The Seeking Fatherhood Study: The phenomenological experience of gay male couples seeking parenthood

Brad Walter Larsen
Pacific University

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The Seeking Fatherhood Study: The phenomenological experience of gay male couples seeking parenthood

Abstract
In the last decade, a body of research focused on lesbian and gay parenting has been developed, yet the experiences of gay male couples who are pursuing parenthood is not strongly reflected in the literature. Twelve gay male couples in the midst of their journey to parenthood were interviewed. A phenomenological inquiry method was used to describe their experience, and to identify needs relevant to clinical psychology, including training, cultural competence and appropriate interventions. This study resulted in a narrative of their experiences. Recommendations for providing competent mental healthcare and resources for this unique population are offered.

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Committee Chair
Jon Frew, Ph.D., ABPP

Second Advisor
Alyson Williams, Ph.D.

Third Advisor
Michel Hersen, Ph.D., ABPP

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THE SEEKING FATHERHOOD STUDY:
THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE OF
GAY MALE COUPLES SEEKING PARENTHOOD
A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF
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APPROVED BY THE COMMITTEE:
Jon Frew, Ph.D., ABPP
Alyson Williams, Ph.D.
PROFESSOR AND DEAN:
Michel Hersen, Ph.D., ABPP
ABSTRACT

In the last decade, a body of research focused on lesbian and gay parenting has been developed, yet the experiences of gay male couples who are pursuing parenthood is not strongly reflected in the literature. Twelve gay male couples in the midst of their journey to parenthood were interviewed. A phenomenological inquiry method was used to describe their experience, and to identify needs relevant to clinical psychology, including training, cultural competence and appropriate interventions. This study resulted in a narrative of their experiences. Recommendations for providing competent mental healthcare and resources for this unique population are offered.
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The focus of this research is the phenomenological experience of gay male couples pursuing fatherhood. A phenomenological study describes the lived experience of a concept or phenomenon for several individuals. The phenomenological researcher attempts to describe the shared aspects of the participant’s experience of a phenomenon. The intention of phenomenological research is to capture the essence of a particular experience (Creswell, 2007).

The purpose of this study is to describe the lived experience of gay male couples who are pursuing fatherhood. What follows is a brief summary of the relationship between homosexuality and the field of psychology and a review of the statistics show us that gay men desire parenthood and in fact are already parenting.

Important to understanding the context of these experiences is an understanding of how sexual minorities have been historically treated by the field of psychology. Prior to 1986, sexual minorities were officially conceptualized in the fields of psychiatry and psychology as mentally ill or sexually and morally perverted, and in either case in need of long term psychological treatment or otherwise irreparable. Homosexuality was formally classified as a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in 1952 when it published the first edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) (Krajeski, 1996).

At about the same time that the APA was establishing institutionalized discrimination against homosexuals, Evelyn Hooker, a researcher at University of California at Los Angeles, was developing a friendship with one of her graduate students, who identified as gay. He introduced her to his social circle, which included gay men. These men were happy, emotionally healthy, and successful. Intrigued by the stark contrast between the clinical case studies of gay men and the gay men she met, Hooker set out to do some research of her own. She matched 30
homosexual men with 30 heterosexual men for age, IQ, and education and conducted a series of assessments and then had experts in the field interpret the results. Hooker concluded that homosexuality as a clinical entity did not exist and forms of homosexuality are as varied as are those of heterosexuality. If anything, Hooker argued that homosexuality may be a deviation in sexual pattern which is within the psychologically normal range (Hooker, 1957). It is worth noting that prior to Hooker’s research, all research on homosexuals focused on individuals already under psychiatric treatment; no one had ever conducted research on a homosexual population that was not already in therapy, a mental hospital or in the disciplinary barracks of the armed services (Spiegel, 2002).

Though Hooker’s research was argument enough for changing the APA’s position on the pathology of homosexuality, psychological researchers continued to assume the pathological nature of the homosexual and sought out cures for the condition. Even members of the APA who identified as homosexual believed that homosexuality was a mental illness. These members gathered at informal meetings during annual APA conventions and even dubbed themselves the “GayPA,” (Spiegel, 2002) yet did not question the pathology of homosexuality, reportedly even among themselves. This led to institutionalized attitudes toward sexual minorities and clinical interventions based on biased research that persists in the present day (Erwin, 2010).

A growing volume of research supportive of a change in the conceptualization of homosexuality (Altman, 1971; Fort, Steiner, & Conrad, 1971; Robertiello, 1971), along with fervent protest from gay advocacy groups, influenced the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality as a diagnosis from the DSM-II in 1986 (Hooker, 1993). After 1986, research began to focus on identifying legitimate psychological issues for lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people. Researchers sought to understand identity development among gay
people, the psychological impacts of homophobia, the coming out process, and relationship formation and definitions (Benson, Silverstein & Auerbach, 2005; Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Bigner & Bozett, 1989; Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008; Miller, 1979; Shonkwiler, 2008).

Over the last three decades, researchers have investigated the families that people who identify as LGB are creating (Barret, 1996; Benson, Silverstein, & Auerbach, 2005; Brown, Smalling, Groza, & Ryan, 2009; Mallon 2000; Miller, 1979; Riskind & Patterson, 2010). Patterson (2004) reviewed the social science literature on gay fathers and their children with an interest in understanding more about the gay men who become parents and how they go about creating their families. Patterson declared that “the concepts of heterosexuality and parenthood are intertwined so deeply in cultural history and in contemporary thought that, at first glance the idea of gay fatherhood can seem surprising or even exotic” (p. 397). Patterson concluded that gay fatherhood is an inevitable emerging phenomenon that will undoubtedly redefine the role of the father in modern culture (Patterson).

To ensure that the pathologizing of families headed by people identify as LGB does not continue, it is important for researchers and practitioners alike to understand the multidimensional aspects of the daily lives, relationships and families of people who identify as LGB (Crawford, McLeod, Zamboni, & Michael, 1999). This research is intended to be a contribution to the literature focused on families headed by people who identify as LGB.

**Gay Men’s Desire for Fatherhood**

In response to societal and family rejection, gay men have historically created their own chosen family and community. Yet their desires sound similar to the desires of heterosexual people; they want to live in good health, with supportive friends, and activities that are satisfying and follow similar patterns of development over the life span in pursuit of these desires (Kimmel,
1978). Even before the Stonewall riots in 1969, generally considered the starting point of the gay rights movement in the US, the entire sexual minority community in America has fought for opportunity, visibility, safety, freedom, and respect; what many non-sexual-minorities take for granted. For a growing segment of the gay male population, this list includes the desire to pursue fatherhood (Rabun & Faith Oswald, 2009).

Historically, if a young male living in the United States realized he was gay but also had a desire to be a father, he implicitly knew his options were limited; he could either come out of the closet and resign himself to not having children, or remain closeted and get married in order to become a father. “When I realized I was gay I also knew I wanted children and I thought getting married [to a woman] was the only way to do that” (Matt Town, personal communication, 5/2/2009). In the past, many gay fathers remained closeted in a heterosexual relationship and some came out of the closet later in life.

Using nationally representative data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), Riskind and Patterson (2009) studied parenting intentions, desires, and attitudes of childless lesbian, gay, and heterosexual individuals. In part, the results showed that gay and lesbian participants endorsed the value of parenthood just as strongly as did heterosexual participants. In their study of data from the NSFG, Gates, Badgett, Macomber, and Chambers (2007) found 52% of childless gay men ages 15 to 44 expressed a desire to have children.

Becoming a parent might be one of the most valued experiences of American adults, and despite outspoken and virulent opposition, gay men have become parents through a variety of methods for decades (Mallon, 2000; Ryan, Pearlmutter, & Groza, 2004). Same-sex couples are adopting more frequently than ever before and changes in laws and public opinion are allowing
more of these couples to become parents and fully integrate their families with their communities.

**Gay Men Are Already Fathers**

Out gay men are already parenting. Statistics from the NSFG (Willson, 2003), and the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (Administration for Children and Families, 2004) estimate that 65,500 children are living with a lesbian or gay parent. Gay and lesbian parents are raising four percent of all adopted children in the United States.

Researchers at the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute surveyed US adoption agencies to find out if they work with lesbian and gay prospective adoptive parents, the extent to which agencies place children with them, and agency staff attitudes regarding adoption by gays and lesbians. The institute concluded that adoption agencies are increasingly willing to place children with gay and lesbian adults, and consequently, a steadily escalating number of gay men and lesbians are becoming adoptive parents (Brodzinsky, Patterson, & Vaziri, 2002).

Undoubtedly, gay and lesbian couple led families are increasing in frequency even though lesbian and gay adults in the United States are far less likely than heterosexual adults to be parents (Riskind & Patterson, 2010).

Gay men have been fathering in one form or another for decades. Researchers have looked at closeted fathers, single gay fathers adopting, and more recently fathering by gay couples. Though there is a growing body of psychological research about the development of children raised by gay fathers, few researchers have sought to specifically understand the experience of gay male couples seeking parenthood in the context of a committed relationship (Lassiter, Dew, Newton, Hays, & Yarbrough, 2006). Little is known about how these families come to be and if there are common themes shared by gay male couples in pursuit of parenthood.
Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the experience of gay male couples as they pursue fatherhood in the United States and to capture aspects of their shared experiences. This research is important for three reasons. Describing the experience of gay male couples pursuing parenthood may highlight relevant psychological issues, may expand resources to contribute to the ever-evolving competence of clinicians and may contribute to the development of resources for gay male couples pursuing parenthood. At this time there is no research that is focused specifically on the experience of gay male couples pursuing parenthood while they are going through the process. This study prioritizes the present experience of these couples, as any commentary about their experiences once they have children would likely be filtered through a retrospective lens, such as work presented by Brown, Smalling, Groza, & Ryan (2009).

Clinical Issues

In general, gay men are at greater risk for bipolar disorder in adulthood, and major depression and generalized anxiety disorder during adolescence and adulthood (Cochran & Mays, 2008). Whereas these conditions were once understood to be proof of the pathological nature of homosexuality, it is now understood that these conditions are often the results of social, familial and religious condemnation of homosexuals, and at the very least need to be understood within the context from which they emerge (Cochran & Mays, 2008; Aquinaldo, 2008). For this reason, it is imperative that any clinical conditions associated with couples pursuing parenthood be understood in their full context and that culturally appropriate interventions be developed.
Clinical Competence

From a standpoint of working with diverse populations, psychologists are compelled to pursue competence when working with populations that are marginalized and not well understood. The APA emphasizes that guidelines rooted in “methodologically sound research, the APA Ethics Code, and existing APA policy are vital to informing professional practice” (APA, 2010, p. 2) with sexual minority populations, and the guidelines should be used for clinical practice, training and informing public policy. Furthermore, psychologists and other mental health providers will need to become competent in working with gay male couples pursuing parenthood (Coates & Sullivan, 2005). The Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (APA, 2002) states the following:

…an understanding of factors associated with age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, or socioeconomic status is essential for effective implementation of their services or research, psychologists have or obtain the training, experience, consultation, or supervision necessary to ensure the competence…(2.01, Boundaries of Competence, ¶ b)

The American Psychological Association (APA, 2003) has issued guidelines for competent psychological practice with diverse populations. These guidelines assert that recognition of the interaction of individuals’ socialization experiences and dimensions of identity (e.g., gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, religion/spiritual orientation, educational attainment/experiences, and socioeconomic status) enhances the understanding and treatment of all people. The guidelines further point to the importance of psychologists’ knowledge about the roles of organizations, including employers and professional psychological associations, as potential sources of behavioral practices that encourage discourse, education and training, institutional change, and research and policy development that reflect rather than neglect, cultural differences (APA). These guidelines imply a value for self-awareness and self-reflection
by psychologists. The importance of the intrapersonal and interpersonal exploration, awareness and learning has been emphasized throughout the multicultural literature (Arredondo & Perez, 2006).

Specific to this study, psychologists are bound to follow guideline eight of the APA’s Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients (2010), states that psychologists should “strive to understand the experiences and challenges faced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents” and the APA “encourages psychologists to act to eliminate all discrimination based on sexual orientation in matters of adoption, child custody and visitation, foster care, and reproductive health services” (Paige, 2005, p. 496). In order to do this, ongoing research about emerging aspects of the LGB parent’s experience must be understood.

Though a psychologist may feel competent to work with sexual minorities in general, the psychologist needs an understanding of the unique challenges faced by parents who identify as LGB in addition to the common challenges that all parents face. When working with parents who identify as LGB, a psychologist needs to address perceptions and biases about alternative routes to parenthood including adoption, artificial insemination, surrogacy, and foster care. Identification of one’s value judgments will minimize the risk of the clinician causing harm to parents who identify as LGB and their children.

**Expanded Resources**

The research on alternative routes to parenthood for heterosexual couples includes significant attention to the phenomenological experience of the parents as they pursue parenthood (e.g., Flykt, Lindblom, Punamaki, Poikkeus, Repokari, Unkila-Kallio, et al., 2009; Lotz, 2009). Resources for psychologists working with heterosexual couples pursuing parenthood are abundant (e.g., APA, 2007a; APA, 2007b; Horowitz, Paley Galst, & Elster,
This focus on heterosexual couples is not limited to clinical research and practice, but extends to magazines (e.g., Parents Magazine, Parent & Child, Hybrid Moms Magazine), memoirs (Indichova, 2001), and websites (e.g., www.infertilityfriends.org, www.fertilethoughts.com, www.fatherhood.org, www.fatherhoodinstitute.org) and other mediums.

Comparable resources do not exist for gay male couples. Clinical research focused on the emotional and psychological experiences of gay male couples may lead to support and needed care for these couples and their families. Describing their experiences with a phenomenological approach may highlight needs that can be addressed by future psychological research. Further, understanding the experiences of these couples may contribute to the establishment of a standard of care for gay male couples pursuing parenthood for providers from an array of disciplines.

**What This Study Is Not**

For this research, it is assumed that any debates about sexual orientation being the predictor of appropriate parenting skills are settled; researchers have definitively concluded that ideas that lesbian and gay adults are not fit parents have no empirical foundation and that gay men are no more or less capable of healthy parenting as heterosexual men (Anderssen, Amlie, & Ytteroy, 2002; Brewaeys, Ponjaert, Van Hall, & Golombok, 1997; Coates & Sullivan, 2005; Erich, Leung, & Kindle, 2005; Parks, 1998; Patterson, 2000; Patterson & Chan, 1996; Perrin, 2002; Spivey, 2006; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Tasker, 1999; Victor & Fish, 1995; Turner, Scadden, & Harris, 1990). A resource manual was published by APA (2005) for lesbian and gay parents in which it was concluded that though there exists unique circumstances and needs for families headed by people who identify as LGB compared to heterosexual led families, there
exists no significant difference in terms of development outcomes for the children raised in these families.

The current study is intended to address the identified gap in the psychological literature by focusing on the phenomenological experience of gay male couples in the process of pursuing parenthood. By seeking to understand the experiences of gay male couples seeking parenthood, mental health needs can be identified, information for competent clinical practice can be made available, and appropriate resources can be developed to serve not only these men but also the children they seek to parent.
Literature Review

In the psychological research on parenting and fatherhood, research on gay fatherhood has become increasingly prominent since the late 1970s. A search for the literature focusing on gay fathers on PsycINFO returns 141 articles from 1979 to 2010. Over the years, this body of research has focused on various aspects of gay fathering. What follows is a review of the research on gay men as fathers since 1979 through 2010. This review of the relevant psychological research will focus on gay men in the fathering literature, gay fathers in the context of heterosexual marriage, gay men becoming single fathers, gay men revolutionizing the role of the modern father, and finally gay male couples seeking parenthood.

Gay Men in the Fathering Literature

In this section, the inclusion of gay fathers in clinical research about fatherhood will be highlighted. Assumptions of heterosexuality of fathers and an overall presumed heterosexuality within the family are reflected by a majority of the fatherhood literature (e.g., Cummings & O’Reilly, 1997; Koestner, Franz, & Weinberger, 1990; Lamb, Pleck, & Levin, 1985; Radin 1994). Genesoni and Tallandini (2009) reviewed literature from 1989-2008 which focused on a man’s psychological transition to fatherhood. The authors of this study made the implicit assumption that all men transitioning to fatherhood are heterosexual and by association all the research they reviewed is based on the same assumption. These authors did not mention the possibility that fathers could be closeted gay men, nor did they include research that highlights the experiences of openly gay men as fathers.

In the last two decades, gay fatherhood has been researched, but primarily independent from the general fatherhood research. The fatherhood literature and the gay fatherhood literature are distinct, indicating a presumption of heterosexuality of fathers in the broader fatherhood
literature. It is reasonable to assume that a large majority of fathers are heterosexual, but a
disservice is done to those gay fathers raising families when they are excluded from general
research about fathering. The unique life experience of gay male fathers may offer some insight
into fathering in general and conversely heterosexual fathers may be able to offer support to gay
fathers. Armesto (2002) makes the point that because many of the existing studies on gay fathers
take place within a culture of heterosexism and homophobia that equates gay fathering to
inadequate or possibly harmful parenting, the conclusions reached in those studies must be
scrutinized diligently.

More recently however, the identification of gay men as fathers has been integrated into
the mainstream literature on fathering. Works focused on the role of the father in families, such
as that of Golombok and Tasker (2010), devote sections to gay fathers and families headed by
gay men. In their chapter on gay fathers, the authors reviewed much of the available literature
and concluded that studies on gay men and their children are far less represented in the literature
than studies on lesbian women and their children (Golombok & Tasker).

Gay Fathers in the Context of a Heterosexual Marriage

It is likely that gay men have been fathers throughout human history; however their
sexual attraction to men has remained concealed when not culturally acceptable. In modern
times, these men have remained in the closet of a heterosexual marriage (Bozett, 1989). In the
late 20th century and early 21st century, the focus of research has shifted to investigating what
parenting by gay men looks like, rather than on questioning if gay men can be good parents, and
acknowledging that regardless of their capacity, gay men are parenting.

Research throughout the late 1970s and 1980s focused primarily on gay men as parents in
the context of heterosexual marriage (Bigner & Bozett, 1989; Bozett, 1979; Bozett, 1989; Miller,
These are men who, due to societal, religious, or cultural expectations decided to marry a woman even though their desire was to be with a man. Many men who understood that they were primarily attracted to other men pursued marriage because they believed it to be the only way they could become fathers. Later in life, while still actively parenting, many of these men came out of the closet.

Miller (1979) interviewed 40 gay men who became fathers while in a heterosexual marriage. Miller determined that negative conclusions about gay men, including that they have a negative influence on children, were unfounded. As a result of the interviews, he developed a four stage model of identity development. In the first stage a married man who pursues sexual contact with other men will engage in what Miller termed covert behavior, which refers to secretive same-sex encounters often facilitated by alcohol. At this stage of identity development, Miller suggested this covert behavior is often rationalized as a result of excessive drunkenness. In Miller’s second stage, a married man becomes marginally involved with the gay community either sexually or socially. He may continue to live with his family, but the increased need to conceal parts of his existence creates feelings of guilt. To compensate for these feelings, he may shower his family with gifts and attention. In Miller’s third stage, transformed participation, the married man begins to take on a gay identity for the first time. He begins living separately from the family and begins to disclose his sexual orientation to others outside of his immediate family. Miller suggested that it is in this stage that men encounter emergent feelings that are in conflict; men begin to feel relief and more themselves however they also experience increased anxiety about possible interventions of the courts in regard to custody and visitation rights for their children. The final stage is called open endorsement, in which these men have established gay identities and are actively participating in the gay community and possibly working to support
various organizations focused on supporting the gay community. Miller further observed that the fathers coming out process often resulted in a positive transformation within the family unit.

Bigner and Bozett (1989) surveyed the relevant literature and wrote that gay fathers have a more complex psychosocial environment than other gay men or heterosexuals because they must integrate the conflicting role demands of both the gay and heterosexual worlds. Furthermore, they concluded that gay men who became fathers in the context of a heterosexual relationship are at least equal to heterosexual fathers in the quality of their parenting. Similar to Miller (1979) they stated that gay fathers who disclose their sexual orientation to their children are found to have a closer and more intimate relationship with their children. Bigner and Bozett proposed some reasons for this heightened intimacy, including: gay fathers tended to teach their children to be accepting of variations in human behavior, disclosure may have helped to relieve family tensions, and the long history of the parent-child relationship would support an inclination to understanding rather than rejection. Bigner and Bozett established their own identity integration conceptualization when they concluded that the process of identity development for gay fathers requires a reconciliation of the polarized identities of gay and father. That is, according to these researchers, because each identity essentially was unacceptable to the opposite culture, these men need to integrate both identities in order to attain a resolved identity as gay father.

Benson, Silverstein and Auerbach (2005) interviewed 25 primarily white, middle to upper middle class gay fathers who had children in the context of a heterosexual marriage, and later established a gay identity. The fathers were interviewed in a focus group format which highlighted their efforts to integrate their fathering identity and their gay identity. The authors asserted that gay fathers who came out after becoming fathers are changing the traditional role of
the father in American culture by disclosing their sexual orientation to their children. Similar to Miller (1979) and Bigner and Bozett (1989), Benson, Silverstein and Auerbach highlighted that such disclosure required a great deal of intimacy and emotional vulnerability. This model of closeness, they posited, could serve as a model for all fathers.

Early research sought to understand the experience of gay men who became fathers in a marriage and came out later in life. This research identified models of identity integration and generally sought to highlight the experiences of gay men who were coming out and continuing to father their children. The latest research on gay fathers has moved away from gay men who become fathers in the context of marriage and come out later and toward men who come out as gay first and then seek parenthood.

