a similar father of heterosexual orientation as gay men have a sense of what it feels like to be an outsider, and an understanding of what it feels like to worry about not being accepted by others (Varon, 2000).

There are also some unique factors and strengths associated with single parent adoptive families. For example, one study found that adopted children in single-parent homes experience fewer behavioral and emotional problems than those raised in two-parent households. The researchers also reported that the single parents in their study were emotionally mature and possessed a high threshold for tolerating frustration, and a low susceptibility to the prejudices and judgments of outsiders. Finally, the authors found that single adoptive parents were likely to have a self-sufficient nature and solid emotional boundaries, which may assist in creating a safe place for adopted children (Groze & Rosenthal, 1991).

Another study that explored the strengths of single adoptive parents found that the majority of adopted children in single parent homes had better receptive and expressive language skills than those residing in two-parent homes. The researchers concluded that children in single parent homes get more intensive, one-on-one communication time with their parent than do children with two married, working parents (Brown, 2000).

Finally, single parents must be highly motivated to become parents. They have to navigate the homestudy process, locate a receptive agency, and overcome the stigma associated with being a single parent. Therefore, these parents tend to be highly invested in their roles. As Varon (2000) reports: “Their (single-parent) families often exhibit a high degree of negotiation between parent and child. They are often characterized by a

less hierarchical and more cooperative family dynamic, less traditionally sex-typed expectations and more gender equality” (p. 37). Therefore, the dynamics in single-parent families may serve to encourage children to be independent, have a high sense of competence and self-esteem, which results from feeling as if they are vital members of the family.

Summary

“Even as these discussions (regarding gay and lesbian adoption) proliferate on the legislative and rhetorical levels, the reality on the ground is outstripping the pace of the debate. That is, a growing number of lesbians and gay men are becoming parents and are living as families every day, irrespective of what the policymakers do or say” (Brodzinsky, 2003, p. 2). As families headed by gays and lesbians are especially vulnerable to the effects of public policy, the next section details the political landscape of gay and lesbian parenting in the US.

The Political and Ideological Landscape of Gay Parenting in the US

There are not many issues that spark as much controversy as adoption by gays and lesbians. This is an issue with which many individuals in the community wrestle, as do some professionals. For individuals, this may be a conflict between the belief that all children deserve a permanent home, and reconciling this belief with religious or moral values. For professionals, such as social workers, this may be a conflict between personal or religious values, and those of the professional association that sets forth a code of ethics for professional activity.

Despite the evidence supporting gays and lesbians and their parenting abilities, many people believe this should not happen. Gay men and lesbians have been socialized

in a society that devalues their worth, belittles their dignity, and in many cases criminalizes their private sexual behavior. The lack of protection afforded to gay families is often overlooked by the larger society and adds to the stress of raising children in a society that in many cases is still undecided about the entitlement of gay people's basic civil rights.

The political landscape for gay people in the United States is for the most part unsupportive. This becomes quite apparent as gay people pursue what are considered to be universal desires: the desire to find someone and settle down, the desire to parent, and the desire to protect their families.

In a report entitled, *The State of the Family* (2002), the Human Rights Campaign Foundation addresses legislative matters pertaining to gay families in the United States. The following inequities in the provision of benefits are noted by the authors, and provide further evidence of the gap in which gay families are often forced to exist:

- Same sex couples are denied more than 1,000 federal benefits and protections of marriage, and in all states but Vermont, are also denied the state rights and responsibilities that are associated with marriage.
- Many children of same-sex couples are permitted to have only one legal parent of each sex, which leaves both parents and children vulnerable. For example, the children may be unable to count on financial support from a non-biological or non-adoptive parent if the couple separates. The non-biological or non-adoptive parent may also be unable to continue to raise the child if the biological or adoptive parent dies while the child is still a minor.

- Gay and lesbian individuals are denied Social Security survivor benefits when a life partner dies. Their children also are likely to be denied survivor benefits if a deceased parent was denied the opportunity to become a legal parent through second-parent adoption.
- Gay and lesbian people can be fired, denied a promotion or otherwise discriminated against based on their sexual orientation or gender identity in most states, which could leave their families financially vulnerable.
- If a same-sex partner or parent of a same-sex partner becomes seriously ill, gay, lesbian and bisexual employees are not entitled to unpaid leave to care for them under the Family and Medical Leave Act. (p. 10).

There are currently three states that expressly prohibit adoption by gay men and lesbians: Florida, Utah, and Mississippi. The law in Florida is the oldest in the nation and was passed in 1977. The laws in Utah and Mississippi were both passed in 2000. Mississippi's law disqualifies gay and lesbian couples, and the Utah legislation makes it illegal for any unmarried couple to become adoptive parents (thus Utah's defense that the legislation is not anti-gay, as it includes unmarried heterosexual couples) (Human Rights Campaign Foundation [HRC], 2002).

The adoption laws in Florida are the most overtly homophobic and are discussed in detail in order to provide an in-depth understanding of the political and ideological landscape that exists in some areas of the United States. The Florida law banning adoption by gay men and lesbians dates back to 1977. This was when Anita Bryant launched the "Save Our Children" campaign aimed primarily at repealing the Dade County gay rights law. Though she targeted the civil rights law, her campaign built

momentum for the ban on adoption by gays and lesbians. Throughout 1977, ads in Florida newspapers ran stating, "There Is No 'Human Right' To Corrupt Our Children" (Whitt, Thomas, & Marcus, 1995).

The proposed ban on adoption by gays and lesbians passed overwhelmingly in the state legislature on June 1, 1977, and was signed into law three days later. According to the "Let Him Stay" website, one of the main sponsors of this legislation said, "The problem in Florida has been that homosexuals are surfacing to such an extent that they're beginning to aggravate the ordinary folks. We're trying to send them a message, telling them: 'We're really tired of you. We wish you'd go back into the closet'" (ACLU, 2003, Lawsuit section, para. 7).

Since 1990, three separate lawsuits have been unsuccessful in overturning the gay adoption ban. In the most recent state court case in 1997, a county judge refused to rule the law unconstitutional, citing the state's right to determine what was appropriate for the children in its care (ACLU, 2003).

In 1999, the most recent case challenging Florida's adoption law was filed in federal court. The lawsuit, *Lofton v. Kearney*, contends that Florida's adoption law violates the equal protection clause of the federal Constitution. The State of Florida defends that its unequal treatment is justified because it is the state's way to express disapproval of gay people (ACLU, 2002). Contrary to their defense, the State of Florida does license lesbians and gay men as foster parents. The State Department of Children and Families also places children in long-term care with lesbian and gay foster parents, even allowing them to become guardians of children.

The case in Florida has garnered much media attention. On January 29, 2004, the Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit voted to uphold the challenge to the Florida law that prohibits gay people from adopting. As of this writing, the plaintiffs and their attorneys are still on the process of exploring legal options and developing a course of future legal action (ACLU, 2002). The conservative backlash against adoptions by gays and lesbians is not primarily based on empirical evidence that suggests that gay men and lesbians are unfit parents. Instead, negative opinions of adoptions by gays and lesbians are largely based on moral imperatives that are derived from a conservative interpretation of Christian teachings and principles.

The issue of adoption by gays and lesbians was addressed recently in *The Citizen*, a magazine available on the internet. In the article “He has no mama now,” author Candi Cushman outlines the case against gay and lesbian adoption, and offers talking points to empower those who oppose these adoptions. She asserts that concerned citizens should contact their legislators and address the following points:

- I don’t want my tax money to fund state-sponsored homosexual adoptions that make children guinea pigs in untested social experiments.
- Research completed over the last 30 years clearly shows that children need both a mother and a father to have the healthiest upbringing, while homosexual parenting is a new and unstudied phenomenon.
- State-funded homosexual adoption guarantees some children will never have a mother and a father. Is it fair to let the state choose which children those will be?
- The “right” of homosexual adults to adopt shouldn’t outweigh the need of children to have both a mommy and a daddy.

- Putting foster children already wounded by psychological or physical trauma in homosexual households gives them yet another emotional challenge to overcome.
- We shouldn't allow children to become political trophy prizes: Homosexual activists' own comments reveal that "adoption rights" are part of a political quest for acceptance (Cushman, 2002, Cover story section, sidebar).

Additional opposition for gay and lesbian adoption has come from the Family Research Council (FRC) who "champions marriage and family as the foundation of civilization, the seedbed of virtue, and the wellspring of society" (Family Research Council, 2003, Welcome section, para. 1). The FRC supports Florida's ban on gay and lesbian adoption, and recently offered a response to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Technical Report that concluded in their support of gays and lesbians as adoptive parents (2002). In this response, the FRC asserts that "children raised by homosexual parents are more likely to experience gender and sexual confusion, more likely to become promiscuous and more likely to experiment with homosexual behavior. These children are also at greater risk of losing a parent to AIDS, substance abuse or suicide" (2002, Press section, para. 3). Finally, they assert that "children raised in a stable, married, heterosexual home do better than children raised in any other type of household. They are healthier physically and emotionally, do better academically, experience less poverty and commit fewer crimes" (2002, Press section, para. 4).

The lawsuit to overturn Florida's adoption policy also has many supporters. Among these supporters are those employed by the Florida Department of Children and Families (the defendant in the case), as well as those legislators who originally helped to enact the law. In a sworn deposition, Florida's leading official overseeing adoption

policy was asked if she knew of any child-welfare reason at all for excluding gay people from adopting children, to which the official replied that she did not. She was then asked if she believes children's best interests would be served if lesbians and gay men were allowed to adopt. She responded, "As I previously stated, I think it's contraindicated to rule out such a large population of people who quite possibly could meet the needs of waiting children" (ACLU, 2003, Defense section, para. 4).

Additionally, eight former members of the state House and Senate, including the former Speaker of the State House of Representatives and a former President of the State Senate signed a written statement that read, "In 1977, we were among the state legislators who helped pass Florida's law prohibiting gay people from adopting children. We now realize that we were wrong. This discriminatory law prevents children from being adopted into loving, supportive homes – and we hope it will be overturned" (ACLU, 2002, Lesbian Gay Rights section, para. 1).

Many social, professional and child-welfare organizations have also expressed their support for overturning Florida's adoption law. These organizations include: The American Psychological Association, the National Council for Adoptable Children, the Child Welfare League of America, The American Association of Family Physicians, The American Academy of Pediatrics, and the National Association of Social Workers (ACLU, 2002, Support section, para. 2). All of these organizations have taken public positions against restricting lesbian and gay parenting by submitting *Amicus Curiae* briefs, as well as utilizing press releases publicly stating their support for overturning Florida's ban.

While Florida's adoption policy continues to bar otherwise qualified gays and lesbians from becoming adoptive parents, there are some positive changes in the political landscape in recent years. In 1999, a state law in New Hampshire was overturned by the governor. The overturning of this legislation makes it now legal for gay and lesbian individuals to apply for adoption, as well as ended the prohibition that banned foster parents from having a gay person spend the night in their home.

Another success for families headed by gay men and lesbians was the recent US Supreme Court that struck down the 13 remaining state sodomy laws. These laws prohibited consensual sexual activity between two people of the same gender, and were struck down on the basis that gay men and lesbians are entitled to the fundamental right to privacy guaranteed by the US Constitution. These laws were commonly referred to as the Crimes against Nature (CAN) laws and were used to support discrimination against gay men and lesbians in housing, employment, and family-related matters (D. Mason, Personal Communication, June 26, 2003).

In a movement that has learned to measure its success in fragments, legislative inactivity can be viewed as positive as well as negative. In 2004, only four bills were introduced that would alter gay people's abilities to become parents, either through foster care or adoption. Three of the proposed bills were designed to prohibit gay men and lesbians from adopting, and increase adoption agency's ability to exercise discretion in placing children. In the other case, if passed, the legislation would have allowed gay couples in Colorado the right to adopt as a couple (Human Rights Campaign, 2004).

While some states are grappling with the issues of gay parenting on a legislative level by introducing bills that would either limit or increase the state's protections for gay

families, others choose to allow the court to decide these matters on an individual basis. The *State of the Family* (2002) established criteria for determining each state's record of case rulings regarding gay and lesbian families and then ranked each state as either having "good court records, unclear court records, poor court records, or state law prohibits" (p. 19).

The family court systems in 20 states and Washington DC have demonstrated an openness to same-sex parents in their rulings. However, 11 of these states have demonstrated an openness to adoption by gay and lesbian individuals, while only nine states and Washington DC have demonstrated an openness to adoption by gay and lesbian couples. The majority of these states are located in either the Northeast US, or in the Pacific Northwest (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2002).

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the family court systems in 10 states have poor records with respect to adoption, custody or visitation by same-sex parents. The majority of these states are located in the Southeastern US (including Virginia) (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2002).

Although Virginia has a poor record with regard to adoption and custody by gay individuals, there may be signs of change on the horizon. On August 9, 2002, a case involving an openly lesbian woman who charged the Department of Social Services with violating her rights was settled in mediation. The result of this mediation is that she will be treated in the same manner as a heterosexual applicant, and that all child-placing agencies in Virginia will be informed of this non-discrimination policy in a directive that explicitly states that there are no absolute barriers to potential adoptions of children from outside the Commonwealth (Virginians for Justice, personal communication, August, 28,

2002). This decision represents a huge step for gay Virginians wishing to adopt, and for the children in need of homes. Undoubtedly, this policy will take time to be circulated and enforced, but as mentioned before, in a movement that has learned to measure its success in fragments, this is certainly a step in the right direction.

While the debate surrounding the rights of gays and lesbians to adopt children continues, some organizations believe that it is the children who suffer when political thought has not progressed as far as social thought. The American Civil Liberties Union summarizes the issue best when it writes:

Ask mainstream children's groups about adoption, foster care, and other parenting, and it's unlikely they'll jump right into talking about lesbian and gay parents. Instead, they'll talk about the crisis in this country's child welfare system. They'll talk about the 568,000 kids in foster care, many of whom are essentially warehoused and shuffled from one home to another until they turn 18 and "age out" of the system. They'll talk about the 117,000 of those kids who are ready to be adopted—but are still waiting because nobody wants them. They'll talk about how it's getting worse instead of better—and has been for decades. They'll talk about the kids they see who are abused and neglected, and about the foster homes that aren't accountable to anyone, and about the thousands of kids who somehow get "lost" in the system—made vulnerable by the very safety net that's supposed to catch them. And then they'll ask why we're even debating whether to limit the pool of qualified, loving parents (ACLU, 2002, Policy section, para. 3)

As highlighted throughout this section, gay men and lesbians who are also parents are especially vulnerable to the effects of public policy. These families have historically

struggled to secure legal protections for their partners and their children that are equitable to their non-gay counterparts. This is a theme that has been pervasive throughout this chapter, as well as one that was echoed by the individuals who participated in the preliminary interviews. These findings are presented in detail in Chapter Four.

Conclusion

Although it is still relatively small and fragmented, the base of existing literature and scholarship that centers adoption, gay and lesbian parenting, and gay fathers combines to create the context in which the current study is grounded. Additionally, it provides information about the unique strengths that gay men have as fathers as well as the challenges faced by this unique family configuration. Finally, scholars have only recently begun to explore the influence that gay fathers may have on the transformation of traditional conceptualizations of both gayness and parenting.

As more gay men make the decision to parent and become visible in their own communities, I believe that the larger gay community will be one step closer to finding the acceptance it seeks. One of the most common arguments of anti-gay individuals is that as a community, gay men are predatory, and pose a particular danger to children. I can only hope that the increase in visibility of gay fathers in the literature, on the playgrounds, and in PTA's across America will serve the dual purpose of dispelling this myth while assisting the gay male community in its continued maturation.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

Overall Approach and Justification

Qualitative research is broadly defined as "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Where researchers using quantitative methods strive to assert causal determination, prediction, and generalization of findings, qualitative researchers undertake projects whose end result is illumination, and a deep understanding of the phenomenon of interest. Therefore, qualitative analysis results in a different type of knowledge than does quantitative inquiry.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) assert that qualitative methods are best used to understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known. They can also be used to gain new perspectives on things about which much is already known, or to gain in-depth information or explore a phenomenon that may be difficult to convey quantitatively. Thus, qualitative methods are appropriate in situations where one needs to first identify the variables that might later be tested quantitatively, or where the researcher has determined that quantitative measures cannot adequately describe the phenomenon under investigation.

There are many different, but not mutually exclusive types of qualitative research designs. Some of the more common are: ethnographies, case studies, phenomenological studies, grounded theory, and constructivist studies. Each of these studies has a distinct focus, and differing rigor expectations, but shares common assumptions and approaches

with the larger qualitative research paradigm. According to Padgett (1998), even though studies may have differing foci, there are some common elements that can be identified in most qualitative research studies. First, the methods used in qualitative studies are “inherently inductive as they seek to discover, not test explanatory theories” (p. 2.). Qualitative studies are also naturalistic as they favor “in vivo observation and interviewing of participants over the decontextualizing approach” of traditional scientific methods of inquiry (p.2). Additionally, qualitative methods imply closeness to the data and an absence of a controlled environment that stands in contrast to traditional quantitative inquiry. One example of this absence of control is the use of an emergent design, where the researcher focuses on the emerging processes as well as the outcomes or product of the research. Finally, qualitative studies generally seek to describe the complex environment of individuals in a holistic manner using a thick description rather than pre-identified categories, concepts, and variables (Padgett). At the heart of this thick description is a bricolage, which is a “pieced-together, tightly woven whole that is greater than the sum of its parts” (Padgett, p. 3).

While some scholars are wedded to one type of qualitative research design, others pick and chose methods from different traditions that best fits the research question guiding the inquiry. For example, Patton (1990) voices support for the notion of a "paradigm of choices" that seeks "methodological appropriateness as the primary criterion for judging methodological quality" (p. 39). The use of a paradigm of choices ultimately allows for a "situational responsiveness" that strict adherence to one paradigm or another will not (p. 39).

Finally, researchers must also be cognizant of the fit between the theory that undergirds the inquiry and the methodology of the study design. One way to analyze this congruence is to examine the proposed methods and theories using a paradigmatic framework, such as the one explicated in the text *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis*. Burrell and Morgan (1994) present four paradigms that offer competing epistemological and ontological viewpoints. These paradigms (functionalist, interpretive, radical humanist, radical structuralist) are one framework that can be used to explain sociological theories along the domains of radical change / regulation and objectivity/subjectivity.

The interpretive paradigm is characterized by a rejection of any view that “attributes to the social world a reality which is independent of the minds of men” (p. 261). This paradigm explains the ontological nature of the social world as a “subjective construction of individual human beings who, through the development and use of common language and the interactions of everyday life, may create and sustain a social world of intersubjectively shared meaning” (p. 261). Research undertaken from this paradigm will undoubtedly resist traditional scientific methods whose end result is a concrete and immutable truth. Researchers choosing to operate from this perspective adopt the position that the social world is constantly changing as its members come to understand reality in different ways, and through different lenses. These researchers look for truth that is produced locally, and undertake projects whose end result is not replication or generalizability, but instead a deep contextual understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Qualitative Methods and the Current Study

This study was designed to develop an understanding of the experiences of single, gay adoptive fathers who made the decision to parent within the context of a pre-established gay identity. As the overarching goal of this study was to capture the lived experience of study participants, a phenomenological design was the most appropriate methodology for several reasons. First, this approach minimized the extent to which events and experiences were manipulated in order to study them. Secondly, this approach placed no prior constraints, such as predetermined response categories, on data as they were collected (Padgett, 1998).

Phenomenology was influenced by philosophers Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schultz, and emphasizes *verstehen*, or the interpretive understanding of human interaction (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). *Verstehen*, or "understanding," begins with the assumption that human beings have a unique capacity to make sense of the world. As the main focus of phenomenological research is to develop an understanding of an individual's or group's experiences with regard to a phenomenon and how they interpret their experiences, it follows that this approach is sensitive to the influence of the environment within the individual's life. However, it is important to note that phenomenology, like other qualitative methods, is flexible and able to be adapted to a particular research scenario. Therefore, while the current study is being labeled a phenomenological study, the approach has been adapted to fit the context of the current study. Finally, congruent with the assumptions of the interpretive paradigm explicated by Burrell and Morgan (1979), phenomenologists believe that there are many ways of interpreting life experiences, and it is the meaning that is assigned to those experiences

that constitutes reality (Greene, 1978). In summary, using a phenomenological approach allowed this research project to answer the broad question: "What are the experiences of single, gay adoptive fathers?"

Finally, it is important to re-emphasize the emergent nature of the qualitative research paradigm. Because the researcher seeks to observe and interpret meanings in context, it is neither possible nor appropriate to finalize research strategies before data collection has begun (Patton, 1990). However, it is appropriate for qualitative researchers to bound the scope of the inquiry by specifying the primary focus of the study, develop initial interview questions, and develop tentative data collection strategies and exclusionary criteria (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Rodwell, 1998).

Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of self-identified single, gay adoptive fathers. Specifically, the study explored: the development of the father identity and its relationship to the gay identity in single, gay adoptive fathers; the extent of role confusion and role strain (as defined in Chapter 2) in single gay men who are adoptive fathers; the sensemaking activities of participants; and the role integration activities of these men. Toward this aim, the following dimensions were explored in the four preliminary ethnographic interviews that were conducted during the spring of 2003 with single, gay adoptive fathers throughout the United States:

1. At what point in these men's lives do they feel they developed a father identity?
2. How has fatherhood impacted their relationships within the gay social networks?
3. How has fatherhood impacted their relationships within non-gay social networks?

4. To what extent, and by what processes do single, gay adoptive fathers integrate the roles of both gay man and father?

The study expansion continued to be guided by the dimensions explicated above. Additionally, after the data from the preliminary study were analyzed, other constructs emerged, and questions that solicited information regarding style of discipline and self-disclosure were added to the interview guide. These dimensions of exploration were most appropriate for use with qualitative methods as they were designed to uncover the unique experiences of single, gay adoptive fathers. This line of inquiry may be particularly useful for social workers who provide services to gay fathers and their children, to those who develop programs that are designed to meet the needs of this type of father, and to those who develop public policy that affects this population.

Sampling in Qualitative Research

Although sampling in qualitative research represents a drastic departure from the methodologies employed in quantitative research, the sampling decisions are paramount to both inquiry paradigms. In quantitative inquiry, most researchers utilize probability sampling techniques as they are interested in causation, generalizability, and obtaining a sample that is representative of the larger population. In contrast, non-probability sampling techniques are most appropriate for qualitative study designs as the focus is on “flexibility and depth rather than on mathematical probabilities and generalizability” (Padgett, 1998, p. 50).

Qualitative sampling typically involves the selection of a small number of persons who are chosen for their abilities to contribute diverse viewpoints and experiences to the sample. Although small in the number of respondents, the data that

are collected are in-depth and information-rich (Patton, 1990). Information-richness refers to those cases that provide a deep contextual understanding of the phenomena under study and facilitate an understanding of issues and concepts related to the purpose of the study (Patton).

Generally, participants are recruited through “purposive or theoretical sampling” techniques in which the inquirer selects participants based on their ability to provide needed information (Padgett, 1998, p.50). One of the goals of qualitative sampling is to obtain maximum variation in the study sample. Morse (1998) defines maximum variation sampling as the process of “deliberately choosing a heterogeneous sample and observing commonalities in their experiences” (p. 73). Padgett (1998) further posits that this is the most useful method of sampling when researchers are interested in conducting an exploratory study, or investigating an abstract concept. The use of maximum variation sampling is particularly useful if inquirers are interested in sampling the extreme case (or outliers) in order to learn about the multiple perspectives that exist about the phenomenon of interest.

There is no generally accepted rule of sample size in qualitative inquiry. As the study designs are emergent, it is impossible to pre-determine an appropriate sample size. Rodwell (1998) asserts that qualitative inquirers should continue data collection until saturation, or “information redundancy is apparent” (p. 56). The notion of flexibility in determining an ideal sample size is also supported by Patton (1990) who concluded that there are no generally accepted rules regarding sample size in qualitative inquiry. Although there is a large degree of flexibility in qualitative sampling, there are external factors, such as time constraints and financial considerations that may ultimately

influence the size of the sample, or the length of engagement on the project (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Sampling Strategies of the Current Study

The sampling strategies for this study included the use of purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling is defined by Rubin and Babbie (2001) as the selection of participants that the researcher believes will yield the most comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study, based on the intuitive feel for the subject that comes from prior ethnography and reflection. Purposive sampling was the most appropriate method to use with this line of inquiry as it recognized the emergent nature of the design and allowed the identification of a group of participants with diverse life experiences. As there was not an emphasis on generalization in this study, the sampling plan allowed for in-depth knowledge of each gay father involved as a participant in the process.

