

The logo consists of the letters 'MJU' in a stylized, handwritten font. The 'M' and 'J' are connected, and the 'U' is separate. A horizontal line is drawn below the logo.

Gay Men's Motivations for Having Children: Gay Fathers and the Reconceptualization of Fatherhood and Homosexuality

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This article investigates why gay men have children, given the difficulty of the process of having children, the anti-child and anti-family stigma attached to homosexuals, and the supposed liberation from the expectations of having children that gay men experience. The study adds to existing literature by providing up-to-date interview data on gay fathers, by exploring the intersection of the evolving conceptualizations of fatherhood and homosexuality, and by illuminating the changing nature of both gay identity and the LGBTQ community. Findings are drawn from recording and coding five interviews with gay fathers. In-depth interviews were used to best uncover the lived experiences of gay fathers. The findings indicate that gay men's motivations for having children are acceptance and positive experiences with families of origin, emotional intimacy and open communication within gay couples, a familialization of the LGBTQ community, increasing societal acceptance of homosexuality, and the joys of fatherhood. Analysis of the findings indicates that gay men are not having children to make up for their homosexuality. Rather, they are doing so despite their homosexuality. Gay men serve as pioneers in the construction of new conceptualizations of fatherhood as a more emotionally involved role and homosexuality as less individualistic and non-familial. The study opens avenues for future research on the emotional aspects of fatherhood, negotiation of parental roles within couples, and how the increasing normalization of gay fatherhood has changed the role of families

Introduction

Families have been a focus of inquiry for sociologists since the incipient days of the discipline. Globalizing forces destabilizing, among other things, the image of the single breadwinner (Heath & Stacey 2002), coupled with the emergence of a gay and lesbian social movement demanding equality in legal rights within a number of social spheres, has ignited debate about how gays and lesbians fit within conceptualizations of the family. Along with the lesbian baby boom that occurred in late twentieth century (Weston 1991), an

unprecedented number of openly gay men began to have children. Gay men ostensibly face a number of barriers that would discourage them from having children, including shaming by some homosexuals who claim that the family unit is heteronormative and oppressive, and structural and cultural homophobia, such as heterosexist adoption agencies the complications of surrogacy (Mallon 2004). Furthermore, by choosing to have children, gay men have supposedly violated two of society's tacit rules: that gay men can't be trusted around children and that women are the preferred nurturers of children (Mallon 2004). While heterosexual men who choose parenthood (or stumble upon it accidentally) are rarely questioned for their decision, common perceptions that construct homosexuality as an antithesis to family life render gay fatherhood a fascinating subject of inquiry.

So why do they do it, given the difficulty of the process of having children, the anti-child and anti-family stigma attached to homosexuals, and the supposed liberation from the expectations of having children that gay men experience? What does the increase in gay men choosing fatherhood say about conceptualizations of both fatherhood and homosexuality? How does this phenomenon reflect changes in the LGBTQ community? This article argues that gay men who have children are not doing so to make a statement about homosexuality or the role of families, nor are they having children to make up for rejection (either from families of origin or the LGBTQ community). Essentially, gay men are not having children to make up for their homosexuality. Rather, they are doing so *despite* their homosexuality.

This article will accomplish four tasks to elucidate this claim. First, it reviews extant literature on conceptualizations of fatherhood and gay men having children, identifying the intersections and gaps that motivate and guide my research. Second is a discussion of the use of in-depth interviews to uncover the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of gay men and their journey prior to and during fatherhood. Next is an analysis of the findings explaining how acceptance and positive experiences with families of origin, emotional intimacy and open communication within gay couples, a familialization of the LGBTQ community, increasing societal acceptance of homosexuality, and the joys of fatherhood motivate gay men's decision to have children. Fourth, this article will discuss how gay men choosing fatherhood serve as pioneers in the reconceptualization of both homosexuality and fatherhood and lastly suggests directions for future research.

Literature Review

Gay Fathers and Men's Liberation

Extant literature focuses on the motivations for childrearing throughout history. In ancient and medieval times, motivations for having children were primarily political and economic. In the ruling and noble classes, children were used to continue lineage and secure a family's rights to land and other material resources through inheritance and marriage. In the lower classes, chil-

dren were additions to the work force that were vital for agricultural labor (Coontz 2005). Once family became the primary site of the dissemination of values and norms in the eighteenth century, having children became an essential part of one's obligation to forming a sacred family unit. Concomitantly, women's work in the home became less marketable. Thus, middle class women shifted their focus to childrearing and keeping the house an ideal and comforting escape from the amorality and vicissitudes of the private sphere. Parenting became feminized and a gender gap in motivations for parenting began to form. A father's role became purely financial, providing the means necessary to support his wife and children.