**Gay Men Becoming Single Fathers**

As gay men became more visible in their families, communities and society at large, instead of becoming fathers and then coming out as gay men, they came out first and then pursued parenthood. If these men pursued fatherhood through adoption, it was often as individuals pretending to be single heterosexual men because adoption agencies would not work with gay males (McGarry, 2003). Literature that focused on these gay men as single parents continued to rebut the homophobic and heterosexist conclusions of previous research in regard to their capacity and appropriateness as parents, and the developmental outcomes of their children (Anderssen, Amlie, & Ytteroy, 2002; Armesto, 2002; Barret, 1996; Benson, Silverstein, & Auerbach, 2005; Bigner & Bozett, 1989; Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008; Erich, Leung, & Kindle, 2005).

Turner, Scadden, and Harris (1990) interviewed 10 single gay fathers and 11 single lesbian mothers about their experiences and relationships with their children. These authors
found that participants consistently reported their homosexuality had not caused long term problems for their children. Most participants reported overall positive relationships with their children and strong parent-child bonds. The authors also concluded that most gay fathers have positive relationships with their children, the father’s sexual orientation is of little importance in the overall parent-child relationship, and gay fathers try harder to create stable home lives and positive relationships than would be expected among traditional parents.

Armesto (2002) reviewed the literature relevant to gay parenting through the lenses of developmental and ecological frameworks. He highlighted the stressors associated with coming out of the closet and parenting in a society that does not recognize nor offer protections for the relationships gay men have. These men are constantly negotiating homophobia, heterosexism, and the perception that they are inappropriate as parents. Armesto concluded that competent parenting in gay men seems to be positively correlated with the ability to successfully come to terms with a gay identity and to negotiate the constant influence of living in a homophobic and heterosexist society.

Berkowitz and Marsiglio (2007) interviewed 19 childless gay men and 20 gay men who became fathers after coming out as gay to understand how their identity develops when becoming fathers. They sought to understand how gay men become aware of their desires for fatherhood and how these men negotiate their desires for fatherhood with their identities as gay men. The authors found that gay men's desire for fatherhood “evolves throughout the life course and is profoundly influenced by institutions and ruling relations such as adoption and fertility agencies, assumptions about gay men, and negotiations with birth mothers, partners and others” (p. 366). Environmental and relational criteria heavily influence a gay man’s awareness of his desires for fatherhood and whether or not he will pursue his desires. For example, a heterosexual
male is confronted with the possibility of fatherhood whenever he engages in sexual relations with a woman, though this not true for a gay man.

Brinamen and Mitchell (2008) conducted in depth interviews with gay men who became fathers after coming out as gay. The participants described the development of their family, the development of their identity as gay fathers, the challenges of male primary caregivers, and their evolving relationships with loved ones. Identity development for men who identify as gay first and then seek out parenthood is a distinctly different process than it is for gay men who become fathers in the context of a heterosexual relationship and come out of the closet later. Brinamen and Mitchell developed a six stage identity development process is as follows:

1. a coming out experience that assumes being gay means not parenting;
2. increased self-awareness and confidence as a gay man;
3. recognition of the strength of newly constructed gay families;
4. observation of gay families and learning about the effects of gay parents on children;
5. valuing the unique gifts a gay man has to offer a child; and
6. an integration of the gay and father components of identity, including both a narrowing and expansion of support networks. (Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008, p. 521)

Brinamen and Mitchell’s model is one of identity expansion, versus Bigner and Bozett’s (1989) polarized identity integration model. Brinamen and Mitchell stressed that the model is meant to be descriptive, not prescriptive, and that the stages can overlap or be skipped altogether. These authors discussed three main areas of difficulty that gay men encounter as they develop identities as fathers. The first focus was being out in the heterosexual community as a gay father which they authors concluded assumes that issues of negative stereotypes, fears about interest in children and general safety in the community have been addressed. Second, it is suggested that in the gay community, gay fathers experience rejection because fatherhood implies a strong connection to their heterosexuality. Finally, gay men choosing to parent violate the cultural belief that the mother primarily raises children. Nonetheless, Brinamen and Mitchell highlighted that “by choosing to become parents, gay men realign with this socially sanctioned
life goal and benefit from the approval, respect, and acceptance that the title of parent confers” (p. 538).

Gay men who had come to terms with their sexual orientation but still found themselves desiring to be fathers pursued parenthood despite a multitude of obstacles. These obstacles include societally based homophobia and heterosexism, desires that are antithetical to both their identities as gay men and fathers, and in some cases having to pursue their goal alone. Research has concluded that these men go through an expansion of identity and come to parent quite successfully (Brinamen & Mitchell, 2008).

**Gay Men Revolutionizing the Role of the Modern Father**

Gay men who become fathers after coming out of the closet are increasingly visible in American culture. As a result, the concept of fatherhood and what makes a man a father must be reevaluated. Traditional models of fatherhood are no longer an accurate reflection of modern fathers.

In an attempt to understand the relationship between masculinity (at one time considered a measure of a sexual orientation) and fatherhood, Robinson and Skeen (1982) administered the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem, 1981) to 30 gay men who became fathers through heterosexual relationships and 30 gay non-fathers. They found that gay fathers were no more masculine than gay non-fathers. This conclusion ran counter to the generally held beliefs in the early 1980s that masculinity and sexual orientation were positively correlated. The authors established that sexual behavior and sex-role orientation are unrelated phenomena.

Barret (1996) shared his observations based on relevant literature about the unique needs and experiences of gay fathers to highlight the gay man’s reconstruction of fatherhood. Barret (1996) described gay fathers in this way:
Gay fathers are like any other fathers. They may be young or old, professional or blue-collar, healthy or terminally ill, emotionally stable or unstable, financially secure or on welfare, or in committed relationships or single. Gay fathers across the country clearly have strong commitments to their children and, like other parents, organize their lives to maximize their children’s well-being. (p. 258).

However, Barret concluded that not only are they reconstructing the fathering role, but “gay fathers…unlike heterosexual fathers…have the additional challenge of protecting their children from the prevailing discrimination and prejudice directed toward homosexuals in America, to minimize its negative impact on their children” (p. 257). These additional challenges are the basis for the assertion that gay male fathers are transforming the boundaries, roles, and expectations of fathers, but addressing these challenges as part of their role of father.

Later research on the changing nature of fatherhood compared the effectiveness of gay fathers to that of straight fathers. Lichtanski (2004) compared 33 gay and 31 heterosexual adoptive fathers parenting a total of 90 adopted children on various parenting characteristics. Lichtanski found only two differences between heterosexual fathers and gay fathers; on average heterosexual fathers scored higher on lack of self-confidence and gay fathers scored higher on the available social support. Self-confidence was measured by a subscale of the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ; Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen, & Hart, 1995). Social support was measured by the Duke Social Support Index (DSSI; Blazer, Hybels, & Hughes, 1990), which conceptualizes social support by four dimensions: social network, social interaction, subjective social support, and instrumental social support. In addition, Lichtanski found that more often than heterosexual fathers, gay fathers regularly show affection for their children, offered sympathy and comfort, and praised good behavior of their children. The heterosexual fathers seemed to be unsure of how to address their children’s misbehavior, regularly used scolding and critical language with their children, and overall came across as demanding. These observations do not describe all gay and heterosexual fathers, but Lichtanski
concluded that openly gay men choosing to adopt fare equally well or better as adoptive fathers compared to heterosexual men who choose to adopt.

Hicks (2006) reviewed data from interviews with foster care social workers and case managers in the UK and found that gay men applying to be foster care providers had historically been subjected to an assessment of their parenting skills which included a thorough evaluation of their sexual orientation and sexual activity. Hicks further found that as a result of this evaluation, gay men were cautious about or did not discuss their sexuality when applying to be foster care providers. In his interviews with foster care social workers and managers, Hicks found the word gay being used with three distinct connotations. Gay men were perceived to be maternal and/or feminine, a source of perversion and sexual risk, or were assumed to present problematic models of gender. Nonetheless, at the time of his study, Hicks reported that gay men “now expect their sexuality to be taken seriously and treated fairly” (p. 98) and further argued that foster care practices should reconsider and expand limited views of gender, sexuality, and parenting.

In their interview with 19 childless gay men and 20 gay men who became fathers after coming out as gay, Berkowitz and Marsiglio (2007) found that the changing identities of gay men as fathers have the potential to influence institutions and political-cultural-sociological conditions. As pioneering gay men continue to pursue parenthood, the positive influence on the societal norms, expectations, and therefore, acceptance, of gay men in a parenting role can be considered inevitable.

Benson, Silverstein, and Auerbach (2005) interviewed 25 White, middle to upper middle class gay fathers who had children in the context of a heterosexual marriage, and later established a gay identity. The authors argued that gay fathers, “precisely because of their
position at the margins of conventional family life, have the potential to reconstruct masculinity by transforming the fathering role in American culture beyond the model of nurturing father toward of a model of intimate father” (p. 3). As a relatively new phenomenon, gay fathers are literally reconstructing the concept of fatherhood and the role of fathers in the modern family (Benson, Silverstein, & Auerbach).

Broad, Alden, Berkowitz, and Ryan (2008) reviewed literature related to what they termed activist parenting. Activist parenting is understood to be simply challenging the traditional norms about who can be a parent and what parenting looks like. The authors highlight activist mothering, parents in Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), and other research examples that highlight how parenting by people who identify as LGB is inherently a political role. Broad and colleagues found political undertones in the discourse of gay men who were seeking parenthood. For example, one father characterized himself as one of the “unwanted fathers adopting unwanted children” (p. 513), referring to the attitudes toward gay fathers and older children who were often not wanted for adoption. The participants in the reviewed studies asserted that they were satisfying their desire to become fathers, while simultaneously engaging in activism by being more visible in their communities as active families.

Mallon (2004) interviewed gay men who had become fathers to examine the factors that contribute to the changes in gay men's lives once they become fathers. Mallon found a similar understanding that their roles were undeniably political. “By the fact that we are gay with children, we are already activists. When you live openly as a gay person, especially a gay person with children, you are nonconformist” (p.21).
The visibility of gay men parenting is growing and public perceptions are changing. Increasing public exposure of gay parenthood “both signals and fosters dramatic transformations in the meaning of contemporary parenthood generally, and of paternity particularly” (Stacey, 2006, p. 28). Gay men seeking fatherhood face unique challenges. Stacey (2006) commented that gay men who openly seek parenthood are in direct opposition to the cultural norms for masculinity and paternity for adult men in modern American. These men also oppose the dominant gender and sexual norms of gay culture itself. Gay men who choose to pursue fatherhood do so in the face of enormous obstacles without support from traditional biological, cultural, institutional or legal realms.

Massey (2008) asked two hundred participants to evaluate vignettes that describe a restaurant scene in which two parents respond to their child’s public tantrum. The sexual orientation and gender of the parent actively intervening were varied. Massey assessed for heterosexism, evaluated parenting skills, and attributions for child’s behavior were assessed. Surprisingly, gay male parenting skills were rated most positively as compared to a lesbian couple and a heterosexual couple. Massey surmised that the positive assessment of gay male parents could be due to participants viewing them as “doing a good job considering their struggle” (p.478). Though there are presumably a multitude of factors, it is undoubted that public perceptions and opinions are changing.

Depictions of same sex couples parenting together are appearing in the mainstream media. Most recently, the Emmy winning television series Modern Family which depicts the trials of an extended family, includes gay couple, Cameron and Mitchel, and their adopted daughter Lily (Levitan, Lloyd, & Winer, 2009). This program is watched by an average of 12.6 million people each week (Hilton, 2010).
As more gay men pursue fatherhood they are by definition defying the conventionally held beliefs about who and what a father is. The research shows gay men bring unique skills and resources and offer healthy alternative approaches to fathering.

**Gay Male Couples Seeking Parenthood**

It is increasingly common for gay male couples, as opposed to single gay men, to choose to become fathers together through myriad means, including adoption, foster care, and surrogacy. It is noteworthy that international adoptions from most countries for single men have been discontinued in part due to an effort to avoid placing a child with a gay man. There is a growing body of literature about same sex couples parenting together, though lesbian couples have received the most attention in the literature as compared to gay men (Goldberg, 2005; Tasker & Patterson, 2007). Specific issues related to gay male couples choosing and pursuing parenthood have not been thoroughly investigated.

Strah and Margolis (2003) shared twenty-four personal accounts of gay male couples and single fathers describing their unique experiences of the transition to fatherhood, the struggles, and the successes they experienced as they raised their children. Their book also serves as a resource about adoption and other routes to parenthood. The writers highlighted the fathers’ experiences of waiting, preparing, enduring often intrusive evaluations of character and home, discrimination, and the high price of adoption. The authors describe the fathers as trailblazers who stopped at nothing to become happy families.

Brown, Smalling, Groza, and Ryan (2009) asked 182 gay and lesbian participants, who had adopted to write statements reflecting the barriers and challenges faced while pursuing parenthood, the challenges they faced once they became parents, and their three greatest joys as lesbian or gay parents. Participants noted barriers to becoming parents such as perceived
discrimination, lack of information and emotional support, and personal doubt. Once they became parents, the participants noted challenges such as legal and benefits concerns, issues of acceptance, school and community support, and lesbian and gay family role models. The authors reported that 68% of the noted joys of being parents were unrelated to a lesbian or gay identity. Of the remaining noted joys, participants referred to being role models and pioneers, raising children with healthy familial relationships, and unanticipated family and community support. The authors further concluded that lesbian and gay couples continue to perceive adoption practices to be discriminatory and suffer due to what Goldberg and Sayer (2006) refer to as a lack of legal and institutionalized validation for their particular family form.

The last two decades have seen numerous and humorous personal accounts by gay men about their experiences pursuing fatherhood (Aoki, 2007; Green, 2000; McGarry, 2003; Savage, 1999; Strah & Margolis, 2003; Webb-Mitchell, 2007). These authors shared more than just their personal triumphs, but also offered guidelines and direction for their readers who hope to become fathers themselves. Sex columnist and writer, Dan Savage (1999) shared the intimate and humorous process of pursuing parenthood through open adoption with his boyfriend Terry. In this book, Savage shared the intimate details of their discussions about their relationship, the relationship they developed with the birth mother, and preparation for fatherhood. He shared their experiences during their first year of parenthood, the negative attitudes about them being same-sex parents they encountered and how they responded. For gay fathers, this and similar memoirs have served to at least prop open the door to the mainstream cultural consciousness of parenting by gay men.

Green (2000) wrote about his experience of falling in love with a man who already had an adopted son. Green discovers that, "fatherhood trumps gayness" (p. 23) and he and his
partner came to identify more as typical parents than as typical gay men. The author highlights that his experience simultaneously makes him more like his heterosexual counterparts and more different.

In her essay on gay fathers, Shonkwiler (2008) described her investigation of the phenomenological experience of the gay male’s identity development as a father and “what it means to be a real father in the context of a family intentionally constructed without a mother” (p. 537). The author highlighted that these families are fertile ground for the self-actualization of fatherhood within the “structures of late-capitalist identity” (p. 538). Shonkwiler asserted that both memoirs helped to launch a societal shift, or at least the beginning of one, that brought awareness to gay men’s capacity for healthy parenting.

Gay male couples are moving forward in their pursuit of parenthood and in their wake is a changing conceptualization of fatherhood not only for society at large but also for younger gay men. D’Augelli, Rendina, Grossman, and Sinclair, (2006/2007) interviewed 133 lesbian and gay youth about their interests in long-term relationships, same-sex marriage, and becoming parents. Eighty-six percent of young gay men they interviewed reported that they expected to rear children someday and ideally with a partner. Rabun and Faith Oswald (2009) interviewed 14 gay men between the ages of 18 and 25 years about their plans for fatherhood. They learned that the narratives of these men “upheld and expanded, rather than challenged, the normative nuclear family ideal” (p. 269). The researchers further found that these young men intended to make fathering their first priority.

Wells (2005) offered one of the only psychological studies that focused on the experience of gay male couples pursuing parenthood. The author retrospectively interviewed gay male couples about their experience pursuing fatherhood. He found the couples he interviewed
established for themselves clear identities as men, fathers and gay men. Gianino (2008) interviewed eight gay male couples who had recently adopted children to explore and understand their unique experiences. The author found that these couples learned to respond to questions about their family openly and honestly, which established a sense of greater integration as a couple and a family, as well as their overall identities as gay men.

The focus of this literature review was on gay men in the fathering literature, gay men as parents in the context of heterosexual marriage, gay men becoming single fathers, gay men revolutionizing the role of the modern father, and gay male couples seeking parenthood. A gap is revealed by the literature review. Specifically, the experience of gay male couples seeking parenthood has not been rigorously studied. Though there is more research on gay male couples fathering, research focused specifically on the experience of gay male couples pursuing parenthood is limited. In response to this identified gap in the literature, this study is designed to describe and understand the present experience of gay male couples pursuing fatherhood.
Method

Qualitative Research

A quantitative approach to research is most commonly used to investigate phenomena that have been previously researched and widely discussed in the literature though a qualitative approach is more appropriate for investigating phenomena that are not well researched or understood. Given the limited available research on the experience of gay male couples pursuing parenthood, a qualitative research method was appropriate for this study. As a reflection of the nature of qualitative research to avoid fixed definitions of phenomena, a description of qualitative research is itself subjective and emergent. Creswell (2007) refers to “assumptions, a world view, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research and problems inquiring into the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, p. 37). Creswell emphasizes the process and concludes that a final report unavoidably and hopefully includes the voices of the participants and the researcher and “signals a call to action” (p. 37). A qualitative study can help to “understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing” (Eisner, 1991, p. 58). Qualitative research allows for a deeper and perhaps richer investigation of the experience or identity of individuals. Qualitative research allows the researcher to be curious about the phenomenon under study and relinquish any expectations about the outcome of the research. It is ideal for studying diverse populations, such as, in the case of this research, gay male couples, and new phenomena, such as gay male couples seeking parenthood.

Phenomenological Research

There are several approaches to qualitative research. One of these approaches is phenomenological. A phenomenological researcher describes the experience of a specific
phenomenon for several individuals and the meaning they make of the phenomenon. By describing a shared experience, the phenomenological researcher identifies what the participants have in common with one another. Given the limited inquiry into the experience of gay male couples in the midst of pursuing fatherhood, a phenomenological qualitative approach was most appropriate for this study. Phenomenological research requires consideration of the role of the researcher, his philosophical assumptions, and his world views (Creswell, 2007). These are explored below as pertinent to this study.

**Role of the Researcher.**

Quantitative research designs typically utilize standardized measures or a psychometric test to collect the data to be analyzed. Though qualitative research may utilize some quantitative measures, the primary instrument for data collection is the researcher. The researcher typically conducts interviews, transcribes the interviews and analyzes or interprets the transcriptions (Creswell, 2007). For this research, I am the only interviewer.

For qualitative research in general, as well as this study specifically, it is understood that the researcher plays a significant role in the data collection and that the involvement of the researcher is expected to influence the collected data. It is up to the researcher to maintain a keen awareness of his impact on the research participants and the data collection and analysis, and to directly comment on it. In addition, the researcher maintains a research diary throughout the course of the research to record his experience, reactions and impressions of the interviews, and overall process. The researcher attempts to be aware of his personal history, values, and beliefs, and how they may add or detract from the phenomenon under study, rather than trying to avoid or reject these influences. In fact, when the history, values, and beliefs of the researcher are ignored, they can have a far greater impact on the purity of the data collected than when they
are acknowledged directly and addressed throughout the research. For the present study, these characteristics of the researcher are described below.

I have utilized psychological phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) which emphasizes pure description by the researcher versus interpretation. Central to this approach is Husserl’s concept of epoch in which investigators attempt to maintain an acute awareness of their own experiences and bracket them off or set them aside, in order to bring an unassuming stance to the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas). It is understood that this approach is a theoretical ideal, meaning that it is ultimately impossible to completely separate oneself from previous experience. An added dimension to epoch is the researchers attempt to maintain awareness of when he is not able to maintain a differentiation between his own experience and those of the research participants. At such a time, he seeks out consultation.

It is common practice for the phenomenological researcher to acknowledge personal beliefs and values prior to the initiation of the research. Thus, the following provides an overview of these for this researcher. 1. I believe that a person’s sexual orientation is not in any way, on its own, an indicator of an ability to parent a child. 2. I accept as true that families exist in a variety of forms, all of which are valuable and none of which are more “correct” than any other. 3. I do not consider it necessary for a family with healthy, well-adjusted children to be led by heterosexual parents, nor do I believe it is necessary for a family to be led by two parents. 4. I am convinced that a family comprised of a heterosexual father and mother does not, on the basis of their sexual orientation alone, guarantee the healthy development of a child. 5. I value the nourishing qualities of love that contribute to the healthy growth of a child, which can come from any combination of parents and/or primary caregivers. Without a doubt, these beliefs have informed my decision to select this research topic, the construction of the study, the interviews
and meaning from the data. Furthermore, the fact that I am a gay male who, along with my partner, intends to seek parenthood in the near future leaves me prone to over align myself with the experiences of these couples. By maintaining an awareness of these beliefs and values I am able to acknowledge their influence and make efforts to limit their influence whenever necessary.

These beliefs and values have influenced all aspects of this research from how I constructed questions and engaged participants to how I interpreted the results and the conclusions I have drawn. It is possible that my identity as a gay man or my personal desire to become a parent may have allowed for the participating couples to feel more comfortable with sharing their deeply personal experiences than they otherwise might have. My awareness of the unique experience of gay men may influenced what caught my interest during an interview, potentially resulting in otherwise ignored aspects of their experience or over emphasis on others. How I organized the results and what I find important to highlight was also unavoidably influenced by my own identity and experience. Again, this is expected and supported in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007), as long as it is transparently identified throughout the research process.

**Philosophical assumptions and world views.**

It is standard practice for the phenomenological researcher to identify his philosophical assumptions and world views. Philosophical assumptions are the underlying suppositions that are made about the nature of reality. A world view is defined as a basic set of beliefs that guide action (Guba, 1990, p. 1). My overriding philosophical assumptions (e.g. axiological and ontological) and world views (e.g. social constructivism and queer theory) are described below as they relate to the current research.
Axiological assumptions consider the role of values of the researcher and the participants. The researcher acknowledges that the research is value laden, that biases are present, and openly discusses values that shape the narrative. No matter how bracketed, the researchers voice will be evident in the telling of the story (Creswell, 2007).