The difficulties of locating participants within specialized populations, such as single, gay adoptive fathers, are well documented (Berger, 1984; Kehoe, 1988). In order to help alleviate this potential difficulty, and to capitalize on the social networks that are often quite strong in marginalized communities, snowball sampling techniques were also utilized. Snowball sampling is a form of nonprobability sampling where the initial participants who agree to be part of the study nominate others who may be potential study candidates (Rubin & Babbie, 2001).

Participants were identified through referrals from adoption agencies, and from advertisements in newspapers targeting the gay community, as well as in online forums, such as the Gay A-Parent listerv, and the ProudParenting.com website. The participants

had diverse backgrounds and experiences in terms of age, ethnicity, type of adoption, and age of adopted child. One way that the researcher ensured diversity in the sample was to ask participants to identify one person who is also a single, gay adoptive father and whose life experiences are different from his own. The identification of those with different life experiences assisted in providing data that were rich in variation, and uncovered the diverse experiences of the participants.

Therefore, purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to recruit 16 single, gay adoptive fathers to participate in this phenomenological study. These fathers were over the age of 21 (the legal age at which one can adopt a minor in most states), and single at the initiation of the adoption process and at the placement of the child in the adoptive home. While the participants may have been actively dating, they were not cohabitating, and did not have plans to share the responsibilities for parenting the adopted child(ren). While the study focused heavily on the adjustment period following placement and the life changes that occur as a result of the decision to parent, the only inclusion criterion regarding the age of the child or the length of time that the child has been in the home was that the parent was still actively parenting the minor (under 18) child. This criterion for inclusion expanded the sampling frame, as well as acted as a way to incorporate variation within the study sample. It was hoped that this variation would provide insight into the adjustments and life changes that exist throughout the parenting cycle. Finally, while the majority of adoptions were finalized, men who had physical custody of the children that they were in the process of adopting were also eligible to participate in the study. This allowed men who were adopting through public agency programs, such as foster-adopt programs to participate in the study. In these situations,

the permanency plan for the child was adoption, with the agency in the process of making the participant the child's legal and permanent family.

Inclusion of Preliminary Interviews

Consistent with an emergent design, the four respondents who participated in the pilot phase of the study were included in the study sample. This was appropriate as the insight gained through initial data collection and analysis guided future data collection. Each of the participants gave verbal permission to be re-contacted if additional information was needed in the future. These participants also served as additional sources of information as the design emerged and the study progressed. Finally, the inclusion of the preliminary interviews was appropriate as the general research questions, and the focus of the study did not change dramatically between the phases of the study.

Role of Researcher

Data are generally collected through the use of the human instrument in qualitative research. By human instrument, it is meant that it is the researcher who “through skill, patience, and wisdom obtains the information necessary to produce a rich qualitative study” (Morse, 1998, p. 66). Paramount to the qualitative research process is a trusting relationship between the researcher and the participant. Other important qualities of researchers include flexibility, persistence, and resilience (Morse). Specifically, the qualitative researcher practices what Patton describes as an “empathic neutrality” (1990, p. 55). As the relationship with participants is personal, the researcher is “not neutral, distant or emotionally uninvolved” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 12). However, several prominent scholars warn that qualitative inquirers need to maintain a critical distance, or take steps to bound subjectivity, as the credibility of a qualitative

study depends on the researcher's ability to be sensitive to the data and to make appropriate decisions in the field (Padgett 1998; Patton, 1990).

The role of self-disclosure on the part of the researcher and its impact on the decision to participate in the study is a dimension that was explored in this study. This dimension was one of the last topics explored in the ethnographic interview, and was designed to build general knowledge of effective recruitment strategies for minority populations as well provide information that might be useful in designing future studies involving gay fathers.

While there is some disagreement among scholars about how much disclosure is appropriate, the general consensus is that researchers should be truthful when asked direct questions, but vague enough to protect the integrity of the study (Padgett, 1998). The purpose of this research project was overt, and all participants were informed that the researcher was a Ph.D. candidate who was conducting the research for a dissertation. Therefore, self-disclosure on the part of the researcher was limited, and used as appropriate in facilitating rapport, and a trusting relationship between the participant and the researcher.

Data Collection and Management

There are three common types of data collection associated with qualitative inquiry: interviews, observation and document analysis. Qualitative interviews are generally used as either a primary strategy for data collection, or in conjunction with observation, document analysis, or other techniques (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Qualitative interviewers often use open-ended questions that allow for variations in responses. Patton (1990) recommends use of an interview guide or schedule as a list of

questions or general topics that the interviewer wants to explore during each interview. In this study, the guide was built on the foundations of the working hypotheses that were developed during the prior ethnography stage. This guide was prepared to insure that basically the same information was obtained from each person while giving the interviewer the freedom to probe and explore within these predetermined inquiry areas. In keeping with the emergent nature of qualitative research designs, the interview guide was modified over time based on the emerging themes culled from the collected data, or to exclude questions the researcher found to be unproductive for the goals of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

The review of prior research studies discussed in Chapter 2 provided this researcher with the conceptual framework necessary to begin to develop ideas on how to bound the phenomenon under investigation, and begin to develop foreshadowed questions used in the interview protocol. Each interview served as a means for reflection and the opportunity to develop a clearer sense of the population. Additionally, as this ongoing reflection assisted in the development of a more clearly defined conceptual framework, the interview questions evolved throughout the data collection phase of the study.

In addition to the literature review, interviews with a gay adoptive father, the adopted child of a gay man, and an adoption agency executive were conducted during the fall of 2002 as a way of learning more about the adoption process as it relates to gay men. These interviews provided this researcher with in-depth knowledge representing both emic and etic viewpoints, and were used as a means of bounding subjectivity, and provided a starting point for the development of foreshadowed questions designed to

uncover how single, gay adoptive fathers make sense of their lives. Additionally, the inclusion of a gay adoptive father in this group provided a beginning understanding of how gay men integrate roles (gay man and father) that are often thought to be mutually exclusive, thus providing information on what it means to be a gay man living in American society who is also a father.

The main data collection tool used in this study was an individual ethnographic interview. Ethnographic interviewing is based on the discipline of cognitive anthropology, and is designed to “elicit the cognitive structures guiding participants’ worldviews” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 112). This was the most appropriate type of interview to use in this study as its value “lies in its focus on culture through the participant’s perspective and through a firsthand encounter” (p. 112). In other words, this type of interview is especially useful for gathering information about participants’ life experiences and behaviors, as well as developing an in-depth understanding of the way that individuals make sense of their life experiences.

There are three types of ethnographic interview questions that were used in this study: descriptive, structural, and contrast. Descriptive questions were used to understand the experiences of the participant. One example of this type of question is: “How did you come to the decision that you wanted to adopt as a single man?”. Structural questions were designed to provide the inquirer with information related to the participant’s cultural knowledge. An example of a structural question from the interview guide is: “Are the laws in your state supportive of adoption by gay men and lesbians?”. Finally, contrast questions provided information about the use of specific terms in the

participant's language (Padgett, 1998). An example of this type of question is: "How do you think you learned what it means to be a 'good father'?"

The ethnographic interviews lasted between one to one and a half hours in duration. In order to create consistency in the data collection method, all interviews were conducted on the telephone. These interviews were recorded by using an adapter that linked the telephone and the recorder, and channeled the conversation into the tape recorder. To facilitate the interview process, the researcher utilized an interview guide (Appendix A) that contained the foreshadowed questions developed during the prior ethnography phase of the project, and refined throughout the data collection phase of the study. The interview had some structure, but also had the flexibility to allow participants to introduce new concepts and interpretations (Patton, 1990). Pre-established probes were designed, and were utilized to assist the study participants in expanding on answers that were provided. Finally, although the process was emergent, it also had problem-determined boundaries that were developed by the researcher, and assisted in keeping the line of inquiry from expanding into an unmanageable size or scope (Rodwell, 1998).

After each interview, the researcher produced verbatim transcripts of the interview content, with the assistance of the audio recording. It is important to note that there is disagreement among prominent scholars about the most appropriate means of capturing data that are collected in qualitative interviews. Several argue that a tape recorder is "indispensable" (Patton, 1990, p. 348; Padgett, 1998), while others "do not recommend recording except for unusual reasons" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 241).

While there is value in both positions, audio recordings provide a sense of security to the

novice qualitative researcher, and provide the means to ensure that what is spoken is what is recorded.

This researcher began the process of transcribing interviews as soon as they were completed. It was during this process that the researcher began to reflect upon the interview, and alter the working hypotheses accordingly. Whereas in other types of research, this would be inappropriate, it is expected in the qualitative research process. This alteration in hypotheses is supported by Rodwell (1998) who states: "...as this is almost an inductive process building on the particulars that are discovered, it should be assumed that the working hypotheses will be changing as the inquiry proceeds. In fact, a lack of change in the working hypothesis will put emergence, and therefore, trustworthiness and authenticity rigor into question" (p. 151).

Throughout the study, a methodological journal that provides information on the changes that occurred to the methodology was maintained. This reflexive journal, which was reviewed by the study auditor, provided a way for the researcher to concretely describe the changes to the working hypotheses, and provide evidence to support the rationale for those changes.

Finally, this study was a confidential study. All participants were assigned a unique ID, and each interview was assigned an identification number (EX: Participant 018, Interview 03). All lines of interview text were successively numbered. This allowed direct text cites of interviews by the researcher, or identification of the text during the study audit. The original transcripts were stored in a locked, fireproof cabinet to ensure that they were not damaged due to fire, water, or some other unforeseen event.

Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen define qualitative data analysis as "working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (1998, p. 145). Qualitative researchers tend to use inductive analysis of data, meaning that the findings emerge from the collected data and are inclusive of the views of participants (Patton, 1990). Finally, while qualitative data analysis software packages are becoming more prevalent, this researcher utilized the traditional method of data analysis, which includes index cards and manual analysis, as it allowed the researcher to remain close to the data.

The collected data were first unitized, with the researcher placing each unit on an individual index card, as well as referencing it back to the original transcript. This reference is one component of an audit trail, which is a scheme for identifying units of data according to their speaker and the context, and includes the participant's identification number, and the page and line number where the unit originally appeared (EX: 1,10-16) (Rodwell, 1998). This process was completed with all interview data, only ruling out units that were completely unrelated to the study, such as opening statements. Rodwell (1998) describes unitizing as the process of identifying the "smallest piece of information that can be understood by someone with minimal knowledge or experience with the phenomena under investigation" (p. 155). Once all study data were unitized, the process of open coding began.

During open coding, the researcher identified and tentatively named the conceptual categories into which the phenomena observed were to be grouped (Strauss &

Corbin, 1990). The goal was to create descriptive, multi-dimensional categories, which formed a preliminary framework for analysis (Strauss & Corbin). Words, phrases or events that appeared to be similar were grouped into the same category. These categories were gradually modified or replaced during the subsequent stages of analysis that followed. Once the process of open coding was complete, the process of lumping and sorting began.

The lumping and sorting process allowed the researcher to visualize where data began to fit together. Lincoln and Guba (1985), as quoted in Rodwell (1998), define the process of sorting as “comparing each unit with all other data units to identify relevant themes or categories,” and the process of lumping as “putting units that seem similar into provisional categories” (p. 156). This was the first stage of the constant comparison process, where this researcher compared the data as they were currently lumped to how they fit together when categorized differently. The lumping and sorting process acted as a dry run at categorization, and was subject to change throughout the analysis.

Once this researcher was satisfied with the selection of categories, he began to identify sub-groups within the categories. This process is best described as a lumping and sorting of categories. The goal was to progressively move to higher levels of abstraction in a coherent and consistent manner. This constant comparison of study data continued until the number of final categories was reduced to a manageable number. Rodwell (1998) posits that in most cases “good data reduction will result in less than nine manageable categories” (p. 159). The author further asserts, based on a citation from Kahneman and Tversky, that nine categories of “disparate information appears to be the largest heuristic possible for human sensemaking” (p. 159).

Patterns among the categories were then be analyzed in an attempt to discover how each category related to the other identified categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). The end result of this analysis was categories that were divided into sub-groups, and sub-types of themes. It is through the constant comparison of units and categories that themes, which represent the highest levels of abstraction, were identified and used to guide the study findings. Finally, an integrative diagram, presented as Figure 4.1, was developed to show the relationships among concepts and patterns in the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rodwell, 1998).

Ethical Issues

This study was submitted to, and approved by, the Committee on the Conduct of Human Research at Virginia Commonwealth University. Additionally, as this research project represented an expansion of a previously approved study, this researcher was not required to submit a new Institutional Review Board Application or supporting materials. However, as there were some changes to the interview guide, as well as an expansion of sample size, a request for study modification was submitted. The purpose and nature of the study were described in the study flyer (Appendix B), which clearly stated the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participation. The study used voluntary respondents who were not coerced into participating. Confidentiality was maintained in this study with only the researcher, peer reviewer, study auditor, and committee members having access to the original interview transcripts. An informed consent document, which was signed by the participant and the interviewer, provided a comprehensive overview of the study as well as outlined the potential risks and benefits of participation. The consent form and

interview recording procedure were reviewed with each participant, and all questions were answered before the interview was completed (Appendix C).

Rigor

Qualitative methodology often has components, such as audit trails and peer debriefing, which may be unfamiliar to those accustomed to viewing research findings from other inquiry paradigms. These components are essential to the integrity of the study, and act as the qualitative researcher's means of accounting for the rigorous nature of the inquiry.

Rodwell (1998) identifies trustworthiness as a necessary testament to the quality of the research product, and credits its development as a response and reaction to the standard expectations associated with traditional positivistic research, including reliability and validity. The four aspects of trustworthiness are credibility (are the findings believable?), dependability (are the study's methods acceptable?), confirmability (are the results linked directly to the data?), and transferability (are the study's findings useful in other settings?) (Rodwell).

Additionally, Padgett (1998) identifies six strategies for enhancing rigor in qualitative research. This study utilized four of these strategies. The first strategy for enhancing rigor in the study was the use of triangulation, which refers to using "two or more sources to achieve a fixed point of reference...which yields a clearer and deeper observation" (Padgett, 1998, p. 96). Denzin (1978) identifies four types of triangulation which include: theory triangulation, methodological triangulation, observer triangulation, and data triangulation. Of particular interest in this study was theory triangulation. As explicated in the theoretical framework section in Chapter 2, the research was developed

using multiple theories. This type of triangulation assisted in yielding diverse findings that served to broaden perspectives of the experiences of single, gay adoptive fathers.

A unique challenge of qualitative research is the tendency of novice researchers to become enmeshed with the project and the data. This enmeshment may lead to the transgression of boundaries without conscious intent on the part of the researcher. One way to combat this threat to the quality of the research product is through the use of a peer debriefer (Padgett, 1998). Dr. Raphael Mutepa served as the peer debriefer for this study. He is both knowledgeable about qualitative research methods and assisted in confirming that the study was dependable as well as assisted in determining whether the data had transferability (the notion that information gained in one area can have meaning and usefulness in other contexts).

As qualitative research projects are often born out of a personal interest in the topic under investigation, the peer debriefer often proves to be an invaluable resource. In this study, the researcher was also a single, gay adoptive parent. His membership in this group created feelings of closeness to the data, as well as an enhanced desire to show the positive experiences and abilities of single, gay men as adoptive parents. Dr. Mutepa assisted in maintaining the integrity of the study by reviewing the collected data and findings.

This study also utilized member checking as a way to ensure that the results of the study are trustworthy. Member checking is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as the process of periodically returning to the field to ensure that the project and data analysis are heading in the right direction and that findings are grounded in the data. During the interviews, the researcher obtained permission to re-contact participants in the future.

The researcher selected three participants to review the results and make sure that their perspectives were represented in the study's findings. Each of these participants confirmed that their perspectives were accounted for in the results. The input of participants was important in guarding against researcher bias, and also acted as a logical extension of the empowering nature of qualitative inquiry (Padgett, 1998).

Finally, this researcher used a study auditor as a method of ensuring the rigorous nature of the study. Annette Clayton, a Ph.D. Candidate in the School of Social Work at Virginia Commonwealth University, served as the auditor. Ms. Clayton is an impartial third party with experience and familiarity with qualitative methods of data collection and analysis (Padgett, 1998). She reviewed the audit trail, which consisted of the raw data (transcripts), coding schemes, and field notes. These items were reviewed with an interest in determining if the findings could be traced back to the raw data. Ms. Clayton was also interested in exploring the logic and clarity associated with the coding schemes and thematic development process. Additionally, the audit trail was a way of ensuring that the researcher was able to bound subjectivity, or maintain a critical distance, throughout the inquiry process. Finally, the audit served as a "metastrategy for enhancing rigor because it also documents the other strategies – prolonged engagement, peer support, member checks, and theoretical triangulation have been used when appropriate" (Padgett, 1998, p. 101).

Limitations of the Study

As described in detail previously, the study utilized several methods to account for the rigorous nature of the inquiry. However, there were limitations that could be seen in the study as well. As presented in detail in Chapter 4, the sample of single, gay

adoptive fathers was relatively homogeneous, and shared the characteristics of many of the existing studies of gay fathers. The majority of respondents were Caucasian, highly educated, reside in urban areas, and have similar income levels. However, it is also possible that while the sample appeared to be homogeneous, it may be reflective of the population of single, gay men who chose to become adoptive parents.

Another limitation is that all interviews were conducted on the telephone. This method of interviewing has both positive and negative implications. The telephone allows individuals who live far away to participate in the study. However, the use of this method restricted the researcher's direct observation of both non-verbal and environmental cues. As this is a population about which little is known, the benefits of this method of data collection, and the potential knowledge gained through the telephone interviews outweighed the loss of indirect and environmental data.

While there were several limitations to the study, it is this researcher's belief that this study generated knowledge about a population that has not been studied previously. At a minimum, this study may shed light on an often invisible population, which may serve to improve the services that are available to, and responsive toward the needs of single, gay adoptive fathers and their children.

An initial review of the literature revealed many potential sources where this study's results could be published. They include: *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Child Welfare*, *The Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services*, *Families in Society*, *The Journal of Social Issues*, *The Journal of Men's Studies*, and *The Journal of Homosexuality*. Other well-established, peer-reviewed journals such as *Social Work* and *Social Casework* produce periodic issues that highlight issues relating to special populations, including

gays and lesbians, and parenting. Wherever the results of this study may be published, they will undoubtedly contribute knowledge to the minimal literature that is currently available regarding the lived experience, and meaning-making of single, gay adoptive fathers.

Conclusion

This research project was a phenomenological study that utilized ethnographic interviewing techniques. Data were collected through telephone interviews with 16 self-identified single, gay adoptive fathers. The collected data were analyzed using the constant comparison method with a focus on developing themes and identifying patterns that emerged from the data. Finally, the study design incorporated four components that worked to ensure the rigorous nature of the research process, and add credibility to the project's findings.

Chapter Four

FINDINGS

Context

The study sample consisted of 16 single, gay adoptive fathers who reside throughout the United States, as well as internationally. All respondents were actively parenting their adopted children at the time of the interview. They were recruited through various methods, including a listserv focusing on gay and lesbian adoption, word of mouth, and nominational sampling techniques. The data were collected using ethnographic interviews that were between one to one and a half hours in duration.

In order to create consistency in the data collection method, all interviews were conducted on the telephone. An interview guide (Appendix A) containing foreshadowed questions was used to facilitate the interviews and assure that comparable data were collected. Verbatim transcripts of the interview content were created after each interview. The collected data were then unitized, and each unit was placed on an individual index card with a reference that allowed it to be traced to the original transcript. Conceptual categories were then identified and tentatively labeled. However, these categories were gradually modified or replaced during the subsequent stages of analysis. Once the tentative categories were developed, the process of lumping and sorting began.

The lumping and sorting process allowed for a visualization of how the data began to fit together. This was the first stage of the constant comparison process, where the data were compared as they are currently lumped to how they fit together when

categorized differently (Rodwell, 1998). Once appropriate and inclusive categories were developed, sub-categories were identified for each of the main categories. This process is best described as a lumping and sorting of categories. The overall goal of the analysis was to move to progressively higher levels of abstraction in a coherent and consistent manner. The analysis of data collected during the interviews resulted in the development of six broad categories of data, as well as subcategories of each of the main categories.

Description of Sample

A descriptive analysis of the demographics from the interviews yielded data that are largely similar among several domains (see Table 4.1). For example, the majority (87.5%) of respondents are Caucasian and highly educated, with over half (53%) holding either a Master's (MA, MS, MSW, MPH) or professional (MD, PhD) degree. Over half of the participants reside in urban areas. Six participants (37.5%) had income levels of over \$100,000 per year. The mean age of participants was 42 years, with a range of 20 years. There was diversity in the sample with regard to the type of adoption, and age of the adopted child. For example, the youngest child of a participant is five months old, and the oldest child is thirteen years old. Therefore, the participants represent diversity with regard to levels of parenting experience as they are parenting both infants and older children who were adopted domestically and internationally. Interestingly, over 82 percent ($n = 13$) of the fathers who participated in this study are parenting children of a race different than their own (transracial adoption). Finally, all participants have expressed satisfaction with their decision to become a single, adoptive parent. This lack of voice from those who regret the decision to become an adoptive parent biases the findings towards those who have had positive adoption and parenting experiences.

However, this is a cross-sectional study, and there would likely be variation in satisfaction with parenting if the cohort were followed over time (longitudinal vs. point in time design).

Table 4.1: Selected Characteristics of Respondents

Name	Age *	Ethnicity ****	Education **	Number of Adopted Children	Age(s) of Children *	Months Since Adoptive Placement	Ethnicity of Children ****	Locale ***
James	41	C	MA	1	8 yrs.	18	C	MA
Caleb	45	C	SC	1	4 yrs.	52	AA	MW
Greg	45	C	MA	1	11 mos.	1	A	S
Mark	43	AA	PD	1	5 mos.	5	AA	S
Joe	48	C	PD	2	8 and 9 yrs.	40, 105	A	MA
Tom	50	C	BA	3	5 and 3 yrs; & 8 mos.	60, 36, 8	AA	W
Chris	42	C	SC	2	12 & 13 yrs.	60	Biracial (C/AA)	SW
Brent	36	C	MA	1	6 mos.	6	AA	SW
David	35	H	AD	3	5, 6, and 7 yrs.	36	L	MW
Louis	55	C	MA	1	4 years	42	H	S
Ray	43	C	SC	1	4 years	48	H	W
Randy	38	C	AD	1	2 years	11	H	IN
Charles	46	C	PD	2	3 years (twins)	31	A	MA
Peter	37	C	SC	1	2 years	14	C	MA
Matthew	45	C	MA	1	9 years	22	AA	W
Noah	48	C	BA	2	6 and 3 yrs.	66, 30	A	MA

* AGE. Ages were current when informed consent was completed.

**EDUCATION. SC-Some College; AD-Associates degree; BA-Bachelors degree; MA- Masters degree; PD-Professional Degree (PhD, MD, JD)

***LOCALE: MW-Midwest US; S-Southern US; SW-Southwest US; MA-MidAtlantic US; NE-Northeast US; W-Western US; IN-International

**** ETHNICITY: C= Caucasian; AA = African American; H = Hispanic; L = Latino(a); A = Asian

Participant Summaries

Participant 1 - “James” is a single 41-year old Caucasian gay male. He lives in a large city in the Northeast United States. He has a Masters degree and works for a large social service organization. He is the adoptive father of “Ben,” an 8 year old Caucasian male. James identifies as both a Protestant and a Buddhist, and participates in religious activities twice a week. He has been Ben’s primary caretaker since he was placed in the home 18 months ago. Ben formerly resided in the foster care system.

Participant 2 - “Caleb” is a 45 year old Caucasian male who resides in a small city in the Midwestern United States. He was married to a woman for 5 years in the 1980’s. There are no minor children from this marriage. He is divorced, and considers himself to be single. He has completed some college, and is an executive in the information technology field. Caleb identifies as a Protestant, and participates in religious activities monthly. He is the adoptive father of “Todd,” a 4 year old African-American male. Caleb used a facilitator to assist in the adoption of Todd, who was adopted at 3 weeks of age.

Participant 3 - “Greg” is a 45 year old Caucasian male who resides in an urban area in the Mid-Atlantic United States. He is currently single. He has completed a Master’s degree and works in the health care field. Greg identifies as a Catholic, and participates in religious activities once a week. He is the adoptive father of “Evan,” a 1 year old male. Greg adopted Evan from Asia when he was 11 months old. The interview was conducted when Evan had only been in the home for 10 days.

Participant 4 - “Mark” is a 43 year old African American male who resides in an urban area in the Mid-Atlantic United States. He is currently single. He completed a professional degree (MD) and works as a pediatrician and a professor in a medical college. Mark identifies as a Protestant, and participates in religious activities on holidays. He is the adoptive father of “Ella,” a 5-month old African American female. Mark adopted Ella at birth with the assistance of a private agency. This is an open adoption where Mark and Ella have ongoing contact with the birthmother. The interview was conducted when Ella had been in the home for 5 months.