By the 1950s, there was a firm expectation that required men to grow up, marry and support their wives and children (Ehrenreich 1983). However, men's motivations for having children became less clear when the once static notion of sexual identity became challenged by the emergence of a women's movement and a gay and lesbian movement, both of which gained prominence in the 1970s and 1980s. Queer perspectives in the academic world and youth culture proliferated, and the dominant image of the family as one with a single breadwinner began to diminish. Most importantly, women's liberation essentially led to men's liberation—that is, from the expectation that they play a purely financially supportive role in family life.

Ehrenreich (1983) argues that upon liberation from a rigid definition of masculinity, the old "unreformed masculinity was characterized by clogged arteries, 'emotional constipation,' and the inability to cry." "Softer" men who deviated from the image of the ideal man of the 1950s were no longer at risk of being labeled as homosexual because of the "conceptual ghettoization of homosexuality"—that is, gay men became a discernable minority group with their own distinct culture. Straight men could behave in formerly suspect ways without losing the privileges of heterosexual citizenry. Ehrenreich describes the debilitating effect this shift in masculinity has on women and families but leaves men's motivations for having children untouched.

Although societal expectations likely still play a role in men's motivations for having children, given their freedom from rigid expectations that they support a wife and children, it is likely that men also now have children with the goal of cultivating the close social bonds with children that formerly were only available to mothers. For example, forty-eight percent of fathers in metropolitan Washington, D.C., claimed they reduced their working hours to spend more time with their children and twenty-three percent reported they had passed up a promotion for the same reason (Griswold 1993). Perhaps gay men, riding on the wave of men's liberation, strive to obtain the emotional fulfillment of parenthood. But how does the conceptualization of a homosexual identity affect their motivations to become parents, especially if gay men are conceptualized as non-familial and unfit to raise children?

When describing gay men's road to parenthood, Mallon (2004) found that some men expressed positive feelings towards having children as a result of positive experiences with families of origin. He also found that specific moments, such as babysitting someone's child or meeting gay or lesbian parents,

served as a catalyst for the desire to have children. Perhaps gay men's relatively greater liberation from traditional gender roles inspires them to view parenting through a more gender-neutral lens. Studies show that straight men still believe that women should be the primary caretakers of children (Griswold 1993). Are gay men, then, more liberated than their straight counterparts? This article builds upon previous research on both gay fathers and fatherhood by analyzing the intersection of conceptualizations of homosexuality and fatherhood. More specifically, gay men's motivations for having children and their experiences of fatherhood contribute to the normalization of homosexuality and the transformation of the role of the father as an emotionally involved caregiver.

Homosexuals and Family Creation

Perhaps gay men choose parenthood to make up for the costs of their homosexuality. Or is it that they are simply trying to attain the experience of fatherhood that supposedly "promotes adult well-being and intrapersonal growth, stimulates nurturant and altruistic behavior, and challenges men to reassess the meaning of their lives" (Griswold 1993: 230), despite the negative associations between homosexuality and parenting?

Kath Weston's 1991 book, *Families We Choose*, is a seminal work on the interaction between the dominant heterosexual family model and gays and lesbians who attempt to create families. She acknowledges the power of societal and parental expectations in choosing a mate and starting a family — factors that are much more complicated for homosexuals than for heterosexuals. While the motivations behind gay men and lesbians choosing to have children are never explored in-depth, she does claim that many gay men consider friends, surrogate mothers, and community members to be part of their families, often to make up for kinship ties that have been lost because of rejection of their sexuality or fear of coming out to the family of origin (Weston 1993). Weston's findings provide insight into the unique process of family creation that homosexuals choosing parenthood experience. That is, gays and lesbians have children not because they want to meet societal expectations and create biological kin to continue the family line, but rather because they see it as a way creating kinship in the same ways that they have created kinship bonds with friends. Expanding on this concept of family creation, this article examines how gay men's family creation is not driven by a desire to make up for lost social bonds with former kin, but in fact *because* of positive and accepting relationships with these kin.

Captured in the title of her book, Weston emphasizes that homosexuals have *chosen* families. Members include lovers, coparents, adopted children, children from previous heterosexual relationships, and children conceived through artificial insemination. In doing so, she illuminates the image of the heterosexual family unit with two parents and children as a social construct. Essentially, families must not be confused with genealogically defined relationships (Yanagisako & Collier 1987). Along with homosexuals' lack of abil-

ity to produce biological kin in the “traditional” way, the absence of institutional and legal recognition of homosexual family bonds motivates the creation of more self-defined families. These families tend to have more fluid boundaries in terms of who is considered a member and closely resemble families held by many African-American, Native American, and white working class communities. Weston also notes that heterosexual friendships are considered too intense after a certain point, at which they become homosexual. Homosexuals lack this boundary between friendships, making it easier for them to consider friends as family members. Moreover, homosexuals often use material, along with emotional, support to demarcate friends from family. Clearly, the articulation of gay men’s intimate experiences has pushed images of the family beyond the metanarratives of the twentieth century and forced people to think of family life in a more complex way (Mahoney 2006). This article builds upon Weston’s description of homosexuals’ ability to make friends into family by explaining how the support and incorporation of familial elements by the LGBTQ community have provided an unprecedented support system that motivates gay men’s decision to have children.