Ontological assumptions question the nature of reality. Reality is considered subjective and multiple as seen by participants in the study. This is aligned with the values of phenomenology, which attends to the unique, subjective experience of the individual. Researchers use quotes and themes in the words of participants and provide evidence of different perspectives (Creswell, 2007).

It is important for the researcher to maintain a salient awareness of his/her world views in order to mediate how they will influence the research, the interactions with participants, and how the researcher describes what was observed. Two world view paradigms are relevant to the current research: social constructivism and queer theory (Creswell, 2007). The social constructionist worldview holds that individuals naturally attempt to make meaning from their experience and often share meanings with others within their group (Creswell). From a social constructivist world view, I believe the process of meaning making is rich and complex and is ultimately a product of interaction and dialog with others and the environment at large. The meanings made are rooted in broad social, cultural, and historical contexts. This world view is reflected by the interview questions participants were asked. The questions were broad and open ended to allow for each participant’s unique experience to emerge (Creswell). The queer theory worldview emphasizes the unique qualities of the individual (Creswell). Queer theory focuses on individual identity and the evaluation and deconstruction of dominant identities. From a queer theory world view, I believe in challenging the notion that identity is rigid, fixed, or one-
dimensional and that any one identity is normal. Further, queer theory challenges the binary identity models, (e.g., male/female, old/young, gay/straight, black/white) which suggest that identity can only be fixed, rigid and polarized (Creswell, p. 29).

Axiological assumptions or role of the researcher and participants, ontological assumptions or the subjective nature of reality, social constructivism or the inclination to make subjective meaning of experience and queer theory or the multidimensional aspects of identity, are the theoretical foundations of this research study. These theoretical foundations are reflected in the design of the study, my role as an interested and curious researcher, the self-selection by the participants, the description of their subjective experiences and the organization of the results of this study.

To summarize, I will be the primary instrument for data collection. Based on the direction provided by Creswell (2007) and utilizing a research journal, consultation with colleagues and regular self-reflection, I have done due diligence to be aware of and document my own personal beliefs, values and biases as they relate to the study of gay male couples pursuing parenthood, prior to the start of the study (Moustakas, 1994). I will make every effort to maintain awareness of these beliefs and embrace these as resources and limit their impact whenever possible (Creswell). I have acknowledged the philosophical assumptions and world views that will inform the narrative created from the data collected (Moustakas).

**Study Approval and Recruitment of Participants**

This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Pacific University in Hillsboro, Oregon. It was also designed and implemented in accordance with the ethical standards for research with human participants established by the American Psychological Association (Sales & Folkman, 2000).
I utilized purposeful sampling, meaning that I directly contacted communities known to include gay men and gay parents so that members of those communities could inform the research question (Creswell, 2007). This is a method commonly used and widely accepted in qualitative research aimed at the study of less-investigated phenomena (Creswell).

As a first step in the recruitment process, I established a website to recruit and register participants for the study. The website was promoted via Facebook and www.TwoDads.us. Electronic recruitment fliers (Appendix IV) were distributed to adoption agencies known to work with couples who are LGB and through professionals working with parents who are LGB. Participants were also recruited through personal contacts. Finally, a snowball method of sample selection was utilized to identify eligible couples through existing participants. The snowball method is used when the desired sample characteristic is rare. Snowball sampling relies on referrals from initial subjects to generate additional participants (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

In order to participate in this study, the couples needed to be gay male identified committed couples who had been in a relationship for at least one year at the time of the interview. Participating couples could not have had children from previous relationships. Finally, the couple must have already initiated the process of pursuing parenthood, defined by the couple’s mutual agreement of said pursuit. Participants for this research were solicited from the across the United States.

Creswell (2007) does not provide a firm number regarding sample sizes for phenomenological research, explaining that he has observed a wide variety of approaches to determining an appropriate sample size. However, Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) concluded
that if the goal of the research is to describe a shared or common experience then a sample of twelve will likely be enough. Twelve couples were successfully enrolled in the study.

**Participants**

Twelve couples were interviewed. By happenstance, six couples were interviewed in person and six couples were interviewed via phone between March 2010 and August 2010. These couples were from California, Hawaii, Indiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Missouri, New York, and Oregon. The participants were in various stages along the journey to fatherhood. At the time of the interviews, nine couples were considering or actively pursuing parenthood through open adoption with private adoption agencies (though one couple had previously unsuccessfully pursued surrogacy). One couple was pursuing open adoption through their state foster care system. Two couples had yet to make a decision about the route to parenthood they would pursue. Though some couples were just beginning the process, having attended an orientation at an adoption agency for example, others had completed the home study, and were being contacted by birth mothers. I did not limit this research to participants who were pursuing parenthood via adoption, however I was not able to readily identify participants pursuing other routes to parenthood.

**Couple demographics.**

Couples were asked about their annual income. One couple reported an annual income of $50,000-$75,000. Three couples reported an annual income of $75,000-$100,000. Two couples reported an annual income of $100,000-$150,000. Six couples reported an annual income of more than $150,000. Table 1 shows reported household income.
Table 1

*Household Income*

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<th>Income</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$50,000-$75,000</td>
<td>1 (8.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000-$100,000</td>
<td>3 (25.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000-$150,000</td>
<td>2 (16.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Than $150,000</td>
<td>6 (50.0%)</td>
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</table>

Couples reported an average length of relationship of seven years, (range 4-14, standard deviation 2.69). Seven (58.3%) of these couples reported having some variant of a commitment ceremony, wedding or celebration of their relationship. Couples were also asked about languages other than English spoken in their home. One couple reported French, one reported Japanese and one couple reported Chinese.

**Individual demographics.**

The 24 participants were on average 36-years-old (range from 26 to 48 years old, standard deviation 5.57).

Twenty-three (95.8%) participants identified their race as White or Caucasian and one (4.2%) participant identified as Chinese.

Participants were asked about their education level. One participant reported having completed some college without completing a degree. One participant reported having completed a two year degree. Eight participants reported having completed a 4-year-college degree, eleven reported having completed a master level degree, and three reported having completed a doctorate-level degree. Table 2 shows reported education level.
Table 2

Education Level

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Income</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completed some college without completing a degree</td>
<td>1 (4.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed a two year degree</td>
<td>1 (4.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed a 4-year-college degree</td>
<td>8 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed a master level degree</td>
<td>11 (45.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed a doctorate-level degree</td>
<td>3 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants reported working in the fields of education, finance, real estate, development, law, medicine, social services, technology, marketing, and chemical engineering.

Data Collection Strategies

Prior to the interview, all participants were asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix II) and fill out a single page demographics questionnaire (Appendix III). Similar to Gianino (2008), the intent of this research was to describe the shared construction of the couple’s experience pursuing parenthood and so they were interviewed together (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003; Gianino, 2005). As such, a semi-structured interview was conducted with each adult male couple together. The couples were initially asked to share their story of pursuing parenthood up to the point of the interview. Follow up questions were asked based on what was shared in response to this prompt. The follow up questions included domain specific questions addressing the role of extended family, plans for the future, experience of waiting, politics, community, role models and visibility (Appendix I). These questions were only used when the
couple did not address these domains spontaneously, which they often did. As I learned more from each successive interview I included questions that I had not previously considered. The interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed. A total of 14.5 hours of interviews were recorded. The average interview was one hour and 10 minutes (range 37-110 minutes, standard 28.11).

Analysis

The purpose of analysis is to organize and make sense of a large amount of data, identify noteworthy patterns, and integrate and parse multiple stories to construct an outline for telling the story that the collected data reveal. Analysis of the collected data was a multi-phase process informed by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) and Creswell (2007). The transcripts of the interviews underwent phenomenological analysis: the essential meanings of the phenomenon of interest were mined from the text and described through a process of horizontalization of meanings, clustering of meanings, textural description, structural description, essential description, and validation of the essential description (Creswell, 2007).

Dedoose.

The transcribed interviews were analyzed using a web based program called Dedoose (www.dedoose.com). This program allows for convenient organization of the text. Dedoose offers many analysis options, but for the purposes of this analysis, the program was used for organizing and coding the text only. There exists some controversy about the use of computer assisted analysis with qualitative data (Curry, Nemhard, & Bradley, 2009; MacMillan, & Koenig, 2010; Peters, & Wester, 2007). Peters and Wester (2007) expressed their concern that “the available computer programs can be seen as a collection of tools, but the functions and features of these programs are so divergent, that it is hardly possible for a novice qualitative
researcher to select the proper qualitative procedures” (p. 636). However, Curry, Nembhard and Bradley (2009) highlighted the value of qualitative research analysis by computer: “given the volume of data typically generated in a single study, software offers important efficiencies in organizing and retrieving data” (p. 1446). I have addressed Peters and Wester’s concerns; as a novice qualitative researcher, I used Dedoose as a convenient tool for organizing data in the analysis process, not for running complex analyses procedures with the program.

**Horizontalization.**

Twelve Microsoft Word files containing interview transcripts, one for each couple, were initially analyzed by a team of five graduate students including this researcher. This team identified relevant excerpts across all transcripts through the process of horizontalization. Horizontalization in qualitative research refers to the process of reviewing the transcripts for excerpts that seemed or felt relevant or meaningful to the research interest (Creswell, 2007). I utilized the “comment” function in Dedoose to record my thoughts and feelings about why I selected specific excerpts. This was done for each transcript. These relevant excerpts were then uploaded to the Dedoose program.

**Clustering of meanings.**

I coded the relevant text selected in each transcript independently to organize them into clusters of meaning based on my sense of the meaning or essence of the passage. I then integrated the clusters of meaning from the each transcript to create a master list. I combined clusters of meaning from each transcript with those from other transcripts when there was a repetition of ideas. For example, if one excerpt was labeled “desire to be a father” and another was labeled “wanting to be a father,” these were combined. The clusters of meaning were then organized into categories and themes.
**Themes and categories.**

The themes and categories are the materials used to create a general description of the experience, including textural descriptions, structural descriptions and essential descriptions. The textual description is what the participating couples experienced while pursuing fatherhood. The structural description is how the couples experienced what they experienced. The essential description is a synthesis description that provides the quintessence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p. 61-62). This includes the shared or common aspects of the experiences across all participants. As recommended by Creswell, I engaged the support of a colleague, unfamiliar with this specific research thus far, to review the data and textural, structural, and essential descriptions to determine the validity of the writing.

**Reliability and Validity**

Reliability and validity are thought of differently when conducting qualitative research versus quantitative research. Further, there is widespread disagreement about how these concepts are or should be defined in qualitative research. Creswell (2007) refers to the findings of several others to describe his perspective on reliability and validity. Golafshani (2003) refers to Lincoln and Guba (1985) to offer the word “dependability” for qualitative research as a synonymous concept with “reliability” in quantitative research. Essentially, reliability can only be determined by a rigorous review of the researcher’s methods and an assessment of the integrity of the research to adhere to research protocols and to acknowledge any deviations across research studies (Creswell, 2007). As suggested by Gibbs (2007), both of the following methods to maximize reliability were applied to the current research: I checked transcripts to make sure that they did not contain obvious mistakes during transcription and I made sure that
there was not a drift in the definition of codes, a shift in the meaning of the codes during the process of coding.

Validity is considered one of the strengths of qualitative research. Creswell (2007) believes the mere process of conducting qualitative research is the foundational level of validating the accuracy of the data. Validity is determined by whether the findings are an accurate reflection of the experiences of the researchers, the participants and the readers. Based on the literature named above, the methods I used with the current research to ensure validity of the findings included clarifying the biases that I brought to the study, presenting negative or discrepant information that was counter to the identified codes, clusters of meaning, or themes, and I used peer debriefing to enhance the accuracy of the accounts.

Overall, if a qualitative study is to be considered reliable and valid, the methods should be transparent, communicable and coherent (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Another researcher should be able to readily understand exactly how the data were analyzed and verify it, the codes, clusters of meaning, and themes should make sense to both the participants and the researchers, and the codes, clusters of meaning, and themes derived should be internally consistent, yet also reflective of individual and cultural differences (Wells, 2006).
Results

In accordance with common practice in qualitative and phenomenological research as mentioned above, the experiences of the 12 participating couples will be described utilizing the themes and categories derived from the interview transcripts. As transcripts of the interviews were analyzed, 92 general concepts emerged that were common across a majority of interview participants. After further analysis, these 92 concepts clustered into ten categories with 41 themes. These categories and themes provided a framework for retelling the narrative that reflects the common experiences as well as the exceptions of all of the participating couples. Participants were initially asked to tell the story of their relationship and their journey toward parenthood so far. This resulted in a rather linear description of their experience. The categories and themes are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Considering Fatherhood</td>
<td>• Always Going to be a Father</td>
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<td>• Roadblocks to Fatherhood</td>
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<td>• Reasons for Becoming a Father</td>
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<td>Relationship</td>
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<td>Role Models</td>
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<td>• Dan Savage</td>
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<td>• Parents as Role Models</td>
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## Table 3 (cont’d)

### Categories & Themes of Interviews

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<th>Categories</th>
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<td>• Sharing Plans for Fatherhood</td>
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<td>• Coming Out at Work</td>
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<td>• Coming Out as Gay Fathers</td>
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<td><strong>Friends and Family</strong></td>
<td>• Role of Friends</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Role of Family</td>
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<td>• Role of Women</td>
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<td><strong>Gay and Father Identities</strong></td>
<td>• Focus on Adoption</td>
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<td>• Benefits of Gay Parents</td>
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<td>• Appropriate Parents</td>
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<td>• Internalized Homophobia</td>
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<td><strong>Stigma and Stereotypes</strong></td>
<td>• Gay Men in a Straight World</td>
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<td>• If You Were a Straight Couple</td>
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<td>• Stereotypes</td>
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<td><strong>Resources</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Parental Roles and Values</strong></td>
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<td>• Traditional Parenting Roles</td>
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<td>• Value for Education</td>
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<td>• Parenting Styles</td>
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<td><strong>The Process of Pursuing Fatherhood</strong></td>
<td>• Getting Started</td>
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<td>• The Agency</td>
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<td>• The Home Study</td>
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<td>• Introduction Letters</td>
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<td>• Into the Pool or The Waiting</td>
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<td>• Hearing from Birth Mothers</td>
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<td>• We're Ready to Be Dads</td>
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What follows is a brief summary of each section of the results. The category of considering fatherhood focuses on the participants’ recollections of desiring fatherhood when they were children and teenagers, the roadblocks they imagined would limit their opportunities for becoming fathers, their reasons for pursuing fatherhood, and their fantasies about fatherhood in the near future. In the relationship section is a description of the participants’ experiences with relationships as they relate to wanting children and a description of the participants’ value for having a partner with whom they could have children. The role models section highlights the couples’ desire for more visible evidence of gay male couples parenting, the role models they do look to, and how they view their own parents as role models. In coming out again, the participants’ experience of discovering that beginning the process of pursuing fatherhood means repeated coming out as gay men as they affirm that they are two men pursuing parenthood. The section friends and family highlights the participants’ descriptions of the kinds of support they receive from friends and family and the roles their friends and family are taking and will take once a child arrives, especially women. In gay and father identities, the participants’ experiences of converging identities as gay men and fathers is described. Stigma and stereotypes describes the experiences of these couples considering how their experience might be different if they were a straight couple, how they imagine they will respond to criticism, and the stereotypes they wish to avoid. In resources, participants’ awareness of resources not available to them are acknowledged and the resources they were please to find are highlighted. In parental roles, the participants’ values and roles they wish to include in their role as fathers are reviewed. The category of the process of pursuing fatherhood highlights the overall logistical and practical matters associated with pursuing parenthood as gay couples. These included getting started,
research, planning, envisioning a child, choosing a method, the agency, the home study, introduction letters, into the pool, hearing from birth mothers, and we’re ready to be dads.

All names mentioned in the excerpts have been changed to protect the identity of the participants and individuals to whom the participants refer throughout the interviews. Excerpts from participants are coded as outlined in Table 4.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Couple</th>
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<th>Code 1</th>
<th>Partner 2</th>
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<tr>
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<td>CAP1</td>
<td>Partner 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Couple B</td>
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<td>Partner 2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>CKP1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Couple L</td>
<td>Partner 1</td>
<td>CKP1</td>
<td>Partner 2</td>
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Considering Fatherhood

The couples shared their broad level considerations of fatherhood, which included their earliest memories of desiring fatherhood, their sense that being gay might limit their opportunity for becoming fathers, and generally discussed why they wanted children. The four themes that emerged were: always going to be a father, roadblocks to fatherhood, reasons for pursuing fatherhood, and imagining a future with a child.

Always going to be a father.

Many of the participants reported similar memories of a desire to become a father from a very young age. For some, this was more than just a passing fantasy, but something about which they felt quite adamant. This childhood desire to become a parent is not unlike that of their heterosexual counterparts. CBP2 stated, “I just always saw I was going to be father, no matter what. I didn't...I didn't care. I mean, it didn't really faze me that I was gay or anything. I just knew that somehow I was going to be a dad.”

The men described revealing to their partner their childhood desires to become a father was a bonding experience between them. One couple talked about the moment they realized they had, as adolescents, both kept lists of names for future children:

CLP2: And then as we started dating, we...one day, we were talking about something, and we both found out that since probably about 13, we both had kept a list of baby names written down in a spiral binder and a spiral notebook. And we both had that list. And then as a fun thing, Aaron actually kind of coordinated the lists to see if we matched. CLP1: I did. I did indeed. I made a spreadsheet, and then every time there was a name that was on both lists, I put it in bold. That was really exciting like, “Look at this, we both love the name, Darrin. This is great.”

While many did express an early desire for fatherhood, a few participants commented that they had not thought much of having children when they were young, such as CDP2, “I
never really had a burning desire to have children until I met Micah.” Nonetheless, these men realized a desire for fatherhood once in their current relationship.

**Roadblocks to fatherhood.**

Some participants talked about their gay identity being a barrier to fulfilling their desire to becoming fathers. CDP2 stated, “You know, I looked at being gay as a roadblock, too, to having kids.” Participant CGP2 remarked how his identity as a gay man influenced his thinking about becoming a father in the future, “I’ve always been a fan of kids in general and I think part of my coming out process was the fear of never being able to have a family and that kind of thing.” CBP1 saw the obstacles confronting gay men seeking fatherhood from a slightly different perspective, “I saw [becoming a father as a gay man] as like an obstacle or just like, something I'm challenged to overcome. I think that's how I saw it. Yeah. Being gay as a challenge, like, it was more difficult. I can't just have a good time in the bed. Right?” Whether these perceived barriers were a result of internalized homophobia or an inability to conceive of how they would ever have children with another man, these men found ways to overcome the perceived roadblock and moved towards their desire for fatherhood.

**Reasons for becoming a father.**

Participants commented at length about their reasons for pursuing fatherhood. They had long discussed their desires with their partner, their families and their friends. Yet, finding the exact words to explain why they wanted to become fathers was more of a challenge. CDP1 stated:

I know Sam's favorite thing to ask all of my sisters and our heterosexual friends was like, “Why do you do this?” Like, you know, they're always complaining about being tired and all of that. He would be very direct with them and he would get angry and crazy. They can't explain it to me. I don't get it. Why are they doing it? They, you know, they say it's great and we should do it, but then they can't say why. I kind of see he gets very very frustrated by that and I just accept it, that there is an emotional aspect of it in
connection that you can't know until you experience it. And I was fine with that and I'm waiting for it. That will be cool when it happens.

Some couples were able to identify a value for establishing a legacy and others desired having children so they would have family to spend time with as they grow older. Couple I had the following exchange:

CIP1: I thought it was kind of like, “What's going to happen when we get older, and it's going to be just the two of us?” And maybe eventually just one of us left like...I don't want to say we wanted someone to take care of us, but it was...
CIP2: What do we...what's the mark that we leave? I mean, we're uncles, and that's another big piece of it, too. I mean, we are always around kids whether it's our friend's or our own families’. And we have witnessed the experience that our siblings, that our friends are having. And it's just this incredible joy, like just that all you hear is there is nothing like this, and it's like that missing piece.

Other participants expressed that becoming fathers was a natural next step in the evolution of their relationship. For example CKP2 stated:

I think we’ve settled down a little bit more…I think that’s just in the natural progression of our relationship. We love to do stuff around the house. You know we have spent countless hours in our backyard, in the vegetable garden, and landscaping and you know we take the dog to the dog park on the weekend. We really don’t…I think at this point we really do sort of the same stuff that we would do if we had a child.

A few participants talked about parenthood as a gift to their future children, for example CGP2 commented, “Being able to see my mom…and I think the success she had with us kids…I really want to give that to a child and that was kind of very influential on our decision.”

For the couples in this study, the reasons for pursuing parenthood were variable and complex, much like any person or couple pursuing parenthood. An overall trend was a value for a loving family.

**Future fatherhood.**

The couples in this study all expressed certain anticipation for what their family life would look like once a child arrives. Of course a new baby in the home will affect their daily
lives and their relationships, as would happen in any home. The couples shared their uncertainty, expectations and fear, which are quite reminiscent of any expecting couple. Some spoke frankly that they do not know what to expect from fatherhood, such as CDP2 who shared:

Unknown...it's just...I don't know what the daily rhythm of life would be like with the baby. I mean I have ideas from my friends who have kids, and you know, and I do have concerns that, you know, we both have full-time jobs and, you know, how are we going to create a life that’s balanced and, you know? Do we get a nanny or, you know, how will all of those logistical things fall into place? But I think that those are all pretty run-of-the-mill concerns.

They commented on how they imagine their lives will change and how they will change and grow as individuals. CHP1 shared, “I am excited to see what happens as far as like, my own development in becoming a less self-involved individual because of it.” And others shared some of their fears about parenthood. CEP1 revealed his worries about caring for a small baby and avoiding inadvertently harming the child.