Participant 5 - “Joe” is a 48 year old Caucasian male who resides in a large urban area of Mid-Atlantic United States. He completed a professional degree (MD) and is currently employed as a physician. He is currently single. Joe identifies as a Protestant, and participates in religious activities daily. He has two daughters, “Sarah” and “Meg” who were adopted from Asian. Sarah is 5 years old, and came into the home at 8 months of age. Meg is 9 years old, and has been in the home since she was 2 months old.

Participant 6 - “Tom” is a 50 year old Caucasian male who resides in a large city on the West Coast. He has completed a four-year college degree, and works for the federal government. He is currently single, as he was at the initiation of the adoptions of all three of his children. He identifies as a Protestant and participates in religious activities one time per week. He has three African American sons who are 5 years old, 3 years old, and 8 months old. The oldest two children came into the home at 6 months of age, and the youngest was placed at birth. Although they were adopted separately from a public adoption agency, all of his children are biologically related.

Participant 7 - “Chris” is a 42 year old Caucasian male who resides in a metropolitan area of the Southwest United States. He has completed some college, and is a business owner. He is currently single, as he was at the initiation of the adoption of both of his children. He does not claim to be religious, but possesses a sense of personal spirituality, and rarely participates in religious activities. He has two bi-racial sons who are 12 and 13 years old. They were adopted through a public adoption agency 5 years ago.

Participant 8 - “Brent” is a 36 year old Caucasian male who resides in an urban area of the Southwest United States. He has completed a Master’s degree (MA), and works as a school administrator. Brent is currently single. He is not religious, but possesses a sense of personal spirituality, and rarely participates in religious activities. He is the adoptive father of 6 month old “Vaughan” who is an African American female, and was adopted in a closed adoption at birth through a private agency.

Participant 9 - “David” is a 35 year old Hispanic male who resides in the Midwest United States. He graduated from a technical college and works as a training manager. He is Catholic, and is currently single, as he was at the initiation of the adoption of all of his children. He is the adoptive father of three Latino children ages 5, 6, and 7 years old. They are members of a sibling group, and were placed in the home 3 years ago through a public adoption agency.

Participant 10 - “Louis” is a 55 year old Caucasian male who resides in Florida. He has earned a Master’s degree, and currently works as an educator. He is Jewish, and participates in religious activities on holidays. Louis is currently single. He is the

adoptive father of “Lleyton,” who is Hispanic, and was adopted from Latin America. Lleyton is currently 4 years old, and has been in the home for three and a half years.

Participant 11 - “Ray” is a 43 year old Caucasian male who resides in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. He has attended some college, and works as a computer programmer. He is Catholic and participates in religious activities once a week. Ray is currently single. He is the adoptive father of “Eric,” who is Hispanic, and was adopted from Latin America. Eric is currently almost 5 years old, and has been in the home since he was 7 months old.

Participant 12 - “Randy” is a 38 year old Caucasian male who resides in Israel. He has completed some college, and currently works as a mental health provider. He is Jewish, but never participates in religious activities. Randy is currently single. He is the adoptive father of “Juan,” who is Hispanic, and was adopted from Latin America. Juan is currently two and a half years old, and has been in the home for 13 months.

Participant 13 - “Charles” is a 46 year old Caucasian male who resides in the Mid-Atlantic United States. He has completed a professional degree (Ph.D.), and works as a psychologist. He identifies as a Protestant, and participates in religious activities monthly. He is currently dating, but not living with his partner, and was single at the initiation of the adoption process. He is the adoptive father of 3 year old twin boys who were adopted from Asia when they were 8 months old.

Participant 14 - “Peter” is a 37 year old Caucasian male who resides in the suburbs of a large metropolitan area in the Mid-Atlantic US. He has completed some college, and is a business owner. He identifies as Catholic, and participates in religious

activities once a week. Peter is currently single. He is the adoptive father of a 21 month old Caucasian son who was adopted when he was 6 months old.

Participant 15 - “Matthew” is a 45 year old Caucasian male who resides in a large metropolitan area in the Western US. He has completed a Master’s degree (MSW/MPH), and is a child and family therapist. He is not religious, but possesses a sense of personal spirituality. He participates in spiritual activities only on holidays. Matthew is currently single, as he was at the initiation of the adoption process. He is the adoptive father of “Lance.” Lance is a 9 year old African American male who was adopted from the foster care system 22 months ago.

Participant 16 - “Noah” is a 48 year old Caucasian male who resides in the suburbs of a large metropolitan area in the Mid-Atlantic US. He has completed a bachelor’s degree, and is employed as the vice president of finance for a professional organization. He identifies as Catholic, and participates in religious activities monthly. He is currently dating, but not living with a partner. He was single at the initiation of both adoptions. He is the adoptive father of two sons, ages 6 and 3, who were adopted from Asia at 4 and 7 months, respectively.

Results

The analysis of the study data resulted in the development of six main categories of data. These broad categories include: identity development, family creation, parenting, children, relationship transformation, and outside relationships. Subcategories were developed for each of the main categories (see Table 4.2: Main categories and subcategories). Although not directly related to the present study, participants also responded to questions about the impact of self-disclosure on the part of the researcher.

Table 4.2

Main categories and subcategories

Categories	Subcategories
Identity development	Identity development of participant Stigmatization Parallel processes
Family creation	Other methods of family creation Characteristics of child / Type of adoption Adoption process Political and legal context Family expansion
Parenting	Motivation and preparation for parenting Parenting experiences Single parenting Transformative effects of parenting
Children	Relationships with children Children and sexual orientation Children and adoption
Relationship transformation	Romantic relationships Relationships with friends Relationships with family of origin Relationships with employers
Outside relationships	Self-disclosure of father Support networks Interaction with gay community

Identity Development

The first main category of data was labeled identity development. This category contained data that were related to the participants' perceptions of how and when they developed different identities, recollections of the feedback received from outsiders, and the participants' perspectives on how their experiences as gay men may assist them in understanding their children's experiences. The data contained in this category were divided into three subcategories. The first subcategory, identity development of participants, contained units that spoke to the coming out process as well as initial thoughts on the development of the father identity. The second category was labeled stigmatization. This subcategory contained units of data that spoke to the participants' experiences around disclosing their desire to become parents, and the reactions that different individuals have had to them and their families. The final subcategory was labeled parallel processes. The data contained in this subcategory were related to the participants' thoughts around how their life experiences may assist them as they parent their adopted children, the majority of which are children of color.

Identity Development of Participant

Throughout the interviews, participants provided information about how and when they thought they developed different identities. All of the participants, except one had formally disclosed their sexual orientation to their family of origin. Peter reported that he never came out to his family. He said: "I am sure they know, but we have never talked about it" (P14, I1, 25-26).

The participants also provided information on when they thought they first realized that they wanted to be parents. The majority of the participants stated that they

wanted to be a father since they were very young. Louis reported that he always wanted to be a parent:

Certainly when I was a teenager, it was really a fantasy at that point. I picked names for my kids that were very romantic and had romantic ideas. It was totally teenage fantasy stuff, but nonetheless it was very powerful for that time in my life. And I always pictured myself with children, I couldn't imagine there was anything better than that (P10, I1, 34-40).

The coming out process is not only a marker in the identity development of a gay man, it also created stress for some of the participants who feared that their disclosure might mean that they would never be a father. Noah said that he "always felt the instinct that I wanted to be a parent. I felt that when I came out, it was a disadvantage in that by being true to myself, I was abandoning my chances at parenthood" (P16, I1, 33-36). This was a similar experience to Mark, who said:

As a Pediatrician, I have devoted my life professionally to the care of children, and one of the things that I had to deal with in coming out was that I wanted my own children, and I didn't want being gay to interfere with that process that was important to me. Whenever I talk about coming out, I say that I had done one too many abuse exams on children as a resident, and I knew that I wasn't a pedophile, and I had to deal with that whole gay equals child molester thing. But dealing with that was part of dealing with my own internalized homophobia (P4, I1, 81-92).

For others, the development of a father identity was a process that did not include accepting the possibility of becoming a single parent.

Many of the participants imagined parenting with a partner; therefore, developing an identity as a single parent was something that required extra time. Joe talked about the process he went through in accepting that he would be a single parent:

I guess I was pretty optimistic that I would be partnered doing it. And then my experiences with previous partners kind of gave me a heads up that parenting with a partner might be more difficult than doing it alone. So, ideally I think it is better to do it as a couple, but as I got older, I just realized that if I was going to manifest this in my life, I could not wait for a relationship to happen (P5, I1, 80-88).

Some participants, like Mark, had no issues around becoming a single parent as evidenced by the following statement:

I knew I wanted to be a parent, and the years were marching ever onward. I can't depend on a partner to suddenly appear in my life, and I knew I could parent a child. One of the things that I said all along is that if a 14 or 16 year old girl can parent with meager resources, and I have a few more, I realized I could do it. I mean, it would be great to have a partner, but I am not going to sit around and wait for that to happen" (P4, I1, 125-132).

Finally, while most of the participants recalled always feeling a desire to be a parent, one participant described the process differently. Ray recalled seeing an advertisement for the paper for a child that was waiting to be adopted:

There was a picture of a small boy and the caption said "This boy would be most appropriate for placement in a single father household." I think that was the genesis of when I thought that maybe I could be a parent. I was not certain if I wanted to be a parent; I just became aware that it was a possibility (P5, I1, 41-47).

The participants also spoke about how their identities as fathers continued to develop even after they became parents. It was during the actual day to day parenting that they began to draw on their life experiences to help inform the type of father that they wanted to become. The majority of the participants spoke either positively or negatively about their own father as having an impact on the way they approached parenting. These opposites are best characterized by the words of Charles, who said: “My dad taught me about what it means to be a good parent. There is no doubt about that” (P13, I1, 111-112), and by Ray, who said: “I want to be clear that my father served as a role model for the type of parent that I don’t want to be. Sort of like, when I hear myself talking and I sound like my dad, I think, Oh no, I have got to do something different” (P11, I1, 104-108).

Other family members also serve as role models for the participants. Caleb recalled advice that his mother gave him when he first started parenting:

My mom said any day at the end of the day in which the kids are alive is a good thing...and they are pretty hard to kill. What she meant by that was to try something new, and if doesn’t work, try something else, you are not gonna kill them [the children]. So, from the pragmatic aspects of parenting, my mom has given me some of the best advice in the world (P2, I1, 465-474).

Some participants looked outside their own parents for role models on how they wanted to parent their own children. While David thinks that knowing how to parent is at least in part innate, he also reported learning from the media, and from books as well as parenting classes (P9, I1, 62-64). Ray learned by watching other parents interact with

their children, and using some of what he saw to inform how he wanted to parent (P11, I1, 110-111).

Finally, Tom reports that he felt fortunate finding a role model in a single woman who was a single parent by choice. Before he met her, he did not even know it would be possible to be a single parent. “I thought you had to be there before school started and as soon as it ended. She showed me about daycare and stuff. She really showed me how to be a single parent” (P6, I1, 62-65).

Stigmatization

Throughout the interviews, the participants spoke about their implicit and explicit experiences of stigmatization. Some of the stigma came in the form of explicit negative feedback about their decision to parent. For example, Ray recalled receiving negative feedback about his decision to parent from gay men. Specifically this feedback centered on two topics: the accusation that he was trying to act like a heterosexual, and potential romantic partners telling him that they could not compete with a child for his attention (P11, I1, 228-230).

Part of being a gay adoptive parent is the continual process of breaking down barriers. Some of these barriers are stereotypes about what it means to be a gay man. Mark explained: “It has been said time and time again, that this (parenting) is kind of the complete antithesis of the way most people think of the gay lifestyle. I mean, you can’t party until 3AM at the cha-cha palace, and come home and do 4AM feedings” (P4, I1, 360-363).

Other barriers are based in society's ideas about the abilities of men to be caretakers. Mark recalled comments made by the hospital social worker where his daughter was born:

The social worker at the hospital where Ella was born, which is in a sort of a rural area, the social worker there made a comment to my social worker about how unfortunate it was that this baby would not have a mother, and implied that I, as a man, would not do a good job raising her. And I thought, well, does she say that when the 14-year old goes home with the newborn, and doesn't have two nickels to rub together, and hasn't finished high school, and doesn't have a job, and is going to move in with her mother, and so on. I found out about that comment days after we left the hospital. There have been some other strange comments. When one person found out I was adopting, they said to me "Why in the world would you decide to go and do that?" And I thought, why do straight people have kids...because they want a family. And the other really weird comment I recall was from a well-meaning person. They said, "That is great that you are adopting. Now there is going to be some life in your house!" And I thought, what has my house been before, a mausoleum? These are the ones that I recall. Although there is also the constant undercurrent that because you are not a woman, you just can't do a good job (P4, I4, 385-406).

The participants are also dealing with the stereotypes, and associated stigmatization of single-parent families. For many participants, there is a theme of feedback from outsiders that children need to be placed in a two-parent household. Brent responded to this by saying:

In an ideal world, it would be great if all kids had two people to raise them.

However, we don't live in an ideal world. There are so many kids that are not loved by anyone, and are abused and neglected in single parent and two-parent households. It is pretty arrogant of us to assume that a child who is loved by one person who loves them and respects them, and is willing to teach them and look out for them, is worse than them not having anyone and continuing to live in the system (P8, I1, 322-330).

While the transformation of relationships in different communities is discussed later in this chapter, there were some units of data that captured the isolation that can occur as a result of stigmatization. Ray spoke very candidly about this isolation in his interview:

Sometimes I feel like a freak. I feel like I get more support from the straight community than I do from the gay community. So, I feel like I am on the outside of both communities. Like being on the margins of both communities, and not fitting in anywhere. I kind of feel like a pioneer or a freak, it is kind of hard. There are three pieces that lead to the feeling of not fitting in: being single, being male, and being gay. Most stuff I see about single parents presumes a woman or heterosexuality. And in the gay community, I am sort of seen as....well, I don't know how I am seen, but I seem to get the same response: "Wow, it is really interesting that you are a parent, but I don't want to give up my freedom." In a social group, I would really like to have more contact, but my son trumps everything. It is like, he needs to be taken care [of], and I see that with other good parents, that the child's needs come first. That wanting to meet or talk with people as adults always ends up being child-centered (P11, I1, 323-343).

However, the feelings of isolation seem to be outweighed by the joy that Ray receives from being a parent. He also stated:

When I was thinking about what it would be like to be a parent, I was not thinking about the isolation or being on the margins. I guess I didn't take the time to think about what the experience would be like in terms of how much work it would be. If I had it to do over again, I think I would have started earlier. If I had it to do all over again, I think I would, I would like to think that I would, but I try not to think about having to do it all over again, because I am really connected to my son. The feedback that I get is that it shows. So, I think parenting was the right thing at the right time, and I am really grateful for that (P11, I1, 347-360).

While Ray expressed feelings of isolation, Caleb, a Caucasian father with an African American son, spoke about how people see what they chose to see:

I think for the most part, and I say this about my neighbors too, I think they mostly think I have a black wife who works a lot. And they just never see her. They probably think, poor guy, he is always taking care of that kid. And I think the same thing is true in public. I am not a very effeminate person, and I don't wear pride rings anymore, but my car does have pride stuff on it. You know, walking through the grocery store, I don't think I look like a gay man with a kid. I look like a heterosexual guy with a kid and his wife, somehow was lucky and didn't have to come to the store, or she is working a lot. I don't think that people come to that conclusion right away, and that is because of where I live. I think if we lived in an environment where that was more of a common occurrence, but here that is the last thing that you would jump to. I mean, I don't know that they want to acknowledge

that we have a bunch of gay people in my state; I definitely think that they don't want to acknowledge that we have gay people with kids in my state, so it is just not common for them to think that way. Every time we walk into a restaurant, they always say, "Just the two of you tonight?" And it just pisses me off. It just wrecks my nerves, and I want to say, "It is all of us... We are all here right now" (P2, I1, 537-560).

Finally, Tom who lives in a large, progressive city does not feel isolated or stigmatized as a Caucasian single, gay adoptive father of three African American sons. He reported:

I thought that I would stand out when I first started parenting, but when I sold my condo and bought a single family house, I found that all of the families in my new neighborhood were single parent families, divorced families, and all kinds of things. So, instead of standing out, we just fit right in. I don't think there is any family in my neighborhood where the original parents are parenting the original children. So, I don't think that gay people should be discouraged from parenting because they think they will stand out like sore thumbs, and not be a part of the community. The old stereotypical image of what family is is no longer (P6, I1, 349-360).

However, Tom has concluded that the race of his children may have an impact on the level of support that he receives:

I think people are supportive of me because they see my three kids of color and think that their mom could not care of them, that they are drug exposed. So, people tend to think what I am doing is a good thing. I think it would be different if I had adopted a blonde-haired, blue-eyed kid. People might ask why I got that child instead of a

“better” situation. I think some people think there are not many people who would have wanted to adopt my kids anyway, so they don’t really care that I did (P6, I1, 362-370).

Parallel Processes

The participants also discussed the ways that they thought their life experiences assist them in helping their children develop their own identities. Noah spoke to this when he said:

In my book, I talked about how as gay people we sometimes forget how much we struggled, and how that struggle has made us stronger. I think that absolutely will help us in being parents, because we will absolutely allow our children to be themselves, which is a tremendous gift. Because most of us grew up in homes where we could not be ourselves (P16, I1, 248-254).

David provided an example of how his experiences as a gay man directly impact the way that he wants his children to experience the world when he said: “As a gay man raising kids, one of the things I am going to impose on my kids and make sure they experience is tolerance, not just for gays. They need to have a very wide variety of things in their lives” (P9, I1, 283-286).

The participants also spoke about the ways that they thought they could assist their children in understanding their experiences as adopted persons. James talked about identifying with his son’s struggles to tell people that he is adopted: “I think that since I am coming from a perspective where I always felt disconnected too, and couldn’t tell people something that was really important to me. I think that that is going to be really

helpful for him” (P1, I1, 533-537). Greg also echoed these sentiments that there are parallels between being gay and being adopted when he said:

I think in the sense that being gay is at least in today’s world, you are a minority. It is different for a lot of people, and I think being adopted is that way too for a lot of people, so I think those two have some parallels, clearly they are not identical, but I do believe there are some lessons I have learned in my life that I will be able to use when I help Evan learn about being adopted, and how to deal with that on an everyday basis (P3, I1, 529-537).

As previously discussed, the majority of the participants are parenting children of color. Whether these are same race or transracial placements, the participants made statements about using their life experiences as gay men to help them understand their children’s experiences. Matthew explained this well when he stated: “I think some of the prejudices I have experienced, sort of that hatred for just being who I am, helps me understand society’s fears about black children and black men” (P15, I1, 317-319). This view is supported by Tom who asserted:

I think my experiences as a gay man also helps me out as a parent. I think in terms of transracial adoption, gay people are probably good choices as parents. They have seen situations where they are not accepted or people want to put them down. So, you develop some of the defenses that other minority persons develop. I think every minority parent tries to teach their kids some kind of defense strategy, such as telling a kid to stand up for their rights, or planting the idea in their kids that they have to try harder than anyone else (P6, I1, 319-328).

Family Creation

The second main category of data was labeled family creation. This category contained data that were related to the participants' experiences in creating their families. The data contained in this category were divided into five subcategories. The first subcategory, other methods of family creation, contained data about the participants' attempts to create family through methods other than adoption. The second subcategory was labeled characteristics of child/type of adoption. The data contained in the subcategory spoke to the participants' desires to adopt a particular kind of child, or through a particular method. The next subcategory was labeled adoption process. These data centered on the participants' experiences throughout the adoption process and their interaction with their adoption agency, facilitators, and social workers. The fourth subcategory was labeled legal and political context. These data spoke to the participants' experiences with public policy, as well as misinformation that is sometimes perpetuated by adoption professionals. The final subcategory was labeled family expansion. These data contained information about the participants' plans to expand their families in the future.

Other Methods of Family Creation

Throughout their interviews, the participants discussed the reasons that they chose adoption as a method of family building. For some it was a process of elimination. As Greg noted:

Well, there were only so many options as a single man to start a family, and I looked into surrogacy, and decided that I did not want to do that. There were a lot of expense[s] and a lot of legal issues with that that I wasn't particularly willing to

entertain. I wasn't interested in asking a friend to carry a child for me...that did not appeal to me, because I wanted to it be something that I did on my own, and so adoption seemed to be the clear choice (P3, I1, 150-158).

Louis felt the same way, and noted: "(Surrogacy)...just seemed full of pitfalls and uncertainties. Really adoption just seemed simpler" (P10, I1, 98-99). Brent was given the opportunity to pursue a surrogacy in the past. He recalled: "Through surrogacy, I just worried about the cost involved and the risk. It might sound silly, but it just did not make sense to me. You know, whenever you involve a number of people and the emotions of a situation, it just makes me nervous" (P8, I1, 116-121).

The participants also expressed that they did not feel it necessary to have a biological link to their children. Noah noted: "Even before I adopted, I felt really strongly that there are so many kids out there that my genes don't need to be passed on" (P16, I1, 61-63). While Peter reached the same conclusion as Noah, his thought process was slightly different. He noted:

I think that kids are better off in a two-parent family. And since I can't provide that type of home for a child, I didn't think it would be right for me to go to a surrogate and bring another child into the world. However, I certainly believe that a one-parent family is better than having no family. So, the idea of adopting a child with no family didn't seem as radical. The other part of that is because I have friends that have adopted, and know adopted people, I am very aware of how many kids need homes. So, what I said might sound stronger than I really mean it. I don't think there is anything immoral about using a surrogate, or anything like that. I just felt like adoption was a better thing for me to do than to go that way. I never had any issues

about having a child that is biologically related to me. I couldn't see how my son could be any more my son if he were biologically related to me. I can't imagine there would be any difference in feelings or in the connection that we have (P14, I1, 59-76)

Finally, Noah expressed his conclusions that for most gay men, adoption is a good fit. He said:

As gay men, we generally look to adoption with open arms, as our first choice for creating a family beyond a couple, and straight parents generally adopt for fertility reasons...what a win-win situation for children and gay men. We are so thrilled to be parents, and so thrilled that anybody would allow them [gay men] to be parents that we go into it [adoption] with open arms, and it is incredible. And to think that we are now becoming this sub-section of society that is creating families by taking kids in need into loving homes is great (P16, I1, 292-302).

Characteristics of Child / Type of Adoption

Before they started the adoption process, the majority of the participants stated that they had already identified the types of characteristics for which they were looking in the children they adopted. The most common characteristics identified were age and special needs. Some participants, such as James, were seeking to adopt an older child.

He explained:

Well, I knew that I wasn't really able to, wasn't going to be effective with a baby. I am always afraid around babies because they seem so breakable, but so I figured that was not a good place to start. Then I also knew that being single with my time constraints, a school aged child would make more sense. I could be a better parent to a school-aged child. So, I started looking for a child aged 5-10, and I was actually

waiting for a really long time, probably about a year and a half because I wanted also to be open about my orientation because of the child's age (P1, I1, 143-153).

Other participants, like Brent wanted to raise an infant. He explained:
I wanted the experience of raising a baby, and I wanted to be there for all of the developmental stages, and I also wasn't sure about my abilities and resources to deal with a child who had suffered some traumatic experiences in life. That was one of things that narrowed it down for me. I knew that I wanted to adopt a baby, a newborn. That was one of the things that was important (P8, I1, 178-185).

Another factor for many of the participants was whether the child had special needs. For the majority of participants, it was not an issue of the child having a disability, but more of an issue about their ability as a single parent to meet all of the child's needs. As Peter explained:

I felt that as a single parent, I was not able to handle some special needs. I felt like I could handle any physical problems, and any correctible mental problems. I did not think I would be able to handle any long-term mental problem like Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. The social worker advised me to adopt a younger child because of attachment issues, so I did that based on her advice (P14, I1, 98-104).

This was not the case for all participants. For example, Tom said:
I really wanted an infant, but since I had to work, I needed a child that was not disabled to the point that I could not leave them for 8 or 10 hours a day. I wanted a child that was able to go to daycare. But I didn't care beyond that. I told the social workers that I enjoy challenges, and that I would take a child that had been prenatally drug exposed...I would be more than happy to take one (P6, I1, 131-141).

As noted previously, many of the participants are parenting children of color, either through same-race or transracial placements. The majority of the participants stated that race was not a factor for them in their decision to accept a placement. For Mark, who is African American, his decision to adopt an African American child was simple:

It was important to me as an African American man to provide a home to a child that perhaps might otherwise end up the foster care system, moving from home to home. Part of it was an attempt by me to provide a home for a child that needed a home, and that was why I went domestic” (P4, I1, 176-180).