Weston claims that the transformation of lesbian and gay relations that allowed homosexuals to create families is inseparable from sociohistorical processes. Changes in contexts for coming out of the closet, attempts to build urban gay communities, cultural inferences about same-sex relations, and the lesbian baby-boom are all factors contributing not only to changing relations among gays and lesbians, but also to the motivations behind gay men choosing fatherhood. This article accounts for changes in sociohistorical contexts and analyzes how these changes have normalized and streamlined gay men’s process of having children and ultimately creating a family.

Weston also emphasizes the popular portrayal of gays and lesbians as individualistic, non-familial, and ultimately harmful to society. This possibly explains the antipathy towards heterosexual family norms that many homosexuals have. Furthermore, this popular image could serve as a motivation for gay men to have children and want to change the image. Or the motivations could be the opposite. Adoptive relations, a common method gay men use to have children, poses no threat to the image of procreative relations so fundamental to the dominant heterosexual model of the family because they are essentially imitations of it. This suggests that gay men, especially those choosing to adopt, may be modeling the dominant heterosexual family unity and, in so doing, normalizing popular perceptions of homosexuals. However, the findings in this article suggest that gay men are not attempting to regain status lost through disclosure of their sexuality because societal acceptance of homosexuality has increased and gay identity is no longer rigidly defined as individualistic and non-familial.

Weston’s discussion of the changing conceptualization of gay identity motivates this study’s investigation of gay men’s motivations for having children in relation to these changes. Weston claims that, “Founded on the premise of a shared sexual identity, gay communities remained, like friendship, an egalitarian and fundamentally non-erotic concept.” Community can be used to re-

place alienated biological ties. However, the LGBTQ community has been censured for excluding non-white and/or working class homosexuals. Discourse around identities came to see sexual, racial, ethnic, and other forms of identity as fluid and intersecting. “Attempts to understand the integration of sexuality with other aspects of identity were not experienced as ‘splits’ by those who had never felt included in the community from the start” (Weston1991: 130). This shift in discourse and the pressure on the LGBTQ community to become more inclusive may encourage gay men to adopt children with backgrounds of different classes, races, ethnicities, and/or nationalities. Indeed, gay identity and the LGBTQ community have become more inclusive and ultimately provide support for gay men’s decision to have children.

Previous Research on Gay Men and their Children

Many studies that examine the relationship between gay men and their children involve gay men and children from heterosexual relationships (Miller 1979), since openly gay men having children was relatively uncommon until the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century. Other studies examine the dynamics of fatherhood that are particular to gay men (Bozett 1989). The research that focuses on gay men’s motivations for fatherhood (Bigner and Bozzett 1990) is outdated because it mostly focus on gay men who had children in a marriage while closeted. For example, Bigner and Bozzett propose that among the reasons a gay man has children are a) his inability to deal with his homosexuality until several years after marriage during which a child is born; b) he may choose to be a father even though his homosexual orientation is in tact; or c) he is dissatisfied with the gay lifestyle.

The authors later expand on b) by comparing the reasons straight men have children with the reasons gay men have children. Straight men placed greater emphasis on traditional values such as continuing the family name, ensuring security in old age by having children to care for them and transmission of family traditions. Gay fathers place greater emphasis on the function of parenthood in conveying social status and gaining acceptability as an adult member of the community. Moreover, the authors claim that the nature of gay culture is conflicting with the characteristics of fatherhood, such as commitment and responsibility to others. They also say that, “many gay men who have a positive, healthy gay identity may wish to become a parent for altogether different reasons such as truly enjoying children and wanting them to have a valued place in their life” (Bigner and Bozzett 1990: 159). It is necessary to retest these conclusions because of the rapidly changing sociohistorical context in terms of constructions of both homosexuality and fatherhood.

This article adds to previous research in three fundamental ways. First, by studying gay men who openly have children in contemporary times, this article provides new insight into the outdated literature on gay fathers and their families of origin, their intimate relationships, and their experiences with fatherhood. Second, these fresh findings are used to examine the intersection of

two formerly separate concepts: fatherhood and homosexuality. Third, the findings are analyzed to elucidate the changing nature of both gay identity and the LGBTQ community.