It was interesting. We went and saw the movie Babies recently, and we watched the child in Africa. That baby…or the one in Mongolia, out roaming around doing his thing. How much dirt was consumed, you know. It didn't really matter. You know and it made me feel a little bit more comfortable because it's kind of like, “Okay, I don't have to worry as much…these little things probably will not break the child.” So it was heartwarming to see that movie.

Couples shared what they look forward to doing with their child:

CHP2: I look forward to, you know, teaching him how to sew and teaching him about music and exposing him to museums and, you know, gardening and life, and you know, all those things.
CHP1: That will be fun. I'm getting excited about it.
CHP2: You're getting excited about it?
CHP1: A little bit, yeah. Exciting.

The awareness of the uncertainties, expectations and fears about fatherhood resonated with what any expecting parent might acknowledge.
Relationship

Participating couples shared aspects of their relationship that have influenced their decisions about parenthood and vice versa. Partners talked about the importance of finding a partner with whom to become a parent and the effect the process has had on their relationship. The two themes that emerged were: finding the right person, and it’s only been good for our relationship.

Finding the right person.

Partners shared their value for developing a relationship that would be conducive to family. For these men, having a stable and loving relationship in which to raise a child was paramount. For example, CFP2 stated, “I knew at some point in my life I would always have a child, and it's just a matter of finding the right person, settling down, and doing that.”

Couples explained that they were upfront at the very beginning of their relationship, as CBP2 stated, “So, having kids was an important conversation that we had early on or that we knew about each other even before we met, I think, because we met online. So we’d seen each other’s profiles, and….” CHP2 recalled, “Well, that was the question that was asked when we very first started dating, do you want children?” CLP1 shared his unique experience of trying to imagine what his children would look like with a prospective partner:

I will say that for me, when I was dating women in my younger years, I always had in my mind the idea of, “Is this going to be the mother of my children? Is this going to be it?” And so, when I finally, finally did come out in my early ’20s, I had had that mindset for so long because it just felt completely natural to me. I remember my first boyfriend… I remember sitting across from him one day and looking at him and thinking, “I wonder if our kids will have auburn hair like Andy does.” And then I caught myself like going, “What am I saying?” … So I always was thinking in those terms. And every time I had a date, even a first date, I would think, “Is he father material? Could I raise a child with him?”
So important is their dream of having children, many of these men were upfront with any prospective partner that children were in their future.

**It’s only been good for our relationship.**

Though each couple was in a different phase of the process of becoming fathers, many shared how they felt their relationship had changed or been impacted by their process. Couples talked about becoming closer, becoming more aware of one another and identifying what they wanted to be sure to prioritize in their relationship once a child arrived. Some couples expressed that they had noticed no changes at all.

Becoming closer throughout the process of pursuing fatherhood was a common subtheme for these couples. For example CCP2 stated, “And so I think that we’ve become closer and that we’ve...I think we have to depend on each other more.” CIP2 shared, “I think, for me, it's made me more conscious of our relationship and the dynamics of it, because going through that whole profile thing…It just makes...it's made me more conscious.” Couples talked about how the process not only improved their relationship but has inspired them to be more proactive in taking care of themselves in preparation for the future. CGP2 shared, “I think it’s only been good for our relationship. And for me it’s changed, like my outlook of things because you know I’ve started going to the gym and working out and running and being more active because that’s what I want to do when our kid gets here.”

Some couples explained that they have not experienced any changes in their relationship. CDP1 stated, “I don't know that [this process has] changed the relationship at all. It just seems like another reflection of our relationship and how we do things.” Other couples expressed that any changes they have experienced are not due to their pursuit of fatherhood. CEP1 stated, “I don't think the changes in our relationship have necessarily been influenced by the process at
all. I would say changes in our relationship have probably been influenced more by outside influences like changing jobs or going to school.”

**Role Models**

Participating couples said quite a bit about the role models they are looking to as they seek out parenthood. The initial challenge for many of them was finding evidence that there are families being led by gay male couples. They talked about learning from LGB parents around them, but especially from author, LGBT rights activist, and gay father, Dan Savage. Some participants talked about seeing their own parents, especially fathers, as role models for their own parenting. The four themes that emerged were: evidence, observing others, Dan Savage, and parents as role models.

**Evidence.**

Participating couples talked about a desire to see more evidence gay male couples parenting in their communities and in the broader gay community. CEP2 shared the following poignant story about wanting to see more evidence of gay male couples parenting:

One weekend, when we came up to Seattle, and we were in like, a cupcake shop or something and there was this, I mean, there's this gay couple and they had two...I think they had twins. And that was just very endearing just to see that in action right before your eyes. I wish we saw more gay men like walking on the street. So I wish we had more evidence of gay parenting around us.

Couple H concurred and went on to explain the significance for them of seeing other gay male couples parenting:

CHP1: There is something really very different about seeing like two men with a child. CHP2: Yeah. That's true. And you see two men with a child, it's very touching and it's very sincere, and it's like a rarity. It's like...the number of times we've walked down the street and seen two men with a kid, it's like...it's like a once a year occurrence.
Some couples commented that they’ve seen more evidence of gay male couples parenting overtime, so much so that their initial responses to seeing men with children has changed. CIP1 explained that he has seen more evidence of gay men parenting over time:

It's so funny because I know so many guys who have kids now like especially in softball like they'll...gay guys, I play gay softball...So now when I see them like...if I see one of the guys with a kid, my automatic thought is, “Oh, that's their son. Oh, that's their child? How did they get it?” You know what I mean? Whereas years ago, when I first started playing softball, I'd be like, “Who's that kid and why is he...?”

Some couples acknowledged knowing maybe one or two other gay couples who were fathering. CHP1 recognized that, “Steve and Josh are the only gay couple we know who have kids.” And CBP1 remembered that, “Well, yeah. There's a couple across the street that's gay, and they adopted a child.”

Overall, the sense of these couples not having many others to look to and learn from was palpable. They seek a connection with other gay male couples parenting, especially now as they encounter the few gay male couples who are parenting, they are faced with that which they long for; a child of their own.

**Observing others.**

Participating couples talked about their tendency to look to other gay couples that they know or encounter to learn about how they became parents and how they behave as parents. Others mentioned observing their heterosexual contemporaries and observing how they are parenting. This very natural tendency to look to others is complicated for gay male couples because there are not many other parenting gay couples for them to look to and they must apply what they observe in parenting straight couples to their own developing family.
CLP1 stated that, “I think that as gay parents, we also have to accept the fact that we need to look at other families like ours.” Others pointed out that because there are so few examples, they are allowed to make their own way, which can be challenging:

CHP1: And so, it's exciting to think that we just get to kind of do our own thing for what, you know, what works best for us. But also a little terrifying in that there's nobody...we often say just as like gay men, nothing to do with kids, is that we just, you know, it's a lack of formal models, lack of people to model after. It's just so obvious.
CHP2: That whole generation died away.
CHP1: Yeah. It’s all gone.

Others are looking to their friends, gay and straight, who are parenting. CJP1 remarked, “And, you know, a lot of my high school friends who I grew up with, they're starting to have kids now. So, it's interesting to see how they take care of their kids.” CIP2 claimed, “Our friends, Paul and Jeff, who had a kid for how many years now? They were one of the first gay couples we know to get married and to have a kid.”

Most striking and encouraging was the couples’ sense of simply continuing to pursue parenthood even with limited guideposts from others who have gone before them.

Dan Savage.

The columnist, author and editor Dan Savage, who is gay and has a son with his partner, came up often in the interviews with these men. Dan Savage is most recently known for the “It Gets Better” campaign, which focuses on encouraging LGB youth, many of whom cannot imagine what their lives might be like as openly gay adults let alone any kind of future. But before the “It Gets Better” campaign, Dan Savage wrote “The Kid” (Savage, 1999), about his experience of pursuing open adoption with his partner. This book opened the doors for many gay men to the reality that being an openly gay man and father, was a possibility. CFP2 acknowledged, “I've read a couple of Dan Savage's books, The Kid and The Commitment.” CEP1 shared, “I mean I know for me [Dan Savage’s book The Kid] kind of turned on a huge
light bulb that said, ‘Oh, my God, this is actually possible.’ Dan Savage…seems like a real pioneer to me.”

Some couples investigated a specific adoption agency in part because of Dan Savage’s example; CLP2 said, “This is the agency that Dan Savage mentioned in his book, ‘The Kid’. It's not mentioned particularly, but it's actually the agency that he used.”

Parents as role model.

Parents and particularly fathers serve as role models for these men. Though not true for all participants, many referred to their parents as models of healthy parenting. CBP2 shared, “My dad was really involved in our lives, like everything. He was always...he was at every practice we had or maybe too much, but he was a pretty good dad. So I'm not going to necessarily stray from, at least, what he was like as a father.” CEP1 offered, “For me, I think also again on a personal level my parents [are role models]. I really enjoyed my parents, I mean, they are good parents.” The men in this study found their experience with their own parents readily transferrable to their own approach to fatherhood.

Coming out of the closet, again

Participants spoke about how sharing their plans for fatherhood required them to be open about themselves in a way that reminded them of coming out of the closet as gay men. They talked about their experiences of telling family and friends their plans for parenthood, having to come out about parenthood at work, and what they imagine it will mean to be a gay male couple with children when out in public. The three themes that emerged were: sharing plans for fatherhood, coming out at work, and coming out as gay fathers.
Sharing plans for fatherhood.

Many couples found that they received tremendously positive feedback and support when they began telling family and friends about their plans to become fathers. A few participants commented on the rare negative response they received.

Participants shared their experience of receiving support from their friends and family, in contrast for some to what they had anticipated or prepared for. CIP1 commented that “[our friend’s] automatic first reaction is like, ‘Oh, my God, you guys are going to be awesome fathers.’ That's like everyone that I met.” CAP2 stated, “Well, really with as far as everyone knows that we are doing the whole adoption process, we've met nothing but happiness.” CCP2 elaborated, “And so, it's nice, it's sweet. I know that the response my family has given is not the typical response for many gay men, so I feel lucky in the sense that they are so supportive of it and very excited about it.”

Some couples reported not sharing their plans with family, such as CFP2: “[Our parents] know nothing…Neither families. Well, we just don't want to…it could be long process, and I think until we're probably in the adoption pool…no, not the adoption pool, ‘til we're actually working with the birth mother that we might actually bring it up.”

CIP2 shared his experience of telling his father:

“Are you really okay about this?” And he was like, “I can't tell you how excited I am.” And that was huge relief, and I said, “So, and what about, do you think you could love a child that wasn't a birth child?” And he said something like, “If it's your child, I'm going to love it as much as I love the others.” So it was just like this huge, like, thing just being lifted off your shoulders.

Participants received nearly all positive support from friends and family, though CIP1 shared, “other than the random gay person who's like ‘whatever.’” This kind of response from
other gay men was understood by the participants as a reflection of that person’s resentment for the couple’s perceived alignment with a heterosexual norm.

**Coming out at work.**

The couples talked about their experiences of letting coworkers and superiors know about their plans for parenthood or what it might be like for one partner to bring their baby to the place of work of the other partner. Others shared some of their more difficult conversations with coworkers and superiors. Some shared their experience of having to educate coworkers about being gay. CAP2 recounted the following vignette:

> So I had an interesting conversation with a lady whom I worked with professionally and getting to know personally, and she was sort of giving me the...I guess, grilling me over it, you know, how gay culture works and that type of thing. And she was asking questions like, “Well, you know, if you adopt, would you expect that the child would be gay,” and you know, asking sort of, to me, what were really silly questions, but it was apparent that she really had not had very much contact or involvement with gay people. So I think that, you know, certainly there are going to be people out there who are going to frown upon our lifestyle and going to frown upon our trying to build a family together whether it's via adoption or surrogacy, but I think that a lot of that comes really from ignorance in not understanding that our relationship really is no different from anyone else's.

Others shared their experiences of encountering heterosexism or the presumption of heterosexuality. CLP2 shared a recent experience, to which most gay men can relate, of deciding to correct the presumptions of a coworker and in so doing came out to her:

> I was talking to somebody I work with, but I haven't necessarily physically met, but I talked to her on the phone. And we're working on some different things, and I said, “Well, I have to do this because we're going through an adoption process.” And they were like, “Oh, that must be really exciting for your wife.” And I'm like, “Actually, it's my husband.” And she was like, “Oh.” And that's where, one, you have that question of like, “Okay. Do I really want to reveal that, the whole issue of every time? Every day is a coming out period because you're always going to meet somebody potentially that doesn't know that you're gay.

Others shared that they are generally having a positive experience being out about their sexual orientation and their plans for fatherhood. CAP1 shared, “As far as the community goes I
am out and able to be open at work, in the environment that I'm in. And the majority of my office knows that we're going through this process and is very accepting and nurturing of the process.”

CCP1 talked about the challenges for gay men seeking employment benefits to cover his expected child:

I think the first thing, specifically, on being gay parents is the fact that there is an impact on your work that I think if you're a straight couple, you wouldn't have. Such as...for me, what comes to my mind is there is no policy in my company as coverage of the family. And so now, not only do I have to go to my HR director to tell her I'm gay, I have a partner, but on top of that, she needs to get her nose in my business because, now, I want to know if my kid is going to be covered. She has to become the advocate on my behalf to go see the owner of the company to say, “Oh, we need to cover, you know, adoption.” Or, “We need to cover a kid. But by the way, it's for a couple that is not married, for a guy who is with another man.”

This is a great example of the kind of scenario that a gay male couple would not anticipate and to which a straight couple would not have to give a second thought.

**Coming out as gay fathers.**

Participating couples spoke at length about the anticipation of being out in public with a child. They acknowledged that when they are out together with their child most people will realize that they are a gay couple. Alternatively, if one partner is out with the child others will ask about the child’s mother, causing the father to explain his situation repeatedly. This is a common experience for gay fathers.

CHP1, shared “Part of thinking about raising the kids is that our kids are a real outward sign. Like if Carl and I are walking together, pushing a stroller and have a kid. Part of me feels like it's a real outing, like people can, they’re like, ‘Okay, that's a gay couple.’” CLP2 put it simply, “I think we're both fully aware that once we have our child, the child’s existence is going to out us every day and everywhere we go, and we're fine with it. We're absolutely fine with that.”
Becoming a father as a gay male couple seems to require a great deal of ego strength and confidence in oneself as well as a certain level of comfort with the community in which they live.

**Friends and Family**

The men discussed the roles that their friends and family are currently playing in their pursuit of parenthood. In addition, they shared how they hope their friends and family will be involved in the raising of their children, including comments about the role of women. The three themes that emerged were: role of friends, role of family, and role of women.

**Role of friends.**

Participants shared how their friends are part of their process and how they imagine their friends will be involved in their families in the future. CAP1 explained, “We have had a very tight-knit sort of social network, if you will. And a lot of our friends, naturally being the same age that we are, are starting to have families of their own. So it's sort of a natural part of life.”

They described a deeply felt sense of joy at the prospect of raising children with friends. CHP2 shared:

And that, you know, it was interesting because somebody turned to me, who had been married for a while and we knew that they were, you know, in the next couple of years, were going to be having children. And she's turned to me and she said, “I cannot wait to raise kids with you guys.” And I started crying. I was just so moved by that. And also by the realization that I had never considered, “Oh my gosh, wow. What a huge blessing. I get to raise children with you.”

Couple L shared the following exchange about going through the adoption process with friends, who are also a gay male couple:

CLP2: I would say he's probably one of my three closest friends in the world. And so, it was great that we're going through this process together; however, they're already two months ahead of us, well, because they already own their own home, and…

CLP1: Our bitterness at Isaac and Wayne being ahead of us is medicated by our love for them.
CEP1 said about their friends that they are, “all on the watch list, I guess. They're all waiting with baited breath for this.” Couples are supported by their friends who are all waiting for news of a child coming into their lives. Couples were energized by the idea of raising children with friends.

**Role of family.**

The couples discussed how their families are involved in the process of their pursuit of parenthood and in some cases not involved. They also shared how their families may be involved in the future. For some, parents offered their joyful enthusiasm, which is what many would certainly hope for. CCP2 shared, “Well, my mother is very excited. She has already sent us presents. My sister is also equally excited. She just sent us another present this weekend.”

CBP1 humorously shared how his parents participation in their waiting process, “I would call home and my dad will ask, ‘Have you heard anything?’ And my mom is like, ‘Bill, they'll tell us when there is something to know.”’

For some couples, extended family will play an integral part in the raising of the child, including providing part time child care. CAP1 talked about how his family will be involved when they have children:

> It's our anticipation that our families will be very involved with our children. But as far as helping out with babysitting and, you know, family functions and holidays and things of that nature, it will be a very sort of stereotypical childhood in that, you know, those will be big events and the grandparents and aunts and uncles and what not will be very involved there in the child's life.

CEP1 shared that though his parents have not been entirely supportive, “So I think [my parents are] going to play a pretty significant role in the child's life just because of proximity and we have a great relationship with them.”
For others, family or parental involvement will not be an option for one reason or another. For CHP1, family involvement will be minimal:

So, I don't think, I don't really see much role at all for my family, which is...I mean...I said that matter of factly. I mean the emotional part is kind of sad and...which prevents involvement and to see my family involved with like my older brother's kids and I was like, you know, it's mom's, the grandma's, all about that. And the reality is if I went back with four kids of my own, it would not be like that.

CEP2 explained that the dynamics in his family make sharing his plans for adoption different:

My family is a little different. Neither of them is okay with the gay thing, one hundred percent. I mean my mom loves Joseph...But I don't think...She's not renting out billboards that say, “My son is gay!” I told her a lot about the adoption. She doesn't ask questions. She doesn't get involved. My dad is pretty much an island, anyway, so he knows.

For some of these men, their families have not been able to come to terms with their sexuality, so the prospect of supporting two men having children is that much more challenging to resolve.

Role of women.

Participants discussed what role women will have in the lives of their children. Some talked about the female relatives and friends who will be involved. Others expressed their concern about the absence of an ever present female caretaker. Much of the discussion about the role of women between the couples during the interview were lengthy. CBP2 shared, “I think it's important for any child to have a female role model or some female to communicate with. So, we definitely want women that are more liberal to be involved in their lives, I think, just to show that it's okay for a woman to be around.” CHP1 shared his confidence that women will be a constant presence for his children, “So, I feel like, without a doubt it's much easier to throw a
stone and hit like a wonderful nurturing woman in our lives than it is to find the male counterpart to that.”

Couple I had the following exchange about the women in their life, expressing their certainty that their child will be exposed to many women in their family and social circle:

CIP2: Well, I mean, there'll be aunts galore and…
CIP1: Nieces.
CIP2: …grandmother, and cousins.
CIP1: Nieces, cousins and nieces.
CIP2: I think, I don't know. I think we'll have...
CIP1: I mean, my closest friends are girls, I would say, and I'm very close to my sisters as is he.

Couple E shared their concerns about the child not having a mother figure:

CEP2: I think I worry about the baby not having a mother, or not having any maternal person, but I mean our baby will...
CEP1: Yeah. I mean she'll have them, he or she will have lots of female friends.
CEP2: Well, I mean, you know, just having an ongoing role model as a maternal role model I guess.

These couples are seriously considering the issue of exposing their children to enough female role models. For some, there is certainty that there are enough women to provide healthy role models for their child. For others, there are concerns and uncertainties about how they can make sure their child is exposed to women.

**Gay & Father Identities**

Participants shared their growing awareness of their identities as gay men and their developing identities as fathers and how these two identities do and do not intersect. The four themes that emerged were: focus on adoption, benefits of gay parents, appropriate parents, and internalized homophobia.
Focus on adoption.

When considering the intersection of their identities as gay men and as prospective fathers, many participants explained how their identities as fathers felt distinct from their identities as gay men. CCP1 summed up a common sentiment, “And so I don't think…I don't see a link between being a gay man and being a father. I don't know. For me being gay is a fact, but it's not a definition.”

CCP1 commented, “For me, being a gay parent is not on the table, and the adoption is, what really is my concern. And sometimes, I'm thinking about it, I'm like, ‘Shit, did I forget that I'm gay, and that I should be concerned about that aspect?’” His partner concurred, “for us, it's all about the adoption and we sort of forget about sort of us as gay men doing this in some way because we have been so obsessed about adoption.”

For these couples, while not losing sight of their identity is important, when it comes to their pursuit of fatherhood, their identities as prospective parents takes precedence.

Benefits of gay parents.

Couples readily discussed the advantages they saw for gay parents and their children. CHP2 shared his perspective, “I think as a gay couple, you just are already at the paradigm shift and you have a new viewpoint. And so, you're able to...you're questioning all the infirmities and all the pillars of society as it is and so you're able to help a child with that.”

CLP2 expressed his frustration about the hypocrisy of those fighting to prevent gay men from adopting, given that gay men must be so careful and intentional with their pursuit of parenthood:

I think the thing is that when you hear people, about beating their children, or killing them, or things like that in the news and stuff. I think that when we see a lot of this stuff going on in the world, and then, [we as gay men are criticized] for wanting to adopt
children and I'm like, “But you're not doing any better.” And we want to choose this, and we really have soul-searched to be parents.

CCP1 reiterated that gay male couples seeking to become parents must be considerate and deliberate in all of their decisions:

I think that, for me, the impact of the upbringing and the fact that we are gay parents is really related to the fact that you make a choice of having a baby, you know? In our case because of the process that is involved, you know, of the cost that is involved, the length of the process, it's not like, “Okay, let's start doing it today and let's see if it happens,” while if you are a straight couple…You never have...you don't have to ask those questions and you don't have to answer to a third person that you never met before. For me, that's really poignant.

This point resonated strongly across all couples; gay male couples must be so deliberate when it comes to pursuing parenthood that by the time they welcome a child in their home, they have had to consider all of their doubts, fears, hopes, available resources, and strengths and weaknesses of their relationship. They see this fact as a tremendous benefit of being gay parents, both for themselves as parents and for their children.

Appropriate parents.