On the other hand, David did specify race as a characteristic he considered in potential placements. He said: “I wanted to adopt Hispanic children as that is the culture that I am most familiar with. It is what I grew up in, and what I know” (P9, I1, 98-106).

Several of the participants stated that they preferred to adopt boys, because they were most familiar with male-oriented things. There were also several participants who did not have a preference for gender. For example, Joe said: “I figured that if you are doing it biologically, you don’t get a choice, so it did not matter. I just thought that God would make whatever was supposed to happen, happen” (P5, I1, 172-176).

It was not only the characteristics of the desired child, but also other complex factors that led participants to pursue a particular kind of adoption. As Brent explained:

There are a number of factors that influenced my decision to do a domestic private adoption. I first started researching international adoption, because I thought that was what I was going to do. However, after researching all of the detail for each of the countries that accept single men, such as the length of time that you have to be in the country for over 2 weeks, and in most countries you cannot be an openly gay man or

woman. So, when I started looking through all of that, one of the things that I knew I wanted to do at this point in my life was to adopt as an openly gay man. I did not want to start a relationship not being who I am. That is why I went with domestic adoption. So, I started looking at agencies and what agencies would be most open and most accommodating to my particular situation (P8, I1, 130-145).

Like many of the other participants, Ray got a relatively late start to parenting. His decision to adopt internationally was based on wait times, flexibility in allowing older individuals to adopt, and the reputation of the person with whom he was working. He explained: “My decision to adopt internationally was based on the fact that I would be working with someone that was not only comfortable [with single men adopting], but was willing to demonstrate that they could get children placed. That was my most important criteria” (P11, I1, 68-73)

However, broader social issues impacted the decision to adopt through a particular method for several participants. Joe, who is a physician, stated:

I ended up doing some OB work on the West Coast, and while I was there, I heard about the problems of infanticide in India, and then whole gender selection issue of what is going on in China. When I heard this I was horrified. I knew about India, but was horrified about China, and it dawned on me that this was the way that I would do my family, it (gender selection) just seemed so wrong, and as it turned out at this point, China was open to single men. It was not common, but it did happen (P5, I1, 148-158).

Several of the participants also discussed their concerns about pursuing an open adoption. In many instances, this was based in their belief that no birthparents would

ever pick them to raise their children. However, one participant, who was chosen by his son's birthparents, had some insight into why he believes that he was chosen. Caleb said:

In my three week wait period, I had three birthmothers interested in me. Now, I first thought, isn't that really cool, but I later spoke with a gay man, who said to me, "Don't you get it. Don't you know why they picked you?" And I said, "It is because I am wonderful, right?" And he said, "No, women like to pick gay men to raise their children because they know that there will never be another woman in their child's life as their mother." When he said that, it was like, WOW! -- light bulb. They can always hold on to that identity, they will always be the mom (P2, I1, 295-306).

However, there were often other considerations, such as finances or desire for ongoing contact with the birthparents that dictated the type of adoption pursued.

Tom explained that he did not have a lot of money, so he decided to pursue an adoption through a public agency (P6, I1, 131). James further explained: "Part of it was financial. On my salary, it was one of my only options, because others are so incredibly costly. Also, given that I am a social worker, I knew about, and learned more about the options here and met people who worked in the public system" (P1, I1, 120-125).

For other participants, like Noah, one of the considerations in choosing international adoption was his apprehension about getting involved with birth families. He stated: "I also thought about what might happen if I did adopt locally. What might happen if some extended birth family found out that I was gay and starting making trouble? That seems to be a really remote possibility with international adoption" (P16,

I1, 72-80). Peter chose not to pursue a domestic adoption for other reasons. He has experience with open adoption in his own family, and explained:

My sisters were both adopted domestically in open adoptions. It hasn't been good for them. They are biological sisters and their birthmother is a drug addict. She has a pretty horrible life, and the agreement when my parents adopted them was that they would have regular visitation, and it has always been a strain on the girls, especially when they were growing up. So, while I know that people have great experiences with open adoptions, it was not something that I was interested in getting involved in. I also had a fear because of cases you see in domestic adoption where birthparents go to court and win the right to have their child back. I have written to my son's birthparents, and I am open to letters and having communication, but I wanted to be the one to have control over that (P14, I1, 81-95).

Finally, while some participants chose not to pursue adoptions where there would be ongoing contact with the birthparents, others have open adoptions. For example, Mark's daughter's birthmother calls the adoption agency, who then in turn calls him. They get together about one time per month (P4, I1, 318-319). However, sometimes birth families and adoptive families lose contact despite an arrangement for contact. Such is the case with Caleb who reported:

I have sent some things [to the birthmother]. I send them through the agency who acts as a conduit. I have encouraged her to send things back. I have encouraged her to send pictures back because I would love to have pictures of her for Todd to see, but she has not responded. I can't imagine what it must be like, so I understand (P2, I1, 325-331).

Adoption Process

As was discussed in the previous section, the sixteen participants created their families through a number of different types of adoptions, including: domestic private placement, domestic public adoption, older children/special needs adoption, transracial adoption, fost/adopt programs, and international adoption.

Several of the participants attempted adoptions using multiple agencies and social workers, based on roadblocks they encountered throughout the process. The majority of these failed adoption attempts were through the public social service system. Greg explained:

I applied to adopt through the state foster care system, and our state system here, like many systems is pretty disorganized, and it seemed like there was not very much headway being made. It was a year after my homestudy was finished, and it still wasn't even written up by the caseworker, so that is when I decided to change. I saw an article in the paper about a particular agency, and so I called them, and that was when my process with the international adoption started (P3, I1, 221-232).

Charles' philosophy was that he did not need to go outside of his own community to find a child in need of a family. He learned that over 3,500 children were waiting in the city where he lived, so he started the adoption process through his city's Department of Children's Services. He recalled the barriers he encountered:

When I worked with the public agency, they seemed to weigh very heavily the fact that I am a psychologist, and they were desperately trying to dump a special needs child on me. In the public system, I was given three possible placements and they

were all mentally retarded children. It seems that the kids they wanted to place with a single person were the ones who could benefit from being in a two-parent home.

When I started working with the private agency, they were much more concerned about making a good match between parents and children (P13, I1, 158-167).

Mark also had a similar experience that led him to be more forthcoming about his sexual orientation. Like others, he started with the state child-placing agency, but encountered troubles that made him realize he needed to explore other options. He explained his search for a second agency:

It turned out that the secretary in my office was a lesbian and had adopted through a Christian agency here in town. She said, just go in, and don't tell them that you are gay. They worked with me and my "roommate." So, I called them up, talked to them, and then filled out the application and sent in the deposit. Then I chatted with the guy who was the director of the adoption branch of the agency. He asked a bunch of questions, and then asked me if the previous agency that I had worked with had asked if I was gay. So, I told him "no, they did not ask," So, a few questions later, he asked a very direct question. "Are you a homosexual?" I told him that I really didn't think that information was germane. I am a board certified Pediatrician; I have devoted my life to children, and I am interested in adopting a child. And he said, that's fine, I will call you tomorrow. So, a month later, I had still not heard from him, so I called him, again I was told that he was out, and to leave a message. He never called back. Three weeks later, I called again, which was at the tail end of 2001, and finally ended up talking to him. He told me that he was sorry, and that he had talked to the head of the agency, and we don't allow single men to adopt. I was livid that he

had known this information for over six weeks, and did not call me. Then in February 2002, I started going through the phone book and calling adoption agencies, and ended up calling an agency that I didn't know at the time was affiliated with Jewish Family Services. So, I called them and said, "My name is Mark XXXXXXXX, and I am gay, and I want to know if you are willing to work with me!" I just wanted to get it out there. The social worker said, "Well, I have never been asked that question before, we work off the license of an agency in another part of the state. Let me call them and find out what they say." So, she called me back and said "there is no problem – so, lets go!" (P4, I1, 253-287).

Although several participants were not successful in adoption through public agencies, others had a different experience. David was living in Los Angeles when he first thought about adopting. He described how he learned about his agency at an event targeting the gay community. He said:

I was at a gay pride festival in LA. and there was an information booth. There are so many kids waiting in the system that they were recruiting gay people specifically. So, I filled out a form, and then after it seemed like I waited forever, they sent me a letter that assessed how interested I was in my adopting, and invited me to an orientation, which was with a diverse group of people (P9, I1, 111-117).

He also described his relationship with the social worker that handled the adoption of his three children. He said: "I formed a strong relationship with my worker. We were not friends, but she worked hard and respected what I wanted to do. Once I identified the kids that I wanted, she worked really hard to make it happen" (P9, I1, 151-154).

Other participants, like Brent, used an informal network of other gay parents he met online to identify agencies that were willing to work with gay men. He recalled his anxiety about making the initial call when he said: “I called the agency and asked them some questions. They were fantastic, very friendly. It (adoption as an openly gay man) was so much easier and so much less of a hassle than I ever thought it would be. All they said was ‘great...we will send you an application’”(P8, I1, 196-200). Even though Brent had a positive experience with the agency in the beginning, he was still surprised when he got a call saying he was a father. He explained: “It was also such a shock when I actually did get a placement, because in a way, I never thought I was [would] get matched or placed with a child. So, when they finally called, it was like: Oh my god!” (P8, I1, 214-217).

Noah, who has completed two international adoptions, provided another example of how the informal support networks of gay parents helped steer him in the right direction. He stated:

I actually learned about my agency through a referral from my therapist. He told me about a social worker who had an adoption agency who was gay friendly. I went out to visit, and one of the first things I said was “I am gay and I am single” and I knew that they were probably not going to have a problem with it. I also knew that for my own well-being that I needed to get that out on the table right away. That way, if they did not like it, I would just go somewhere else. They told me that sexual orientation had nothing to do with good parenting, that it would not be mentioned in the homestudy because some countries would frown upon that (P16, I1, 119-130).

James was also open about his sexual orientation throughout the adoption process. He discussed his rationale for requesting that his sexual orientation be included in the homestudy report. He recalled:

In the homestudy, I told them that I wanted it [sexual orientation] to be clear, but, it also didn't seem, since they don't say someone is straight in their homestudy, it didn't seem to right to say that I am gay. But I just wanted to be clear so there wasn't some miscommunication, and then somebody freaks out. So, they did work it out really well in the homestudy, they talked about former partners (P1, I1, 178-185).

Finally, while for many participants the journey to fatherhood was long and fraught with obstacles, for others it was a relatively simple process. For example, Caleb used a facilitator about which he read in a gay and lesbian magazine instead of an adoption agency. He mentioned that he was not constrained financially, which provided flexibility and the ability to aggressively search for available placement options. He explained his experiences:

I started and completed my homestudy in only two weeks. When I decide I want to do something I do it. My friends will tell you: "Once he decides to do something, and makes up his mind, there is no stopping him." And from the time that my homestudy was complete until the time I was holding my son was three weeks. So, it was five weeks from the time that I made the first call to start my homestudy until I was holding my son (P2, I1, 238-145)

Political and Legal Context

As discussed in detail in Chapter 2, gay men who adopt children are especially susceptible to public policy. This requires prospective adoptive parents to be informed

about whether it is legal for them to adopt, and guess about the level of resistance they might meet throughout the adoption process. For example, Brent stated: “I know that the laws in my home state are not supportive of gays and lesbians adopting. However, I intentionally chose to adopt from a state that allows non-residents to finalize there, so I never had to worry about it” (P8, I1, 202-206). This was a similar experience to Louis, who resides in Florida, where it is illegal for gay men and lesbians to adopt. He explained: “Since I adopted out of the state of Florida, I never had to deal with the Florida courts. I was able to take care of all of the legal things in the country where I adopted from” (P10, I1, 170-173). However, not all participants felt that sexual orientation was a complicating factor in the adoption process. As Tom explained: “Being that I live in San Francisco, I think being gay is a help rather than a hindrance. I think if I was a straight man, the workers would ask why I didn’t just get married, and have my own kids” (P6, I1, 171-174).

In addition to the formal policies and procedures that serve as barriers to single gay men adopting, they must also contend with misinformation, often on the part of adoption professionals. For example, Peter recalled:

I originally contacted an agency that I drive by on my way to work everyday. I live in a small town, I went there and they told me that it was illegal for single men to adopt. So, I went on the internet and typed in “single male adoption” and my state in google, and my [eventual] agency came up. So, I called them up on the phone, and asked if it was illegal, and they said no (P14, I1, 151-162).

Joe expressed his fear during the adoption process, and his awareness that he was often at the mercy of others in his quest to become a parent. He said: It is very scary to

think that everything will go OK, and then you might run into some person involved in the process who has some personal agenda and screws it all up for you. So, I was very fearful” (P5, I1, 230-233).

James, who disclosed his sexual orientation to his adoption agency, recalled the frustration he experienced during his adoption process that related to informal agency policies and attitudes of social workers. He explained:

I think that it [being gay] was [an issue], but I think the race thing was more of a complicator. I think it was a problem with regard to whenever my worker would go to the kid’s caseworker, how it is set up here is that I have a caseworker, and then there is a matching specialist, and the kid has a caseworker... then they would get to the caseworker, it would always seem to get bogged down. So, it was a problem there. That is why there were a lot of kids I never got to meet, it was stopped at that end (P1, I1, 312-323).

Many of the participants reported that the adoption agencies with which they worked had a “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. Peter explained: “She (agency worker) said you will never be asked the question (sexual orientation), and we ask that you don’t give us any information that will put us in the situation where we have to ask. It was done so that they were not put in a position where they had to lie” (P14, I, 159-162).

Other participants, like Brent, purposefully sought out agencies and/or facilitators where they could be open about his sexual orientation throughout the process. He reported: “Once I narrowed down the agency, I called them and told them that I was interested in adopting as an openly gay man and wanted to know if they could do my homestudy. They were very receptive, so I had no problems” (P8, I1, 160-163).

As single gay men hoping to become parents, some of the participants were faced with obstacles that other prospective families [couples and single women] did not encounter. For example, Ray adopted his son internationally. He was required to undergo a psychiatric evaluation, and submit a letter stating that he was not a pedophile (P11, I1, 132-135). Additionally, Greg who adopted his son internationally, had to sign a statement that he was not in a homosexual relationship for the adoption to be approved. He explained that he did not submit a false statement, or purposefully deceive the agency: “It asked if I was involved in a homosexual relationship, not whether I was a homosexual. So, it was a loophole” (P3, I1, 310-312).

Peter, who also adopted internationally, was not required to sign any statement, but recalled some of the barriers in his adoption:

My agency asked me to travel with a woman, with a girlfriend, and I did. I actually probably carried that too far, because some of the officials became concerned that she didn't like the baby and that was why she did not come on the second trip. They suggested early on for me to find a female friend to travel with, and that if we could be affectionate with each other - that would also be good. They don't ask a single woman to do that...Before the proceeding, the judge asked me if I was of the correct sexual orientation, and I answered yes. My assumption is that the judge asked me that knowing I could answer yes, so that the prosecutor would not oppose the adoption on those grounds (P14, I1, 167-182).

Additionally, while the political and legal issues involved in the adoption process are complex for single, gay men, there are also factors that become relevant after the adoption is finalized and the family is formed. Since the adoption of his sons, Charles

has become involved in a relationship with a man who lives outside of the United States. This creates a new set of difficulties for Charles, including: legitimization of the relationship, immigration laws, and second-parent adoptions. He explained that he is considering a move to a more accepting and utopian place where he can find legitimization for his relationship (civil marriage), and the ability to protect his family (second-parent adoption):

The wild cards are that I really don't know what will happen with my partner. All indications are that immigrations will continue to not be gay friendly, and unless we are willing to do something illegal, which is a consideration, that I am probably going to have to move out of the US in order to be with him. Canada is our choice. There is a visa in process for me and the boys to move there, and that is fine. If he does manage a visa in the US, I would like to stay here. It is home here, there is an excellent school that I would like my kids to go to, I love this house. I am very comfortable in my environment, and I would like to stay if we could (P13, I1, 312-327).

Family Expansion

As noted in the participant descriptions and selected characteristics matrix (See Table 4.1) presented earlier in the chapter, several of the participants are parenting multiple children. Others expressed a desire to adopt additional children, but were not certain if they would pursue another adoption. For some, the desire to have more children is complicated by their relationship status, and its impact on their ability to spend quality time with their child. This was exemplified by James, who said he wanted to have more children, but:

I want to wait until Ben is older because it would be too difficult to coordinate. I watch friends who have two kids and it looks great, but it looks like it is an awful lot of work that I have to do right now. Like, Ben and I love the same things, so we can just go and do stuff. When you have another kid, you have to consider that they like different things, and I am not sure I am ready to do that (P1, I1, 129-138).

However, Tom, who is parenting three children under the age of six, has a different take on family expansion. He reported:

In the back of my mind, multiple kids sounded like a good idea. I didn't try for multiples. I had one child and when he was a couple of years old, I decided to try to find a second child. I found out through social workers that the same birthmother had had another infant, so I adopted him as well. I adopted him at 4 ½ months, the first child was adopted at 8 ½ months, and then the social workers called me up last May and asked me if I wanted a third one and that is how I got three kids. They all have the same birthparents. I think this is it for me, but who knows (P6I1, 83-93).

Parenting

The third main category of data was labeled parenting. This category contained data that were related to the participants' experiences as parents, as well as data about internal changes caused by parenting. The data contained in this category were divided into four subcategories. The first subcategory, motivation and preparation for parenting, contained data about the internal and external preparatory work that was done in anticipation of receiving an adoptive placement. The second subcategory was labeled characteristics of parenting experiences. The data contained in the subcategory spoke to the participants' parenting experiences, and the skills they utilize when managing their

children. The next subcategory was labeled single parenting. These data centered on the participants' perspectives on the unique factors associated with single parent families.

The fourth subcategory was labeled transformative effects of parenting. The data in this subcategory spoke to the participants' reflections of how they have changed since they became parents.

Motivation and Preparation for Parenting

Throughout their interviews, the participants discussed their motivation for becoming parents, and the preparatory work that was done to achieve their goals. This preparatory work was either required as part of the adoption process, or self-initiated activities undertaken by the participants while they were awaiting a placement. For some participants, like Brent, this preparatory work centered on finding solutions to the practical and logistical problems of parenting. He stated:

I did not read books or attend classes. Instead, I independently thought about the things that would affect me the most, like daycare. I thought about how I would go about taking care of the day to day details of our life. You know, when I first decided to do this my family was very helpful at asking me all of the hard questions about how I would manage this. Basically, I went in with the philosophy that this is what I wanted to do and having kids, I really believe there is never a perfect time to do it. So, what happens is kind of backwards. You know a lot of people think, let me put all of my ducks in a row, and then worry about having kids, but my feeling was, what I needed to do was to have the child and then everything else would fall into place. I don't leave everything to chance, but if I waited for everything to be perfect it would

have never happened. I went into it thinking, “We will take care of those things” and “Those things will work themselves out” (P8, 76-93).

Other participants engaged in a self-reflective process to prepare themselves for being parents. Ray explained: “I thought about my own childhood and the type of parent my father was to me...I didn’t feel that I had an innate ability, but I did have the desire to be a good parent. And that if I just paid attention to what I was doing, I would get feedback that would guide me and point me in the right direction” (P11, I1, 93-100).

This introspective problem-solving process also led several participants to make changes in their life so that they would be able to be better equipped to be parents. Joe recalled:

Originally I was in a relationship, and we started talking about trying to create a family with kids, and then we split up. And as a social worker, I realized that I would not have the income to do it alone. That is when I decided that I was going to go to medical school...Because I thought that going to medical school would give me the money, the position, and resources to be able to make that happen. Because at that point, I did not know anyone else who had kids that did not get married to do it...and I did not want to do that. So, I did the pre-med and med school route (P5, I1, 56-66).

Several other participants felt prepared for parenting because of their previous experiences with children. For example, Caleb mentioned that he was very close to a neighbor’s child (P2, I1, 143). James and Joe were both school teachers earlier in their careers (P1, I1, 63; P5, I1, 94). Brent is a school administrator, and was also a school teacher and principal (P8, I1, 9-10). Matthew is a child therapist, and works in a special

education school (P15, I1, 81). Mark is a pediatrician and a professor of pediatric medicine (P4, I1, 10).

Greg explained that he felt prepared for parenting, in part by watching what other parents did with their children. He stated:

I have a big family with lots of nieces and nephews, and I have many friends who have had children over the last few years. I have had the opportunity to watch them parent first hand, and make mental notes about what I think might be good skills or strategies and tactics for me to use as a parent. This has also helped me get clear on what might not work. I have tried to internalize those as much as possible since I have had Evan. I also had parenting classes that I went through, but those were of minimal help to me. Mostly it was through my experiences with other people (P3, I1, 176-186).

Finally, depending on the type of adoption that the participant pursued, there were different preparatory educational requirements. Several of the participants who adopted through the public system mentioned a required training. This training was not designed for a particular family configuration, but instead focused on the needs of children who are waiting to be adopted. Brent recalled having to do general parenting classes as well as specialized training on being a multiracial family as he was adopting transracially, while Charles, who adopted internationally, was not required to participate in any parenting classes, but voluntarily enrolled in a 'Parenting 101' class offered through his agency (P8, I1, 222-225; P13, I1, 173).

Parenting Experiences

The participants discussed their approaches to parenting, its rewards, and the experiences they feel they get out of being parents. For most participants, being a father came naturally to them. As Noah explained: “I have a lot of patience and have gained more since I have been a parent...because your patience gets tested every day. Parenting just seems instinctual to me” (P16, I1, 93-96). Brent echoed these sentiments when he expressed that he has always felt like a natural caregiver (P8, I1, 100).

Louis discussed how his confidence level has increased thorough the years: “As the years have gone on, I feel more confident and I feel like I am a good father, but I didn’t feel that way at first. I felt like an idiot, and now I feel like I am making good choices” (P10, I1, 143-146). He also expressed his initial difficulties with becoming a parent for the first time at age fifty:

In the beginning, parenting was the most difficult thing I have ever done, without a close second. I always tell people that it is good that I was really ignorant, because if I really understood how hard it was going to be physically, then I probably would have thought twice about it...which is too bad, because then I might not have done it, and it has been wonderful. Though it was hard, it becomes normal, and then it becomes hard to think about what it would be like otherwise, and you can’t really remember what it was like to not have them in your life (P10, I1, 384-393).

Other participants expressed their feelings about parenting multiple children. Noah stated: “Right now, the hardest part is logistical. Having two kids at two different stages...The older they get, the more stuff there is to do. I am kind of scared of all that extra stuff and my ability to manage it all time wise” (P16, I1, 230-236).

Despite all of the hard work, the participants had no difficulty identifying the rewarding aspects associated with parenting. Joe mentioned the joy he receives from watching his children grow up to be independent individuals (P5, I1, 357). Expanding this concept, Greg expressed the satisfaction he gets from teaching his child skills:

I can actually teach him to do the things that he does. It is amazing that I am having such an influence on someone else's life. Right now, I am able to help him to do some minor developmental things, such as crawl, that I know in the future will be character building things...That I will actually be able to influence who he is as a person (P3, I1, 506-512).

For Caleb, this satisfaction came from watching his son demonstrate values that he has taught him. He recalled: "You have taught him all these values, but you never sat him down and said 'If a child ever looks enviously at your toy, offer it to him.' But what you did was you gave him all of these other low-level values that he is now applying in life" (P2, I1, 645-649).

Finally, several of the participants expressed a heightened sense of being scrutinized as parents. Tom, who is a Caucasian man raising three African American children did not speculate on which factors he believed caused his family to be more visible. He simply stated:

Being a white gay man raising three black children alone, everyone in the city knows us. I realize that people are watching my family even at times when I don't realize that they are noticing us. An example is someone coming up to us at the market and commenting on how big my boys are getting. Now I don't know this person, but it makes me realize that people pay attention (P6, I1, 341-347).

Single Parenting

For some participants, there are added stressors caused by being single parents in addition to the general stresses associated with parenting. Louis recalled wondering:

...whether I was cheating a child by adopting him. Shouldn't a child have a mother and a father, and I will never be able to give him that. I ended up making a list, and realizing what I could give a child that I adopted. And what I realized was that what I could give him was a lot more than what he would get in many other situations. I can't give him a mother, but I can give him many female role models. There are many people that love and care for him. I think he will have a very rich and rewarding life (P10, I1, 328-337).

However, there are some questions for which there are no easy answers. Tom explained: "As a single parent, the one thing I do not have a solution for is what would happen if something happened to me. My kids would be without any parents. No one volunteers to take on three kids" (P6, I1, 380-383).