Research Design

The findings are drawn from recording and coding five interviews with gay fathers. In-depth interviews were used to best uncover the lived experiences of gay fathers. The same method has been used for previous studies seeking to discover the motivations of poor and unwed mothers (Edin & Kefalas 2005). It has also been used to study the complexities of homosexual families (Weston 1991). Asking gay men about their families of origin, their partners, their children, their communities and their personal thoughts, feelings and experiences will provide the personal and in-depth nature best suited to discover the motivations behind gay men's decision to have children. In-depth interviewing is the suggested method for investigating and understanding little known or poorly understood social arrangements and practices, as well as minorities (Mallon 2004: xiv).

Network sampling is used to select gay men who had children after coming out and not within a heterosexual marriage or partnership. A clear limitation of the research design is the sample size. It is problematic to use results from interviews with five gay men to come to a conclusion about gay men who have children. Another limitation is a lack of comparison groups, such as heterosexual men or gay men to choose not to have children. However, the experiences of these five men provide a unique contribution to the body of interview data on gay fathers and should galvanize efforts for future research not only on homosexuality and fatherhood.

Focus of Interviews: Respondent Characteristics and Range of Questions of Fatherhood

Respondents were aged 52, 53, 45, 45 and 36. All of them grew up in white middle class families. Three grew up in suburbia and the other two grew up in towns before the spread of suburban neighborhoods. All came from two parent families; only one had parents who divorced. Three of the respondents have doctorates and the other two have masters degrees. Furthermore, the children of the men are under the age of 10, so as to limit the sample to a specific historical context, making the affects of such context on motivations for choosing fatherhood more discernable.

The first set of questions attempts to illuminate the effects of the family of origin. Does his family of origin emphasize the importance of children? Did his family emphasize togetherness or was it fractured and what role did children play in this? What are his attitudes towards these different aspects of his family? By gathering information regarding his disclosure of his sexuality and his family members' reactions allows connections to be made between these reactions and the original question regarding family structure. How did

his family's reactions and attitudes change his attitudes towards his family structure, if at all? How involved parents were in the decision to have children makes patterns regarding level of involvement from the family of origin and the decision to have children more discernable.

Next, respondents are asked about their partner. How the respondent conceptualizes marriage and/or partnership will allow him to ruminate on the perceived differences between the heteronormative concept of partnership and marriage and gay relationships. Responses will allow me to see the ways in which he connects partnership and childrearing.

The third topic of inquiry involves the creation of family. If he has always wanted to have children, then it is likely a result of his family of origin or other cultural values that he learned at an early age. If it is a recent decision, then it could be explained by a changing sociohistorical climate, among other things. Gathering information on individual thoughts and feelings towards having children and connecting them to other information on the family of origin or the partner illuminates patterns and helps develop generalizations.

The fourth section asks about the respondents' relationship with the gay community. If the level of involvement with the LGBTQ community is low and/or negative, then motivations to have children may be to change popular perception of homosexuals or to try to model the heterosexual family model because the community is not supportive. If the level of involvement is high and/or positive, then the LGBTQ community is likely supportive and having children is adding more members to a family that was created through non-biological kinship ties.

Asking the participant about his experiences with and attitudes towards fatherhood generates information on which social factors have influenced his perception of fatherhood and how this has affected his motivations for choosing fatherhood. It allows him to retrospectively reflect on his motivations and reasons for having children and could produce data missed in previous questions. Understanding the role of the biological parents elucidates the father's perceptions of family, whether it is the creative family with little boundaries and many members that Weston describes, or a more closed family reflective of the dominant heterosexual model. If people treat him differently and he is surprised, then he probably didn't have children to meet the societal expectation to have children. If people treat him differently and he isn't surprised, then perhaps he made his decision to be father to be seen differently.

Findings

Acceptance and Positive Experiences with Families of Origin

Interviews with five gay fathers revealed no factors specific to gay men that might have influenced their decision to have children. Weston (1991) claimed that some homosexuals have children to replace the kinship ties lost when families of origin reject a member because of his sexuality. However, all five of the respondents said that their families were accepting of their sexuali-

ty. The decision to have children seems to stem from the desire to do the “normal” thing and have children with a long-term partner. The “men’s liberation” that broke formerly rigid definitions of masculinity and roles of fathers provided the opportunity for gay men to become fathers without having to fit into a rigid role.