The interviewees shared their concerns about possible negative effects of two men raising a child, their thoughts about how gay men are stigmatized as inappropriate parents and how they imagine they will be perceived by others once they have a child.

Though research overwhelmingly shows that sexual orientation is not a determinant a capacity for good parenting, the couples in this study talked about having to face what those in their communities might say to them, based on their biases or discriminatory beliefs about two men parenting together. CAP1 shared his initial concerns about two gay men raising a child:

One of the things that I took into consideration was how a child being raised by two gay males, how that will affect the child. And initially, that was a pretty big concern for me because I know childhood is difficult enough under normal circumstances and, you know, certainly, normal is relative or what is normal is relative, but I think that being raised by two gay male parents will certainly pose obstacles for a child to have to overcome.
Some participants talked about having to prove their appropriateness as parents, in response to questions or comments they might get from others. CGP1 explained, “We enjoy people asking us those questions because not only does it enlighten them and kind of give our perspective to them but it also helps us to think about, ‘hey, what will we do in the event of something like this happens?’”

CCP2 expressed his sense that the real issue is the questioning of the capacity of men in general to be appropriate parents: “[My mother] would like to come right away and help out, which I think is a whole other issue, but hopefully, we can discuss this, you know, people seeing us as men and whether or not we know how to do this.”

CCP2 highlighted a much more global issue about the capacity of men to parent appropriately. When it comes to being perceived as appropriate parents, gay men are faced with both the stigma of being men and being gay.

**Internalized Homophobia**

Some couples mentioned a measure of uncertainty when the adoption process was not moving as they expected. They shared their fears that a delay or a lack of response from an adoption agency was a reflection of the agency’s bias against a gay couple rather than a normal delay in the process. CDP2 stated, “I can see where if we were to experience [rejection] in our adoption process, there may be times where I would look at that and say, ‘Oh gosh, are we being rejected or are we experiencing this because we’re gay?’” CLP2 labeled this experience, “I think it's a little bit of internal homophobia where you fear that they're judging you on that particular issue.”

CCP2 expressed his fear that gay men should not be parenting, “I'd be scared of making the girl too butch because we're two guys, I mean, you know, it's just, I mean, female influence
in her life, and you know, that just proves that two gay men shouldn't raise a child and so...”

This was echoed by other couples in this study and is certainly an expressed concern of opponents to same sex parenting.

**Stigma and Stereotypes**

The men spoke about their experiences of being gay men pursuing parenthood when nearly everything about parenting is geared toward heterosexual couples. They mused about how things would be different if they were a straight couple and how they would respond to criticism when they are out in the world with their child. They discussed how they see themselves defying or fulfilling stereotypes. The four themes that emerged were: gay men in a straight world, if you were a straight couple, responding to criticism, and stereotypes.

**Gay men in a straight world.**

The fathers-to-be spoke of their experiences that reminded them that they are gay couples operating in a heterocentric world, especially when it comes to parenting. While there is a growing number of same-sex parents, these couples recognize that they will often be the only gay couples among straight couples. CIP1 shared his experience with a parenting class, “The first thing that was weird is that we were the only gay couple. That surprised me.” His partner continued, “Well, at first, I was sort of hesitant because we didn't know these other people in the class, and it was all about these discussions that we were going to be having, and what did they think of gay people?” CHP2 stated, “I know that we are going to be put in the company of straight couples all the time.” His partner concluded, “Yeah, 'cause there's nobody else.”

CCP2 shared the following anecdote that to illustrate their experience of being expecting gay fathers in a straight world:

We went to the store called Buy Buy Baby in Chelsea. And every time we go in, it's just painfully aware that we are two gay men because everyone else is a straight couple or
two mothers or whatever. And we were trying to get some help to get the car seat and no one would help us. And so it wasn't, you know, and that place is notorious for having really bad customer service. So we're standing there and we're like, “Okay, is it because we're gay or these people are just really bad?”

CHP2 had a unique outlook on the role of gay men becoming parents in a heterocentric world:

And, you know, I'm a totally Jungian in the sense of like knowing that our...one of our purposes as queer people is to do that. And by...whether that's playing the fool or playing the queen or playing, you know, the joker, or being a healer or being, you know, a priest or whatever it is, you know, that you are...you're on the outside of the group and so you're therefore able to reflect back to the group what they are and who they are.

The men recognize that they are not the target audience when it comes to commercial media, but they also acknowledge the unique opportunity they have to blaze new trails and play a supportive role in society.

**If you were a straight couple.**

The participants noted the many times they were reminded by others how their experience would be different if they were a heterosexual couple. CAP2 shared, “We have a friend that actually does a lot of placement for Lutheran Family Services and she was saying, you know, ‘if you were a straight couple, you could have a child in the next week,’ you know, that sort of thing.”

CCP1 noted his concern about missing out on crucial information about parenting that he might get if he were an expecting straight woman:

And I see the other aspect that I find interesting is...It's like you're pregnant, you get on databases where they're going to send you all this information about, you know, that's what you should get, and that's the formula, and that's the coupon for the formula, and so and so forth. And I'm like, “Okay. We are two dads. That's never going to come.” So am I going to be missing on something? I'm sure I'm not going to be missing on much in terms of marketing and buyers. I don't even know what I'm missing because I'm not part of the target population on this aspect.
CIP1 stated that the whole process would be different for he and his partner if they were a straight couple and they must take an alternative and often more challenging route to become parents, “Right. Right. It's not just like, ‘Oops, it happened.’ Like wake up one day, ‘I'm pregnant. Guess what, honey.’” These men are having to seek out information that would otherwise be readily presented to them, face the reality that if they were a straight couple they would be more likely to be matched with a child through a faith based adoption agency, and manage the contrast of their own experience with a typical straight couple who could become pregnant without much effort.

**Responding to criticism.**

The couples talked about their experience with or anticipation of responding to overt criticism of their family from strangers when out in public. CKP1 shared, “The difficult part for me would be other people saying something to my kid about our relationship. I’d have to…that’s something I have to be ready for because I think I would have a potential to overreact and to get very angry about.” CKP2 shared his awareness that how he responds to criticism will have an impact on his child:

I think that our response is going to play into… especially if our child is with us when we experience something like that. It’s going to play into how they’re going to respond to their, you know, peers or whatever at some point so I think that if we can you know have a well thought out, you know, sort of response to that question, then that would certainly make things a lot easier for our child.

CGP2 expressed that how he and his partner respond is important not just for his family but for all same sex parents, “I think by taking those questions then and you know not having that, ‘why the hell did you just ask me that question’ look on your face, but by answering them openly and honestly…I think that helps to build our credibility.”
CBP1 acknowledged his uncertainty about he would respond, “I don't really...it's hard to imagine until it's like happening and here, you're out walking with the baby, and I don't know if people stare or say stuff, I don't know.” CFPI also expressed his uncertainty and concern about how he might respond to criticism, “I'm concerned that if somebody says something that is negative about the fact that we are a gay couple with a child, I probably will not be a good role model for the child in how I react.”

Couples are seriously considering the realities of being a family led by gay parents and what they will need to be prepared for when their new addition arrives. They struggle with wanting to adamantly defend their family while trying to do so with dignity.

Stereotypes.

The couples shared their resistance to fulfilling stereotypes of gay men who have children. CLP2 expressed his disdain for what he described as a cliché, “I mean, they always say that, right? Now the cliché is, is that gay fathers as the cliché. We're all adopting now, and so that's the thing we got to do, and that's not the thing we're going to do.” Couple H had the following exchange about the gay cliché:

CHP2: A friend of ours put us in touch with a friend of hers who had started a blog. And, you go and you look and it's like babies are the new fashion accessory, you know. Like, they are the lady's pair of Jimmy Choo's or Prada sandals or

CHP1: or like in Chelsea, everyone’s got a baby.

CHP2: Yeah, and they're like, “Oh, God. This is not, I think what I want or this is not what I want to be emulating.”

CCP2 shared his concerned about a different stereotype of gay men, “I think that there's a little part of me that worries, like I said before, about the perception of, if we have a boy, you know, that pedophile stereotype.” Though his partner shared the opposite concern, “I'm more concerned about the perception that people would have of having a daughter like, ‘Oh, you have
a daughter, so now you can really be gay, and you know, be like flamboyant or anything like that.”

CJP2 expressed his frustration about the assumptions of what gay men should accept when it comes to parenting, “And one thing that has always bothered me is the assumption that gay couples should only be allowed to adopt if they're willing to take special needs children… it's a little insulting, because it implies that we're second class and should only take the kids that nobody else wants.”

Stereotypes are considered to be based on at least a small amount of truth. While it may be true that there are some gay couples who see a child as the next must have accessory before being faced with the reality of parenthood, the couples in this study expressed a strong desire to avoid these stereotypes altogether and simply pursue their heartfelt desires for fatherhood.

Resources

Participating couples identified resources they have found readily available to them and others that they found lacking. This category label could apply to excerpts across all other categories, however a few specific excerpts are below. The two themes that emerged were resources available and resources needed.

Available resources.

The identified available resources that met the specific needs of the gay male couples pursuing fatherhood were far fewer than the identified needed resources. Certainly the adoption agencies and foster care agencies that are welcoming and affirming of same sex couples, cited in other parts of the results is considered a primary resource by these couples.

In regard to available resources, CEP2 shared his assessment:

I think where we live we have a lot of resources that are not available elsewhere, like gay parenting classes or adopted parenting classes that are open, very open to gay couples and
the agency we worked with. [Our state] is a great state for gay adoptions or adoptions in general and gay adoption is being under that. So I think we do have a lot of resources as a gay couple.

CGP2 expressed that though some resources are available, “as far as community resources, there are very few that I think we will need.”

**Needed resources.**

Any expecting couple is in need of resources and supports at all stages of expectancy, regardless of route to parenthood. The couples mentioned several resources that they wished were available to them but that they were unable to find locally or anywhere at all. They also shared examples of resources that were available but were ultimately unhelpful or unsatisfying.

The primary issue raised by couples was that of feeling that they were all alone in the process. They needed ways to connect with other couples going through a similar process.

CHP1 shared:

> We, you know, we have not outwardly sought a lot of resources. I'll say this, you know. It's like living on an island. And you're like, “I'm going to immerse myself in Italian culture... but you’re like, “where are the other Italians?” Like, you're kind of by yourself. So, I feel like, in a way, I think it's scary because we are like, “Oh, it's just us kind of doing this.” I know it's not the case. There are other people out there.

CGP1 shared a similar sentiment, “I think the thing that surprised me the most about this whole process is just how I feel sometimes like we are on our own.”

Many couples expressed the need for a support group. CCP2 shared, “I think it's interesting there are support groups or there are things that are organized when you are gay parents. So, the child is there and so you have opportunities to meet all other gay parents. But, there are not that many opportunities to meet all the expecting parents.” CGP2 agreed with this sentiment, “I think that the problem here is there is a lack of like a support group.” CIP1 shared:

> The biggest thing now, and you just brought this up the other day with Anna, is like some sort of support group or whatever for like dads or gay parents who are in the spot, where
we are right now, like the waiting. I mean, there's plenty of like, playgroups for gay parents and this and that, and the other thing, but there's nothing right now where we can be like, “Are you going out of your mind as well? Because we are!”

CGP2 simply desired a support group that was welcoming to same sex couples, “So I think if we had a support group…to be able to talk to…adoptive parents down here that were open and accepting rather than the big mega church people that go to countries and adopt babies.”

Couples are also challenged with not knowing what they needed to know or did not know about becoming parents. CEP1 expressed, “I think we will run into situations where we are looking for assistance and end up not getting it. And that I don't think we're at this point we know what those are.”

Though the couples pursuing adoption have settled with agencies that are generally welcoming to and affirming of same-sex couples, they have found that their unique needs get left out in the adoption process. CDP1 wanted adoption agencies, even those that are open and affirming to gay couples, to be more specific about the unique needs of gay male couples, “I don't feel like anything is missing but, maybe, if there was some little segment in the program about the difference for gay parents and what did other gay parents experience and all that because it’s, you know, generally, a lot about what to experience of the parent.”

Over the coming years more appropriate resources that meet the unique needs of gay male couple pursuing parenthood may be developed, but these couples highlighted their awareness of a dearth of resources available to them at the present time. While advances in adoption agencies that are welcoming to same-sex couples is a step in the right direction, these couples are asking for more specific resources.
Parental Roles and Values

Participants described in detail the values they hold for their future parenting style and the roles they imagine they will fulfill as fathers. They highlighted a value for honesty with the adoption process which related to their value for honesty with their future child about where he or she came from. They reported a value for taking on traditional parenting roles, a value for education, and specific parenting styles they hope to implement. The four themes that emerged were: honesty, traditional parenting roles, value for education, and parenting styles.

Honesty.

Participants strongly endorsed a value for honesty with themselves, the adoption process, and their child. This value for honesty seemed to be related to their process of coming out of the closet which required them to be honest with themselves first and then with their friends and families. When pursuing parenthood, same sex couples are often given the opportunity to speed up the process by, for example, one partner pretending to be a straight single male. For these couples, these kinds of dishonest approaches were options they were distinctly not willing to pursue.

CLP2 spoke about why honesty influenced them to not pursue international adoption, “And one of the things that we didn't choose international adoption was because you had to lie, and Aaron and I didn't want to lie.” CIP2 shared, “And we felt very strongly about the fact that we are married, and we would never want to misrepresent that.” CKP2 explained, “If the truth, you know, even if it hurts, at least then you work on it from there. Instead of just creating lies and creating stories and you know whatever else to hide it.”

For the couples pursuing open adoption, the emphasis placed on openness and honest with the child throughout his or her life was appealing. CBP1 shared how his value for honesty
influenced their decision to pursue open adoption, “And also I like the fact of an open adoption. The fact that you have some sort of relationship with the birth mother, and the child has a relationship with the birth mother. We like that aspect of it. There aren't any secrets that could harm the kid.” CBP2 described the open adoption agency he and his partner are working with, “They were really just kind of open and welcoming…And whether you're a single or a couple, or whatever that couple looks like, really, and they really just wanted everything out on the table. And I really like that. There's a lot of honesty.”

Participants spoke about their value for their child knowing where he or she had come from and what his or her history is. CGP1 explained, “The child’s going to know, he’s not biologically ours. The plumbing doesn’t work, you know, but…so we need to be straightforward with him if we expect to have an open line of communication with our child.” CKP2 emphasized, “I want [my child] to know wherever they came from, you know, whatever the circumstances. I really just want them to know the truth about who they are.” His partner added, “I think it’s, again, it comes down to honesty so our kid can be comfortable with who he or she is.” CKP1 went on to say:

But I would be up front and honest about everything. Because I feel that trying to beat around the bush or telling a small lie about something demeans the entire relationship. Even the point where…um, I think it’s demeans the importance that we would have as fathers if we weren’t honest about who our child is and where they come from.

The men in this study emphasized a value for honesty throughout the entire process of their pursuit of parenthood. This emphasis on honesty was pervasive in their relationships with friends and family, between the partners themselves and into their pursuit of parenthood.

**Traditional parenting roles.**

Couples talked about how they imagined they would replicate or redefine the traditional parenting roles of a mother and father. The traditional mother and father roles are often rigidly
conceptualized, however, as these men describe, in truth mothers and fathers take on aspects of fathers and mothers all the time. This is no different for these men who will take on the functions of both mother and father. They also discussed their overall conceptualization of a primary care taker.

CFP1 proclaimed, “I think we'll share those roles. I think early...very early on, it'll follow that Wayne will be in the more traditional mother role.” Alternatively, CEP1 stated, “I think we play both roles. I mean, I don't' really think we divide up things by male and female roles.” His partner added, “I think, yeah, we're both going to be both.” CAP2 concurred, “I think that being two fathers, it's sort of like the single mother syndrome, but there are the two of us. You have to be a mother and father both.” CFP2 joked, “Maybe one of us is going to be breastfeeding.”

The fathers-to-be expressed an equanimity of the traditional roles, but some couples went on to delineate how one partner fit more of a mothering role and the other partner more of traditional fathering role. For example, CGP1 stated:

I would probably say, for the ‘mother and father roles’ we’re an amalgamation of both in certain areas. Larry the cook. The person who does the laundry. The cleaner of the house. He does more of those I guess domestic chores and I do the mechanics. The wiring, the more, I don't know, manly. I don't know. He mows. I don’t want to sound...we really carry both traits and our, I think...we complement each other.

CHP2 shared his perspective on traditional roles, “Daniel is the one who has more of the drive to have children and to adopt which seems somewhat maternal, but then when I imagine us raising children, I will be the one who they come to for the ooey-gooey touchy feely, you know, that kind of thing.”

CCP2 commented on the assumed parenting roles within heterosexual relationships:

Well, I mean, there is no assumption about which one of us would stay home. So it's, I mean, I, you know, straight couples and it would be...I think it's just assumed that the woman is going to stay home. And so, it's a conversation that we ought to have. And, I
mean, if we had more equal salaries, I think that it would probably be more in depth conversation, then it's just...you know, I can't support a family on a teacher's salary.

The men talked about their desires for being a primary caregiver and staying home with the child. Some were clear that they wanted to be a stay at home father, though others were clear they had no interest in staying at home.

CHP2: I do not want to be home raising a kid all day long.
CHP1: I totally do. I do want to do that.

CFP1: I don't know. I think that Wayne will be completely head over heels in love with the kid from the second the child arrives and will actually not want to go back to work.

CGP2: Well, we both want to stay home full time. We do play the lottery every week. We do spend five dollars on that, just in case.

For some, desire to be a stay at home dad was second to economic factors:

CCP2: I think it was more of an economic decision. I mean, as a teacher, I'm you know, he makes more money than I will ever make. And so, it makes more sense, you know, if we were to hire someone full time, it would...all of my...I feel like all of my salary will go to that person, anyway. So I might as well, you know, stay home with the kid, myself. Yeah. I think that's working.

CBP2: Well, [Fenton] really wants to be the stay-at-home parent, and financially in the future, I think that would make more sense because my career path is definitely a little more lucrative. But I think I would be better at it, no offense.

CBP1: I know. I hate cooking.

CFP1 offered, “I think it'll just be a shared process, and I don't think either one of us will be completely traditional on either role.”

Once again, it is clear that these men are seriously considering what it will mean for them to become fathers and how they wish to fulfill the roles of both mother and father for the children they are expecting.

**Value for education.**

Couples endorsed a value for making education a priority for their children. CEP1 shared, “Education is going to be a big thing and both of us have master’s degrees and I think
that's going to be hugely important.” CDP1 reflected, “Yeah. I just can't emphasize enough how much time we've spent talking about schools for a kid that isn't born yet and won't go to school for five years.” CKP1 shared his anticipation, “Yes. I’ve actually thought about education stuff with my kid. I really want to geek out with my kid and get them excited about everything that there is in the world.” CGP2 offered, “Who knows what’s going to happen down the road and I know, not to keep rambling on but one of our goals for our child is to be able to go to private school.”

The men in this study are on the whole quite educated and wish to convey the same opportunity for education to their children. As one participant pointed out, they are spending a lot of time considering education for a child they have not met yet and will not be going to school for another five years after becoming part of their family.

**Parenting style.**

Many of the couples shared their thoughts about the style of parenting they hope to use with their child. Some focused on what they would want to replicate from their own upbringing and others were clear what they did not want to replicate. Couples generally shared what they felt was important in terms of parenting style.

Participants emphasized being available and as fully engaged as possible with their children. CGP1 stated, “Now we just feel that it’s important to be available for children and to provide them with a stable house and we can do it just as well as a nuclear family, you know, as a straight couple can.” CEP2 echoed a similar sentiment, “And I think we both agreed that if we ever have a kid we would both be very involved to make sure that it was, you know…we're a family unit. We’re both mutually involved in being parents.”
CHP2 shared what he missed in his own upbringing and what is important to him to bring to parenting with his partner:

I wasn't raised by my parents. I was raised by my grandmother, my grandparents in a very rather chaotic situation. So, I think that one of the things that has always attracted me to Daniel and one of the reasons that I could see having children with him... is his stability. And his regularity and his ability to maintain a certain kind of discipline and a certain kind of structure that I didn't have and that I find incredibly comforting for myself personally and I think that the little that I know about raising children, the structure is one of the main components that they definitely need, that they like and they like that level of security. And I think that's something that I will definitely want to have emulated in my household.

For CEP2 a balance in parenting lifestyle was important:

So I want us to maintain a good life balanced and make sure that our kid has a good network including Joseph's parents who are three doors away...and feels comfortable going and staying and spending the night and having time away from us because eventually we'll drive the kid crazy.

For CHP2 a more realistic approach was important, “I want to make sure that our children are not like raised in a Pollyannaish world of self-esteem and trophies all the time. But, that they definitely have a sense of belonging and a sense of structure.” CEP1 emphasized enjoyable activities, “a big thing is going to be reading or playing games with the child I supposed to, you know, really trying to avoid sitting them down in front of a TV to veg out. I think those are important to us.” And CEP2 emphasized teaching his child to live a healthy lifestyle, “I want us to educate our child about eating healthy and being active and, yeah, just taking care of themselves.”

Some talked about what they would like to maintain from their own childhoods, including CGP1 who shared, “So my goal is to refine [what my parents did] a little bit more and to be more pro-active and involved still letting them make their own choices but giving them more guidance than just letting them by the fly by the seat of their pants.” CFP1 offered:
I come from a family that was not any kind of like...I would say it wasn't particularly strict. It wasn’t particularly free form either. It was fairly in the middle. It wasn't a religious a family. So in terms of our upbringing, it was...we have sort of a strong sense of right and wrong, but it wasn't grounded in any kind of religious foundation. It was more just sort of a humanist approach to it, and I probably will follow the same path of my child because I thought that my parents did a good job in raising us.