For other participants, the stressors centered on the limitations of freedom associated with being a single parent. Louis explained that having a partner would give him more freedom:

If you have a partner, you can just run out and get some milk. As a single parent, the act of going out to get milk requires basically packing a suitcase, it is an elaborate ordeal, wrapping up the baby, and getting him in the seat, and then getting him in the car. What used to be a 5-minute trip now becomes an expedition of sorts (P10, I1, 308-315).

Many of the participants have had to make concessions in order to manage the demands of being a single parent. For example, Brent recently hired a housekeeper (P8, I1, 303), and other participants, like Noah, Charles, and Peter have hired in-home care to give them some flexibility.

However, several participants viewed single parenting as easier than other types of parenting. As Caleb explained that the logistics of single parenting are not difficult for him to manage:

I think that goes better as a single parent. I wake up every day, and every day I know exactly who is going to have to do what. And you know what, it is me! Maybe I am tainted on relationships, but many of the heterosexual women that I know who are in relationships, they wake up at the beginning of the day, and they think that their partner is going to help...that they are going to share the duties equally, and at the end of the day, they realize, I did everything! So, I think I would rather wake up in the day knowing it is all mine, I have got to do it all, than to have to even think for a minute that someone else is going to do it, and then have them fall down on me...In fact, before I had Todd, I had a full-time housekeeper, someone to cut my grass, I had a handyman, and I hired all of those things out...When I had Todd, I decided I am going to do all of it myself, and you know what, I do. So, I have taken on all of these new duties and I do it myself. It is just a whole different way of looking at it (P2, I1, 659-681).

While Caleb seems to relish the clarity of responsibilities associated with being a single parent, other participants would like to have a partner for a variety of reasons. Joe said:

Sometimes as a single parent, I think I would really like to have someone else around for balance so that when I get caught up in something, and can't see beyond the crisis of the moment, there is somebody that can remind me that this battle is really not that important, or what they are asking for is really not going to hurt them. It is a pretty relentless pace of life (P5, I1, 364-370).

Finally, Ray expanded on the notion of the relentless pace of life, and the impact of focusing all of his attention on his son. He said:

Finding time to take care of myself is the biggest challenge of being a single parent. It is too easy to get wrapped up in all of the things involved in taking care of a little person that you end up not taking care of yourself. I think in some ways I have been able to find in a balance, but in other ways I have not. I mean, I wanted to date, but I gave that up. It was just too much. I will have to deal with this later. I had some therapy around that. I have just tried to change things that weren't working. I had a house, and I let that go and moved into a smaller condo, just so I would not have to deal with so many things. I became much more flexible about making changes if things were not working. I am constantly looking for solutions to reduce the stress (P11, I1, 270-283).

Transformative Effects of Parenting

As previously discussed, each of the participants felt a great sense of satisfaction with their roles as parents, and expressed unconditional love for their children. Many of the participants were also able to identify changes in themselves since becoming parents. As Matthew expressed a sense of self-satisfaction with his parenting role: "I really relish what I do. I mean, I had to really go out of the way to become a parent, more than most

people who might not even chose to be a parent, but just find themselves a parent” (P15, I1, 276-281).

The majority of the participants expressed feeling grounded, or more centered since becoming parents. This was exemplified by Noah, who stated: “I feel more grounded, I feel like this is good for me, that this is my place in life. I can’t imagine what my life would be like without this” (P16, I1, 221-224). Similarly, Joe noted: “You know, since I had kids, I just feel like I am living a whole new life” (P5, I1, 254-255). Caleb expanded this concept when he said:

It is almost like having Todd has caused a 180 degree turn on everything. Everything that I thought was important isn’t, and everything that I thought wasn’t important is really what it is all about. And I don’t know that I saw all of that until I became a parent (P2, I1, 623-627).

Several other participants mentioned that having children has made them more future-oriented. For example, Ray stated: “My focus has changed. I never used to worry about the future and now I think about the future all of the time” (P11, I1, 258-259). Other participants provided examples of changes in specific behaviors they associate with becoming parents. David said: “I can honestly tell you I am a much more responsible person. The burden is not just about me anymore. I have to ensure that my kids’ well being is first all of the time” (P15, I1, 250-256).

For some participants, such as Brent, parenting has mandated that he become more extroverted. He said: “I have found that I stand out more since I became a parent. While I am an introvert by nature, I have been able to adjust to the demands of being more visible...a single man with a baby” (P8, I1, 287-290). While Brent has experienced

the pressure to be more sociable, Ray expressed an increased sense of isolation since becoming a parent. He reported that this isolation was caused primarily by his concerns about leaving his child in the care of others (P11, I1, 248-249). However, he reports this is decreasing as his son gets older and is developing interests of his own.

Finally, Greg described a sentiment expressed by many of the participants when he stated:

Now emotionally, there has been a huge emotional change in me. This is the best thing ever. The sense of being a father and being responsible for my son is an amazing feeling that I can't even really articulate. With my nieces and nephews, I always felt a sense of I am making a difference in someone's life, I am having an impression on who someday is going to be as a person, and that is magnified a million times because I live it every day (P3, I1, 483-492).

Children

The fourth main category of data was labeled children. This category contained data that were specifically related to the participants' children. The data contained in this category were divided into three subcategories. The first subcategory, relationships with children, contained data that captured the participants' feeling about the relationships they have with their children. The second subcategory was labeled children and sexual orientation. The data contained in the subcategory spoke to the participants' self-disclosure of their sexual orientation to their children, and the children's response to this disclosure. The final subcategory was labeled children and adoption. These data reveal how participants talk to their children about adoption, as well as data on the ways that they cope with it.

Relationships with Children

The participants in this study unequivocally expressed a deep love and feeling of connection to their children, as well as satisfaction with their roles as parents. Ray said it makes all of the hard work worthwhile when his son “crawls in bed with me at 6:00 AM and says ‘Daddy, I love you’” (P11, I1, 265-266). This feeling was also expressed by Brent, who said: “When I wake up and see her every morning, that is the best part of parenting. I mean waking up and seeing her, there is no better way to start the day” (P8, I1, 295-297). Finally, Charles expressed what he finds most rewarding about being a parent when he stated:

Last night, while we were changing clothes for bed. One of my sons just decided to hug me around the neck and say “I love you, Daddy!” and that just sums up the reward of parenting. Their total dependence, and reliance, and unconditional acceptance of me as a human being is what is so amazing about being a parent (P13, I1, 291-296).

James expressed that “with kids, there is just something that will last forever” (P11I, 676-677). Louis expanded on this theme when he commented:

When I first started the adoption process, a friend told me that the journey I was about to embark on would be the greatest love affair of my life. I thought that was strange phraseology, but it is true. You sort of fall in love with your child, and it deepens all of the time. Then you are stunned to find that you can love someone that much. It is somewhat intangible, but the sensation of looking over and realizing that that child is mine. Early on, it is sometimes hard to believe that this perfect little child is mine. As kids age, they go through phases, and the phase that my son is in now is this

staggering development of personality, intelligence, and character, and it is tremendously exciting to see him become a little person and develop interests of his own. The complexity of his character and his thought change so rapidly from month to month. It is so rewarding to watch it unfold (P10, I1, 280-299).

Other participants found satisfaction when they saw their children demonstrating something that they taught them. For example, Matthew said:

When my son was placed here, he really could not read, even though he was 8. He can read now, and gets really excited about books. That is rewarding for me...The other day he told me that education was really important, and things like that make it all worthwhile. I love it when he says to me “Matthew” he calls me Matthew, “Matthew, can we talk, I have some questions for you?” Sometimes they are normal questions like can we go to Toys R US, and the sometimes they are really deep, soul-searching questions like: How many relatives did they ask to take me that wouldn’t? And I love that he feels comfortable asking me things like that (P15, I1, 285-306).

Children and Sexual Orientation

The traditional gay male parenting literature has historically focused on men who produced children through heterosexual relationships. In this literature, much of the focus was on the best ways for fathers to disclose their sexual orientation to the child. However, the participants in this study chose to become parents within the context of a pre-established gay identity. Therefore, their needs and experiences around this self-disclosure are different. Given the age range of the children adopted by the participants, there was much variation in the levels of discussion regarding the sexual orientation of the parent. For example, James reflected on coming out to his son:

From the beginning, I knew coming out was something that I wanted to do, but there was not anything in place to help with that. I know some adoptive parents who are not open, and that is not the case with me. Like Ben knows the most important secret in my life, and that makes a difference in a way. In adopting older kids, you have to know that they come with their own history, their own baggage and trust issues already, and if you go into it lying to them, that is bad (P1, I1, 665-672).

Other participants, such as Noah, reported that they had not disclosed their sexual orientation to their children. Noah said: “I have not talked about sexual orientation with either of my sons. Although the word gay is clearly part of the landscape here in the house. Being gay is nothing to be ashamed of” (P1, I1, 147-150). For all of the participants, coming out is an eventuality. However, the timing of this disclosure depends largely on the development of their children. Greg said: “I won’t tell him until he starts asking questions...I mean there is a reason they are not asking questions, they are not mature enough to deal with what you are saying, but I will certainly tell him” (P3, I1, 358-361).

Finally, other participants did not think a formal disclosure was necessary. The majority of these participants have adopted younger children. Mark explained that while he would talk to his daughter about sexual orientation, he hoped:

...that it is just kind of a matter of fact thing, that she will see straight couples in her life, and see gay couples in her life, and it will just be a fact of life that they are all valid ways of having a family; including the family that just has a dad, or just a mom (P4, I1, 331-336).

Children and Adoption

As the ages of the participants' children varied greatly, it follows that there was variation in the types of discussions about adoption, as well as in the plans to discuss adoption in the future. Joe, who is parenting two daughters, expressed happiness that he resides in a city where diversity is the norm. However, he did provide examples of how his daughters have to deal with being adopted. He said: "You know, Mother's Day is not fun for us. Other things in school are tough, like family trees and stuff. But this is a standard thing that all adoptive families have to deal with" (P5, I1, 280-282). He also talked about how he deals with these types of stressors: "I talked to the kids about it. You know, this is their life, and this is going to be their life, and they are going to have to learn to cope with not fitting in" (P5, I1, 291-293).

Some of these adoption-related discussions were initiated by the children. As Matthew stated, "It is always really apparent when we go somewhere that he is not my biological child. He was getting concerned about that, but there is nothing I can do about that. I told him that for his whole life, you are going to be pretty different (P15, I1, 312-316). James experienced the same thing with his son and utilized a local gay and lesbian family group to help his son connect with other children in similar types of families. He stated that his son was

...actually having a more difficult time about telling kids that he was adopted than he was about having a gay dad. And this group has been really helpful with that too, because he has seen all of these kids that are adopted, and has met them all, and that has helped with realize that it is OK (P1, I1, 434-439).

Relationship Transformation

The fifth main category of data was labeled relationship transformation. This category contained data that were specifically related to how the participants' relationships with different types of people had changed since they became parents. The data contained in this category were divided into four subcategories. The first subcategory, romantic relationships, contained data that captured the participants' feelings about dating and entering partnered relationships, as well as units of data about what role they would see that person playing in their child's life. The second subcategory was labeled relationships with friends. The data contained in this subcategory centered on the evolution of friendships throughout the transition to parenthood. The third subcategory was labeled relationships with family of origin. These data centered on the ways that each participant's relationship with his own family of origin has changed since becoming a parent. The final category was labeled employer relationships, and focuses on the ways that participants' relationships with their employer have changed since becoming parents.

Romantic Relationships

Throughout their interviews, the participants spoke about the impact their decision to parent has had on their involvement in romantic relationships, as well as to the degree of change in the characteristics that each participant seeks in any future partner. As a criterion for participation, all of the participants were single at the initiation of the adoption process as well as at the time of the child's placement in the home. The majority of the participants remain single. However, several of the participants are involved in partnered relationships, although none are cohabitating.

Some of the participants discussed the ways that their decision to parent has changed who, and how they date. For example, Caleb provided an example of how he views things differently since becoming a parent when he said:

Right when the whole adoption thing started, I broke off a relationship because of his drinking. It was tolerable for me as an individual, but it would not be tolerable to be around my child. On the positive side of things, I wouldn't now date anyone who didn't at least tolerate children well. I tend to look at how people act and demonstrate their values, more than I did before. Before I might take their word for it, or I might see them do some things and it wouldn't bother me, but now I cringe more, and go 'ooh!'...I don't know if I would want Todd to see that. It can be as simple as them being rude to a waiter or waitress, or it could be anything in which they demonstrate bad values. Now, I am more aware of that (P2, I1, 727-742).

For other participants, such as Brent, the qualities they seek in any future partner have not changed. He explained: "I have always wanted what I have wanted in a potential [partner] and I don't think that being a parent has changed that. I want someone who loves kids, and wants to be a part of raising them...amongst 45 or 50 other criteria" (P8, I1, 335-338).

The majority of the participants spoke about protecting their relationships with their children, even if they did decide to enter a romantic relationship. As Matthew said: "I am very clear about the role I play in my son's life, and the fact that parenting is the most important thing I do, and that my son will always come first" (P15, I1, 328-330). Ray believes that his disclosure as a single parent acts as filter. He said:

I am very upfront about being a single father. I find that I cannot deal with very self-involved people, and they present themselves very quickly as being very self-involved. Before, I might have said “WOW!” he is really attractive and that was ok. But now, I need and want someone that is willing to be a little more responsible, and a little less self-involved (p11, I1, 293-299).

Peter expressed that he now looks for potential partners similar to how he believes women do when he said:

The person that I am currently dating has pursued me for awhile, and I was not interested. He is attractive, but he is not hot. He is marriage material, not the guy you turn your head and look at. He is attractive, he is successful, he is stable, and he is an adult. He does not go to the gym. I am still a guy. I was not all that interested for awhile. And then one day I just realized that he is the type of guy that is a good parent. Not the guy with a buff body. I realized that I needed to be looking for something different, looking for a partner in more of the way that a woman looks for one than the way a man does (P14, I1, 316-327).

Louis provided an example of complexities involved in entering romantic relationships that are present now, but were not before he was a parent. He states:

Now that I am dating again, I am dealing with things that I didn't deal with before. Before, I was pretty concerned about safe sex, and now I am completely neurotic about it. I feel like I can't take a chance, however remote. Even activities that are considered safe make me nervous. I think to myself that it is not 100% safe, and there is some contact with A, B, C, or D and I am totally neurotic about it. Before I could consider having relationships for sexual satisfaction, I have to now have

relationships for the pleasure of their company because I am so neurotic about sex. I feel like I can't take even the remotest chance of leaving my son without his one and only parent. I am a parent now, and I just don't feel like I can put myself at risk in any way (P10, I1, 354-367).

The participants also speculated about what role they envisioned any future partner might play in their children's lives. Some participants, such as Brent, envisioned that person as being a co-parent. He said:

It definitely would be important for me to think of that person as equal. I would hate to think of that person being an uncle or friend when they were involved in a relationship with me that was so intimate. However, if it is a relationship that is started when she is older, I would definitely consult her when making any decisions that impact us (P8, I1, 342-348).

Other participants, such as Matthew, had a different perspective. He provided a rationale as to why he would not view an future partner as a second-parent when he stated:

I don't think that is fair to my son. I am his parent and am very clear about that. I would ideally imagine being in a relationship again, but I don't know. If I met someone and they really wanted to be a parent, I would encourage them to adopt on their own. In some ways, I feel like the relationship that I have with my son is the most important relationship in my life, certainly now, and probably ever. I feel like my son has had a really neglectful life, and I think he deserves the attention. I really want to do this right; I want to be a good parent (P8, I1, 335-346).

However, there was consistency among the participants that the role any future partner might play would be influenced by the age of the children and would incorporate their needs and desires. As David said:

It would not be a decision that I would make by myself. It is something they would be involved with. But as far as them calling someone else dad, I don't know that it would happen. I am sure there are creative ways that kids come up with on their own. The person would be involved, but it would be more of a support function for me (P9, I1, 347-352).

Relationships with Friends

Throughout their interviews, the participants also spoke about the ways that their relationships with their friends, both gay and non-gay, had changed since they became parents. The overwhelming majority of participants reported that they are socializing with other parents more, regardless of sexual orientation. Additionally, some participants reported that their relationships with their gay friends changed significantly since becoming parents. For example, Matthew said: "Before I had kids, I was not in the bar or nightclub phase of my life. However, I was in the phase of meeting small groups of friends for dinner. And now, I don't really do it" (P15, I1, 237-241).

For some participants, such as Ray, this transition was about a lack of time to socialize (P11, I1, 204). For others, like Louis, it was about having different interests:

One couple that I was close to had no interest in my parenting at all. Our interests up until then were the same: real estate, travel, theatre. I think they thought it was just really boring. The main impact on my friendships has been caused by practicality. I don't have the time to socialize the way I used to, and that have made me more

isolated. It is partially my fault. I don't make the effort to prepare a dinner and invite people over; to do the things that are required to keep up my friendships with other gay men. So, I have become distant, but I myself, don't have the time to participate. I have found that I interact much more with other parents now that I am one (P11, I1, 234-250).

Other participants, like Mark, have experienced mixed reactions from his gay friends about his decision to adopt. He reported:

I think for the most part people are pretty fascinated with it. I think some people are envious without actually coming out and saying it. And I think in some ways, I would have assumed that people would have been like "uh, gross" because I have seen that in the past that the gay male response to a gay man with kids is negative because again, you can't live the party life and stay out until 3 AM anymore (P4, I1, 427-439).

It is the idea of a shared experience that drew many of the participants closer to other parents. Matthew pointed out: "I mean, unless you have a kid, you probably don't want to go and hang out at the Science Museum on a Saturday" (P15, I1, 257). He went on to say that he feels like he is living in a world that is not gay or straight. He provided an example by explaining: "If I saw an article in a magazine about gay South Beach I would not be interested in it, but if it was about parenting, gay or otherwise, I would be interested" (P15, I1, 259-262).

Some participants, like David reported that they felt supported in their decision to adopt by all of their friends, and that they are closer to other parents now. Ray expanded on this concept when he said: "We can talk about kids and that is a safe topic. I am seen

as ‘normal’, and they can identify with what I am going through” (P11, I1, 162-164).

Louis also offered his thoughts on why he is now closer to his heterosexual friends:

In some cases, I think it pulls you a little closer because they understand the choice.

With gay people, they are baffled by your decision to parent and think you are biting off way more than you can chew, but straight people seem to understand the choice.

They might think it is the wrong choice for you, but they understand the choice. With some straight people, we just seem to have more in common, something that wasn’t there before (P10, I1, 193-202).

Many of the participants reported positive experiences with their friends as they made the transition to parenthood. Brent posited that because the majority of his friends were already parents, they now have something else in common (P8, I1, 242-243).

However, while he did not express any concern about it, he did comment that some friendships with single, heterosexual friends and childless gay friends had changed “because they think this is just too weird for them” (P8, I1, 245-246).

However, some participants have had negative experiences in relationships that they associate directly with the fact that they had adopted. As Peter explained:

One of my good friends, I was his best man in his wedding, is no longer in my life because of the adoption. He just evaporated. We have never actually had the discussion. The way I read it is that “it is one thing for me to have my sick and depraved lifestyle, but it is wrong to parade that in front of a child.” I also have another friend who was initially concerned that because I am gay, I would have a gay son. I just had to remind him that I was raised by heterosexuals (P14, I1, 210-218).

Relationships with Family of Origin

One of the common experiences shared by the majority of the study participants was the transformation of their relationships with their family of origin. The majority of these changes were ultimately positive, even though there was tension at the beginning for some of the participants. For example, Brent said:

My family and friends were reserved and skeptical, to be nice, at first, about my decision to both adopt and to adopt a child of color. I come from a family of worriers, and there are just so many variables involved that it was hard for them to wrap their minds around any of it (P8, I1, 187-191).

Joe had a similar experience with his own parents. “My parents were not supportive of me being a single parent at the beginning. They have just learned to trust me. They did not want me to go to medical school either, but they learned that I have to live my life” (P5, I1, 244-250).

The overwhelming majority of participants expressed satisfaction in the relationships with their family of origin. They reported that they see each other more often and that the quality of the relationships has improved. Ray explained some of the differences in his relationship with his own parents when he stated: “They have expressed that I am more grown up in their eyes in a certain way since I am willing to take on this responsibility. It creates a shared bond. They raised kids, I am raising a child” (P11, I1, 151-154). James provided an example of how his relationship with his parents is now different. He said:

They are actually more respectful of me because they listen if I say them to them, ‘No, he can’t do that. This isn’t the way I am raising him at home.’ Whether it is like

watching TV or his diet or something, and they actually observe it (my wishes) and don't give me a bunch of grief, which is what they would have typically done (P1, I1, 349-355).

Additionally, Caleb, who adopted transracially, spoke about how his decision to adopt changed the race of his family. He said:

My father is a big genealogy guy, and it actually turns out that I am the only one carrying on the family name. Because my sisters, everybody has a girl, and the one that had a boy doesn't have our name. And then at the same time my father has said I flipped the race of our family. He says in about two or three hundred years there is going to be all of these black people sitting around at a family reunion going who in the hell were all of these white people in these pictures. So, my father actually thought that it was pretty neat that in one stroke that I changed the race of our family, and that I, the one that they thought would least ever carry on the family name, is now the only one carrying on the family name (P2, I1, 432-445).

Even in those instances where family functioning was not optimal, there have been changes that the participants attributed to their becoming parents. Tom explained how contentious his relationship with his own family of origin has been in the past:

Prior to having a child, I had not contacted my parents in seven years. Actually, the first night that my oldest son was here was Christmas Eve, and I called them and told them that they could stop by and see the baby if they wanted to. They live about 30 miles away, but my mom said she had to get her hair done or something like that. They are very fundamentalist, so there has always been a very rocky relationship between us. While they already knew I was gay, when the article (about me being a

single gay parent with three kids) in the newspaper came out, some of their friends saw it, and they found out about it and apparently caused some very severe trauma for them. On my son's third birthday last June another newspaper article came out about my family. My dad called and said 'We don't like you, but we like your kids. That is why we are here at the birthday party.' It is a never ending battle, and they are never really going to appreciate me, although they do in some ways. They have been parents, and they know how much work it is, especially with three kids. They have problems with the gay thing. Having kids got us communicating again, although it is still a little frosty (P2, I1, 191-211).

Caleb has experienced a mixed reaction from different members of his family, including a positive reception from his parents, and a negative one with several of his siblings. He recalled:

I think it strengthened my relationship with my parents. It strained my relationship with a couple of my siblings because as I found out, it was OK for me to be gay, but it was not ok for me to be a parent. Whereas with my parents, [they] have treated my son in every regard like they treat every other one of their grandchildren (P2, I1, 427-432).

Finally, the demands of being single parents have caused several participants to move closer to their families of origin. David explained:

It (parenting) made us emotionally closer. I was the only child (of 7) without kids, and each of my siblings had 3 or 4 kids, so it made us closer too...More alike. I also moved back to Nebraska before Christmas. I had lived away for 17 years, and I felt

like it was time to come home and raise my kids. So, now we are geographically closer as well (P9, I1, 175-180).

Matthew had the same experience, and said: “We went for a visit this summer and had such a good time that we are planning on moving there when his adoption is finalized. I have realized that being single, I really need that family support system because it is just too hard to be on your own without any kind of backup” (P15, I1, 165-175).

Relationships with Employers

When discussing the ways that their lives had changed since becoming parents, many participants identified changes in their relationships with their employers. Some felt supported in their decision to become single parents by choice, while others felt that there had been negative changes. Some participants, like James, have experienced a positive transition with his employer:

I am extremely lucky with work, and they are very flexible. I pretty much make my own schedule. They have been really great. If there is a snow day or something, I can just bring Ben in, and no one has any problem with that. They actually had like, a baby shower for me. The director set up a baby shower during a meeting, so they have been really supportive (P1, I1, 385-390).

Mark also felt supported in his decision to become a parent, but noticed some changes among his colleagues:

I work for one of the top research medical universities in the US. It is very progressive. We have domestic partner benefits, and sexual orientation is in the EEO statement. They offer paternity leave, so I took 6 weeks off after Ella was born, and certainly that altered my relationship with my colleagues, because suddenly I was not

in the call rotation for six weeks, and I wasn't seeing my clinic patients, so they had to pick up the slack. You know, I had no control over when Ella was born. It wasn't a situation where I could postpone it or move it up. I didn't want to inconvenience anyone, but I wasn't going to miss out on this very special time.

The decision to become a parent causes many employees to utilize different company-sponsored benefits, such as on-site daycare or childcare subsidies, than when they were childless. Terminating these benefits can cause a hardship for parents, which may cause them to vacate their positions. As Charles reported: "The University made the decision to close the childcare center last year. That pretty heavily influenced my decision to resign. If I did not have childcare, there was no way that I continue to work and manage a private practice" (P13, I1, 222-225).