This desire to do the “normal” thing by having children is not an attempt to redress the deviancy associated with homosexuality, but is rather a result of being treated normally regardless of their atypical sexual orientation. Three of the five respondents were raised in white middle-class suburban families with the father as the single breadwinner and the mother as a stay-at-home mom (although one of the mothers eventually went to work for the Department of Education). The other two respondents were raised in white middle-class families, but before the birth of suburbia. The respondents fit the 1950s image of the family that was considered the norm, but what was not, in fact the majority (Coontz 2002). When commenting on his experience growing up, one of the respondents named Timothy says,

Did you ever see the TV show Happy Days? When I was growing up people used to joke that we were the Cunninghams. My sister was a cheerleader, I was a boy scout, you know, I was like, Mr. Do-Gooder. My dad was the scoutmaster and president of the PTA. My mom was the stay at home mom who was always bringing up cupcakes. We had the house that everybody congregated at. I can’t tell you how many times when I was a kid I would be upstairs waiting for somebody to pick me up and they would be late and I would come down and they were downstairs just hanging out with my parents. It had its ups and downs like anyone growing up, but it was pretty good. It was pretty stereotypical mainstream mid-America suburban.

Not only do these men’s families of origin fit the image of the normal American family, but four out of five of them said that they were very close with their families. Because these men were not rejected from their families, but rather embraced for being gay, they continued to internalize the expectation that they have children just like everybody else. Furthermore, positive associations with their families of origin due to their “normalcy” and their closeness with their families encouraged these men to have children. These gay men don’t necessarily want to recreate the exact same family structure that they were raised in (single breadwinner model). Regardless, their experiences with their families of origin have taught them that children and family are fundamentally positive and emotionally enriching. These findings challenge Weston’s conceptualization of gay families as fundamentally different from heterosexuals. These men aren’t attempting to make up for broken ties, nor are they challenging dominant models of families. They simply don’t see themselves as different. Consequently, they want to have children and recreate their own positive experiences with their families of origin.

Although all of the respondents claimed that their families of origin had no direct involvement in their decision, the positive responses from their parents when given the news of the decision indicate that family of origin was indeed a motivating factor in the decision. “We visit many many times a year, even more times than we used to. My mom and my daughter Skype every single morning together.” “My mother was shocked—thrilled in fact.” “Everybody loves Roger [child of one of the respondents].” “My mom wants a granddaughter so bad, and she’s offered to pay the adoption fees if we just stay in the pool long enough.” Clearly, having children had positive effects on the men’s relationship with their families of origin.

Emotional Intimacy Within Gay Couples and the Reconstruction of Fatherhood

Although there were no conditions with their families of origin that suggest reasons for having children that are different from heterosexuals, these gay men have especially emotionally close and communicative relationships, attributes increasingly acceptable in fathers since men’s liberation from rigid fatherhood roles defined by emotional distance. Three of the five respondents said that expectations of having children were made clear with their respective partners at the beginning of the relationships. It is possible that these men felt that the intention to have children had to be made clear at the beginning of the relationship because of the perception that gay men are less likely to have children. However, none of the respondents or their partners were opposed to having children, even if they didn’t necessarily want to. Two of the five respondents were the instigators of the decision, with their partners going along with the decision. Another two went along with their partner’s decision to have children. The last respondent said that both he and his partner wanted to have children and made their desires known in the early stages of the relationship. Four respondents directly cited communication as one of the essential components of a good partnership or marriage. High levels of communication between partners undoubtedly contributed to their ultimate decision to have kids. After all, four of the five respondents had to convince their partners or be convinced. More importantly, however, is that it also reflects the popularity of the belief that men who are emotionally invested can and should become fathers. Emotionally invested men are no longer just stigmatized as effeminate or gay, but praised as good fathers.

High levels of communication among gay couples not only reflect a changing social construction of fatherhood, but also the pioneering role gay men play in the reconstruction of fatherhood. Good communication skills—and a strong, emotionally invested relationship—probably plays less of a role in motivating the decision to have children for straight men. Although men’s liberation has increased the emotional closeness within heterosexual couples, heterosexual couples are more likely to suffer the consequences of gender role normativity, such as the lack of authentically emotionally intimate relationships. This emotional intimacy appears to be especially prominent in gay men

that choose to have children. The one respondent who had a partner who also wanted children from the start said,

We knew, I mean we had a very fast start to our relationship. Things picked up very quickly. We got together when we were pretty young, I mean we were twenty-two at the time. From an early time we had talked about the fact that we wanted kids.

Evidently, gay men, at least those who choose to have children, experience a level of emotional intimacy that transcends normative gender roles. In this way, gay fathers represent a great step forward in the liberation of men from limitations on emotional distance.