They stressed alternative punishments for misbehaving children. CLP1 declared, “I can tell you that there are certain things that my parents did that those patterns are going to stop with me and with my brother, at least, in my family.” CJP2 said, “There was corporal punishment in our home and I don't...I'm not going to replicate that at all. CKP1 shared:

I would certainly have to look more into disciplinary methods and try to see what’s out there for disciplining a child because I don’t...I got spankings and I don’t think I’d want to do that to my kid or become over reactive to something that seem really stupid to the child. So that would be my biggest thing I would research.

CJP2 echoed a shared sentiment about quality time with children:

What bonds you to your kids is not the big major gifts. It's not that. It's the...you were there every day. They saw you every day. You ask about how their day was every day. You went to their games on the weekend. You cheer them on in the league. That's what bonds your parents to you. And knowing that I think has been very important.

CLP1 acknowledged that most, if not all, parents are adlibbing when it comes to parenting:

…bearing in mind, of course, parenting is completely on-the-job training. And we know that we’re going to screw up. It's inevitable. We know that. But hopefully, the screw-ups that we make are not going to do repeats of the things that we vowed to ourselves and to our siblings. We'll never do that, and I'll never say that, and I'll never...I hope that those big things...I know already that there are going to be things that are going to come out of my mouth, and I'm going to shock myself and go holy crap, it's my mother or worse, my father.

A sentiment shared across all couples was stated simply by CLP1, “And that's important to us that our child, sees other families like ours.”

The men expressed that they had sincerely considered how they wished to approach parenting of their children. Some emphasized a value for being available providing quality time.
This value for quality time for some was an aspect of replicating much of how their own parents approached parenting. For others still, how their parents approached parenting provided an antithetical model for their own approach to parenting.

**The Process of Pursuing Fatherhood**

The couples that were interviewed did not present a linear storyline reflecting a step by step process for pursuing parenthood. However, there were many common themes that fit within this category that make sense in the following order. The couples talked about the timing of initiating the process and what it means for them to get started. They shared their research, planning and preparation methods. They candidly discussed their thoughts and feelings about wanting an infant versus an older child, having a child of a different race, considering any health conditions a child might have and whether they wanted a boy or a girl. The men I interviewed talked about how they decided on a method to becoming parents, their experiences with adoptions agencies, writing their adoption profiles, and hearing from birth mothers. The eleven themes that emerged were: getting started, research, planning, envisioning a child, choosing a method, the agency, the home study, introduction letters, into the pool or the waiting, hearing from birth mothers, and we’re ready to be dads.

**Getting Started**

Participants talked about what prompted them to start the process of pursuing fatherhood when they did and what steps they were taking to get started. CFP2 shared, “This is the right time in our lives that we do want children to extend our legacy, I guess.” CJP1 added, “So, once we kind of pinned down, kind of a time frame or date, I think that's when we started to get really serious about the adoption process.” CHP1 explained that the timing was related to his own development and independence:
I feel like after we got hitched, that it really felt like, “okay.” In a way, we've often spoken about it just like after we have “married.” Also, my family drama just didn't seem to resonate the same way. We weren't as linked back to our family. It was kind of like we were doing our own thing together and then suddenly, as we kind of stopped looking back with our family, looking forward the concept of having kids, it got put on the radar kind of...I would say it was suddenly put on the radar. So, “okay, this is something more realistic.”

For CKP1 being ready was in part about finances, “and I want to make sure we’re at least financially secure enough to be able to support a child without having to overburden ourselves.”

Couple E had the following exchange about being ready:

CEP1: So again none of us was like we were scurrying around to get in and get this done, just kind of taking its own time based on things that were going on in life so...

CEP2: I was also in grad school so I think that was part of the reason we weren't, you know, it doesn't matter, the rush. It’s supposed, you know, we wanted…I wanted to get through school and be ready. We never really rushed.

For these couples, the unifying thread was the idea of finding themselves ready to begin the undertaking of pursuing fatherhood. They were mostly clear that moving forward in the process of pursuing fatherhood demanded a sense of being ready.

Research

Couples recounted the research they had conducted, which included attending information sessions, reading books and reviewing the available options for pursuing parenthood. CHP2 described his process:

I'm an intellectual and so I have to process things through thinking and reading and research. And so, I've already started, you know, finding books online and reading about it and dealing on emotional stuff and how to connect and how to attach, and you know, those kind of things just because it's hard enough raising your kid, much less not having any idea. I mean no one knows how to do it, you know. So, I feel like we have to be like educated about it and have done the research.

CLP2 described an informational workshop they had attended, “Rainbow Families has a number of workshops, and we actually went there and attended a number of the workshops and stuff that's part of kind of that building process that it teaches about, ‘Well, what is
adoption? What are the different types of adoption?” CCP2 cited a book they had read, “In terms of the adoption, there was a book that came out recently that Andrew saw the author speak and it was about raising a child who’s adopted and it wasn't specifically about gay parents, but we found it very...I found it very useful.”

In contrast, some of the men left the research to their partners. CAP2 explained, “I'm not much of a person to do the research and that sort of thing and that where Bruce is very research-oriented, so he of course took control over all of that.” CBP2 concurred. “I think when we were first doing research, Fenton did most of the research.” The partner of CAP2 utilized information available on the web from the Human Rights Coalition (HRC):

He used HRC as a resource as far rules, regulations, laws, as far as same sex parents for our particular state goes and how we would end up doing the whole parental rights and that sort of thing, but as far as actual statistical information how adoption agencies that use that are gay friendly I guess you can say that sort of thing.

The process of researching methods to pursue parenthood is an important one for these couples. Given the relative multitude of options, the couples had to consider what was a financially, emotionally, and logistically option for their family.

**Planning.**

Participating couples noted the planning they’ve engaged in, some in the long term, in order to have children. The couples had to plan for the economic realities of pursuing parenthood as well as the relational and emotional realities.

CLP2 shared the practical plan he and his partner had established, “What we did is, we sat down and wrote out, and this is going to sound, so like, bureaucratic…It's disgusting… but...we wrote out a strategic plan.” He went on to say, “number one was debt, two was have a wedding, three was to buy a new house, and four was to adopt the child in that chronology. That
was more so that we could figure out financially how we could accomplish that, and we've done one, two, and three.”

CGP2 recalled their focus on planning:

I think for me it’s a lot of what Jacob said in that I’m a planner I like to plan things, I have spreadsheets for everything so I can you know see whatever scenario pops out. And I think with this from everyone that we’ve talked to, our friends and our families, it’s like the more you plan, the more disappointed you’re going to be. So this is one of those few times where I think we’re both like, let’s just see how it plays out.

CKP2 highlighted that planning is both a necessity as well as the luxury for gay couples pursuing planning:

Yeah. We’re definitely we want to plan it out and you know do it kind of in a responsible way because we have that option and you know there’s just so many straight couples that have kids then just aren’t prepared for parenthood at all and they don’t either do a good job or you know they take in a lot of extra work and we both want to make sure we’re just really prepared. Like financially and you know of course our relationship is you know great and stable and everything but I guess it’s just you know…I mean Bjorn’s 26 and I’m 31 and we figure that we can still you know wait a few years.

The couples in this study expressed their value for planning in a way that matched their style as a couple. They were equally aware that they could attempt to plan every moment, yet the reality for them is that at some point they would need to roll with the process.

**Envisioning a child.**

Participants talked at length about the child they hoped for. They debated the realities of having an infant versus and older child, a boy versus a girl, a child of different race, having more children in the future and considering taking child with special needs. The five sub-themes that emerged were: wanting an infant, a boy or a girl?, a child of a different race, having more than one child, and a child with special needs.
Wanting an infant.

The fathers-to-be discussed their desire to adopt an infant versus an older child. CBP1 shared, “we both knew we...we kind of wanted an infant just because I don't know why, just because you feel like you can raise it from a... like a seed.” Yet, CBP1 later shared, “And [we got an offer] from...a three-month-old. They said, ‘Do you want to be considered for that because it's not an infant?’ And we said, ‘Yes.’”

Some participants, including CLP1, talked about the tension they felt between wanting an infant and knowing that many older children are in need of good homes:

And, I really had to ask myself what...is it okay to say that I want a newborn when I know that there are a lot of older children out there that need good homes that we, in fact, could provide or equipped to provide? Is that okay for me to say that, and I don't have to feel guilty. And I had to go through a real internal process to be able to say, “This is really what I want, and it's all right that I'm saying this, and I don't have to feel bad about it. It's about what feels right for us, not for anybody else, but for me and for us, and for the child.”

CLP1 expressed firm conviction that, “I knew that a newborn was really what I wanted for various reasons. That we're not...that we didn't arrive at that haphazardly. We really thought it out about, what age we wanted to adopt initially, and I still, like, absolutely feel strongly about what we're doing.”

CLP2 revealed that he is not opposed to older children:

And so, that's the reason why I was thinking about older children is because the peer group that I was seeing out there were always adopting older children that necessarily had some problems or health problems, or different things like that. And that was something where it was like, “Okay. Well, I could see myself adopting somebody who's maybe 3 or 4.” Now, Aaron isn't as keen on the idea, but after we go through this particular adoption through the newborn age, I'm also interested in things, doing a mentoring adoption where it would be somebody that was 15, 16, or 17 where we were a mentor to them and that, primarily, would be maybe like somebody who is gay and got kicked out of their house, that they're good kids, but it's just that their parents weren't as accepting. And that's something that I'm open to after we go through this whole business.
Given that the couples in this study are pursuing what might be considered non-traditional routes to parenthood, they were presented with the opportunity to reflect on their desire for an infant or an older child, possibly even a teenager. Again, this is an example of what the couples emphasized as a benefit of being a same sex couple pursuing parenthood; at each choice point they have deeply considered the implications of their next decision.

**A boy or a girl?**

The men expressed both preferences for and concerns about having either a boy or girl. Others, however, expressed no preference. In all cases, reasons were given.

Those who did express a preference expressed a preference for a son. CCP1 was clear, “Boys. The preferences are boys. I mean. I want a healthy sober child. Either way, we're going to fine.” By contrast, CCP2 was less certain:

> I think we have more possible names for girls than for boys. I don't know whether that...I went to with my...when I went with my friend to Buy Buy Baby, we were looking at clothes. And all of the clothes that I was looking at and thought were cute were all boys' clothes, and she's like, “I think you really subliminally want a boy.” So I don't know.

CJP2 pointed out that his partner talks about a son by default, “Cause you might have noticed James always refers to our future child as him? I think James used to be very concerned about what would happen if he had a daughter, but I think he's a little better about that now.” CCP1 explained his desire for a son, “one other reason why I would like to have a son is because I think there are things that I didn't do with my father that I would like to do with my son.”

Some couples claimed that they did not have a preference, though they highlighted their concerns about having a daughter. CJP1 shared his desire to have a son with whom he could play sports, “But, you know, it's...it's not like if I have a son they're going to want to play sports, anyway. So, I don't know.” CDP2 claimed no preference, but acknowledged some concern:
Well, you know, and we've discussed that we really, we have no preference and I think that would be quite an adventure. I just, you know, I think I know less about how a girl works. I just think I'd be a step less comfortable and probably less so, the more I consider the concept. I would say that was probably an early reaction to the thought of adopting.

Couple C explained their rational for having no preference:
CCP1: We also know that expressing a preference would not be in our favor, so why would we...
CCP2: It's cuts your opportunity in half.
CCP1: Yeah. Exactly. It's more than half because you now have to wait until she is giving birth, so…

CCP1 expressed his overt concerns about raising a daughter:

I'm personally concerned about raising a daughter. There are things I don't know about women. It's...I don't know. It's something we have discussed because I will be as happy if we have a daughter or if we have a son. So there is no question about love, and am I going to be able to do it? Yes. I'm sure that, you know, when our daughter will be here, it's going to be fantastic, you know. That's the way I see it.

Others expressed a desire for a boy and a girl, such as CFP2, “We definitely want to do one of each.” His partner concurred, “I want one of each, and I don't have a strong preference one way or the other about what we start with.”

As these couples explained, while they may have some preference for a boy or a girl, this is one decision that is largely out of their control.

*A child of a different race.*

A number of partners talked about the possibility of raising a child of a different race than either parent. CHP2 shared, “Yeah, yeah. I always envisioned us with the ethnic babies for some reason.” CBP1 shared in CHP2’s interest, but expressed his concern, “We have thought about that. Like, what if baby is a different race, and so there's a...that's really important to handle that correctly for the best of the kid.” CIP2 shared his thought process for deciding against raising a child of a different race:
It was interesting because we were pretty open to different races, but we had to consider the child's point of view again and the demographic of the neighborhood, the demographic of our families and extended families, and their feelings, and would our child be treated any differently if they were a different race. And so there are all these different factors. And on top of that, we actually talked about it that night in the class was the fact that our child is going to standout anyway because they're going to be the kid with two dads. There's not any that I know of, even in this community that have gay parents, and that's going to make our kid feel different in a way. So we basically decided on a Caucasian child for a lot of those reasons, just not only to be like, “Oh, where is that gay couple's kid? Oh, that one, the black one.”

CJP2 from Couple J, the only interracial couple interviewed, shared his perspective:

Anyone that marries someone of another race, even if you're heterosexual, you have to come to terms with the fact that your children are not going to be racially identical to you. And, if that's important, then, you deal with that at the point you enter the relationship. And that's not important to me anyway.

He went on to say:

And, you know, I think everybody, you want some connection with your child. I mean, it's our child regardless of the racial background. He's going to go to Chinese school and he's going to learn about Chinese culture because, you know, we're an extremist family. I mean, it's...you know, we're Chinese and Scottish and...they're going to have to go eat the picnic on the graveside on the Ching Ming Festival in the spring because if I have to do it, they have to do it, too.

The couples had extensive discussions about raising a child of a different race. This is one of only a few areas in which the couples had quite divergent perspectives. Some valued the possibility for a multi-ethnic/multicultural family, while others felt that a child of a different race in a family led by a gay couple would be adding another layer of encumbrance on the child.

**Having more than one child.**

Couples considered the prospect of having more than one child. CKP2 shared his intention to have more children, “At some point we do want to have at least one child and then sort of take it from there and see you know if we want another child at some point or whatever.” Couple B shared this humorous exchange about wanting more than one child:
CBP2: I keep visualizing my perfect scenario, and if Fenton would help, it might actually happen. But he doesn't like to visualize anything.

CBP1: Ben wants a Marimba Band. That's why he wants like 15 kids that you can take on tour, like the Jackson Eight.

CBP2: Like some people want a baseball team now.

CBP1: No, you want a Marimba Band.

CBP2: Why not?

CLP1 shared his concern that they will have just one child:

CLP1: I mean, I think we're feeling in some ways resigned to the fact that given our ages as I am 44 and where we are in the process here, it very well may come to pass that our child won't have siblings, and we're becoming resigned to that idea even though it's not really what we've envisioned. It's certainly not what I envision. Again, this past life regression thing, if I believed in a past life, I envisioned that I was surrounded in some way by many, many, many children whether I was a teacher or-

CLP2: And there was like a glow, and there was like angels singing or something?

CLP1: No. That's in this life, honey…I'm kidding. But, in this life, I really...I always envision that I would have many children, and I'm now resigned to the fact that it may be that we'll only have one. And it's not exactly what I wanted, but I will make this work. It's going to work.

For some of the men in this study, there is a clear desire for having more than one child. However for others, due to financial or age concerns, they are facing the reality that the will have just one child.

A child with special needs.

The men shared their considerations of raising a child with special needs. Couple C had the following exchange reflecting on their discussions of what they were willing to accept:

CCP2: But I think one conversation that was difficult was in the application...here, they go through all these, you know, if a child like all the problems that the mother could have, if she was a drug addict or alcoholic or that the father was drug addict or if their family is, you know, this whole list includes whether or not the baby has a cleft pallet all the stuff that you have to go through and say to the agency, “Yes, we're willing to accept that, no we're not.”

CCP2: And that was difficult because we were pretty much on the same page, but there are things that one of us could be a little less comfortable than the other.

CCP1: And that there are things that are difficult to explain why, it's more you know...

CCP2: Correct.

CCP1: I know I'm ready for that or I know I'm not ready for that, but there is no rationale behind it.
CLP1 described the pressure he felt to be willing to accept a child with special needs:

I used to feel very guilty years ago that I was reticent to adopt a child that was known to not be healthy, a child that had HIV or whatever. And I felt guilty for years, thanks to my Jewish upbringing. I'm perfectly inclined, and I felt guilt for years about it knowing that, “Gosh, I should want to adopt these unwanted children, and help them, and all that.” I didn't want to do it. Now, with that said, if our child comes down with a medical condition, becomes ill, you step up and you do what any parent does. You figure out what you're going to do. But I'm not saying that, I'm saying that I would like to have a child that starts out, if we can help it, that it's knowingly healthy.

CDP2 expressed that choosing to wait for a newborn rather than raising a child with special needs has made their process more challenging:

I've been a little bit disappointed that I don't know and maybe it is just misinformation that I chose to believe, but I was always under the impression there are lots of kids out there who are in situations where they need to be adopted. And I think if that's the case, if you're willing to adopt a child who has had, you know, a history of mental, physical problems, or abuse, or you know those type of situations, the fact that we've chosen to select the newborn, narrows that pool down so drastically that I think I've been a little frustrated that it's too difficult to adopt.

However CJP2 expressed an openness to the child that comes his way regardless of any medical or developmental concerns, “But, you know, it's the kind of thing where, you know, you just open yourself to the idea that you don't know who's going to come and you're okay with that, you know?”

The couples in this study, like any expecting parent, had to consider the realistic possibility that they child with whom they are matched may have special needs that would significantly alter their expected experience of parenthood.

Choosing a method.

The participants shared their thoughts of the different routes to parenthood that are available to them. Their thoughts include the pros and cons of each method. The four sub-themes that emerged were: surrogacy, international adoption, foster care adoption, and open adoption.
Surrogacy.

Participating partners talked about their perspective on surrogacy and their experience with pursuing surrogacy.

CJP1 expressed, “I kind of think that there are enough children out there that need to be adopted that I didn't feel the need to have a child that was specifically of, you know, of my genes.” CBP2 agreed, “Surrogacy. We weren't really...I don't think interested in, because, we didn't necessarily want to bring another life in, on this planet.” CLP2 shared what happened after they attended a workshop focused on surrogacy, “We went home very sad because even though we had kind of ruled it out, it was a little sad because we realized that we hadn't really confronted it. And I think that it brought up a lot of discussion about heritage and lineage…discussions about passing on our genetics.”

CHP1 shared one of drawbacks he perceived about surrogacy, “But when you think about the hormonal drive that happens, which we as men can’t even begin to consider, and that you would ask someone to give up their baby just after they’ve had that baby because you had an agreement and you signed a piece of paper?” And Couple H highlighted another:

CHP2: And people say, even with surrogacy, even if they were your biological child…
CHP1: It's still in the air.
CHP2: Yes.
CHP1: Where's mom?
CHP2: Yeah, where's mom, you know?

Couple A had previously pursued surrogacy and CAP1 recounted their experience:

Ultimately, we sought the counsel of a reproductive endocrinologist. So, you know, we were doing everything that we could to really try and make that happen. So that was very disappointing and ultimately we all sort of said, “Okay, this isn't working,” and then we went back to the adoption process.

Couple J had the following exchange about what they would have done had they pursued surrogacy:
CJP2: If we had gone surrogacy, it probably would have been James who would have, I mean, been the donor because it's easier to find white surrogates than it is Chinese… it made more sense for James to be the donor, so...you know, with him being opposed to it, sort of, that left one option, cause, you know, we don't have the oven, so we can't bake the cake…
CJP1: I like that.

Couples in the current study, for the most part, either never gave surrogacy a consideration or if they had initially, ultimately decided against this route to parenthood for the reasons provided above.

**International adoption.**

Couples shared why international adoption was not an option. CBP1 said, “Well, international adoption, many countries don't accept gay people as parents. So that was like, ‘Oh, well, it's...I guess, that’s going to rule out a lot of the world.’” CAP2 agreed, “We looked into international adoption and what with the regulations and the laws, being kind of very stringent for international adoptions as far as gay or single men go, we decided that we really couldn't go for that option.” Couples ultimately decided against international adoption, but for a multitude of reasons decided it was not a route they were willing to take to become fathers.

**Foster care adoption.**

Some couples shared that they considered foster care adoption but ultimately decided against it. CHP2 expressed that, “my hesitation for foster care initially had been an emotional one, which is to become attached to a child and have that child be taken away.” CCP1 explained, “We also reviewed was the foster care possibility, but being French, foster care is much more difficult because you cannot travel with the kid."

One couple that was interviewed were pursuing foster care adoption at the time of the interview. Below are some excerpts from this couple describing their experience with foster care adoption. CIP2 shared, “We had those preconceived notions of what the program was like and
from the horror stories in the news and stuff. So you think we didn't really know what it was all about at that point.” Couple I shared that they attended workshops and learned from friends who had successfully been through the process of foster care adoption before them. This couple shared that foster care adoption of a new born is considered to be the longest process compared to open adoption. Nonetheless, since the interview this couple was the first, of all the couples interviewed, to adopt their child. A son.

**Open adoption.**

A majority of the couples interviewed were planning to pursue or were actively pursuing open adoption. The participants, such as Couple G, spoke primarily of the benefits of open adoption:

- **CGP2:** We’re very open to the idea that, you know that [the birth mother] will play a role and that’s why we did pursue open adoption because we don’t want there to be lingering questions, you know when they’re four and five and they realize, why don’t I have a mother and when they’re teenagers…

- **CGP1:** But with an open adoption I mean, it has so many different benefits. One, we’re going to know the medical history of our child and that’s a benefit that private, close adoptions don’t necessarily have. Two, we’re gay. We can’t have children.

- **CDP2** highlighted the benefits for the child of an open adoption, “Well, you know, Micah was sort of keen on adopting a newborn child and so it was one of the reasons why we are brought around to the open adoption process and I think that psychologically for the child, open adoption is probably, you know, the better approach.”