Many of the participants' schedules became less flexible after becoming parents. For example, Matthew said that he used to do about an hour of paperwork at home every night. However, he has put up a barrier, and no longer works at home in the evening (P15, I1, 187-188). Finally, for some of the participants the decision to parent mandated a change in positions. Caleb had the resources to be able to stay at home with his son for over three years. When the time came to look for work again, he looked for a job that was much different than the one that he previously held. He stated:

(I lived) A lifestyle of doing mostly high-end consulting, in which I traveled five days a week fifty weeks out of the year. When I then became a parent, I have tossed that lifestyle completely aside, and when I went to look for a job, I looked for a company that understanding of family issues, that was near my house, that was not demanding in the travel regard, that was not demanding in the overtime regard that I could not do

from my own home. So, it did affect how I looked for a job, and what I looked for in a job. It is also cut my salary by five times (P2, I1, 506-516).

Outside Relationships

The final main category of data was labeled outside relationships. This category contained data that were specifically related to how the participants manage relationships with individuals outside of the family system. The data contained in this category were divided into three subcategories. The first subcategory, self-disclosure of father, contained data that captured the participants' feelings about disclosing their sexual orientation to people indirectly involved in their lives, including teachers and other parents. The second subcategory was labeled support networks. The data contained in this subcategory centered on the ways that the participants have developed networks of supportive people with which to surround themselves. The final subcategory included data that discussed the level of interaction each of the fathers has with the larger gay community. These units include data that discussed changes in the levels of participation in events in the gay community since becoming a parent, as well as each of the father's perceptions of, and level of participation in activities designed specifically for gay fathers or families headed by gay parents.

Self-Disclosure of Father

For many people, the act of disclosing their sexual orientation, or coming out, is not a decision that is made lightly. This disclosure is often made even more cautiously when the individual is a gay adoptive father. Matthew discussed how he has recently been disclosing less than when he first became a father. "I think that now I am conscious about disclosing less often to strangers. At first, I was just so proud of my family that I

would tell anybody that would listen. Now, I am more protective of my family” (P15, I1, 355-358).

However, Matthew also noted that his son often disclosed information about his father’s sexual orientation at school. He recalled an incident:

Another parent actually came up to me at Science Fair night, and said it is so nice to know a gay father. I felt like asking: Who are you, and how do you know about me? I was sort of uncomfortable that this parent knew so much about me, but I got through it. I imagine that it is going to be more of a deal when he is a teenager, more so than now, cause I really don’t think he understands what it means to be gay (P15, I1, 142-149).

In these situations, some participants, such as Joe, discussed having to talk to his daughter about disclosing information. He said: “My older daughter asked me if I thought the teacher knew I was gay. I had to tell her it may not be safe to disclose this information in certain settings, such as at school” (P5, I1, 221-224). This is an idea on which James expanded: “I am always just a little apprehensive....want to make sure where people stand before we get too friendly with them, so it is not a difficult situation later on” (P1, I1, 405-408).

Finally, one participant pondered whether he needed to come out to his son’s friend’s parents. As Matthew stated:

I imagine it being very difficult when my son is at the age where he wants to have friends sleep over. If I know the kids, but not their parents, I have to figure out whether I need to tell the parents I am gay. I don’t know what I will do (P15, I1, 208-212).

Support Networks

Developing a support network is paramount to the mental health of all parents. This becomes even more important when the parents are outside of how families are traditionally conceptualized, including gay and lesbian-headed, and single parent families. Many of the participants have well-established diverse support networks that include family, friends, employers, ex-partners, and childcare providers. Others, like Mark are still in the process of developing their support networks. He explained:

Having only a five month old, I am still developing my support network. I have several colleagues at work that have young infants, and we have gotten together a couple of time to chat about what it is like to be a pediatrician and have a newborn. It can be hard, I worry about everything....I would love to have a large cohort of other gay men as parents, and there are plenty here, but most of them are men who were married, and share custody, so their situation is different than mine. And the process that they went through to become parents is so very different than mine. You know parenting a newborn every day is a whole different world than parenting a kid you see every other weekend, or parenting one that is older and in college (P4, I1, 157-172).

Many of the participants have developed support networks of other gay and lesbian parents. Joe reported that he felt lucky that three of his colleagues are also gay and were going through the adoption process at the same time as him (P5, I1, 126-127). However, the majority of the participants stated that they did not feel a connection or bond with other parents based solely on sexual orientation. Greg commented: "I don't (socialize with gay fathers) anyway, so I am not going to start just because we are single gay fathers together. My friends are my friends because they are people that I share the

same values with...” (P3, I1, 437-441). Matthew shared this opinion, and gave an example of the differences in parenting styles he has noted:

I do have one gay friend who is raising a teenager that might be considered part of my support network. But, we have very different parenting styles. Just because he is gay doesn't mean that we are similar. He is a lot stricter than I am, and more of a disciplinarian. I guess that means that just because we are both gay fathers, does not mean that we are necessarily going to connect, or view things the same (P15, I1, 225-232).

Several of the participants noted that gender is often a factor in the development of support networks. For example, Greg mentioned: “They do have (support) meetings at the adoption agency, and they have a single parent group as well, but to tell the truth, I will probably forego those just because it is all women, the guys don't go, and I am not crazy about the idea of being the only guy” (P3, I1, 382-386). Tom has had similar experiences while trying to develop support networks with women. He said:

One thing that I think is interesting as a single male parent is that women seem to feel comfortable telling other women what to do, but they don't seem to feel too comfortable telling a man what to do. I think women talk amongst themselves a little more. I sometimes have to go out of my way to ask a woman what I should do in a certain situation (P6, I1, 120-126).

Other participants, like David, found that they have become part of the support networks of gay men who are prospective parents, and that these relationships are reciprocal. He said: “They are not as much part of my support network as probably I am

a support to them. But we do email each other some, and keep in touch that way” (P9, I1, 225-227). Peter expanded on this concept by saying:

It is kind of strange, but I get contacted pretty regularly, normally once a week, by strangers who have heard about me from a friend of a friend, always saying that I didn’t know that single men could adopt, can you please give me some advice. I had made quite a few friends through that process. Some are couples, some are single gay men. None of them are in my immediate community. I live in a small town, and I don’t think there are other gay families here. So, I am connected through the internet and email, as well as have some friends that live close by (P14, I1, 230-239).

Professional caregivers are also part of the support network of many of the participants. However, the level of involvement varied greatly depending on the age of the child, the geographic location, and the income level of the participants. For example, Charles has recently moved and started a semi-retirement, and now has in-home care for his twin sons part-time. This is different from before when he was working full-time, keeping a private practice as a psychologist, and had a live-in nanny. He explained:

On any given occasion, if I needed to do something, for myself or my business, I just called the nanny and said I would be late, or that I needed her to work on Saturday, and now this babysitter, I get about 4 hours a week that I can use to take care of the things I need to do (P13, I1, 304-310).

Finally, some participants with older children have found that their children have actually made the effort to surround themselves with supportive people. Caleb explained:

I think kids will find what they need. My son happened to develop a relationship with his Aunt Pam, and she happened to become his Aunt Pam, it wasn’t a planned

thing. If it hadn't been her, it would have been someone else that I would have found to play that role in his life (P2, I1, 711-715).

Tom expanded on this concept when he said:

I believe that kids are resilient and they find what they need. For example, if they need a mother figure, they will seek someone out that they know, and let that person fill that role so that they can obtain what they need. I fully support my kids having outside relationships with positive adults, and am happy to help them nurture those relationships (P6, I1, 372-378).

Interaction with Gay Community

As each of the participant's involvement with the gay community varied prior to having children, it follows that there was also variation in the way that this interaction was impacted by their becoming parents. Some participants, like Peter, were never really involved in the gay community at all. However, Peter came out later than many of the other participants, and was in a heterosexual marriage in the past. He talked about his experiences:

Coming out in my 30's, I was already established in my community. I owned my own business, I am friends with my neighbors, and I wasn't willing to give up what I have to be part of the gay community, so I brought being gay into I was as opposed to going and joining the gay community. I didn't become gay with a capital G, but rather a small G (P14, I1, 141-147).

However, the majority of the participants were somewhat active in the gay community, but said their participation in these events had decreased since becoming parents. This decrease in participation in events designed for the gay community, such as

Pride Festivals and parades, was caused by a number of reasons. For example, Ray noted:

I went once to the pride festival when he was young. He was still in a backpack. I did not care for it, I just saw everything differently. It was sort of like, would I want to be explaining this (what was going on there) to him. So, we did not go for a few years. We went to the gay pride rally after the parade last year, because I needed to be around gay people for a bit. Well, it is easier to control the environment at the rally. If I saw something I was not comfortable with, I could just steer him away or get him to look the other way. It is really an exhausting environment to be in when people are prancing around and stuff, and I am trying to take care of a small child. So, it does not feel like a family-friendly environment (P11, I1, 211-224).

Louis felt the same way, and expanded on the concept of events being family-friendly when he stated:

At pride festivals, for instance, where supposedly it is about having pride, there are posters of half-naked men everywhere. It is more than that though. It is about what activities are enjoyable with a small child. Activities that are not essentially child-friendly and interesting to a child are not things that we do. For example, I am very political and belong to the gay democrats clubs here. I used to bring him to the meetings when he was very little, when I could carry him in a carrier, and he would just sleep. But now he is older, and you can't go with a little boy to a political meeting. The same thing happens with my gay synagogue. It just happens to not be very child-friendly. He will run up and down the aisle, and people are amused for about five minutes, but after that, they are over it. Also, the services start at 8:30 at

night, which is past his bedtime. It is all of those practical considerations that have made me much less active in the gay community (P10, I1, 259-276).

Other participants, such as Mark continue to be active in the gay community. He reported that he is the past President of a gay and lesbian professional group, and that he is still an active member. He attended their annual conference last year, and took his daughter with him (P4, I1, 446-448). Other participants, like James, participate in events in the gay community, like performances of choirs, film festivals, and gatherings, as well utilize specialized resources, such as support groups for children of gays and lesbians to help his son develop a sense of community with other children with gay or lesbian parents (P1, I1, 464-466).

Impact of Researcher's Self Disclosure on Recruitment Process

At the completion of the interview, each participant was asked to provide their thoughts on the impact of self-disclosure on the part of the researcher on two domains: sexual orientation and parenting status. The first question probed into whether an explicit statement that the researcher is gay would have any impact on their decision to participate in this type of study. A similar question was asked of participants regarding the impact of disclosure that the researcher is an adoptive parent was also asked of each participant.

Sexual Orientation of the Researcher

Over half of the participants responded that the explicit disclosure in the study flyer or other advertisements would make them more likely to participate in this type of study in the future. This question also yielded data that speak to the often invisible motivating factors for participation in research studies. These factors are illustrated in Charles' response to the question. He stated: "I am more biased by being a Psychologist,

and I want to contribute to the literature on this. However, my own comfort level is certainly higher having made the assumption that you are gay” (P13, I1, 371-374).

There are also factors that make potential participants hesitant to be a part of the study.

As Peter noted,

My willingness to participate in this type of study is influenced by my thoughts about your sexual orientation. However, it is also because of where you live. If I did not know you were gay, I might have thought you were doing this type of research in a negative way. This is based on my stereotypes about the South. I was afraid that it might have been a negative study, and that I would inadvertently help end gay adoptions (P14, I1, 338-346).

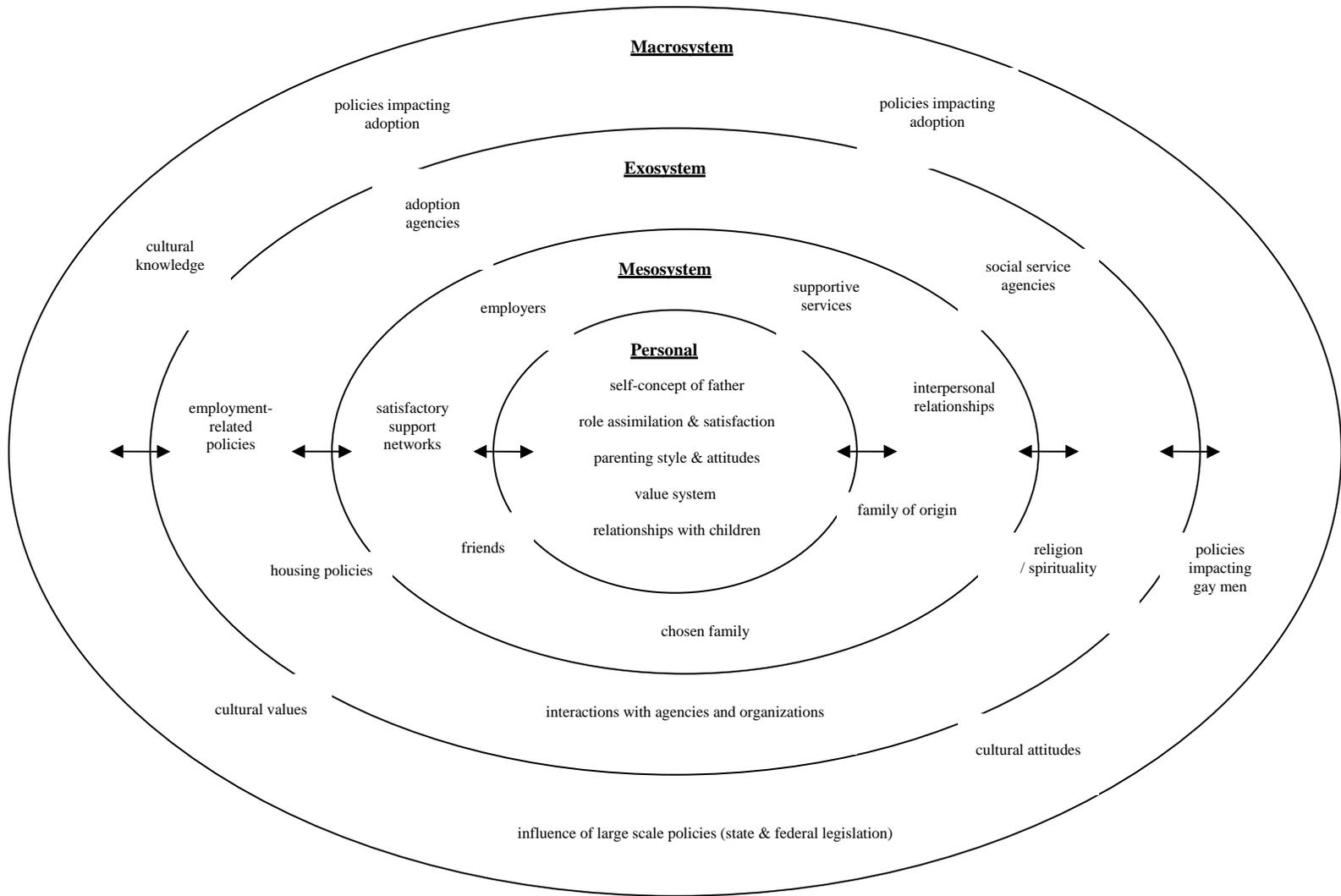
However, the other participants were not influenced by knowing the sexual orientation of the researcher, and instead were influenced by the research topic. For example, Brent reported: “I was really ecstatic that there is a study being done. So, it would not have mattered who it was” (P9, I1, 352-354).

Researcher’s Parenting Status

With the exception of one individual, the participants overwhelmingly stated that disclosure of parenting status had no impact on their willingness to participate in similar studies. However, Caleb noted that knowledge of the researcher’s parenting status:

...might help me understand the researcher’s motives for doing it, but I don’t think it would make me want to do it or not do it. I want to do it because there was so little information available to me, so that if there is even a spark of information available to somebody else in a year, then I think that is great (P2, I1, 805-810).

Figure 4.1: **Integrative Diagram**



This diagram provides a visual display of the experiences of the participants in the current study. The participants in the current study's experiences are diverse and multi-layered, and include interactions at the personal, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem levels.

Personal Level: These interactions are influenced by the father's self-concept and role assimilation and satisfaction and include: parenting attitudes and style, value system, and relationships with children.

Mesosystem Level: These interactions include the father's development of satisfactory support networks, as well as the father's relationship with those close to him, including: family of origin and/or chosen family, friends, employers, and other supportive services/networks around which the father surrounds himself.

Exosystem Level: These interactions include the influence of, and interactions with organizations and policies that have a direct impact on the individual. These include: adoption agencies, social service agencies, employment-related policies, such as the Family Medical Leave Act [FMLA], and housing policies.

Macrosystem: These interactions include the influences of global policies and cultural attitudes that impact the individual indirectly. Included at this level of interaction are: cultural norms and values about male caregivers, adoption and adoptive families, single parenting, and gay and lesbian parenting. Additionally, large scale policies, including adoption-related legislation, and state and federal legislation that seeks to limit the rights of gays and lesbians as individuals and parents are included in this level of interaction.

Chronosystem: While not depicted on the visual, the chronosystem has relevance to the current study. This level of the system incorporates the idea that the phenomenon being studied cannot be separated from the time/space in which it was conducted. Therefore, it is important to note that the findings of the current study are impacted by the relevant policies, legislation, and cultural attitudes that exist in 2004 in American society.

Summary

In summary, the collected data were divided into five broad categories, and 22 subcategories. These data detailed the participants' experiences with both the adoption and on-going parenting process. Additionally, the findings illustrate the various influences, from interpersonal to societal, that impact the participants' ability to develop and maintain their families.

Chapter 5

IMPLICATIONS

Review of Study Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to provide insight into the lived experience of self-identified single, gay adoptive fathers. Specifically, the study explored: the development of the father identity and its relationship to the gay identity in single, gay adoptive fathers; the extent of role confusion and role strain (as defined in Chapter 2) in single gay men who are adoptive fathers; the sensemaking activities of participants; and their role integration activities. It was hoped that through this study, suggestions for the development of supportive policy, specialized services, and competent professional practice could be identified.

The results of the current study are expected to be a useful addition to the social work knowledge base. On a micro level, the results may help inform direct practitioners who are often responsible for making decisions regarding the fitness of gay men as fathers. The results may also be of interest to practitioners who work with the children of gay fathers, and are interested in gaining insight into the unique experiences of children raised in this particular family configuration. On a macro level, the results could be used by administrators who are working to develop programs whose goal is to support the continued development of gay fathers, or by policy makers who are interested in this specific group of gay fathers and their children. Finally, a copy of the study's results were distributed to all participants. In keeping with the empowering nature of qualitative

research, the study findings may present new insights to the group of fathers who participated in the study.

Relation to the Findings of Previous Studies

As the current study sought to expand the existing social science literature on gay fathers and adoption, it was designed after a thorough review of the existing literature was undertaken. As this is a relatively new area of inquiry, the majority of the literature reviewed was conceptual and theoretical. These sources, coupled with the existing empirical literature created the majority of literature review. The majority of the current study's findings are congruent with the findings of previous studies; while others present findings that suggest that the experiences of the current study's participants are unique. These findings have been categorized into three subsections, which include fatherhood, parenting, and adoption, and are presented below.

Fatherhood

First, literature that explored the experiences of fathers in American society was explored. These studies of presumably heterosexual fathers assisted in the development of the conceptual framework upon which the current study is built. A comparison of the current study's findings with these existing studies revealed both common and unique factors associated with fathering across different populations.

Motivation to parent was a topic that was explored with the current study's participants. The majority of participants spoke about their previous experiences with children, and their desire to provide a home for children in need. This finding has some commonality with a previous study. For example, Mackey, White, and Day (1992) explored the reasons that men choose to become fathers, and found six reasons that men

chose to parent. These reasons include: psychological, social, bloodline, accidents, economic, and other reasons. While there is certainly a psychological component that influences the motivation of the current study's participants, other factors, such as accidents and bloodline are obviously not factors that are shared with the current study's participants. Additionally, another study found that African American tended to see their role as a social one, by "providing children to those who want them" (Coney & Mackey, 1998, p. 177). While only one participant in the current study is African American, this was clearly not his motivation for parenting, nor would it be for the other study participants, regardless of ethnicity.

The transformational effects of parenting were topics of investigation in both the current study, and in a previous study. There were similarities in experience that crosses lines of sexual orientation, relationship status, and method of family building. The participants in the current study spoke about shifts in personal values, such as becoming more emotionally mature and responsible. These were also echoed in the findings of the comparison study (See Palkovitz & Palm, 1998).

Finally, the participants in the current study discussed the ways that their relationship with their own fathers had impacted their views on parenting. Unequivocally, each participant believes that their relationship with their own father has impacted their parenting style, either through positive or negative examples. This was similar to the experiences of participants in another study. Christiansen and Palkovitz (1998) explored men's experiences growing up with their families of origin as a foundation for predicting their involvement in parenting activities, and reported that the

quality of the father-son relationship impacted the participants' perceptions of their parental role.

A review of the historical and contemporary literature on gay fathers was also reviewed during the development of this study. There were similarities and unique experiences noted between the participants in the current study and those who participated in previous studies. The majority of these early studies centered on men who produced children through previous heterosexual relationships, and explored if and when the disclosure of the father's sexual orientation to his children was appropriate. (Bozett, 1980; Dunne, 1987; Harris & Turner, 1986; Miller, 1978; 1979a, 1979b; Wyers, 1987). Several of the current study's participants revealed that they had difficulty in determining if a formal coming out was necessary as these children have grown up with a parent who has an established gay identity. Others, specifically those who adopted older children, did wrestle with the most appropriate time to come out to children. Similar to the findings of other studies, the current study's participants felt that disclosure of sexual orientation was a necessity, and contributed positively to the family's functioning.

The participants in the current study also spoke on themes of personal growth. Specifically, through their narratives it is interpreted that being a single parent has put them in touch with their masculine and feminine side, as they undertake activities that are characteristic of both mothering and fathering behaviors. This theme is one that is found in other recent scholarship focusing on gay fathers as well (See Peterson, Butts, & Deville, 2000; Auerbach & Silverstein, 1999; Silverstein, 1996; Schacher, 2002)

There were also similarities noted around approach to parenting and parenting styles between the participants in the current study, and those gay fathers who have

previously been studied (See Bozett, 1993). This study's participants seemed to approach parenting from a nurturing position, were highly invested in their parental roles, and viewed their roles as fathers quite positively. Further, the current study's participants seemed to embody what Silverstein and Auerbach term degendered parenting (2001). This occurs through the deconstruction of socially prescribed roles, which the participants in the current study do either consciously, or out of necessity. By reconstructing these traditional parenting and gender roles, the current study's participants are contributing to transformation of the meanings of masculinity and femininity in American society.

Additionally, this study's participants discussed the ways that their relationships with their gay friends either ended or evolved as they assumed parenting roles. The majority of participants reported that they tend to socialize more with parents now, and have less free time to socialize with their gay friends who did not have children. This was similar to Green's (1999) experiences of becoming a parent. Perhaps because he came to parenthood through his partnership with a man who was already an adoptive parent, he felt the need to separate out his two primary roles: gay man and father. While he initially made efforts to keep these roles separate, he was able to integrate these seemingly mutually exclusive roles, and integrate his sexual orientation into his unique strengths as a parent, as well as incorporate personal characteristics that were enhanced by parenting into his role as a gay man. This was not an experience that was discussed by the current study's participants. However, this may be a function of being the primary adoptive parent, as opposed to joining an established family.

Finally, the participants in the current study indisputably expressed pride in their children and the families they have created, as well as expressed the idea that their bond

with and commitment to their child transcends biology. This was similar to the findings of Schacher (2002) who studied gay men who came to parenthood via a number of methods, such as surrogacy and adoption within same-sex relationships.

There was also another similarity between the current study's participants and those in Schacher's study. Over 82% (n = 13) of the current study's participants have adopted either transracially or transculturally. This was slightly higher than the demographic reported in the Schacher study, which indicate that over half of the men in her sample had adopted a child whose ethnicity was different than their own. While two studies does not present overwhelming evidence of the proportion of gay men who adopt children of a race or culture different than their own, it does provide further evidence of the transformative effects that gay fathers can have on society's conceptualization of kinship and family. Therefore, this is an area that should be the focus of future inquiry.

Parenting

The findings of the current study were also examined in relation to the findings of other works centering on two concepts: gay and lesbian parenting, and single parents. Through their descriptions and narratives, the study participants described their experiences in becoming parents. Overwhelming, they spoke of the purposeful planning and intentional activities that was involved in their decision to become adoptive parents. This finding was congruent with the results of another recent study focusing on gay and lesbian adoptive parents. Dalton and Bielby (2000) found that lesbian and gay men's journey to adoptive parenthood is a more deliberative and less socially scripted process in part due to a lack of access to the same institutional supports and social rituals as heterosexuals. This was also congruent with the experiences of several of the current

study's participants, who cited lack of support from friends and family as initial barriers to parenthood.