Increasing Acceptance of Homosexuality

The variation in age among the respondents indicates an increasing societal acceptance of homosexuality that decreases barriers for gay men seeking to have children. Two of the respondents were in their early fifties, another two were in their mid forties, and the respondent with the youngest child was in his mid-thirties. One of the oldest respondents, George, said, "The avenues weren't clear. I was just happy that I was allowed to live with another man because there were states where you couldn't even do that." One of the respondents in his mid-thirties, Timothy, didn't start the adoption process until he was 35 years old, partially because he did not come out in his mid-twenties or find a lifelong partner until several years after coming out. For the two oldest respondents, legal restrictions and persistent homophobia delayed their decision to have children. Although Timothy was fully accepted by his family when he came out, homophobia prevented him from coming out of the closet and finding a man with whom he could have children. Timothy and the other men chose to have children when the sociohistorical context became more accepting of gay men having children. Thus, Weston's and Bigner and Bozett's explanation of gay fatherhood as a phenomenon couched in the barriers experienced by homosexuals are no longer valid because many of these barriers, structural and cultural, no longer exist.

An increasing societal acceptance of homosexuality has not only paved the way for gay men who wanted to have children but couldn't do so until recently; it has also bred a generation of gay men who have always seen having children as a tenable prospect. The youngest respondent, Luke, started the adoption process at almost the same time as Timothy, whom he is almost ten years younger than. He mentioned that he "definitely sensed some heterosexual bias" within the adoption agencies, but his homophobia was less of a factor in waiting until his mid-thirties to have children. Luke was explicit about the reasons for his timing:

One thing is just because of who [his partner] is. It was always easy for me to see how he would be a great father just because he's so loving and so funny and he's really responsible and he's really smart and he has a back-

ground in education so he's really good at teaching people things. I just always knew he would be a great dad. In terms of when decided it was the right time, it was very much just due to logistical circumstance. So for a number of years I was a graduate student and he was working, then we were both graduate students for a time, then he was a graduate student getting his doctorate and I was working, and we knew that those times that one or both of us were in school and we had very limited income that it would be a bad time. And also that we were controlled geographically by our schooling.

Luke's reasons for having children seem to have less to do with being gay and have more in common with modern heterosexual middle class individuals and couples who often wait to have children because of education or careers. Homophobic tendencies in social institutions and attitudes delayed some of the men's decision to have children, but Luke's case underscores the increasing acceptance of homosexuality in American society that normalizes the idea of homosexuals becoming parents. Gay men growing up in this generation will believe that having children is not only possible, but also acceptable.

The Familialization of the LGBTQ Community and Gay Identity

Although their involvement with the LGBTQ community has declined, none of the respondents faced any disapproval of their decision to have children from the LGBTQ community, suggesting that gay identity is no longer opposed to family life nor rigidly defined by individualism, partying, and sex. Three of the five respondents said having children significantly decreased the time available for all pursuits, including involvement with the LGBTQ community. The other two respondents would probably have responded the same way if they were living with their child at the moment. However, because of their unique situations, the child is living with its other set of parents for the time being. Timothy says, "Within six months we lost touch with most people. Because of changing interests, not because they shunned us. There were seven couples we stayed in touch with. Now they all have kids. And all of them were clearly interested in having kids." Luke's contact with the gay community is also now limited to other gay and lesbian parents. The other respondent, Robert, said that most of his friends are straight. The desire to have children may have resulted from growing tired of a lifestyle of individualism, partying and lack of responsibility to family members that that Bigner and Bozett (1990) define as aspects of gay culture. However, the lack of negative reactions the respondents experienced from members the gay community upon the disclosure of their decision to have children and their continued involvement in familial LGBTQ events and organizations belies the conceptualization of gay culture as solely individualistic and non-familial.

Increased involvement in LGBTQ events and organizations, which hitherto were virtually non-existent, also indicates a reorienting of the LGBTQ community to include families and family lifestyles. The same three respondents who reported a dramatic decrease in available free time and involvement in the LGBTQ community said that they still attend events that allow gay and

lesbian parents to come together. Echoing the sentiments of all three of these men, Robert says, “I think it’s important that [his child] sees that there are other kids like him. You know, kids with gay parents.” Moreover, Timothy is a member of an organization specifically geared towards gay parents. He cherishes the role the community plays for him, his partner, and his children because to raise a family, “it takes a village.” Organizations and events have burgeoned in the last decade, indicating an incorporation of familial culture into the LGBTQ community. Homosexuality is no longer a rigidly defined identity or culture, at least not like the one that Bigner and Bozzet describe. Rather, it is being increasingly normalized and incorporated into aspects of society at large, such as families. The LGBTQ community no longer takes refuge in the safety of the gay ghettos, but extends itself to all corners of American society. Sexuality now says less about a lifestyle and more simply about what gender(s) a person is attracted to.