- **CAP2** expressed his appreciation for open adoption in comparison to a closed adoption:

As far as open adoption goes, I've always been a little reserved with closed adoptions because I'm just, you know, as time goes on, the child that was...he's going to realize that he didn't come or he or she was not born from the two of us. So with open adoption actually allows them to know who their family is, know how to do the contact, or who to contact that sort of thing because we will have ongoing contact with the mother or the birth parents if there's two of them together. So that's probably the most...the best part, I guess, you could say about it because it eases the child into knowing who they are as well as we will always be the parents. So we're kind of excited about that part.
Open adoption was the predominant method for pursuing parenthood for the couples in this study. Many of the couples found that the agencies that were working with gay male couples were the agencies that were also conducting open adoptions. The open adoption philosophy accurately reflected the desire of these couples to be clear with their child about where he or she comes from.

**The adoption agency.**

Some couples had not yet arrived at the point of having selected an adoption agency with which to work. Of those that had, a few mentioned which agencies they had selected. Couple J selected, “Independent Adoption Center, IAC,” Couple C selected, “Forever Families Through Adoption,” and Couple B selected, “Open Adoption and Family Services”

Some couples selected the agency with which they wanted to work based on their reputation for work with same-sex couples:

CBP1: So there's one organization in Portland called Open Adoption. We opened their website, and they're very gay friendly. They just...welcome gay parents, and I don't know, like 30% or 40% of parents waiting are gay or lesbian and some percentage. And so they weren't afraid of it. They embraced it, and the fact that they were local here in Portland was a plus. Yeah, they also offer counseling. It's just great for your whole life...what for the triad, the birth parents, and the adopted parent, and the kid. So it's a family counseling for you as long as their existence in this organization of free counseling. So that's the benefit. So we just went in there one day and talked about stuff...

Some couples were referred to an agency by friends, such as CAP2, “So then we decided on open adoption and that's when we...we have a couple of friends that were actually going through IAC, which is our adoption agency, and we chose them.” Couple G attended an orientation at one agency; CGP1 recalled their experience, “I really…we didn’t know what to expect and after we left I think we had more questions than we did answers so we came back we did a lot of research we researched actually probably four or five agencies before we choose.”
Though couples appreciated the accepting nature of the adoption agencies, some recalled the specific challenges they faced as same sex couples:

CBP1: It's kind of weird. We went to the two-day orientation session for the adoption agency, and it started out with like, “All of you here are going through a grieving process because you can't have kids, and you had to give up that notion of biological kids. And I want you to write about how...your feelings, and how sad and depressed you are about this.” And she...and then you're there...”I just want you to know if you're gay, it's a little different, but you know, how...you know, this is a grieving process.” And we're hearing that for like an hour or two.

Some participants expressed their frustration with the agencies with which they were working:

CCP1: I mean, I think, here, it's a problem of the feeling you have with the adoption agency. It's the fact that even though you are paying them to do something for you, you cannot be demanding with them. You have to go by whatever they feel like doing. You know, you can be a little pushy, but you also realize, “Shit, if I'm pushy, she's going to put me on the black list, and I'm never going to hear from them.”

The couples expressed an overall ambivalence about the agencies with which they are working. On the one hand, the agencies are open and affirming of same sex couples. On the other, the couples found themselves at the mercy of the agencies. They are paying money, doing a lot of the leg work themselves, and afraid of asking for too much, lest they be placed at the back of the line for a child.

**The home study.**

Each couple that was pursuing adoption through an open adoption or foster care adoption and were waiting to hear from birth mothers at the time of the interviews had experienced a home study. Couples shared their experiences with the home study interview. CFP2 shared that while they were supported by their adoption agency, because they did not live near the agency with which they were working, they had trouble finding a local agency to conduct the home study:
I guess, regionally, we had troubles trying to find people who do a home study which, I guess, depending upon the region you're in. But here in Hawaii, a lot of the agencies that do adoptions...because it had to be an adoption, it's pretty much an adoption agency that does the home study. A lot of them are faith based and were completely refusing the work with same sex couples just, even just to do a home study so that was kind of a little bit of a shock. I think I called five or six different agencies before I finally got one that would do a home study.

CFP2 commented on their similar experience, “And we weren't actually going to be adopting [with that agency] but it's just a little...to me, it was a little rude that they wouldn't look at us just for a home study.”

CCP1 shared the value of the home study experience for him:

There was a lot of questions in the home study about how you're going to educate your kid which really, you know, pushes your buttons in terms of how well you educated yourself and how are you going to change that for the kid or how you're going to do it in the same way, which I think are questions that as a gay couple, you know, there's a third person asking you all those questions, you should ask those questions. For me, that's really poignant.

Couple I shared they had to complete an exhaustive profile as part of their home study:

CIP1: Well, throughout the class, we're given a family profile to write, and that is...it starts off, it's like a 33-page questionnaire about everything, I mean, everything. It's not just like one questions, it's like a question. And within one question has like six questions. So it's like…

CIP2: Your community, you neighborhood, demographics, your family, your religious beliefs, your sexuality...

CIP1: How you were brought up, how you were raised, how you were disciplined, school…

CIP2: Disciplined in your home.

CIP1: …friends and school. Us, what we like about each other, what we don't like about each other.

CIP2: Past relationships, why they ended. Everything.

CLP2 explained that while they are making headway, the process is frustrating:

And so we're finishing up the home study process. In fact, actually, we just had the fire inspection of our house today. So, we're trying...but we're frustrated because it's a very long process, and there's a number of things you have to go through that every adoptive parent has to go through to collect all the information for the home study. So, we're kind of in an emotionally frustrated position at this point, but we know that we're going to get there. It's just we're just trying to get the bureaucratic stuff out of the way.
Couples shared that the home study process was both somewhat invasive, but ultimately gratifying and often resulted in greater awareness of how the couples relate to one another.

**Introduction letters.**

Couples were asked to draft a letter of introduction to the prospective birth mother or to complete a family profile. This letter is intended to introduce the couple to the birth mother, provide her with a basic profile of the couple and the letter includes a photo of the couple. The couples shared their experience of drafting this introduction letter. CJP1 recalled the length of time it took to complete the letter, “So, we actually started the process of this letter, I think end of 2008, and it wasn't until October 2009. So it was nearly a year that we spent going through the process of getting all the paperwork done and getting that letter analyzed.”

Couples I and F both had exchanges recounting their struggle to draft their introduction letter:

CFP1: I thought of something else that was surprising. That was just how hard it is or hard it was for us to write our introductory letter, our autobiographies and to make our photo collage. It was a big challenge to figure out what to say that would be appealing to somebody and what photos, out of nine years’ worth of thousands and thousands of photos, to choose that define us. I just found out really, and it's nothing specific about same-sex couples, but I just was really surprised how hard it was to put all that together.

CFP2 described that decided to select a photograph that he felt reflected their relationship:

Yeah. And even just the basic introduction letter which is in the book and on the website of what photo are you going to use that's going to stand out which...I don't know. If you looked...we...I was showing my intro letter at work on the website and ours really does stand out compared to the others which of the two people right next to one another just side by side like kind of chest hide up, no background, and just the typical cheesy smile kind of photo. We went for an outdoory, kind of very scenic photograph which the agency actually said it was a good one to use. So, hopefully, we stand out enough to be chosen sooner.
CJP2 shared their experience of preparing a photo for their letter, “You have to be together. You have to, if you're not the same height, you have to be sitting so you look the same height. Your faces have to...you have to be facing front, smiling teeth showing, eyes open, no glasses unless you're completely blind, you need them.”

CIP1: It was hard. I mean, it was hard; A because the last time I had to write a paper or anything was 16 years ago. But then 'till like have it be that personal and that...the person who taught the class was the director of the agency. You know told us over and over again, be as honest and as explicit as you can because I will see right through it if you're not. And we had a hard time honestly because we have really great lives. We have really great support systems. We have great families. We have great family stories. We have bumps in the road a lot, but we were sort of like, “Does this sound too good? Now, is she going to be suspicious?” So you're writing it with that in mind too, and you just get to a certain point too that so much is coming up emotionally because I have to go, you know and you type out your whole coming out story and all that. And it brings up a lot, and you really have to like say, “Okay. That's enough for tonight.”

CIP2: Oh, yeah. There were definitely times where I was like, “I'm done. You're turn.” Like that whole part about parenting and like what kind of a parent am I. I’m I talking about like a no, I don't have kids yet. If we're talking about like his mother's death and like really, I mean, it really wants you to dive into the worst parts of your life as well as the best and that...

CIP1: It was hard. It ended up being ours was like the longest that they've ever seen, naturally.

CDP2 expressed his frustration with the process of editing the letter with the adoption agency, “I'm trying to think back and remember...well, I mean there were certainly frustration because the agency was being very particular in terms of what the lacking materials needed to look like.” However, CJP1 countered, “but I mean, you also have to understand that this agency has, I'm sure, decades of experience in dealing with birth mothers and they probably have a feeling that they know what birth mothers like and what birth mothers don't like. You know, something that we don't have.” CJP2 mused, “and what's interesting is every contact we've had has been from the internet site not from the letter.”

Writing of the letter is one of the last steps before the couples are placed into the pool of waiting candidates. The letter is meant to be a brief introduction of the couple to prospective
birth mothers. Writing a good letter required them to be honest, meet the criteria of the agency and somehow capture the attention of a prospective birth mother. The couples in this study found the writing of this introductory letter to be profoundly challenging and frustrating.

**Into the pool or the waiting.**

For those couples who have made it into the pool of eligible couples waiting for a child, they talked about what the waiting period has been like for them. CLP1 shared, “there is this constant level of a blend of excitement and frustration and just talking about it just brings that more to the surface.” Alternatively, CEP2 offered, “and I don't think we've really stressed out about it and we've had a few like screening calls where it's like fire drill and you have to do a lot of major life thinking and make decisions very quickly about whether you're open to this particular situation or not.” CBP2 reported, “We have like separated, not really separated ourselves but just like tried so hard not to think about what's happening at Open Adoption or with anything that...yeah.”

Some couples used humor to manage the waiting:

CEP1: But for the most part, I almost feel like we're almost forgotten that we're in the pool and that we can get this call one day and say, “By the way, you won the lottery.” And we're both going to be like, “Oh, what? When did we sign up for that for that contest?”

Couple B had the following exchange about how they respond to friends and family who are asking about their progress:

CBP2: That's why I'm not going to start telling people because everybody asks, like what's happening with adoption process?
CBP1: No news means nothing.
CBP2: Yeah. Obviously, nothing. I'll post it on Facebook or something.

Participants shared examples of how hard the waiting has been on them:
CBP2: Yeah. It definitely takes time, and there's definitely...you definitely second guess what you're saying and what you're doing. And when you make a decision to pass on a screening call, it's...

CBP1: And sometimes, I'll get negative, I'm mean like “we're not getting picked because we're gay.” And Ben is on my case about that. Well, just...he’ll be like, “What are you talking about?” And straight people have waited this long, too, and we don't know if that's the reason and...

CBP2: Oh, Fenton thought he was going to be 80. He thought we're going to be in the pool for 40 years.

CBP1: You never know. Sets a new record.

CBP2: We actually went to meet with our adoption counselor after he said that.

Participants shared examples of when they would struggle seeing other couples who moved through the process and were matched with a child quicker than them. CIP2 described another couples experience, “They did it in a weekend like two 12-hour classes, got certified, got their home study turned in, and then two months later, they had a house visit and an hour and a half after their house visit, got a call about their placement.” CJP2 talked about another “couple that went into PetsMart and happened to say, ‘Oh, we just came from this class about adoption.’ And the girl was like, ‘Oh, I'm looking for birth parents.’” CBP2 shared, “Other couples, yeah. Who...have been pulled off [the website] and they're most likely because they have a successful adoption. And that's difficult because sometimes people are there for two weeks.” CIP1 admitted, “So it's making me crazy not knowing like, “are we the only ones that don't have the match?” I mean, because I know we were one of the only couples in the class looking for an infant.” CDP2 reasoned, “but I think, you know, it's just a matter of waiting for the right one, I guess.”

After many months, and years for some couples, the couples found themselves having to simply wait for the magic moment when they would be contacted by a birth mother who expresses interest in their profile.
Hearing from birth mothers.

The couples spoke about their experiences with hearing from birth mothers. Some heard from birth mothers who ended up passing on them and others discovered that the birth mother was attempting to scam them out of money and had no intentions of giving up her baby. In some cases these birth mothers were not expecting a child at all. Participants talked about how they managed the shock, disappointment and grief they experienced.

CAP1, explained, “And we have been contacted at this point, as I had mentioned, we became active, if you're going to refer to it that way, in November in 2009 and since then, I think we've been contacted three times.” CBP2 expressed, “Every time the phone rings and it's an unknown number, your heart kind of stops.” CJP1 elaborated on this point:

Right. You always have like, a thrill when you got those contacts. You know, I think initially that first couple of times it happened, it was kind of very exciting, but it's, you know, I'm a little bit more cautious or is less emotionally invested at first because you always want to put your best foot forward. We’ve actually had some people call us and then we call them back and then we never hear back from them.

Though couples experienced the excitement of hearing from birth mothers, they were also faced with the disappointment and loss when they found themselves the target of a scam. In fact, five of the twelve couples interviewed experienced at least one scam. An excerpt from each of their experiences is presented. CJP2 explained:

And, you know, and they warn you that, you know, especially, if you've been in the process for a while and you’re starting to get anxious, you know, be cautious because people will try to scam you. It's unfortunate, but it happens. So, we had a couple of contacts that we sort of suspect who are people trying to seek funds and what we knew was like a scam, actually, out there.

CGP1 expressed his feelings about being scammed:

I think the most disturbing part of it is in a matter of the seven months that we’ve been on the program we’ve had three fraudulent hits as to people inquiring about us becoming their adoptive parents. I mean, there are illegitimate people out there and there are scam artists unfortunately in the short amount of time that we’ve been in the program. We’ve
been hit three times.

CAP1 shared their experience of becoming close with a potential birth mother only to find out she was not legitimate:

And our third contact, and perhaps most frustrating, was a couple of weeks ago, actually, in March. We were contacted via email by a young lady who is 17-years-old and lives in New York State and she had emailed us, but then ultimately, contacted via the phone. IAC - as part of their process, you have to obtain a 1-800 number, so that birth mothers can contact you conveniently. And so, she called us and over the course of about two weeks, we spoke with her on the phone almost daily as well as emailed back and forth. And ultimately, come to find out through IAC, that she was not pregnant or is not pregnant and actually a known, sort of, scammer if you will, who has contacted adoptive families in the past and sort of run the same scenario where she tells them that she is pregnant and wants them to adopt her child and all this. Apparently, her motive is largely attention.

CCP2 recalled their fortune of discovering the scam early on:

Well, luckily we found out pretty quickly because the first one, yeah, we were unaware, of course, there was a scam and there was this woman who had twins. And for some reason, all the scams they have had, they had already had the baby and that it was like two months old. It was kind of exciting and then to find out at the end of the hour that it was scam. It was disappointing.

The participating couples expressed how they managed their disappointment and loss when a partnership with a birth mother did not work out or if they discovered they had been scammed. CGP2 explained, “how we dealt with that is we got a dog. Another dog. That will never happen again but I just wanted to be honest about how we dealt with that.” CJP2 offered, “There is the point where you, sort of, have to accept the fact that, you know, you may have a lot of contacts before something goes through. I think everyone's experience is a little different.

CAP1 stated, “I think at this point, you know, we've been in the game, so to speak, for a while now and we are a little bit more guarded as far as our feelings go.”

For CGP1 shared his reaction:

So that you know in seven months to be scammed three times you get a bit disenfranchised but you’re still excited and it still hurts even though as much as you
would like to tell yourself, okay let’s not get too invested, let’s not get too excited, the potential of having a child is a lifelong goal of ours and when you’re presented with that and then it slipped out from beneath you, you know, it takes its toll.

CCP1 shared the upside to discovering they had been scammed:

Even though it was a scam, it actually raised questions that are very valid questions in the sense that it was the twin questions, it was also not a newborn. We are guessing that they are between 6 and 12 months old. So that was raising a lot of questions, “Are we ready for the twins? Are we ready for babies that are not newborn but you know not old either?” So I know that it was the challenging part that you realize that you have to make the decisions very quickly.

Finally, CDP1 shared their struggle to try to connect well with a potential birth mother:

We were contacted by email by one prospective parent or birth parent shortly after. I was on that line, when he said, “Oh, this is great, that was a quick response,” and got really excited about it. But, you know, it was just kind of hard to figure out how to have that conversation, how to have it by email, and I think my tendency is to, you know, hang back and let people develop or evolve as I want to. And so, you know, afterwards, she was, you know, relatively not communicative and we probably held back more than we should have, and afterwards, you know, we second guessed ourselves and said, “Oh, we should have been chatty, you know. This is young woman on hormones and maybe we're just playing it too cool because we're the guys,” and all of that. We, you know, seemed like second guessing ourselves.

For these couples, the anticipation of waiting to hear from a birth mother can be excruciating. Unfortunately for these couples, and many couples waiting to be matched with a birth mother, they had to endure the experience of being scammed by a person posing as a legitimate expecting mother looking to have her child be adopted.

We're ready to be dads.

Many of the couples interviewed expressed a confident awareness that they had done the emotional, relational, logistic, financial, and existential preparation and work necessary for pursuing parenthood. Over all they expressed a sense of readiness. CIP2 shared the following anecdote that let him know that he was ready:
This is a good story because it clearly highlights for me the moment I was like, “I need to be a father.” I got up on Easter morning, grabbed my digital recorder and recorded the dog getting out of bed, coming down the stairs, and going to his Easter basket. That dog is going to be gone in like eight years. Do you know what I mean? And it's going to be like I'm putting...I'm projecting this onto an animal which isn't...it's not...It just spoke to me that moment that I was sort of like, “Yeah. This is what I want to be doing with a kid.”

CCP1 shared, “You know, when they ask a question ‘how do you feel?’ It's like, ‘Yeah. We want to have a kid.’” Couple L had the following exchange confirming their readiness:

CLP2: But I think that the one thing is that that we know that we're in this together. Well, Isaac and Wayne and Aaron and I were kind of the happy couples. We were like, “We're just so happy to be here.”
CLP1: It fits the term gay.
CLP2: We were privileged to be there because we were like, “We're ready to go. This is how we're going to have our child, and this is what we're going to do.” And so, it was kind of a neat thing to see also because Isaac and Wayne were with us about how it was a totally different perspective where we're like, “We're ready to be dads.”

After putting so much time, money, and effort, not to mention love and consideration, into the process of pursuing parenthood together, these couples expressed a firmly grounded sense that they are ready and willing to jump in to parenthood. While some couples were still at the beginning stages, they had already done so much research and preparation that they, just like those in the pool of available parents, could say with confidence that they are ready to be dads.
Discussion

The purpose of this study was to describe and better understand the experience of gay male couples as they pursue parenthood. I purported that this research is important for three reasons. Describing the experience of gay male couples pursuing parenthood may highlight relevant psychological issues, may expand resources to contribute to the ever-evolving competence of clinicians and may contribute to the development of resources for gay male couples pursuing parenthood. A qualitative phenomenological research method was selected in order to describe the experiences of the participating couples. The focus of this discussion is a comparison of the findings (categories and themes) with relevant research literature as they reflect psychological issues, clinical competence, and expanding resources. Finally, I consider the relative limitations of this research, and propose directions for future research.

Findings and Implications

The data collected were analyzed and divided into ten categories. The overall findings are consistent with Gianino (2008) and Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell (2003). These researchers found that couples underwent complex financial, relational and emotional processes as they pursued parenthood. Some specific findings in each of the ten categories in the results will be compared to the available literature.

Considering fatherhood.

As the data reveal, thinking about fatherhood for many of these men began long before their adulthood or choice of partners. Mallon (2000) found that the gay fathers he interviewed discussed much of what the participants in this study described about their desires for fatherhood when they were younger. Similar to some of the participants in this research, the gay fathers in Mallon’s research described a desire for children but not being able to imagine the possibility.
Some men in Mallon’s study shared that they knew fatherhood was possible, but that they just had not seen anyone gay men doing it. Again, this sentiment was reported by the men in the current study. Similarly, contemporary research on young gay men, notably D’Augelli, Rendina, Grossman, and Sinclair (2006/2007) and Rabun and Faith Oswald (2009), highlight that desiring fatherhood is quite common among gay men. From the standpoint of clinical competence, it is important for clinicians to be aware of the possibility that gay male clients may have these desires.

Relationship.

A large percent of the participants reported that finding a partner who shared in their desire for fatherhood was of great importance. The men recalled humorous stories, such as testing another’s appropriateness for co-parenting on a first date. However humorous, the mutual desire and motivation for parenthood is a predictor of success in becoming parents (Herrmann-Green & Gehring, 2007). The couples in this study remarked that finding the right partner with whom to parent was one of the primary steps toward realizing parenthood. If one partner is not as interested or invested in parenthood as the other, this disparity may result in one partner seeking parenthood on his own or possibly the end of the relationship. Herrmann-Green & Gehring also found that a partner with significantly less desire and motivation than the other may ultimately match the other's enthusiasm as the couple continues to discuss the possibility of parenting together. This eventual matching of a partner’s enthusiasm was mentioned by two of the couples in the present study. A clinician may need to help couples to differentiate and communicate their levels of commitment to the process of pursuing parenthood together.

Many participants in the current study shared that they found themselves growing closer to one another through the process of pursuing parenthood. In fact, one couple expressed that it
was the process of completing a parenting profile that helped them to better understand and support one another. Other couples shared quite openly what it meant to them to raise a child together. Gianino (2008) highlighted a theme of contemplation of parenting that included facing internalized homophobia and examined the meaning that children would bring to their lives. Much like their heterosexual counterparts, these men consider parenting a natural next step in their lives together. However, these couples reported that this process has the potential to raise conflict between partners, increase anxiety within each partner and lead to periods of uncertainty. A couple may present for therapy with these concerns. A clinician will need to consider the context in order to help the couple conceptualize their experience as a natural response to the process of pursuing parenthood as gay men. In this regard, as will be discussed in further detail below, participants made clear their need for more resources and support groups where they could place their experience in context with other gay male couples pursuing parenthood.