Lack of support from employers was also mentioned by several of the current study's participants. Specifically, they spoke about the ways that their willingness to perform overtime, work late, and work at home on the weekends and evenings has impacted their relationships with their employer. This was consistent with Miller's (1987) conclusions that women may encounter a work climate that is modeled on the patterns of men, with virtually no support for those who must maintain dual roles in both the family and work domains. While there are obvious gender differences, this suggests that experiences of single, gay adoptive fathers may be similar to that of single mothers in the workplace. The added complexity is that single fathers may also encounter this difficulty in that the established role expectations for male workers and the tasks associated with this identity have not been developed in a milieu that considers the need for a single male to actively participate in parenting tasks.

Because single parents are playing multiple disparate roles within the family, there is a need for well-developed support systems that may not be as crucial to the functioning of two-parent families. The work of Lindbald-Goldberg (1989) resulted in the development of characteristics of successful single parent families. While this work was based on single mother's experiences, they transfer to the current study's participants. For example, this study's participants displayed many of the characteristics identified by Lindbald-Goldberg, including: 1) more available personal resources, which enhances their coping effectiveness; 2) better family organization, which balances household responsibilities and decreases task overload; 3) a positive family concept,

which values loyalty, home-centeredness, consideration, communication, and closeness; 4) an ability to highlight positive events and place less emphasis on negative aspects of stressful events; and 5) possessing less stress-producing, supportive social networks. Finally, specific to the current study's participants was the impression that they seem to possess a sense of control over their own destiny and perceive themselves to be effectively dealing with pressures of a society that often does not support their decision to become adoptive parents.

Finally, a comparison of demographic data from national level data and the current study's participants yielded common and unique factors. For example, much like the children of the current study's participants, 40.6% of children who live with single fathers are living with never-married fathers (Fields & Casper, 2001). Additionally, while over 37% of the current study's participants were parenting more than one child, over 75% of single fathers in the US are raising one child. While a much more expansive study would be required, it may be that adoptive families headed by single gay fathers are more likely to adopt more than one child for a number of reasons, including as several participants mentioned adding a balance to the family, or having a sibling so that the child would not feel alone in the event of the death of the father.

Another area that differs by gender among single parents is with respect to the financial resources of the family. All of the current study's participants had income levels well above the poverty threshold, with several in excess of \$100,000 annually. This is congruent with the findings of Hilton, Desrochers, and Devall who found that single fathers had more education, more prestigious jobs, higher incomes, and less economic strain than single mother-headed families (2001).

Increased income and its impact on economic strain can be illustrated through its impact on the ability of the current study's participant to secure childcare. The average family utilizes about 8.7% of their income for child care. However, this share rises upwards of 25% for poor families (Shellenbarger, 2002). Because of this, some single parents are forced to secure unpaid arrangements, such as friends or neighbors, as alternatives to formal day care even though issues of disparity around the quality of care then become pertinent. None of the fathers in the current study explicitly mentioned difficulty in either securing, or affording childcare. In fact, several of the participants have in-home care for their children, and one participant was assisted through the efforts of a live-in nanny. This disparity may also be a function of comparing adoptive families headed by single, gay fathers that are required to provide proof that they are able to financially provide for the child prior to receiving a placement to single mothers, who may be separated or divorced, and who did not initially plan on being single parents.

Finally, while the current study's participants did not mention financial challenges, they did mention other difficulties, such as dating and the development of future romantic relationships. The same issues are mentioned in a book entitled *The daddy track and the single father* (Grief, 1990). Although this text was written for single fathers who are divorced, it covers some of the common issues faced by all single father-headed families, including childcare and dating. While there were elements of the text that did not speak to the experiences of the participants, such as visitation and joint custody, other topics such as dealing with the anxiety that many fathers feel when they decide to return to dating may be similar for all single fathers, regardless of sexual orientation.

Adoption

A comparison of the current's study results with existing data sources allowed for the identification of common and unique experiences. First, the majority of adoptive parents in the current study are Caucasian. This is similar to the data reported in the 2000 Census, which indicate that over 75% of adoptive families in the US are headed by Caucasian householders (Kreider, 2003). The current study's participants reported similar socioeconomic statuses of other adoptive parents in the US, with the majority having annual incomes of over \$50,000. However, there was a difference in the educational level of the current study's participants and statistics reported by the US Census data. According to the census data, approximately 33% of adoptive parents in the US have a bachelor's degree. In contrast, 75% of the current study's participants have graduated from college, with over half (53%) pursuing advanced degrees (MA, MS, PhD, and MD).

As previously noted, the current study's participants utilized a variety of type of adoption to build their families. Only a small minority of the participants mentioned having difficulty in locating an agency that was willing to work with them. This is consistent with a recent report from the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute which indicated that approximately 60% of adoption agencies in the United States accept applications from gays and lesbians (Brodzinsky, 2003). Several participants that did have difficulties with adoption agencies reported that the problems were tied to the religious affiliation of the agency. This is also consistent with the findings Brodzinsky, which reported that one-fifth of respondents cited religious or moral reasons for not placing children with gays and lesbians.

The study's results were also compared with existing data on adoption by single parents. The majority of the current study's participants fit the criteria for what Varon (2000) terms preferential adopters. This means that for most of the participants, adoption was a preferred method of family building. This study's participants also spoke of issues, such as time management, employment, and finances, that Varon identifies as issues of importance to all single parent headed adoptive families. Additionally, the study participants have had both positive and negative experiences with friends and family, and have seen significant shifts in the composition of support networks since becoming parents. These are also common issues amongst all single parents; however, there may be an added layer of complexity due to the controversial nature of gay and lesbian adoption.

Additionally, Groze and Rosenthal (1991) reported that the single parents they studied had a self-sufficient nature, were emotionally mature and possessed a high threshold for tolerating frustration, as well as possessed a low susceptibility to the prejudices and judgments of outsiders. These were characteristics that were also exhibited by the current study's participants.

Finally, there were several concepts that emerged from the current study that were not explored in previous works. First, several of this study's participants mentioned feeling like a part of mainstream society, or more acceptable since becoming parents. These feelings may have a significant impact on the development of their relationships with individuals outside of the family system. Every participant mentioned expansions in their support networks to include heterosexuals and other parents. Therefore, the

experience of parenting may serve to bridge the gaps of understanding and end the self-imposed isolation between the gay and non-gay individuals and communities.

Implications for Change

As noted in Chapter Four, some participants provided explicit suggestions that could be made by adoption professionals and/or social workers. While others did not speak directly to the needed changes in this system, they did shed light on some of the potential problem areas through their responses to interview questions. These suggested changes occur at the practice level, including professional practice with individuals, groups and families as well as changes that need to occur in larger systems, including at the governmental level.

Implications for Society and Larger Policies

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) allows eligible full-time employees of a covered employer (companies that employ more than 50 employees) to take job-protected, unpaid leave, or to substitute appropriate paid leave if the employee has earned or accrued it, for up to a total of 12 work weeks in any 12 months for several reasons. These reasons include the birth and care for a newborn child, the placement of a child with the employee for adoption or foster care, because the employee is needed to care for a family member (child, spouse, or parent) with a serious health condition, or because the employee's own serious health condition makes the employee unable to perform the functions of his or her job (US Department of Labor, 1995).

This leave is available to all employees regardless of gender. However, as evidenced by the remarks of several of the participants, there appears to be a gender-based difference in the expectations of an employee's utilization of this leave upon the

birth or adoption of a child. For example, one participant noted that he was nervous about asking for the time off, and another noted that he was not aware of any other male employee in his company ever utilizing this type of leave. Therefore, sensitivity training by human resource departments may counteract the negative perception that some employers have with respect to the use of this leave following an adoption.

Additionally, expansion of this legislation to include workers employed by organizations with fewer than 50 employees is warranted.

Discrimination in employment. According to a report published by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation entitled *The State of the Workplace 2003* (2004), “No federal law prohibits employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. As of December 31, 2003, 14 states and the District of Columbia had civil laws that protect all gay, lesbian and bisexual workers within their borders from employment-related discrimination. An additional 11 states prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in their public work forces” (p. 6). Therefore, half of the states in the US provide some level of protection from anti-gay job discrimination.

Clearly, these policies present a unique challenge and stressor for all gay and lesbian parents that reside in areas without legislation in place to protect them in the workplace. This may be especially true for single gay parents, as their ability to remain secure in their workplace may contribute significantly to their ability to care for themselves and their children. Therefore, advocacy efforts to extend job protection to all workers without regard to sexual orientation are needed.

Housing. There are no Federal laws in place to protect gays and lesbians from discrimination in securing or maintaining housing. The Fair Housing Act (Title VIII of

the Civil Rights Act of 1968) prohibits discrimination in the sale, rental, financing of or other housing-related transactions based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, family status or disability. But it does not protect people against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

However, this discrimination is prohibited by the state laws of approximately 25% of the states in the US. The following fourteen states and the District of Columbia have passed legislation that protects gay, lesbian and bisexual people from discrimination in housing: California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wisconsin (Human Rights Campaign, 2004, Discrimination in housing section).

While this is certainly a step in the right direction, those gay and lesbian parents who reside in the other 36 states in the United States still lack basic protection from housing discrimination under the law. This may be even more of a stressor for single parents who are solely responsible for securing housing for their families. This stress may also be compounded by individuals' knowledge that they could be denied the opportunity to secure housing, or removed from their current housing, based solely on their sexual orientation.

Finally, the study participants' ability to partner with the person of their choice and enter a sanctioned relationship that affords them equal access to the rights and responsibilities of marriage is not assured by any Federal law. However, as this is being written, Massachusetts is just 48 hours from issuing its first marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples.

Adoption. As is the case with most periods of rapid advances of social thought in American society, there are attempts to undermine the recent progress made by gays and lesbians by introducing and passing divisive, exclusionary public policy that hurts not only gays and lesbians, but also their children. For example, the Oklahoma legislature recently passed a bill declaring that the state and “any of its agencies, or any court of this state shall not recognize an adoption by more than one individual of the same sex from any other state or foreign jurisdiction” (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2004, News and views section). This legislation puts the adopted children of gay and lesbians couples at risk by not legally recognizing one of their parents. Additionally, this bill not only has ramifications for residents of Oklahoma, but also those who are visitors to the state. For example, if a single adoptive parent enters a relationship and allows their partner to adopt their child, this family would be at-risk if they chose to travel through Oklahoma. While in the state, the second-parent adoption would not be recognized, which puts the family in jeopardy by not allowing the second-parent to make emergency decision regarding the care of their child, even though they have been declared a legal parent by a court in their home state.

As described in Chapter Two, Florida is one of only three states in the United States that have excluded gays and lesbians from adopting. Florida’s policy is the most restrictive and bars all gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals, either coupled or single from adopting. Clearly, overturning this legislation should be a priority. This may serve as a catalyst for increased acceptance and legitimization for gay adoptive families living in Florida, who currently can only build adoptive families via international adoption.

Other policies affecting gays and lesbians. There are also other state measures that have ramifications for all groups of gays and lesbians, including single parents. For example, the Virginia legislature recently passed a bill that strips private contractual rights between same-sex couples by outlawing any partnership contract or other arrangements that purport to provide the benefits of marriage. This bill will be enacted on July 1, 2004, and will deprive gay and lesbian Virginians of some of the few choices that they currently have to protect their families including: advanced medical directives, custody decisions and arrangements, health insurance coverage, and estate planning and wills (Equality Virginia, 2004, News and press releases section). Additionally, because of the broad language used in this bill, a multitude of unintended consequences have been created. For example, it may be possible for the custody arrangements of a single, gay adoptive father to be challenged if he granted custody of his minor children to another male in the event of his death.

Changes in Federal and state policies have the potential to change the way that individuals, both lay and professional, and organizations view adoptive families headed by single gay fathers. Striking down these divisive policies may also have the added benefit of changing society's perceptions of gays and lesbians. This may create greater acceptance of single, gay adoptive fathers and their families, thus reducing the amount of stigmatization and marginalization they experience. The end result of this could be a more just society that makes the protection of its children a priority, without regard to the sexual orientation of their parent(s).

Implications for the Gay and Lesbian Community

Based on the analysis of the current study's data, it is apparent that the transition to parenthood generally has an impact on the level of participation in events in the gay community. These decreased levels of participation may contribute to feelings of marginalization and stigmatization for some single, gay adoptive fathers. Additionally, while single, gay adoptive fathers may participate less in organized advocacy-oriented events after becoming parents, it is important to recognize that by making the transition to parenthood these individuals are undertaking a different form of advocacy. By simply living their lives, and being visible within their community, single, gay adoptive fathers are challenging negative stereotypes about gay men and helping to create change. This type of advocacy could be further supported by gay and lesbian organizations through the development of advocacy trainings and educational materials designed to assist these parents in making effective contributions on a grassroots level within their community.

The voices of this study's participants may also serve as the basis for developing an awareness of the diversity that exists within the gay community. For example, while all of the national gay and lesbian organizations have parenting initiatives, these initiatives may not be perceived as being inclusive of all types of gay-headed families. By including the experiences of the current study's participants, programming that is more inclusive of the experiences of gay male single parents by choice can be developed. For example, while gay and lesbian organizations have made great strides to include adoptive families in their general parenting discussions, it is clear that the majority of participants in the current study do not access these services, as they do not feel included as single parents. This is also true with respect to the impact of gender in gay and lesbian

parenting support groups. Several of the participants noted that they do not access these support services as they tend to be dominated by females, and thus exclude the unique experiences of being a single, gay male who is also a primary caregiver in American society. By widening the scope of programming initiatives and policy advocacy to include the voices of single, gay adoptive fathers, gay and lesbian organizations can provide a positive example of inclusion to the larger gay community and to society in general about the viability of all family forms.

Additionally, it is clear that many participants in the current study have a desire to participate in events in the gay community, but have a reluctance to do so because of the perception of these events as not being family-friendly. For example, organizers of Pride Festivals and marches must be cognizant of the placement of parenting groups within the structure of parades, and of the content of vendor booths, or have designated family-friendly areas. While censoring the free expression of all members of the gay and lesbian community is not suggested, events should be planned with knowledge that there are a number of gays and lesbians who are parenting young children that would like to participate, but who also have a responsibility to shelter their children from adult-oriented expressions and displays. Additionally, events and activities for the gay and lesbian community, such as support groups and churches would become more accessible by single, gay adoptive parents if childcare was offered, as well as by offering these activities and services at times that make attendance by all gays and lesbians possible, including those single parents who do not have access to childcare.

Implications for Organizations and Professionals

While the experiences of single, gay adoptive families are important to a number of organizations and professionals, the focus of the following section is on Health and Human Service Organizations as these organizations are largely responsible for the development and maintenance of adoptive families headed by single, gay fathers. The implications for change on the part of professionals are explicated using the social work professional as a referent. This is because professional social workers comprise the majority of helping professionals directly involved in the development and stabilization of adoptive families headed by single, gay fathers.

Health and Human Service Organizations

It is clear from the data collected in the current study that single, gay adoptive fathers utilize a variety of methods of adoption to build their families, and have had both positive and negative encounters with these organizations. A contributing factor toward these experiences may be related to the organization's level of development of formal policies that guide its work. Without the support of comprehensive legislation or universal standards of adoption practices, agencies are empowered to develop their own policies, as long as they meet the basic operating standards set forth by the licensing agencies responsible for their oversight. In light of the diversity that exists among service providers, there are number of general recommendations that can be offered to support the needs of all prospective and established adoptive families. These recommendations are even more pertinent for agencies who work with single, gay men who are adoptive parents or who wish to adopt as they may experience discrimination for multiple reasons including sexual orientation, gender, and relationship status.

First, agencies can undertake an evaluation of their own policies to ensure they conform to the current interpretations of state and federal policies that impact all types of adoptions. The most common difficulty encountered by participants in the current study was the subjective lens through which formal agency policies or legislation was interpreted. On one occasion, a prospective father was misinformed by an adoption agency that it was illegal for single men to adopt. Another incident involved the agency's unclear policy surrounding its ability to place children with gays and lesbians because of its affiliation with a faith-based agency.

Child-placing agencies also commonly rely on contract workers to complete pre-adoptive assessments as well as post-placement adoptive reports. Many times, these workers are independent contractors, and as such, they may rely on their own interpretation of agency or legislative policy to guide their work. This uneven application of agency policy may create ambiguity with respect to the requirements for becoming approved as an adoptive parent.

This ambiguity may be further exacerbated by the lack of formal written policy that directs agency workers on how to respond to inquiries from all prospective adopters, including single gay men. For example, a number of participants mentioned that the adoption agencies and social workers that are employed by them work from an informal policy of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." This type of policy encourages errors of omission, and does not provide agency staff with clear guidance on how they are expected to work with prospective adoptive parents who are gay or lesbian. Furthermore, while sexual orientation has not been proven to have a negative impact on an individual's ability to be an effective parent, it does have an impact on the environment and context in which the

family will exist. By encouraging prospective adopters to refrain from disclosing their sexual orientation, organizations are failing to fully investigate the readiness of gays and lesbians to adopt, as well as missing the opportunity to explore the ways in which the prospective parent's experiences as a gay or lesbian person may help them better understand the experiences of their adopted children.

To ensure that the agency's policies are evenhandedly applied, in-service trainings can be utilized as an educative tool. These trainings may include dissemination of agency and legislative policy as it relates to approving prospective adoptive parents. Another topic that should be covered with all agency staff is the development and dissemination of standardized expectations, activities, and documentation required for the successful completion of a home study or post-placement adoptive reports. Finally, agency staff may also benefit from training that sensitizes them to the unique challenges faced by gay and lesbian adoptive parents and their children. By developing and implementing agency-sponsored training programs, child-placing agencies and organizations that provide supportive services can ensure that they are providing an environment that encourages fairness on the part of workers, and honesty by prospective gay and lesbian adoptive parents.

The Profession of Social Work and Social Workers

As a profession, social work has a commitment to the promotion of social and economic justice. Ambrosino, Heffernan, Shuttlesworth, and Ambrosino (2001) define social and economic justice as encompassing "fairness and equity in regard to basic civil and human rights, protections, resources and opportunities, and social benefits" (p. 78). They further posit that social workers make strides toward achieving this mission by

“working to expand individual access to resources and opportunities at all levels of the environment...” (p. 79). These levels include the individual and family level, the community level, as well as the governmental level, which encompasses the political and legislative systems.

Additionally, social work’s commitment to social justice is explicated in the National Association of Social Worker’s Code of Ethics (National Association of Social Workers, 1996). Through this mandated commitment to advancing social justice among disadvantaged and disenfranchised populations, social workers are uniquely situated to attend to the needs of single, gay adoptive fathers.

As social workers are unique individuals with diverse life experiences and value systems, it is likely that they will encounter issues that cause a conflict between personal and professional value systems. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) recognizes the impact of these differing value systems, and has developed a series of policy statements regarding expectations for professional practice with a variety of populations, including gays and lesbians. The statement that focuses on gays and lesbians explains that as a profession, social work is committed to working toward building a society where all people are accepted as equals without regard to their sexual orientation. It also affirms that lesbian and gay individuals are entitled to the rights of self-determination, self-definition, and self-expression, as long as the rights of others are not infringed (Adoption Education Center, 2004). Examples of activities that are pertinent to single, gay adoptive fathers and their children, and that can be undertaken in support of this policy statement include: developing and sponsoring educational programs designed to train social workers in the area of human sexuality, including the

needs of the lesbian and gay parents and their children. It is also recommended that Schools of Social Work expand the inclusion of lesbian and gay issues in their curricula with a specific focus on the impact of sexual orientation on parenting abilities, and the development of children who have gay and/or lesbian parents. Furthermore, it is recommended that institutions of higher education develop nondiscrimination policies that are inclusive of sexual orientation as well as develop benefits programs that include domestic partners of lesbian and gay male faculty and staff. These institutional policies would set an example for the expected treatment of gay students and staff members. Finally, additional research into all areas related to the lives of gays and lesbians is needed. This would prove especially beneficial if it focused on the continued development of culturally-competent direct and indirect practice activities, as well as theory and policy development that is inclusive of the experiences of single, gay adoptive fathers.

As previously noted, there is often a collision of personal and professional value systems when dealing with controversial subject matter, such as the adoption of minor children by single gay men. However, there are also occasions where there are value conflicts between organizations representing the social work profession. One issue over which this conflict occurs is transracial adoption.

As noted in Chapter Four, the majority of participants are parenting children of color. Because these study participants, as well as other prospective single gay adoptive fathers may be more likely to adopt transracially, this puts them on a collision course with some professional groups, including the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW). At the 1972 national conference of the North American Council on

Adoptable Children, the NABSW issued a formal position opposing transracial adoption. They cited concerns that the placement of children of color in white homes compromised the child's racial and cultural identity, amounting to a form of cultural genocide. They further expressed concern that black children raised in white homes would fail to develop effective coping strategies to deal with racism and discrimination, and would experience subsequent identity conflicts as they grew older (PBS, 2004, Adoption history: Transracial adoption section). While there is no existing empirical evidence to support this claim, there is still the potential for further stigmatization of single, gay men who have adopted transracially from within the social work profession by those who adopt the position explicated by the NABSW. Therefore, specialized education of social workers is warranted as are longitudinal research projects that explore the impact of transracial adoption and include single, gay adoptive fathers in their samples. Finally, as there are additional stressors associated with parenting transracially, the need for affirmative and inclusive support services becomes even more important.

Direct practice. Johnson and Yanca (2004) describe direct social work practice as interactions that are “focused on change in either the transactions within the family or small-group system or in the manner in which individuals, families, or small groups function in relation to persons and societal institutions in their environment” (p. 255). As this is a broad definition, there are a number of different categories under which direct practice action falls. The ones most relevant to social workers’ interactions with single, gay adoptive fathers are actions to enable the development of an understanding of the person in environment and actions taken to support the social functioning of the individual (Johnson & Yanca).

First, social workers undertake actions to enable the development of an understanding of the person in environment. Most commonly, prospective adoptive fathers seek out the services of a social worker to conduct the homestudy, or pre-adoptive assessment. The activities and personal interviews associated with this assessment present a number of opportunities for the social worker to explore the unique strengths and characteristics of the individual. They also present the opportunity for a conflict between personal and professional value systems. Thus, it is important for social workers to make strides towards increasing their self-awareness.

According to the US Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (2000), social workers need to answer the following questions to ensure they are making sound placement decisions that are in the best interest of the child(ren): “Is this person or couple caring, nurturing, and sensitive to others? Do they have the qualities needed to parent a child? What are their individual strengths and weaknesses? How do their strengths/weaknesses compliment the needs of the child? Do they have the capacity to nurture a child not born to them?” (Placement decisions sect.).

By asking these questions and exploring the potential of each prospective adoptive family, social workers are provided with a means by which they can ensure that they do not limit gay male and lesbian prospective adoptive families’ placement options by only presenting children who are difficult to place. This was the experience of several of the study participants, who reported that workers seemed to only want to place older children with multiple disabilities with them. Roberta Achtenberg, as cited by the US Department of Health and Human Services (2000), confirms the experiences of the current study’s participants are not an anomaly. She concludes that there is an unspoken

ranking within the adoption network. She further noted: "The hierarchy prefers white, married, middle or upper middle class couples, and these couples don't want the special needs kids. The less preferred children then go to unmarried couples of all kinds, single individuals, and gay people. The children are less preferred, and the recipients are less preferred" (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2000, Agency Preference sect.).

Additionally, social workers must be aware of the theories that guide their practice. They should utilize theories that incorporate the experiences of gay men and lesbians, or that at a minimum acknowledge that there are unique factors associated with possessing a gay or lesbian sexual orientation. Using these types of theories allows for the individualization of the prospective parent, and does not evaluate them through a lens that did incorporate their unique experiences when it was developed. One of these theories might be Troiden's theory of identity development for gays and lesbians (See Troiden, 1989). This stage model captures the identity development of gays and lesbians using four stages that include: sensitization, identify confusion, identity assumption, and commitment (Troiden). This theory would be preferable for use in understanding the identity development of a gay man as opposed to a more global theory, such as Erickson's theory of psychosocial development. Another issue to consider is the use of theories that are based on the assumption that a two-parent household is the ideal situation in which to raise children. While there are no specialized theories that explain the life courses of single gay parents by choice, some general life cycle theories, such as the one explicated in *The expanded family life cycle* (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999) do

include a number of realities and perspectives, including gay parents and single parents, into their folds.