The respondents’ overwhelming positive expressions of their experiences with fatherhood indicate that the desire to have a relationship between parent and child motivated their decision to have children. Despite the external social factors that may have produced this drive to become a father, it is important to acknowledge the idiosyncrasy of individuals who long for the emotional bond between a parent and child. All five respondents were clearly very fond of children, suggesting that a fundamental desire to experience the unique bond between parent and child—a desire found in many individuals, regardless of sexual orientation or any other social identity—is a powerful motivator in the decision to have children. Timothy and Robert described specific experiences that motivated their desire to have children. Timothy and his partner took care of their nephew for a few weeks, which “made us realize how much we wanted to have a kid.” Robert said that seeing “Daddy and Papa,” a documentary film by Johnny Symons about gay men having children, solidified his desire to have children. They all described deeply emotional experiences upon seeing their child for the first time. “I wept.” “It was magical.” “The first thing I thought is that I just promise that I will love you. I just remember it clear as day.” These men’s feelings toward children and their comfort with their sexual identity confirms Bigner and Bozzett’s (1990) finding that some gay men have children simply because they want to experience the joys of parenthood, not because of an underlying motive related to homophobia or a clash with the LGBTQ community.

Experiences with Fatherhood: Doing it for the Love, Not the Prestige

Like the emotional intimacy and open communication they appeared to have with their partners, the respondents’ descriptions of their experiences with fatherhood suggest that gay men are pioneers in a reconstruction of the role of fathers. These men are part of the movement described in Griswold’s (1993) historical analysis of the emergence of a fatherhood movement that seeks to reconstruct the role of a father into a parent that spends more time with his children while developing strong emotional bonds once delegated ex-

clusively to the mother. All of the respondents said that they thought a good father is loving, open-minded and a good teacher. One of the respondents, George, went so far as to say that he thought he would have to hold back from being too affectionate with his daughter for fear of smothering her. The strongest indication that these men are pioneers in the fatherhood movement is the effort and deliberateness that went into the process of having a child. Illustrating the responses of all of the respondents, Timothy says, "One advantage I think gay parents have is that you have to want it. You have to be intentional and you really have to want it." Such responses echo Weston's (1991) analysis of the *chosen* aspect of gay and lesbian families, but engenders a new conceptualization of fatherhood that emphasizes men's greater involvement with his children — both in terms of quality and quantity.

Although the respondents think that people treat them differently now that they have children, it didn't seem as though the social prestige associated with fatherhood as an identity played any larger of a role than it would for straight men. In other words, they didn't become fathers to make up for their homosexuality. Each of the respondents pithily explained that people do indeed treat them differently now that they are fathers—after all, fatherhood *is* an identity. However, the connotations of fatherhood didn't seem to be of particular importance to them. In fact, their responses turned to other, less positive aspects of fatherhood as an identity. Referring to interactions with strangers in public spaces, Timothy says, "Would people really be interested in me if I didn't have kids? It's such an identity." Luke was especially surprised at how the adoption of his daughter has changed his perception of women, saying, "Whenever I see women in life, almost the first thing I think is, 'that's somebody's daughter.' If I ever see people, heaven forbid when that happens, I would think 'that's someone's daughter.'" When asked how he thought people saw him or treated him differently now that he is a father, Robert emphatically described the stereotyping he experiences as a father,

I think there's a lot of confusion not so much about being a gay dad but being a man-dad. I noticed I would get *a lot* of — especially when he was really little — when I would bring him to daycare, the *moms* drop the kids off in the morning, the *moms* pick them up in the afternoon and a lot of the daycare providers are also moms or women. There's a lot of 'Well, you obviously don't know that he has a cold.' 'I'm like, oh no I'm aware he has a cold.' There's just an assumption that guys can't actually be nurturing and take care of a child. I've talked a lot about that with my straight stay-at-home dad friends who are like, 'damn.' People think that you're incompetent because you're a guy. 'You must not have that chip'...I also think that *some* women, not all women, are like, 'You're muscling in on my territory.' That's new and different... and also being a stay at home dad, if I'm calling up the electric company or all of that busywork that you do as a dad or a stay-at-home dad, signing him up for any recreational activity, they always assume I'm a woman. I get it because when I did some shitty PowerPoint job in cor-

porate America there would be a take-your-kid-to-work day and there were activities for kids to do. I remember one of the assignments was for the kids to draw a picture of their dads and I remember one of the kids drew a picture of a taxi and a hand waving.

Not only does Robert's response highlight gay fathers' pioneering role in the fatherhood movement, but also that gay men probably don't become fathers to make up for their homosexuality. Rather, they become fathers *despite* the stereotypes associated with homosexuality and men. Clearly, fatherhood has had particular effects on these men, but receiving social prestige is not of particular importance to them. Expectations internalized from their families of origin and a desire to be "normal" by having children are likely motivations, just like they are for straight men. However, these motivations have little or nothing to do with their homosexuality.

Conclusion

Conceptualizations of fatherhood and homosexuality are transforming. These transformations in roles are intersecting and paving the way for an unprecedented normalization of gay fatherhood. The men interviewed did not internalize the perception that gay men and children can never go together. Essentially, they have not molded themselves to fit the stereotypical identity and lifestyle of gay men that was constructed with the initial gay and lesbian liberation movement that dovetailed the women's liberation movement.