**Role models.**

Participants in this study highlighted that there were few role models for them to look to as they pursue fatherhood. This is consistent with Gianino (2008), who found a lack of role models of gay men parenting was a deterrent to men who are considering fatherhood. In a qualitative study, Haracopos (2005) found that a role model for young gay men helped them transition from feeling isolated from peers, family and even themselves to feeling increased confidence, a sense of purpose, increased clarity and comfort with interpersonal relationships. Haracopos found that qualities of role models included confidence, honesty, and ability to offer perspective on family. For the gay men in Haracopos’ study, a role model made a measurable positive impact of their lives. Many participants in the current study identified the value of role models in their lives. What is not reflected in Gianino, but by the participants in this study is that
these couples looked to their heterosexual friends who were having or had children and their own parents as role models. In addition, the men in the current study identified as a role model a nationally known figure, Dan Savage, who published a book on his experience of adopting with his partner. These developments suggest a gradual normalization of the gay male couple parenting phenomenon; as more gay couples can identify with heterosexual couples who are adopting and internalize the experience of a visible role model, their experience becomes less about being a gay couple pursuing parenthood and more about being like any other couple pursuing parenthood. This was endorsed by the participants in this study. Clinicians will need to be aware of gay couples pursuing parenthood may experience both a sense of being different and of being similar to heterosexual couples.

**Coming out of the closet, again.**

Couples talked about the fact that sharing that they were pursuing parenthood with their family, friends and co-workers required them to come out again and again about being gay. Most salient for one participant was his experience of having to advocate with his employer for insurance coverage for a child he did not even have yet. This type of experience has been documented by several researchers (Barret & Robinson, 2000; Mallon, 2004; Schacher et al., 2005). Gianino (2008) found that for some this consideration of the public aspect of parenthood reiterated old fears of disapproval or even homophobic retaliation manifested in early stages in the coming out process. The couples in the current study offered several such examples.

Clinicians will need to be aware of both the coming out process for sexual minorities in general and how gay male couples who are pursuing parenthood may re-experience this coming out process.
**Friends and family.**

Participants shared their concerns about making sure that their future child would have enough exposure to female figures and role models. Goldberg (2010) acknowledged these concerns and addressed them at length. What the participants in this study described reflects cultural pressures for the child to be exposed to both male and female influences as well as a fear of the potential negative consequences of the absence of the mother figure on child development (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999). These beliefs reflect, in part, the principle of social learning theory, that boys need adult male models to emulate and identify with, whereas girls need adult female models (Bandura & Walters, 1963). However, the participants in this study expressed concerns about sufficient exposure to women for both a boy and girl child. A clinician should be aware of a client’s beliefs about gender roles and how children develop gender identity. This is especially salient for gay men, because two men intending to raise a child may hold beliefs about their inadequacy without a mother figure that are rooted in social learning theory.

**Gay and father identities.**

Consistent with Armesto (2002), the participants in the present study reported that they had completed a coming out process about their sexual identity that preceded their sense of preparedness for pursuing parenthood. They stressed that being honest with themselves was an essential criteria for good parenting.

The couples in this research spoke about the benefits they perceive of a family headed by a gay male couple. Johnson and O'Connor (2002) interviewed over 400 lesbian and gay parents and found that 82% of gay fathers felt that their children would benefit in some way from having grown up with gay parents as opposed to heterosexual parents. The most common benefit cited by these authors was the ability to raise a more tolerant and accepting child. However, the
participants in this research felt strongly that the efforts and preparation that gay male couples must go through in order to become parents in the first place would result in a more mindful and beneficial parenting approach. The focus on the benefits of planning by the participants in this study versus the benefits cited by those in Johnson and O’Connor’s study make sense as the participants in this study were in the midst of pursuing parenthood, while the participants of Johnson and O’Connor’s study already had children.

It might be easy for a person unfamiliar with the experience of gay or lesbian parents to wonder what a person’s sexuality identity has to do with his or her identity as a parent. It is important to consider thought that being a gay person is far more than just what kind of sexual activity in which one engages. Being a gay person places one in a category of people who have been socially and institutionally condemned and labeled and ill or perverted. So for a gay person to consider becoming a parent, he or she must be willing to face further critique of their identity.

**Stigma and stereotypes.**

Participants identified fears of being perceived as the “cliché” or stereotypical gay couple having a child. In other words, that the decision was not approached earnestly. This concern is particularly salient for these men, given the time and sincere effort they have put toward becoming fathers. For them, pursuing parenthood was not a frivolous decision. Lewis, Derlega, Griffin, and Krowinski (2003) found that individuals who expect others to judge them using stereotypes experience more distress than those who do not. Given this result from Lewis et al, clinicians need to help clients develop awareness of their expectations regarding the stigma and stereotyping they may encounter.

Gianino found for same-sex male parents, living outside of traditional family norms requires vigilance and further found that men face discrediting reactions regarding their
parenting capabilities as men. Nonetheless, Gianino also found most respondent couples chose to be open about themselves and their families in the communities in which they lived. These findings supported the conclusion that gay men pursuing parenthood value being honest about who they are, regardless of the potential for negative consequences.

Participants in the current study talked about how they imagined they will respond to criticism from others once they are out in public with their children. The expressed competing desires about how they would respond. On the one hand, they imagined feeling outrage and a desire to respond aggressively. On the other hand, they wanting to present a positive role model for their child in how they respond to criticism, especially if their child is present. Mitchell and Green (2007) recommended new parents be prepared for such encounters, but retain a sense of control over personal boundaries. Clinicians will need to be prepared to help couples understand their evolving identities in the context of changing attitudes toward gay men parenting and internalized homophobia.

**Resources.**

The couples made clear their need for support groups that specifically cater to couples going through the process of pursuing parenthood, not for couples with children. Couples were straightforward that they felt awkward trying to share their struggles with other couples who already had children. Couples also shared that when they attended an orientation with an adoption or foster care agency, they were asked to consider mourning the loss of the ability to have biological children. This request seemed overwhelmingly geared toward the heterosexual couples in the room. However, there are specific issues that gay couples will face in the adoption process that are unique to gay couples. For example, couples will undoubtedly encounter homophobia and will need to be prepared for dealing with this. So this begs the
question, why not ask the heterosexual couples in the room to consider how these issues might apply to them. These and other considerations need to be made by adoption and foster care agencies when working with same sex couples.

Goldberg (2010) acknowledged the lack of access to information and resources especially for men in rural areas that may be politically or religiously conservative. The internet has allowed couples from rural areas to seek out information about the process of pursuing parenthood. It is much harder however, to be confident that a local doctor or therapist who is going to be affirming of a gay male couple.

**Parental roles and values.**

Turner, Scadden, and Harris (1990) found that gay fathers try harder to create stable home lives and positive relationships than would be expected among traditional parents. Many couples in the current study reported the efforts they were making, the lengthy discussions they were having about if and how to pursue parenthood, the intentional involvement of family and friends, and the overall preparation they were going through as important and necessary for them to create a stable home for the child they were seeking.

Many couples described the roles that each partner took in maintaining their daily lives at home. Some reported that one partner took on the typically feminine role in the home while the other took on the typically masculine role. Other couples reported a distribution of roles that were based more on each partner’s interests or strengths. Carrington (2002), who conducted research on the division of labor among same sex couples, found that research that gay couples may describe the distribution of household responsibilities in a way that reflects or constructs a gender identity. These findings are consistent with how couples described themselves. Couples in the current study described a partner who completed tasks typically associated with women as
more feminine. Carrington also found that some couples described themselves in ways intended to actively conceal their identification with activities that are typically ascribed to the female role. This is difficult to determine with the participants in this study who were only interviewed, while Carrington both interviewed and observed participants. A clinician will need to be prepared to address internalized homophobia without pathologizing the experience of these men.

**The process.**

The overall process of pursuing parenthood for the men in this study included researching options, choosing and pursuing a route to parenthood, working with agencies, enduring home studies, drafting introduction letters, the long periods of waiting, hearing from potential birth mothers and being ready to be fathers, is dynamic, challenging and complex. The have encountered many obstacles and yet have adjusted and persevered. They reported encountering homophobia, but also receiving support if not from family then from friends. Downing, Richardson, Kinkler, and Goldberg (2009) found that the men in their study described their experience of encountering various types of discriminatory practices in the process of choosing which type of adoption they would pursue. The participants in this study reported a variety of experiences of discrimination in first finding an adoption agency and then with trying to find a local agency to complete a home study.

Several participants talked about their experiences of being scammed by birth mothers, who claimed to be pregnant when they were really not, in hopes of scoring money, attention, or both. These experiences had a significant impact on the men in this study. After spending months and often years planning and preparing, all of their efforts came down to waiting for a birth mother to select them. The excitement that the participants expressed when they first heard
from a birth mother, which was soon followed by shock and disappointment when they discovered they were being scammed, is understandably difficult, if not painfully overwhelming.

Clinicians need to be prepared to support couples through rejection, loss, and frustration, recognizing that most couples pursuing parenthood experience such emotions. Couples also reported their sense of joy as they wait to become fathers. Clinicians need to be ready and willing to support and share in the joy of the experience of these couples.

**Conclusion**

In the present study, I interviewed 12 gay male couples who were in the midst of their pursuit of parenthood. The couples’ descriptions of their experiences coalesced into ten major categories and 41 themes. These categories and themes highlighted the couples’ experiences of considering fatherhood, their relationship, role models, coming out again, friends and family, gay and father identities, stigma and stereotypes, resources, roles, and the overall process of pursuing fatherhood.

The experiences of these men shed light on the emotional and psychological processes experienced, the need for competent mental health care for this unique population and the overwhelming need for resources.

Like all research, this study has limitations that must be acknowledged and understood. Given that qualitative research is often the starting point of investigating new phenomena, the limitations should be understood as points of departure for future of the phenomena. An honest assessment of the limitations of this research can clarify how the research findings can be applied to general populations.

Similar to much of the research focused on gay male parenting, these results reflect a primarily white, middle class, highly educated gay male’s experience while pursuing parenthood.
This is consistent with the findings from Gates, Badgett, Macomber, and Chambers (2007) who found that same-sex couples raising adopted children are older, more educated, and have more economic resources than other adoptive parents. These men tend to have an easier time navigating the obstacles or may not experience obstacles at all when pursuing parenthood (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Mallon, 2004). The participants of this study self-selected to participate, so there may be a unique factor drawing them to participate that was not explored.

This research looked at what is now considered a conventional method of pursuing parenthood (adoption) for unconventional (gay male) couples to become fathers and did not address routes to parenthood other than adoption. A focus of future research could be on routes to parenthood other than adoption.

Because this study examined aspirations of fathers to be and not actual fathering practices of fathers with children, the results should not be interpreted as indications of how these men will act when they become fathers. Another limitation is that the data were not member checked with the participants and therefore may not fully capture the intended content of the interviews.

The men in this study shared their present experience, which involved a lot of guessing about what the future holds for them and their families. A future study of the same cohort could be conducted once they actually become fathers to determine how their lived experience aligns with their imagined experience.

An estimated two million GLB people are interested in adopting (Gates, Badgett, Macomber, and Chambers (2007), yet only fraction of these interested GLB people are actually parenting. Future research should understand the experience of men of different racial and class backgrounds.
The men in this research talked at length about their value for honesty in regards to their identities, the process of adoption and their relationship with their future child. Future research should investigate the connection between the experience of coming out of the closet for gay men with their value for honesty in these and other areas of their lives.

Since the interviews I have heard from several of the couples. One shared their excitement of finally completing the home study process and entering the pool of expecting parents. I was able to learn about another couple’s continued experience of frustration with the foster care system. However, two weeks after communicating their frustration, they were matched with a baby boy. Hearing about their successes and frustrations after is fulfilling. It brings me great joy to share, if even a bit, in their process.
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Appendix I

Interview Questions

The initial question was intended to get elicit a broad overview of their experience. Subsequent questions were asked or not asked based on what was shared in the initial telling of their story.

Tell me the story of your relationship and your journey toward parenthood so far.

Relationship: How has your relationship changed as you have moved through this process?

Upbringing: How has your own upbringing informed your decisions about parenthood.

Family: What roles will your biological family play in your child’s life? Your chosen family?

How do you understand your identity as a gay man and your identity as a father to be?

Who are your role models as gay fathers?

What are some of the major barriers you see for gay male couples who want to become parents?

Have you considered how you find a pediatrician who will value your family?

What role will women play in your family?

How will you afford this process?

As gay men pursuing parenthood, what are you in need of that is not readily available?

What have you needed and found readily available?

What has this interview been like for you? Feelings, thoughts, awareness?
1. Study Title

THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE OF GAY MALE COUPLES PURSUING PARENTHOOD

2. Study Personnel

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Principal Investigator</th>
<th>Faculty Advisor</th>
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<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
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<td>Telephone</td>
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3. Study Location and Dates

Interviews will be scheduled for each couple as needed. Interviews will take place where is most convenient for participants. Locations could include the homes of participants, at a local LGBT community center, or in the office of the principal investigator. Interviews will continue throughout 2010.

4. Study Invitation and Purpose

You are invited to participate in a study on the experience of gay male couples seeking to become parents. This study is conducted by Brad W. Larsen, M.S. and Jon Frew, Ph.D., ABPP, both affiliated with Pacific University in Hillsboro, OR. The results of this study will be used to inform future research about the mental health and social support needs of gay male couples seeking to become parents.

5. Study Materials and Procedures

You and your partner will be asked to schedule a 1 time 2 hour interview with a doctoral candidate in clinical psychology. The interview can take place in whatever location is convenient for you and your partner, including your home, the principal investigators office, via phone or at the QCenter. You and your partner will be asked to answer questions and generally discuss your experiences related to becoming fathers.
6. Participant Characteristics and Exclusionary Criteria

In order to qualify for participation in this study you must be a gay identified male identified committed couple together for at least one year. To participate you cannot currently have children either from previous relationships or within your current relationship. Finally, you must have already decided to pursue parenthood together.

7. Anticipated Risks and Steps Taken to Avoid Them

Participating in this study entails you and your partner completing a recorded interviewed about your experiences pursuing parenthood. There are some minor risks associated with participating in this research. Please consider that you will be asked questions relevant to your experiences of pursuing parenthood together and may find yourselves faced with questions you and your partner have not yet discussed together. In addition, you may find that answering some of the interview questions will be emotionally stirring. Referrals for community or mental health support will be made available to you at any time during the interview, should you need.

In the event that you have a current social relationship with the principal investigator, please be advised that your personal disclosure may negatively impact that social relationship. Please also be advised that your disclosure for this present study may cause social discomfort in the event of any future social interaction or relationship with the principal investigator. In either case, the principal investigator will discuss these circumstances with you prior to beginning the interview in order to address any of your concerns or questions, collaboratively plan for potential future social encounters and finally to reiterate your option to discontinue the interview at anytime.

Should you become uncomfortable during the interview, you have the right to terminate the interview at any point for any reason and will be encouraged to do so as needed by the principal investigator. Should you need to discontinue, the principal investigator will support your decision and provide you with referrals for support. These referrals will include: The QCenter (pdxqcenter.org), a resource and community center for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community & Michael Binks, MEd, LPC, CADC3, a well respected provider in private practice, serving the queer community in Portland.

The study poses no foreseen physical or economic risks. And please remember that at any time during the interview you may decide to discontinue the interview for any reason without any consequence.

8. Anticipated Direct Benefits to Participants

There are no anticipated direct benefits to participants.

9. Clinical Alternatives (i.e., alternative to the proposed procedure) that may be advantageous to participants

There are no alternatives for participation.
10. Participant Payment

There is no payment for your participation in this study.

11. Medical Care and Compensation In the Event of Accidental Injury

You may withdraw at any time for any reason without penalty or adverse consequences. During your participation in this project it is important to understand that you are not a Pacific University clinic patient or client, nor will you be receiving complete mental health care as a result of your participation in this study. If you are injured during your participation in this study and it is not due to negligence by Pacific University, the researchers, or any organization associated with the research, you should not expect to receive compensation or medical care from Pacific University, the researchers, or any organization associated with the study.

12. Adverse Event Reporting Plan

Should you become uncomfortable during the interview, you have the right to terminate the interview at any point for any reason and will be encouraged to do so as needed by the principal investigator. Should you need to discontinue the principal investigator will support your decision and provide you with referrals for support.

Should you become physically injured during the interview, any and all appropriate actions will be taken to ensure they receive appropriate medical attention.

In the case of a minor adverse reaction reasonably attributable to participation in the study (e.g., emotional discomfort), the investigators will notify the IRB by the next normal working day. In the case of more serious adverse events that occur during or for a reasonable period following the study (e.g., ongoing emotional disregulation), the investigators will notify the IRB within 24 hours.

13. Promise of Privacy

Your interview will be digitally audio recorded by the principal investigator. The digital audio files will be stored on a dedicated hard drive that will be password protected by the principal investigator. When not in use, the hard drive will be locked in a safe by the principal investigator. The key will be maintained by the principal investigator.

The interviews will be transcribed and all identifying information will be removed from the transcripts by the principal investigator. The transcripts of the participant interviews will use alternate names for each participant and be saved to a dedicated hard drive that will be password protected by the principal investigator. When not in use, the hard drive will be locked in a safe by the principal investigator. The key will be maintained by the principal investigator.

The informed consent forms will be scanned and saved to a dedicated hard drive that will be password protected by the principal investigator. When not in use, the hard drive will be locked in a
safe by the principal investigator. The key will be maintained by the principal investigator. Any hard copies will be shredded by the principal investigator at the conclusion of the study.

Your interview responses will be kept confidential and though names can be associated with data, steps will be taken to minimize the possibility that someone other than the principal investigator could not identify you. As described above, the informed consent form with your name on it will be scanned and stored digitally and secured as outlined above. The physical copy of the informed consent will be shredded upon completion of the study. As described above, the audio recordings which will include reference to your name will be stored digitally and secured as outlined above. All transcripts will use altered names to de-identify your responses. A name key which will link your name to the altered name will be created on a spreadsheet and stored digitally, but never printed. The stored file will be secured as outlined above. At the conclusion of the study, all means for identifying you as a participant of this study will be destroyed including all digital files, printed transcripts and consent forms.

Should you have a current or future social encounter or relationship with the principal investigator you can be confident that the principal investigator will not initiate or acknowledge any conversation regarding the research interview. Should you initiate a social conversation regarding this research, the principal investigator will remain committed to your privacy and not disclose any of your personal information in a social setting or otherwise.

14. Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Pacific University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences. If you withdraw early and request that any responses given to that point be discarded, the principal investigator will comply with your request and offer any relevant referrals for community or mental health support.

15. Contacts and Questions

The researcher will be happy to answer any questions you may have at any time during the course of the study. Complete contact information for the researchers is noted on the first page of this form. If the study in question is a student project, please contact the faculty advisor. If you are not satisfied with the answers you receive, please call Pacific University’s Institutional Review Board, at (503) 352 – 2112 to discuss your questions or concerns further. All concerns and questions will be kept in confidence.
16. Statement of Consent

I have read and understand the above. All my questions have been answered. I am 18 years of age or over and agree to participate in the study. I have been offered a copy of this form to keep for my records.

Participant’s Signature                              Date

Investigator’s Signature                             Date

17. Participant contact information

This contact information is required in case any issues arise with the study and participants need to be notified and/or to provide participants with the results of the study if they wish.

Would you like to have a summary of the results after the study is completed? ___Yes ____No

Participant’s name: (Please Print) ____________________________

Street address: ____________________________

Telephone: ____________________________

Email: ____________________________
Appendix III

Seeking Fatherhood Study
Gay Male Couples Becoming Fathers

Demographics Questionnaire
(Both partners should complete a separate demographics questionnaire)

Name: ____________________________  Age: ________________

Please describe your race and/or ethnicity: ________________

What is your highest level of education?

- □ Less than high school  □ 4 year college degree
- □ High school diploma or GED  □ Master-level degree
- □ Some college (no degree)  □ Doctorate-level degree
- □ 2 year college degree  □ Other: _______________________

What is your occupation? _______________________________________________________________________

What is your annual household income?

- □ Less than $25,000  □ $75,000 - $100,000
- □ $25,000 - $50,000  □ $100,000 - $150,000
- □ $50,000 – $75,000  □ More than $150,000

Please state the length of your relationship in years: ________________

Have you and your partner held a commitment, marriage or comparable ceremony?

- □ Yes  □ No

What languages other than English are spoken in your home? ________________

Do you have extended family living in your home?

- □ Yes  □ No
Appendix IV

Seeking Fatherhood Study
Gay Male Couples Becoming Fathers

Dear Fathers To Be –

My name is Brad Larsen, a doctoral student in clinical psychology at Pacific University in Hillsboro, Oregon. I am researching the experience of gay male couples in pursuit of parenthood.

I am hoping that you will help by sharing your experiences as you decide to become parents together, research options, prepare to become, and then become, fathers. For example, what things make this experience easier or harder than you expected? What are your feelings about the varied paths to parenthood? What are the expected and unexpected challenges and joys that you face?

Couples who participate in this project will be interviewed individually either in person or by phone prior to becoming parents.

Your participation is very much needed and appreciated. The hope is that this research will highlight the needs of male couples seeking to become fathers together and allow for future research and the development of resources to meet these needs.

To participate you must be a gay identified male, partnered in a committed couple and have been in your relationship for one year. Further, you must not currently have children either from previous relationships or within your current relationship. Finally, you must already have made the decision to pursue parenthood. This study is looking exclusively at the experience of gay identified, male identified couples. Single individuals seeking parenthood, lesbian couples, trans-identified couples and heterosexual couples are excluded.

For more information or to participate please email Brad Larsen, M.S. at bwl200@pacificu.edu, visit www.seekingfatherhoodstudy.com or call 503-383-9606