Social workers can also benefit by using specialized theories to understand the continuing development of adoptive families headed by single gay men. For example, as adoptive families develop differently than biological families, using the adoption life cycle (See Rosenberg, 1992) would be preferable to using general family life cycle theories as there are unique factors associated with adoptive families. Therefore, using culturally-sensitive theories will provide a lens through which social workers can evaluate the potential of prospective adoptive parents in a manner that does not discount their ability to be effective parents by evaluating them using theories that are not inclusive of their experiences.

Direct social work practice also involves social workers taking action to support the social functioning of the client system with which they are working. As evidenced by several of the participants' remarks, some single, gay adoptive fathers experience stigmatization and feelings of isolation that they associate with their choice to become parents. This clearly leads to decreased social functioning of the individual and may also have an impact on the family system. Social workers can help alleviate this stress by becoming knowledgeable of available support services, and providing referrals to individuals who are experiencing these feelings. However, as evidenced by the remarks of several of the current study's participants, some fathers may be hesitant to become involved with services, such as support groups or counseling, if these services do not provide an outlet for them to share their unique experiences in a place where they feel understood. Therefore, social workers must consider the organizational values systems

of service providers to whom they refer gay and lesbian clients. It is important that social workers recognize that while these services may be beneficial to the client system, they are of limited use if they are provided in ways that are not empowering or affirmative.

A final aspect of direct social work practice is an extension of the broker role, and involves program planning and implementation. As social work has a rich history of collaboration and coordination, if there are no existing services to which to refer a client system, social workers and other human service professionals can implement programming to meet these needs. Through their affiliations with agencies and organizations, social workers have the capability to design new programming or develop adjunctive support services that meet the unique needs of single gay men who chose to build their families through adoption. However, social workers should resist the urge to match or link services based solely on sexual orientation as it was evident in this study's findings that individuals, for the most part, do not require that support services be designed specifically for gay men to find them useful. Therefore, referrals to a gay men's support group might be of less interest to some individuals than a support group for parents that is inclusive of all types of families.

Indirect (Macro) practice. Indirect practice involves actions taken with persons other than clients, but that are still directed at helping clients (Johnson & Yanca, 2004). Like direct practice actions, these activities may be undertaken with individuals, families, small groups, organizations, or communities.

Indirect practice is also commonly referred to as macro social work practice, which is defined as "professionally guided intervention designed to bring about planned change in organizations and communities" (Netting, Kettner, & McMurtry, 1998, p. 6).

One of the most common and well-explicated methods of bringing about this planned change is through the use of policy practice. Policy practice is defined by Jansson (1999) as “efforts to change policies in legislative, agency, and community settings, whether by establishing new policies, improving existing ones, or defeating the policy initiatives of other people” (p.10). Additionally, the author also provides a rationale for involvement of social workers in policy practice that is directly tied to professional values that “lie at the heart of social work and that are codified in the profession’s code of ethics, such as social justice, fairness, self-determination, and confidentiality” (p. 3).

Schneider and Lester (2001) posit that many professionally trained social workers do not feel as though they are well-equipped to become involved in the political or legislative system. However, social workers are uniquely trained to look at the person within his/her environment, as well as to think systemically. These skills provide social workers with a unique perspective that might be overlooked by traditional political or legislative professionals. Additionally, no specialized skills are needed to tell a personal story. In this way, social workers use their personal experiences in working with single, gay adoptive fathers to provide education to those who do not have such experience, while at the same time working toward promoting a more just society through the development of inclusive and fair public policies that do not stigmatize or marginalize.

In addition to being directly involved with the development and implementation of public policy, social workers can also engage in indirect practice activities in the agencies where they are employed. These can be done through formal efforts, such as through the development of in-service trainings where social workers can share their personal experiences, as well as disseminate research findings to other agency personnel.

They can also indirectly assist clients by educating other agencies, such as schools and the faith-based community with whom they work on a regular basis. These advocacy efforts may be focused on creating change on an individual level through one-on-one interaction, or they may take the form of planning a panel of speakers, or volunteering to serve on a panel for adoption-related discussions.

Implications for Future Studies and Researchers in the Area

Related Areas of Research

The current research project has provided a foretaste into the life experiences of a population that was previously unstudied. Since this was an exploratory inquiry, it has served to generate areas of future inquiry related to this population, as well as populations with similar characteristics. These related areas for future research include inquiry on the development of children raised by single, gay adoptive fathers; the characteristics of adoption agencies that place children with gay men; the life experiences of birth mothers who chose to place their children with gay men; and the experiences of single, gay men who are parenting children through informal adoptions, or relative placements. As previously noted, the majority of participants in the current study are parenting children of color. Further inquiry into the development of transracial adoptive families headed by gays and lesbians is warranted. Finally, a formal inquiry designed to understand the development and maintenance of support networks may provide beneficial information about the role that family and friends play in the lives of single parents by choice.

Additionally, during the recruitment phase of the study, the researcher was contacted by numerous individuals who were not parents, but were interested in adopting and trying to learn more about the process. These contacts provided evidence of an

interest in adoption by this population. As these prospective parents were receptive to this study's advertisement, a longitudinal study that follows participants as they attempt adoptions and make the transition to parenthood may provide additional insight into the common and unique factors of adoptive families, specifically those headed by single gay men. Specifically, this type of inquiry could shed light on the ways that single parents change roles in response to how their adopted children develop, as well as provide insight into what and who influences the role development and acquisition process as both parents and individuals.

Finally, as many gay men who chose to adopt as single parents come to parenthood later than many of their peers, another area that deserves further study is the future plans of this population. Of specific interest are their plans for ongoing care of their children, and available supports in the event of death or disablement. A better understanding of other plans, such as wills, guardianship agreements, and financial planning would also further knowledge in this area.

Study Methods

Research Roles. Qualitative research is steeped in a tradition that views individuals who participate in research projects as participants or collaborators, and not merely research subjects. What follows out of this tradition is the tendency of qualitative researchers to develop close relationships with participants that are time-limited and professional in nature.

To this end, the current study was designed to involve participants as collaborators throughout the process. They were part of the recruitment effort, as well as served as member checkers to ensure that the results accurately encapsulated their

experiences. Additionally, including participants as collaborators is of paramount importance when conducting research with individuals who have historically been marginalized and stigmatized. The act of participating in this type of research can be empowering as some of the participants have very few outlets in which someone is interested in hearing their story, or takes their experiences seriously. The decision to participate can also have indirect benefits, such as an increased level of self-awareness. Throughout the interview process, several of the participants mentioned that a particular question was a good one, and that it caused them to think about things they had never thought of before. For example, several participants made connections between the similarities around coming out as a gay person and coming out as an adopted person. The interview process provided them with the opportunity to ruminate, and begin thinking of ways that their own experiences may also encourage their children's development.

As noted in the results section in Chapter Four, it is unclear whether the sexual orientation or parenting status of a researcher significantly impacts the level of participation in this type of study. In the current study, the majority of the participants inquired as to whether the researcher was also gay, or an adoptive parent. Therefore, when direct questions were asked, they were answered truthfully. This disclosure serves several purposes. First, it may be the information that becomes a motivating factor for participation. It may also lead to increased feelings of comfort on the part of the participant. The increased comfort level seemed to allow the individuals to share their experiences freely. However, the researcher must plan to seek clarification as some participants will make assumptive statements, such as "you know how people are" or

“You know how that is.” With the increased level of self-disclosure on the part of the researcher, it is of paramount importance to have components in place, such as a peer debriefer and an outside auditor, which ensure the rigorous nature of the inquiry.

Finally, the investment of the participants in the study was quite evident. They inquired as to where the results would be published, and when they would be able to see them. Many of the participants noted that they were excited to see this type of study being conducted. They discussed the numerous places they had looked for information when they first started the adoption process, and how they hoped to make the process a little easier for others that will follow in their footsteps. Therefore, particular attention must be paid to where the study’s results will be disseminated. While traditional publication methods such as scholarly journals and contributions to textbooks will reach an academic and/or professional audience, attention should also be given to how prospective parents will be able to benefit from the inquiry. A comprehensive dissemination plan should also include publicly available web-based resources, newsletters, and conferences for prospective adoptive parents. It is through these dissemination methods that other prospective parents become empowered by the knowledge that others have shared their experiences.

Sampling Strategies. As explicated in Chapter Three, the difficulty of recruiting minority populations for research studies is well-documented. In order to recruit individuals for the current study, the researcher used a variety of methods, including posting information on web-based communities, snowball sampling techniques, and by making contact with individual adoption agencies that have demonstrated openness to placing children with gays and lesbians.

The most successful strategy for recruitment in this study was advertising on the internet. All participants initially expressed interest in participating in the study through an email to the researcher. These initial emails offered the opportunity for the prospective participants to ask questions of the researcher, as well as provided the researcher with the ability to immediately respond to their inquiries. This ability to maintain consistent communication with the participants positively impacted the researcher's ability to sustain their interest in participation. To this end, all study participants who made an initial inquiry, and met the study criteria ultimately followed through and completed an interview.

Gays and lesbians and other marginalized populations often depend on informal support networks to gain information and access services. I found this to be especially true with gay and lesbian adoption, as this often requires individuals to seek out others who have been through the adoption process to learn about which agencies and social workers are open to working with gays and lesbians, as well as to learn about the potential obstacles that are presented by various state and federal legislation.

These existing informal networks served as a source for new participants during the recruitment phase of the study. Each participant was asked if they knew others who met the inclusion criteria, and would be interested in participating. Over one-third of the participants were identified through these snowball sampling techniques. As evident in the success of this method, it is very likely that participants will know others who meet the criteria for participation.

Another strategy used with minimal success was the use of adoption agencies to identify potential participants. One participant was located through this recruitment

method. There are no definitive answers as to why this strategy was only minimally successful. However, it may be because many agencies have historically operated on the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” philosophy. Therefore, while agency workers may have hunches about the sexual orientation of its adoptive parents, they may not be willing to make assumptions by informing them about the study, or forwarding recruitment materials from the researcher. On the occasion where a referral was made in this study, there was an existing personal and professional relationship between the adoption agency and the researcher. These personal relationships, or the affiliation with a specific adoption agency, may serve as mediating factors that influence an agency’s willingness to assist in the recruitment of study participants.

Due to the success of the previously mentioned recruitment methods, other potential methods were planned, but not executed. For example, publications in gay and lesbians newspapers may generate interest in the study. These may be in the form of paid advertisements, or also appear as short articles discussing a new research study that is being conducted. Another avenue that was not explored was the use of print advertising in magazines, such as *Adoptive Families*, which is geared to the general adoption community, and *And Baby Magazine*, which is a monthly magazine for gay and lesbian parents. A final strategy for recruitment is linking with national organizations. To some degree, the majority of the national gay and lesbian organizations have parenting and family initiatives. Making contacts within these organizations, and developing agreements to advertise to their membership bases may increase interest in the study on a national level.

Finally, researchers should be cognizant of the verbiage used in advertisements. For example, the term gay means different things to different people. Some people of color do not identify as gay, as this is a construct that is sometimes associated with white middle-class men. One response to this may be to seek the input and assistance of those knowledgeable with the target community in developing culturally and linguistically appropriate recruitment materials.

Technology. In recent history, technology has been advancing at a rapid pace. These technological advances are providing exciting and innovative means for recruiting and collecting data from populations that have historically been hard to reach, or are spread across large geographic areas.

As noted in a previous section, the majority of the study participants were recruited using the internet. Most of these participants were recruited from web-based communities designed for gay and lesbian parents, such as Proud Parenting (www.proudparenting.com), or from listservs such as the Gay-AParent list operated through St. John's University (<http://maelstrom.stjohns.edu/CGI/wa.exe?SUBED1=gay-arent&A=1>). These internet-based resources allow members to share experiences, seek guidance, and exchange resources with others who have similar experiences, and by doing so, create new ways for often marginalized individuals to seek out and develop supportive relationships with their peers.

A number of large web-based services, such as Yahoo! and MSN (Microsoft Network) allow individuals to develop groups of interest to the many different populations. These groups can be either private or available to the general public. As part of this study, I developed a private group for study participants. A number of

participants asked if I could start an informal email group so that participants could link directly to other participants. However, due to confidentiality restrictions imposed by the Institutional Review Board that oversees ethics in research, I was unable to do so. To meet the needs of study participants, I set up a private, voluntary group and restricted access to only individuals whose email addresses matched those in my participant records. I then sent an email to all participants informing them of the existence of the group. They had the choice to join, as well as were given the opportunity to join anonymously. Once a member of this private group, they were free to post messages to other members, and then made their own decisions about disclosing identifying information to other participants. This group also served as a place to electronically post the findings of the study so that all members had access to the entire dissertation without the added cost of duplication and postage associated with traditional information dissemination methods.

Finally, while all data were collected using telephone interviews, new technology will allow for real-time video conferencing that provides researchers with environmental and non-verbal data that can not be captured using standard telephone interviews. While technology is continuously expanding researchers' options for recruitment and data collection, it must be noted that these advances will only be beneficial for reaching those who are technologically savvy. If researchers overly rely on the web-based tools for recruitment or data collection when designing future studies, those without home computers, access to the internet, or without knowledge of these emerging technologies will continue to be an untapped well of knowledge and life experience.

Conclusion

This research study was a phenomenological inquiry that utilized individual ethnographic interviews as the primary method of data collection to explore the lived experience of sixteen single, gay adoptive fathers. This study was designed to assist in expanding the state of the literature base by exploring the collective experiences of single, gay adoptive fathers. Additionally, it contributes to the existing knowledge of fatherhood in general, as well as provides an introduction to both the unique and common life experiences of gay men who become single fathers by choice.

The results of this study are a useful addition to the social work knowledge base. On a micro level, the results may be useful for direct practitioners who are often responsible for making decisions regarding the fitness of gay men as fathers. The results may also be of interest to practitioners who work with the children of gay fathers, and are interested in gaining insight into the unique experiences of children raised in this particular family configuration. The results of the inquiry may also be useful to adoption professionals, who are responsible for conducting home studies, as well as for making placement decisions. The results may help educate these workers on the capabilities and unique strengths of single gay fathers, and further open doors to recruitment with this population, which ultimately benefits the children in need of homes. On a macro level, the results may be useful to administrators who are working to develop programs whose goal is to support the continued development of gay fathers, or by policy makers who are interested in this specific group of gay fathers and their children.

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Interview Guide

(Consistent with the qualitative interview process, these questions are subject to change as new concepts are identified throughout the data collection period)

Coming Out

At what age did you come out to yourself?

At what age did you come out friends?

At what age did you come out to your family?

Decision to parent

At what point in your life did you know that you wanted to parent?

How much time elapsed between the time that you decided you wanted to parent, and the initiation of the adoption process?

How did you come to the decision that you wanted to adopt as a single man?

How old were you at the age you adopted your first child?

Discourse on Parenting

How do you think you learned what it means to be a 'good father' (innate, media, books, role models)?

Tell me about some of the people in your life that have influenced the type of parent you want to be?

Are any of those people single or gay?

Family creation

How did you come to decide to adopt?

How did you come to the decision to adopt through a particular method (IE: fost/adopt, agency/parental placement, international)

How did you determine what characteristics you were looking for in a child (IE; age, ethnicity, gender, special needs)?

Please describe your first contact with the agency(ies) that handled your adoption?

At what in the process did you disclose your sexual orientation to the agency workers?

Are the laws in your state supportive of adoption by gay men and lesbians?

Have any policies served as barriers to you adopting? If so, how did you navigate the system, and manage to adopt?

Have you discussed your sexual orientation with your child? If so, how did you approach it, and if not, how and when do you plan to?

Needed services and changes to the adoption system

In what ways was the agency most helpful to you?

In what ways, if any was the adoption process was complicated by your sexual orientation?

How could the system better support single gay men who wish to adopt?

Effects of the child(ren) on relationships in non-gay communities

In what ways has your decision to parent altered your relationships with your family?

In what ways has your decision to parent altered your relationships with your heterosexual friends?

Has your decision to parent altered your relationship with your employer?

How do you handle matters of relationship status and sexual orientation when interacting with other parents?

I would guess that there have been times when people have not been supportive of your decision to adopt. What are your experiences about that?

Effects of the child(ren) on relationships within the gay community

Do you know other gay fathers? Single gay fathers?

Tell me about the kinds of interaction that you have with them.

How have your relationships with your gay friends changed since you became a father?

How has having a child impacted your participation in the gay community?

Have you received negative feedback regarding your decision to be a parent from members of the gay community?

Parenting

Tell me about the ways that your life has changed since becoming a parent?

What is the most rewarding aspect of parenting?

Tell me about the challenges of being a single parent?

Do you think that any of your life experiences as a gay man will assist you in helping your child as he/she navigates life as a person who is adopted?

Some people that do not support adoption by gay men and lesbians say that a child needs both a male and female presence in the household; what are your thoughts about this?

Has having children changed the characteristics you would look for in a potential partner?

If you decided to become involved in a relationship, what role would you see that person as playing in your child's life? and how would you make that decision?

Self Disclosure

Would the researchers disclosure that he/she is gay or lesbian have an impact on your decision to participate in this type of research?

Would the researcher's disclosure that he is also an adoptive parent have an effect on your decision to participate in this type of research?

We have covered a lot of ground in this interview. What else do I need to know to help me understand your experiences as a single, gay adoptive parent?

ARE YOU A SINGLE, GAY ADOPTIVE FATHER?

You are invited to participate in a study designed to explore the life experiences of single gay men who are adoptive fathers. **In order to be eligible, you must be at least 21 years old and actively parenting an adopted child (ages 0-18). You must have been single at the initiation of the adoption process, as well at the time of placement of the child in your home.** This study is being conducted by John Matthews, a Ph.D. candidate in social work at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. John is involved with the gay community and has experience working with adoptive parents.

The study will involve one audio-taped telephone interview that will last 1 to 1 ½ hours. Questions will focus on the rewards, strain, and role changes involved in being a single adoptive father.

There will be no reimbursement for participation, although the information you provide may benefit others by enabling social scientists to learn more about single, gay adoptive fathers and minority families in general.

ALL INFORMATION WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

If you are interested in participating in the study, or would like more information about the study, please contact John Matthews at 804-986-4275, or via electronic mail at jdmattthews@mail1.vcu.edu, or the study's faculty supervisor, Dr. Elizabeth Cramer at ecramer@mail1.vcu.edu

Please leave a message if no one answers the telephone.

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

TITLE: An exploratory inquiry into the meaning of fatherhood for single, gay adoptive fathers

VCU IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER:

CO-INVESTIGATORS:

Elizabeth Cramer, MSW, PhD, Associate Professor, Richmond, VA campus
John Matthews, MSW, LSW-P, Doctoral Student, Richmond, VA campus

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

The purpose of this research study is to learn about the different ways that single, gay adoptive fathers conceptualize their role as a parent, and the ways that they manage multiple identities.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you self-identify as a gay man who is an adoptive father, and was single at the time of adoption.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT:

If you decide to be in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form after you have had all your questions answered.

In this study you will be asked to participate in one interview with the researcher. These interviews will last approximately one to one and a half hours and will be conducted on the telephone. During the interview, you will be asked questions relating to the reason that you decided to parent, the reaction of your family and friends about your decision to parent, your experiences with adoption agency staff, and your experiences as a father. The interviews will be audio taped and assigned a unique identification number to ensure that no identifying information will be revealed in the final research product.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:

There is the risk that the interview process may create psychological risks or discomforts. You may feel a loss of privacy or exposure as a member of a stigmatized group. There are political risks since highlighting these issues raises the slight possibility that the results of this study may be used in a manner unfavorable to the gay and lesbian community or to single gay men who wish to adopt.

You do not have to talk about any subjects you do not want to talk about, and you can stop the interview at any time. A referral for psychological counseling will be made

available to you if our discussion leads you to feel that would be useful to you or your family.

BENEFITS:

This is not a treatment study, and you are not expected to receive any direct medical benefits from your participation. However, you may contribute to knowledge that may be used to shape legal and social policy discussions about single, gay adoptive fathers and adoption by sexual minority families in general.

COSTS:

There are no costs for participating in this study other than the time you will spend in the interview.

ALTERNATIVES:

This is not a treatment study. Your alternative is not to participate in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

In order to minimize the risks associated with this research study, all information you provide will be regarded as highly confidential and will be used only in ways that preserve its confidentiality. We will not tell anyone the answers you give the researcher, however, information from the study and the consent form signed by you may be looked at or copied for research or legal purposes by the Department of Health and Human Services agencies, and Virginia Commonwealth University. The audio tapes of the interviews will be labeled with only the unique ID number, and stored in a locked file cabinet until all of the tapes are transcribed in full. A list of the participant's names and ID numbers will be kept in a separate location than the audiotapes. During the transcription of the tapes, the participants will be protected through disguising names and identifying information about you, your child, and your family. After all of the tapes have been transcribed, they will be destroyed. What we find from this study may be presented at meetings and conferences, or published in papers. The findings will be presented in a way that preserves the confidentiality of the participants, and will be framed in terms of recommendations that may enhance the well-being of single, gay adoptive fathers and their children.

If an Injury Happens

Virginia Commonwealth University and the VCU Health System (also known as MCV Hospitals) do not plan to give long-term care or money if you are injured because you are in the study.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you may freely withdraw at any time. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the study. If you decide to withdraw, all data describing you and your family will immediately be destroyed.

QUESTIONS:

In the future, you may have questions about your participation in this study. If you have any questions, contact:

Elizabeth Cramer, MSW, PhD, LCSW (Eramer@mail1.vcu.edu)
John Matthews, MSW, LSW-P (Jdmatthews@mail1.vcu.edu)
Virginia Commonwealth University
School of Social Work
1001 West Franklin Street
PO Box 842027
Richmond, VA 23284-2027
804-828-9027 – Dr. Elizabeth Cramer
804-986-4275 – John Matthews

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact:

Office for Research Subjects Protection
Virginia Commonwealth University
1101 E. Marshall St., Room 1-023
P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, VA 23298
Telephone: 804-828-0568

Consent:

I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to participate in this study.

Participant name printed	Participant signature	Date
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Witness Signature	Date
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Signature of person conducting informed consent	Date
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Appendix D: Letter from Study Auditor

June 4, 2004

John Matthews, MSW, LSW-P
Ph.D. Candidate
School of Social Work
Virginia Commonwealth University

Dear John Matthews:

This letter is to confirm that I have completed the audit of **A Qualitative Study of Single, Gay Adoptive Fathers**. As per your request, the audit addressed the questions listed below. Included in my discussion are anecdotal notes regarding any concerns identified in the audit.

Questions:

1. Are the findings grounded in the raw data?

To answer this question I sampled 15 quotes from Chapter four and attempted to link them back to the original transcript. I found that all fifteen quotes supported findings that were grounded in raw data. However, I did have one concern which is discussed

2. Are the sample quotes taken out of context?

To answer this question I selected five quotes at random and reviewed the transcripts from which they were taken. This was done to determine if what the researcher reported was what the participants were trying to impart.

All of the five quotes selected reflected careful detail to the meanings and perceptions that the participants were trying to impart.

3. Are the main categories and subcategories logical?

To address this question I reviewed the first part of Chapter 4. I also reviewed Appendix A and **Table 4.2** to determine the usefulness of the category structure. Yes, it appears that the category structure is appropriate because the categories reflect the type of data collected. The subcategories are also logically linked to the categories.

4. Are there fair representations of participant's perspectives?

To address this question two random subsections of the categories were chosen from **Table 4.2**. These subsections were reviewed to ascertain whether or not multiple perspectives were included in the results.

The first subsection selected was Identity Development of Participant. Multiple perspectives were included in the results. Several types of identity development were represented in the findings including, but not limited to, disclosure of sexual

orientation to family of origin, father identity, single parent identity and the impact of role models in the development of identity as a parent.

The second subsection chosen was Single Parenting. Multiple perspectives were also included in this subsection. A number of challenges and benefits of single parenting were included in the findings.

In summary, the audit findings support that a rigorous nature of inquiry was adhered to in this study. I wish you the best in this and future endeavors.

Sincerely,

Annette Clayton, MSSW
Ph.D. Candidate
School of Social Work
Virginia Commonwealth University

Vita

JOHN DARYL MATTHEWS

John Matthews was born on April 22, 1976 in Elizabeth City, North Carolina and is the son of Lynn Sava. He grew up in Borinquen, Puerto Rico, and Elizabeth City, NC and received a Bachelor of Social Work Degree from the University of North Carolina in 1999. At the University of North Carolina, he was active in the Eta Omega Chapter of the Phi Alpha Honor Society and a member of the Omicron Delta Kappa National Leadership Honor Society. The Master of Social Work degree was earned from Radford University in 2000. John left a position working as a Development Specialist in Las Vegas to pursue a Ph.D. in Social Work at Virginia Commonwealth University in 2001. His volunteer and paid work experience includes positions in mental health, substance abuse, and developmental disabilities, HIV prevention and education, gay and lesbian community development, and social work education.