A deconstruction of the initial conceptualization of homosexuality is evident in the increasing acceptance within the LGBTQ community of homosexuals who want to become parents, the emergence of a social movement geared towards gaining marriage rights for homosexuals, and the emergence of organizations and events geared towards gays and lesbians with children. The men interviewed all said that they received support from members of the community and continue to rely on the community for help in raising their families. Gay men aren't necessarily becoming fathers because of their dissatisfaction with the homosexual lifestyle. Rather, "the homosexual lifestyle" is now incorporating familial elements.

These men ultimately decided to have children because of the desire to do what is expected of everyone else: to find a long-term partner and have children. Positive associations with their families of origin due to their "normalcy" and their closeness with their families encouraged these men to have children. These men did not view the normalcy of their families as negative because they were never rejected for being gay. Rather, their families' normalcy made their positive experiences with their families of origin even better. Ultimately, their families of origin taught them that having children is a fundamentally positive and emotionally enriching experience.

Communication between partners was a common thread between the partnerships of all the men interviewed, suggesting that good communication skills—and a strong relationship overall—encouraged the decision to have

children. These communication skills probably play less of a role in motivating the decision to have children for straight men. Although men's liberation has increased the emotional closeness within heterosexual couples, such closeness appears to play a more important role in the decision to have children among gay men because they are less susceptible to the constraints of gender roles that heterosexual couples are more likely to experience. In this way, gay men are pioneers in the reconstruction of fatherhood as a role that emphasizes emotional closeness between father and child.

Society is witnessing the increasing acceptance of homosexuality and reconstructing the role of fathers, as evidenced by the variation in age among the respondents. When avenues for becoming fathers became more abundant, apparent and accessible, fatherhood became a tenable prospect for gay men who once thought they could never have children. Furthermore, younger gay men are growing up with the idea that gay men having children is not such an aberration.

Due to the structural and cultural shifts that have made gay fatherhood increasingly attainable, the way has been paved for gay men to fulfill their dreams of having a deep emotional connection with a child they could call their own. These gay men probably don't become fathers to make up for their homosexuality. Rather, they become fathers *despite* the stereotypes associated with homosexuality and men. Expectations internalized from their families of origin and a desire to be "normal" by having children are likely motivations, just like they are for straight men.

Despite the limitations created by the small sample size and lack of a comparison group, this article challenges previous explanations for gay men choosing fatherhood that focus on the negative associations with homosexuality, which are becoming increasingly irrelevant. Moreover, elucidating the changing role of fathers opens avenues for research that focus more on the emotional benefits, rather than the social norms, associated with fatherhood. The reconstruction of fatherhood should also inspire inquiry into the changing emotional intimacy between partners, both homosexual and heterosexual. Comparing the two groups and the intra-couple negotiations of their roles as parents may provide insight into changing norms regarding both sexuality and gender. Finally, further research should investigate how the normalization of gay men having children has altered the role of families.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

Family of Origin

Tell me about your parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters.

How were your parents and other family members involved in your decision to have children? How are they involved now?

Significant Other

Tell me about your partner.

How did you two meet?

How long have you been together for?

What makes a good partnership or marriage? What makes a good husband or boyfriend?

How did your partner influence your decision to have children?

Family Creation

Tell me a little bit about your kids. (Age, sex)

Have you always wanted to have kids?

When you thought about having kids, what went through your mind?

When did you and your partner decide to have children? How did you arrive at the decision to have children?

How did you have children? What was the process like?

What was it like when you saw your child for the first time?

LGBTQ Community

Tell me about your involvement with the gay community.

How did the gay community influence your decision to have children?

What role do you see the gay community playing in raising your children?
Tell me about some of your closest friends? What role did they play in your decision to have kids and what role do you see them playing in the future?

Fatherhood

How is your life different now that you have children?

What would your life be like now if you had never had any children?

Tell me about your children's biological parents. What role do they play, if any?

What do you think makes a good father?

Do you think others think of you differently now that you have kids? Do they treat you any differently?

What about your child's future? Ideally, what kind of future would you like your child to have? What can you do to help them achieve this future? What limitations do you have in parenting?

What do you like best about being a father? What do you like least? How did your expectations about becoming a parent compare with the reality?

Now I want to talk about how your family reacted to your sexuality. When did you come out to your family members as gay, if you ever did? How did they react?

Demographics

How old are you?

Where did you grow up? What kind of neighborhood was it?

What were your parents' occupation(s)?

What do you consider to be your race and/or ethnicity?

Where did you go to school?

How have you spent your time since you left (or completed) school?

